

An Analysis of State Fragility: A Perspective on the State-Citizen Relations in Southeast Nigeria

***Onwunyiriuba, Jocelyn Chirianya**

ABSTRACT

This paper advances the postcolonial debate on Nigeria, with thematic analysis of state-citizen relations in Southeast Nigeria. The intellectual need to historicize the antagonism between the state and the citizens of the Southeast precipitated the investigation into those facile assumptions that the Nigerian state is not autochthonous, that it is congenitally conflicted, divisive, repressive and ultimately, antithetical to the Southeast. The study was underpinned on John Locke's liberal perspective on social contract, and it interrogated the legitimacy of the postcolonial Nigerian state, underscored its colonially inherited character. The Lockean perspective argues that if the state fails in its political imperative, a rebellion against the state will be considered necessary. The study drew from textual instruments and thematic contents on political legitimacy and conflict paradigms, while establishing; that the Independence Constitution was an egotist design for imperial perpetuity; that the postcolonial state is a political design to perpetuate a North-political-dominance for consolidation of imperial clutch on Nigeria; and finally, it established the nexus between the capricious character of the colonial state and the repressive character of the postcolonial Nigeria towards the people of the Southeast. It further justifies the logic of anti-citizen and antinational biases that have led to civil disobedience and civil sabotage, and consequently, state fragility in the Southeast of Nigeria. The study recommended among others, allocation of benign attention to the Southeast region, regional inclusion, or terminally, consider a regional plebiscite to enable the people of the Southeast decide the propriety of their continuous stay in Nigeria.

Keywords: *state-citizen relations, state fragility, colonial Nigeria, postcolonial Nigeria, Southeast Nigeria*

* Dept. of Political Science & International Relations, Hensard University, Toru-Orua, Nigeria, jocelynjohiah@gmail.com

Introduction

Among the theories that have the tendency to deepen our understanding of the fragile state of contemporary Nigeria is the Lockean Social Contract perspective. It is on this basis that this essay adopts this approach that weights Nigeria on the balance of liberal logic, and which makes case for the peoples' rights and freedom, imperative state neutrality, minimum state sovereignty, equality of all and conducive environment for citizens' uninhibited prosperity (Ias, 2021).

Conceptualizing State Fragility

According to Loewe and Zintl (2021), social contracts and state fragility are mutually interfacing: whereas, the core of social contracts is that the state ought to guarantee the citizens' protection, provision, and political participation so as to be adjudged legitimate, while state fragility explains that states can become susceptible to some range of shocks that are likely to make them fail due to shortfalls in their legitimacy value. This can happen as a result of inhibition in three major government deliverables, to wit; protection of citizens, provision for citizens and free political participation of citizens; so that, state-enabled deprivation of citizens in these three basics of the social contracts could spell political unrest (Loewe and Albrecht, 2022).

Furthermore, the concept of state fragility also evokes the assumption that a state lacks the ability to moderate its own internal stability, protect its citizens from activities of non-state actors, as well as maximize overall citizens' happiness (Igwe, 2024). State fragility has also been considered to be analogous to a "country characterized by weak state capacity and/or weak state legitimacy leaving citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks" (McKay and Thorbecke, 2019, p. 3) According to Carment, et al. (2011), state fragility is measured by authority, legitimacy and capacity of a state, of which Bayeh, (2022) has described as a state's inability to maintain monopoly of force within its territory. Available studies

seem to be in agreement in linking this condition to weaknesses in a state's institutions leading to frustrated expectations amongst a population of citizens, or deprivations of free political participation (Vallings and Moreno-Torres, 2005). This in the main, may take the forms of material deprivations and political exclusion of a section of the state, at the overwhelming advantage of other sections of same state (NSACC, 2021).

The Question of Imperative Obligation of the State

The concept of state fragility therefore challenges a state's natural obligation and fiducial responsibility to protect the citizens, distribute value impartially, and remain neutral in governing every part of the state, in line with the presumption of the social contract it has entered with the citizens (Sternehäll, 2016). This work supposes that the colonial descent of the Nigerian state is implicated in the state-citizen rigid and irreconcilable ideologies, and consequent fluid dichotomy, which has been reasonably attributed to failure of state duty (Jauhari, 2011). It also provokes the central and troubling question of the actual transformation of the colonial state to a genuine autochthonous Nigerian state (Oromareghake, et al., 2021). It is the debate of this work that the transformation was way off from an ethical consideration to promote and expand the peoples' rights under the new state arrangement than it was really intended to transfer nominal rights that usurp citizenship and only vest unending subjectship on the people of postcolonial Nigerian state (Jauhari, 2011).

The modern Nigerian state, therefore, is still plagued by major colonial tendencies, including the character of violent dispossession of citizens' right, forceful repression and suppression of dissenting voices (Jauhari, 2011). The leading question is, will it not be hard to dignify a state, whose process of creation, with its supreme law were supervised by the retreating suppressive and oppressive colonial regime? This further hinges on the fact that the letter and spirit of the colonially-derived constitution arrogated to the

Queen of England the titular right of the Head of State, who was represented by the Governor General, who himself was the commander-in-chief (1960 Independence Constitution, Sec. IV, Subsection I). Historically, the shift from a colonially imposed constitution to an autochthonous constitution was illusory at independence, and remained elusive in many succeeding dispensations (Amah, 2017). Just as Olasunkanmi (2017) espoused, the local representatives who joined in the constitution-making in London were not representatives of the colony's diverse populations, who were distinct in terms of tribe, culture, religion and ideology (Jauhari, 2011); so, for all intents and purposes, they were not persons elected by the people to represent them in the constitution-making project. It is deeply curious and way too subtle for a constitution to be written in London by mainly British institutions and personages, only accompanied by a few handpicked local persons who did not sufficiently represent the varying aspirations of the generality of the indigenous people of the regions constituting Nigeria. It has been argued strongly, that the British intent was to enable and consolidate continuous political and mercantilist influence on Nigeria after Britain's apparent departure from Nigeria (Oromareghake, et al., 2021). Such postcolonial state can rightly be cited for illegitimacy, while it is also in order to argue that the colonially supervised transition was purely an illusionary acknowledgement of the citizens' rights. In essence, it represents patent negation of citizens' sovereignty, social and political rights, in such instance where the processes by which the peoples' rights, and that which they would have freely vested in the state by trust were negotiated and enacted without their sufficient participation. Worse of it, the constitution was subject to the Queen's ratification (Amah, 2017).

As it follows that a peoples' constitution must originate from them in consonance with John Locke's Social Contract perspective (Maduekwe, et al., 2020), and that any government must exist by the consent of the people (Nation, 2019). As such, there is a strong

suggestion therefore, that the creation of a peoples' constitution by a foreign interest, without considering their visceral peculiarities, their right to make inputs and their power to elect according to their essential ideologies and pressing aspirations, could have the effect of whittling the citizens' sense of nationalism and corporate belongingness to the emergent postcolonial state. This could further invoke resentful consciousness of arrested citizen's sovereignty, and negative perception of state legitimacy, with strong tendency towards civic disloyalty, civil disobedience and continuous inclination for national sabotage.

It has been strongly argued, that the postcolonial state was hard of doing away with those hierarchical and subject-based tendencies of the colonial regime, which treated the indigenous people with coercion rather than with persuasion, having less regard for creation of national civic theology (Bondarenko, 2021: Jauhari, 2011). Similarly, Olasunkanmi (2017) in his thought about the colonial legal regimes and its subsequent transition to the postcolonial laws, arrived at the opinion, that the laws were elitist formulations skewed in favour of the ruling colonial class over the (dominated) colonized class, and to that extent therefore, they were designed to suppress the people rather than protect them, a replica of which Nigeria's Independence constitution of 1960 and the Republican Constitution of 1963 were. There were hardly differences in spirit and intent between the two immediate postcolonial constitutions and the colonial constitutions. For instance, in Chapter IV, Section 34 (1) and Section 35 (2) of the 1963 Constitution of Nigeria, the president under the Constitution was to be the head of state, and also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He was to be elected via a secret ballot system of a joint session of both houses of parliament, in which case, the parliament was to vote in place of the scores and multitudes of electorates who sprawled across the various regions. To say the least, that was grossly elitist and self-serving, and also bore the most likely implication, that in the event where the Head of State

was at cross purposes with the National Assembly, he could be impeached by it. This left even a far-reaching implication, that he could yield himself in servile loyalty to the national assembly that had facilitated his election, leaving him a compromised stooge of the legislature, instead of a firm trustee of the people to whom he naturally should owe his allegiance in governance. Just as Izuagie, (2016) has observed, the Nigerian political class is a serial product of the colonial regime that assimilated the petty bourgeois values of the imperial state, in which codifications of citizens' rights were primarily to serve the interest and purpose of legitimizing the colonial state. According to him, the rights were invoked and revoked as occasions served the colonial state, of which political and legal culture the postcolonial state and its managers has adapted in order to give themselves a legitimate status in pursuit of their private gains (Ikome, 2007).

The Question of Nigerian State Legitimacy

In accordance with John Locke's explicit political imperative, state legitimacy is a key legal cum political essence, around which a society should be configured, and it also constitutes the social fulcrum, which gives rhythm to state-citizen relations. It typically confers on the citizen the right to rebel and demand for a new social contract where the government fails to protect citizens' rights (Laskar, 2013). A historical review of the Nigerian state reveals transmission and translation of legacies and traits common to the colonial Nigeria to the postcolonial Nigerian state (Imoh-Itah, et al., 2016), since the takeoff of slave trade, through the period of formalization of colonialism that marked the formal imposition of British dominance on Nigerians, to the arrival point of the neo-colonial Nigeria. It is truism to say that the colonial state could not give what it did not have (*Nemo dat quod non habet*), for it was founded on illegitimacy, use of repressive military force, and use of oppressive legal instrument to legitimize self on the people (Imoh-Itah, et al., 2016; Ogbonna, et al., 2023).

Thus, available data have continued to establish the negative link between the capricious and undemocratic character of the colonial state and the repressive and undemocratic character of the postcolonial Nigerian state (Ikome, 2007). The notion of this essay therefore, is that the repressive factor is the serial generator of the erosion of citizen's sense of national association and corporate attachment to the Nigerian state, coupled with citizens' difficulty in acting with moral depths towards the state. The state therefore is burdened with citizens who are largely passive in their citizen obligations towards the state. This essay also argues that these have engendered social and political consequences, such as social revolt and civic disobedience precipitated by the age-long character of the state in eroding the citizens' sovereignty. In affirming this view, Kayode (2015) maintains that there is ethnic suspicion among the ethnic groups, inter-ethnic antagonism and agitations targeted and expressed against the state. A few examples include the Boko Haram insurgents who want to create a Caliphate in the North-East of Nigeria, the agitators of the Niger Delta region, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). There is also agitation for a Yoruba Nation "steered by groups such as Ilana Omo Oodua, Yoruba World Congress (YWC), Disciples of Oodua Republic, and Yoruba One Voice (YOY)" towards self-determination of the South-West region of Nigeria (Akano, 2024). These and many more agitating groups challenge the territorial integrity of the Nigerian state and its survival, and further dispute its claim to prestige of legitimacy and monopoly of the use of violence within its territorial space.

State Neutrality Versus Inequality & Unequal Treatment of Citizens

According to Mason (2007), in a work inspired by BBC radio documentary on the events leading to 1960 election in Nigeria, an election supervised by Britain; it was sustained that some classified records showed that the British government interfered

by manipulating the election outcomes to favour the Northern political elites in line with British imperial interest. Sequel to British interest, it was a belief embedded within the imperial thrust, that if the North held power, it would favour British imperial perpetuity than if it were to be held by the South. The decision is not unconnected to the resistance the British faced in its bid to establish indirect rule in the Southeast. Furthermore, this allegation was substantiated by Harold Smith, a British Colonial Officer who was based in Lagos and worked under the colonial administration of the then Governor-General James Robertson. According to Smith, the colonial transitional plan for independence was not carried out with honesty (Olugbile, 2019). He, Smith had been ordered by the colonial government to get involved in regional election in late 1950s as part of the plans to fix the election to favour the North and make it hold state power upon independence. This viewpoint has been given scholarly accent in Akubor, (2016), in which it was argued that the British government institutionalized ethnic and sectional politics by interfering with elections in the period leading to Nigeria's independence, mainly to favour one ethnic aspect over the other, in line with its explicit imperial interest (Ota and Ndubuis, 2025).

When Professor David Anderson, the then Director of the African Studies Centre at Oxford University, was asked, in relation to an allegation of British government complicity in an election rigging prior to Nigeria's independence, "if such manipulation of an election result could have happened", Professor Anderson replied by saying, 'in almost every single colony, the British attempted to manipulate the result to their advantage.... I would be surprised if they had not done so' (Mason, 2007, Para.7). Essentially, the North was considered, to hold so many advantages for the British government which needed to plant a loyal postcolonial regime, one subservient to the metropole's capitalist drive. Thus, the elites of Northern Nigerian origin became heir to the British imperial design (Olugbile, 2019).

According to Ota & Ndubuisi (2025), the British favourable disposition towards the North was evident in the census conducted in the run up to the independence, in which the British government over assigned population figures to the North, the intent of which, was to give the North an edge to secure higher representation in the parliament, which was considered necessary for it to hold and perpetuate grip on political power above other constituent regions. It is instructive therefore, to note, that ever since, there's been contentious political struggle between the North and the South divides of postcolonial Nigeria (Siollun, 2021).

The evidenced data in this article, suggest that the Nigerian citizen views the state and relates to it from ethnic, regional and religious biases. The state to each citizen is like a prebend, an outlet to be used to generate material advantage for himself, his immediate constituent, his religion and co-religionists, and for his ethnic community (Okibe, 2022). Therefore, the elevation of regional and ethnic sympathy above state nationalism, has dire consequences for mutual distrust among the constituent tribes and counterpart ethnic nationalities (Salawu, 2010), and forms the leading factor for national crisis, which is hinged on the manner the postcolonial leaderships of Nigeria view and interact with citizens from tribes other than theirs, and correspondingly, the way a citizen views and interacts with the state, particularly, when the leader is from a tribe other than his.

The neutrality virtue of the postcolonial Nigerian state, as well as other virtues essential for national cohesion: with specific regard to the sensitive and diverse character of the country, is deeply challenged (George et al., 2017; Nnorom, 2023; Moruff, 2021). This character mirrors the exact nature of the colonial state, which has been implicated in leaving Nigeria deeply divided (Ajayi, et al., 2024), so much as the colonial state never prioritized unity and equal treatment among the disparate peoples making up Nigeria, thereby, entrenching mutual distrust on the eve of independence (Harvard Divinity School, 2024). According to the Nigeria-South

Africa Chamber of Commerce (NSACC) (2021), the Nigerian state lacks neutrality; and this is just as it's a clone of the postcolonial state.

In most recent years for instance, Nigeria has witnessed resurgence of the secessionist group called Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a sect agitating for self-determination, that is mainly made up of aggrieved persons of the Southeast region of Nigeria, who feel marginalized in the Nigerian state (Chukwudi et al., 2019).

IPOB's secessionist thrust can be explained as a reawakening of the subconscious belief that the Nigerian government nurses a genocidal intent against the Igbo tribe, which has become the central creed of emergent Biafran Nationalism (Korie, 2013: Korie, 2012). The perpetration of organized massacre against the Igbo ethnic people, in an anti-Igbo violence in the Northern parts of Nigeria between 1966 and 1967, foreran a series of violent events that gave rise to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, in which war there have been discursive estimates of Igbo deaths, ranging from one million to three million, and then, to six million (Obasi, et al, 2023: Omeje, et al., 2023: Anyaduba, 2019: Korieh, 2013: Wiseberg, 1975).

At the heels of the civil war were claims of state complicity in the mass killings of unarmed Igbo civilians by some Northern ethnic mob. There is also a pre-war Igbo death estimate of about 30,000 in the Northern region alone, and about 2,000 in the Mid-Western region of Nigeria. (Achebe, 2012: Korieh, 2013: Oyeniyi, 2016: Onwumechili, 2014). This also goes with claims of state complicity, characterized by military and police aided pogrom, with no one held accountable: neither the perpetrators nor their aiders were brought to book. This leaves the irresistible conclusion, that the Nigerian state gave its implicit, if not its express approval (Achebe, 2012). The account of Bird, (2011) on the specific genocidal tendency of the federal troops in Asaba during the war proper, against unarmed Igbo civilians, continues to fuel deep suspicion

of an entrenched systemic state tendency towards maintaining an ethnic cleansing agenda. The author's graphic account is revealing:

When the federal troops rolled in, the approximately 10,000 towns people were unprepared for what followed. On October 4-6, soldiers occupied the town, and some began killing boys and men, accusing them of being Biafran sympathizers. On October 7, Asaba leaders met, and then summoned everyone to gather, dancing and singing to welcome the troops, and offering a pledge to One Nigeria. People were encouraged to wear akwa ocha, the ceremonial white, embroidered clothing that signifies peace, hoping that this strategy would end the violence. Although there was much trepidation, and some refused to participate, hundreds of men, women, and children assembled for the march, walking to the village square of Ogbeosewa, one of the five quarters of Asaba. Ify Uraih, then 13 years old, describes what happened: 'There, they separated the men from the women ... I looked around and saw machine-guns being mounted all around us ... Some people broke loose and tried to run away... They shot my brother in the back, he fell down, and I saw blood coming out of his body. And then the rest of us ... just fell down on top of each other. And they continued shooting, and shooting, and shooting ... I lost count of time, I don't know how long it took ... After some time there was silence. I stood up ... my body was covered in blood, but I knew that I was safe. My father was lying not far away; his eyes were open but he was dead' (Bird, 2011, p. 89).

Also, the fact that key positions of governance in the post-war regimes were, and are still dominated by the Northern ruling elements, mainly of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality, co-opting counterpart

political elites from the western region, in defiant exclusion of citizens from the Igbo ethnic aspect (Nsoedo, 2019) can be rightly viewed, first, as divisive, second, as a signification to the Igbos to exit from a country where they have been made to imbibe that they are unwanted. Similarly, the enactment of disadvantageous public policies that undermined Igbo interests and which structurally limited them from maximizing their political and economic potentials as a people was a factor the Igbos could not overlook. This is with specific reference to the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree or Indigenization Decree Policy of 1972 - a policy design to increase indigenous ownership and control of majority equity in foreign-owned companies to Nigerians: A policy which time of implementation was inauspicious, mainly because, at the time, the Igbos were economically devastated from the civil war, and lacked economic strength to participate and compete in the equity acquisition of those assets being transferred from foreign ownership to Nigerians. This was actually exacerbated by the punitive £20 policy promulgated at the end of the war, that every person of Igbo origin with account in any Nigerian bank should only be entitled to receive just £20. Hence, the freezing of all bank deposits of persons from the Eastern region, and therefore limiting Igbo access to funds. (Tagban & Eugene, 2025: Obi-Ani, 2009) In his study, Nsoedo (2019, p. 7) summarily gave accent to this view:

The Igbo people in reality experienced an overwhelming level of disadvantages based on public policies that seemed crafted to undermine their ability to maximize political and economic potentials. The restructuring of Nigeria to create more states for the northern states to the detriment of the Southern Nigeria, especially, the Southeast was not only an impediment politically; it impacts the economic potentials of the Igbo people negatively. Such policies as the failure to rehabilitate the Biafra land after the war, the 20 pounds flat refund to any Biafran who wished to convert the old currency,

or deposits with banks prior to the war; the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972, also known as Indigenization Decree, Federal Character Principle, manipulated population census, creation of states and local government areas in favor of the Northern Nigeria, deliberate underuse of seaports within the Igbo axis, lack of standard international airport, and other exploitative actions. These formed many overt and indirect actions to diminish the ability of the Igbo people to compete on a level-playing ground with other major ethnic groups.

The perceived Igbo exclusion is thought to be a flagrant disregard for the implied social contract of mutual inclusion, especially as touching on the Igbos being free from any form discrimination, by reason only that they are Igbos, in any practical application of any law or administrative fiat in Nigeria. The Igbos, still bearing the indelible scars of the pre-war, the war, and the post-war violence, exacerbated by the unfair treatment, in terms of political and economic exclusions decades after, became reawakened and convinced about the Nigerian government's ethnic cleansing objectives, giving impetus to an unrestrained Biafran nationalism, even to a revolutionary proportion (Mezie-Okoye, 2025; Heerten, et al., 2014).

Since the civil war, there has been peaceful agitation for the integration of the Igbo region into Nigeria's economic and political mainstream, while there has also been clamors against their continuous marginalization in the postcolonial Nigeria (Uduma, 2015). This, among others, includes deliberate neglect of demands to build coastal ports in the Southeastern region: a region, which mainstay is trade and commerce, leaving Igbo business owners with harsh incident of economic burden and undue constraint to rely on Lagos seaport, attended with inflated costs for imported goods (Markson, 2025). Sequel to the recent constitution of an

eight-member National Population and Census Commission, five members were of South-west extraction and three were of Northern extraction, while none from the Southeast was appointed to represent the region in this key existential institution. This according to Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie, the president of Alaigbo Development Foundation (ADF), is a familiar pattern of deliberate, systemic and a deepening exclusion of Igbos, in not just key federal appointment, but in very sensitive national decision making (Ibeke, 2025). This is aside an unexplained removal of Dr. Nkiruka Maduekwe as Director-General of the Nigeria Climate Change Council (NCCC), less than two months into her appointment, and was replaced by Omotenioye Majekodunmi, a South-west appointee (Ibeke, 2025). Again, in what has been publicly interpreted to be a clear case of frustration of the promotion of the Deputy Comptroller General of customs, B.U. Nwafor, an Igbo woman, by the arbitrary extension of the tenure of the current Comptroller-General of Customs, Bashir Adeniyi, beyond his statutory retirement period. A move that is likely to pave the way for another Yoruba officer to succeed Bashir Adeniyi, which is, in the contemplation of the Igbos, a continuous expression of the state historic marginalization of Igbos in Nigeria (Ibeke, 2025: Nnachi, 2025: Markson, 2025).

Sequel to the historic feeling of marginalization among the people of Southeast, the once peaceful approach for secession by some Igbo self-determination movements suddenly took a new turn at some point, and assumed a revolutionary proportion, giving way to arms-bearing and armed struggle by some Igbo dissidents, who carried out targeted attacks on state-owned facilities and military formations in protest against the state, and as a method of registering Igbo ethnic displeasure over perceived state-enabled deprivations of the Igbo ethnic people (Mezie-Okoye, 2025). The agitation also signifies notice of intention to secede from Nigeria to freely determine Igbo political and economic destiny, free from malicious inhibitions. Other methods used by the group includes assassination of police and army officers, arson, kidnap and

murder of perceived state surrogates in the Igbo region (Igbekoyi, 2022). These assaults put the Nigerian state and its military that is already wearied from insurgency and banditry on multiple fronts under pressure.

The state in several reprisal responses had launched military campaigns in the Southeast, and in the bid to tame the surge of IPOB insurgency, it had, through the use of excessive might of violence, killed many unarmed and innocent Igbo civilians, and turned the youths into targeted victims of the state angst, torture, unlawful killing, arbitrary arrest and ill treatment (Amnesty International, 2021: Ede, 2023). The state in its unwillingness to use modern technology and military intelligence to track members of the dissident Eastern Security Network (ESN), the armed wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a pro secession group, the real perpetrators of the crime against the state, had rather turned to extra-judicial killings of unarmed Igbo youths who were haplessly within military sight, even without provocation or reason for military confrontation. This foreshadows a pattern used before and during the civil war massacre of the Igbos: just as evidenced battle conduct and ruthless words of the Nigerian battlefield commander, Benjamin Adekunle, during the Nigeria civil war, “I want to prevent even one Ibo having even one piece to eat before their capitulation...we shoot at everything, even at things that don’t move” (Ejiogu, 2014).

In a Press report by Ugwu (2022), it was suggested that the federal forces were trigger-happy to shoot at Igbo youths with indiscriminateness. Guided by scientific sequence, it is the contention of this essay that the targeted and belligerent response of the Nigerian state towards the people of the Southeastern Nigeria only fueled and deepened the distrust and lack of confidence of the Igbos in the Nigerian state, whom the Igbos continue to see as deliberately genocidal. This view becomes justified when fitted against the military attitude of the Nigerian state when it also dealt with rebellion against the state in the Northern region. The

state was viewed as having exhibited limited military offensive against banditry and kidnapping ravaging the northern region during the presidency of Muhammed Buhari, all of whose service chiefs but one hailed from the North. For instance, in Ayitogo (2021), the then president, Muhammed Buhari in response to the kidnap of school girls in Zamfara state, which is located in the North, had excused, "...that his government is not deploying excessive force against armed bandits because of the fear of heavy casualties of innocent villagers." This attitude could readily be assigned as bigotry: a case of treating same category of crime with unequal blows; lesser penalty for one region, which is of the North and predominantly Muslim, and stiffer penalty for another region of the Southeast, which is predominantly Christian. This can further be compared with how the government of Nigeria treated the Niger Delta militancy, where dissidents were rewarded with amnesty, jobs, contracts and educational sponsorships abroad and within (Kaita, 2025). Similarly, there have been amnesty and reintegration programs for bandits and the infamous Boko Haram militants from the Northern region, and in some cases, negotiation meetings have been held between the government of Nigeria and bandit leaders from Northern Nigeria, while the same government has shown undeniable unwillingness to extend same grace to Biafran agitators (Agboga, 2022; Kaita, 2025). This selective politics of amnesty naturally fuels Igbo ethnic distrust for the Nigerian state. It is against this backdrop, this essay views the national process as pervasively and continuously highhanded against the people of the Southeast, coupled with the established predictable pattern of violence as key instrument of state drive and conflict resolution, especially, in dealing with the people of Southeast of Nigeria.

According to Chukindi (2022), the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety), a civil rights group, which launched an international documentary with pictorial and video evidence, had alleged that security operatives under

President Muhammed Buhari had killed no fewer than 1,360 persons and rendered 51,000 people homeless in the Southeast in 20 months. An objective reflection on these imprints of historical, social, and political factors that have enabled national detachment of the Igbos from the Nigerian state, they essentially engender the objective conditions for civic withdrawal, civil disloyalty and acts of antinationalism that have eventually fueled regionalized fragility and failure.

It appears therefore, that the behavior of the postcolonial Nigerian state is a transliteration, and a historical parallel of the colonial state, which was fraught with classificatory, exclusionary and partisan biases employed as convenient political tools for achieving colonial advantage in Nigeria. Okonkwo (2023, para. 17) captured this succinctly:

... an effort was made to promote and maintain a sense of intractable difference across Nigeria's regions and ethnic groups. London's 'divide and rule' strategy aimed to facilitate colonial domination of Nigeria for British advantage...the following year, the Lyttleton constitution—which succeeded the Richards constitution and was created to pave the way for Nigeria's independence from Britain—established a north/south divide when government positions were lopsidedly allocated to the northern region. the northern region's overrepresentation in central government roles, including ministers and legislative positions, fueled tensions between Nigeria's regions. to many Nigerians, the lopsidedness in political appointments demonstrated the intent of British colonial authorities to ensure that the northern region had structural advantages in the political landscape ahead of independence and undermined efforts to achieve national unity and harmony. the unfair distribution

of power and resources deepened ethnic and regional divisions, contributing to Nigeria's political instability."

This is as the number of contemporary political crisis with colonial origin has haunted the Nigerian state and have festered incurably across the gamut of the polity. Christopher (1988) in his seminal work titled "Divide & Rule: The Impress of British Separation Policies" reveals that the colonial administration was deliberate in dividing and redividing the populations into groups. It is the view of this essay that this event accounts for the astronomical rise in divisive consciousness of discrete differences held along regional, ethnic, and tribal lines. The eventual outcome of which is expressed in the form of citizen regional loyalty and ethnic nationalism. According to Christopher (1988), apart from the racial Christian-Heathen and British-foreigner divisions, the indigenous population was further divided along religious, linguistics, ethnic and skin colour lines. Hence, the Muslim-Christian, the Fulani-Hausa, and the North-South divide created by the British colonial rule still haunts Nigeria long after the colonists have physically gone.

Therefore, the perception that the Nigerian state is partial, exclusionary and non-neutral in its administration of governance, as it relates to citizen-citizen relations and state-citizen relations draws heritage from the British colonial character of favouritism dispensed towards one region above the other.

Conclusion

It appears hard to vouch that there is a modicum of difference between the visceral character of the colonial state and the modern Nigerian state. The colonial state bore with it the highhanded disposition of political oppression, repression and citizens victimization, giving rise to an entrenched mutual distrust between the colonial state and the citizens, a character in which

the postcolonial, and indeed, the modern Nigerian state is fully imbibed.

This essay views governance to be a social trusteeship, which trust subsists only to the extent that citizens retain their natural rights to life, liberty and estate, while conceding also, that the state should provide the essential three “P’s” of governance, to wit; Provision, protection and political participation of the citizens, which arrangement implies that the state yields its free consent to preserve and reinforce the citizens’ basic rights at the pleasurable instance of the greatest number of citizens. At the point the state ceases to fulfill these imperative obligations towards the citizens, its legitimacy will be deemed self-compromised, with possible consequences for justified oppositions, rebellion and antinational activities. This study therefore holds the character of the Nigerian state culpable for forerunning the state crisis, state decline, and state fragility in the Southeast of Nigeria. All of which suggest acute political stress and inability of the Nigerian state to manage and perform the three basic objectives around which the good life for the citizen is anchored: Therefore, it is the contention of this essay, that the Nigerian state is on permanent overdrive to continuously undermine national civic theology.

Recommendations:

Through the analysis, it has been brought bare that the civic loyalty and trust which the people of the Southeast of Nigeria repose in the Nigerian state is deeply compromised, and this derives from the scientific explanation of how the state of Nigeria was configured from creation, ladened with aggravated mutual distrust among the constituent regions, deeply divided by congenital ethnic, tribal, and religious loyalties, all combined to constantly put tribes at each other’s throat. This also has a modern replica, which is exemplified by the manner the ruling classes from the ethnic sides appropriate the state, and treat the state as a prebend for regional, ethnic, constituency and religious advantage, which engenders

patent disadvantage for counterpart regions, ethnic and religious aspects.

This study therefore recommends:

- That the state should take reasoned steps towards shrinking those widened gulfs of ethnic disaffection expressed by the Southeast people of Nigeria;
- Allocate genuine attention to the Southeast region, through political inclusion and creation of a substantive and an applied Southeast Development Commission: not one that may end up as a mere paper tiger;
- Constitute a national sovereign conference to renegotiate the social contract (The Constitution) binding it with the citizens of the Southeast region of Nigeria; or
- The state should consider a terminal plebiscite to allow the citizens of the Southeast to decide the propriety or otherwise of their remaining and co-existing with other regions in Nigeria, all of which is recommended for rectifying and ratifying the lingering question of legitimacy of the Nigerian state.

R E F E R E N C E S

- Achebe, C. (2012). *There was a country: A personal history of Biafra*. London: Penguin Group.
- Agboga, V. (2022). Selective forgiveness and the politics of amnesties in Nigeria. *The Round Table*, 111(5), 567–581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2022.131224>

- Amah, E.I. (2017). Nigeria-The search for autochthonous constitution. Beijing Law Review, 8(1), 141-158.
- Ajayi, J.F A., Falola, . Toyin, F.O., Kirk-Greene, A.H.M., Millard, A.H., and Udo, R.K. (2024, November 2). Nigeria. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria>
- Akano, R.D. (2024). Online resistance in Nigeria: Legitimising the Oduduwa nation separatist mandate through language. Professional Discourse & Communication, 6(1), 12-25. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2687-0126-2024-6-1-12-25>
- Akubor, E.O. (2016). Historicizing ethnic politics and its impact on nation building and nationalism in Nigeria in the 21st century. Historical Research Letter, 33: 1-17. <https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/HRL/article/download/31014/31846>
- Amnesty International. (2021). Nigeria: At least 115 people killed by security forces in four months in country's Southeast. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/nigeria-at-least-115-people-killed-by-security-forces-in-four-months-in-countrys-southeast/>
- Anyaduba, C.A. (2019, February 13th). Nigerian writers compare genocide of Igbo to the Holocaust. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/nigerian-writers-compare-genocide-of-igbo-to-the-holocaust-110766>
- Ayitogo, N. (2021, February 27th). Insecurity: Why we can't deploy excessive force against bandits – Buhari. Premium Times. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/445589-insecurity-why-we-cant-deploy-excessive-force-against-bandits-buhari.html>
- Bayeh, E. (2022). Post-2018 Ethiopia: state fragility, failure, or collapse? Humanities & social sciences communications, 9, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01490-0>
- Bird, E.S. (2011). Reclaiming Asaba: Old media, new media, and the construction of memory, in Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg (eds), On media memory: Collective memory in a new media age (Online edn, 88-103). <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230307070>
- Bondarenko, D.M. (2021). Nation-building in postcolonial states: Historical past and present-day realities. Journal of Globalization Studies, 12(1): 18-37. <https://doi.org/10.30884/jogs/2021.01.02>

- Carment, D., Prest, S., Samy, Y. (2011). ‘The causes and measurement of state fragility’, in Wim Naudé, Amelia U. Santos-Paulino, and Mark McGillivray (eds), *Fragile States: Causes, Costs, and Responses* (Oxford; online edn, Oxford Academic, 43–67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199693153.003.0003>
- Christopher, A. J. (1988). ‘Divide and rule’: The impress of British separation policies. *Area*, 20(3), 233–240.
- Chukindi, J. (2022, July 18th). Military in S’East killed 1,360, left 51,000 homeless in 20 months – Rights group alleges. *Daily Post*. <https://dailypost.ng/2022/07/18/military-in-seast-killed-1360-left-51000-homeless-in-20-months-rights-group-alleges/>
- Chukwudi, C., Gberevbie, D.E., Abasilim, U and Inhonop, D. (2019). IPOB agitations for self-determination and the response of the federal government of Nigeria: Implications for Political Stability. *Academic Journals of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8 (3), 179-194.
- Markson, E. (2025, March 4th). ICA demands seaport in South East, describes delay as economic injustice. *Daily First*. <https://firstdaily.ng/ica-demands-seaport-in-Southeast-describes-delay-as-economic-injustice/>
- Ede, R. (2023, April 5th). Ohaneze decries killing of Igbo Youths in Southeast. *The Punch*. <https://punchng.com/ohanaeze-decries-killing-of-igbo-youths-in-Southeast/>
- Ejiogu, E.C. (2014, September 22nd). Benjamin Adekunle: The portrait of a genocidist. *Sahara Reporters*. <https://saharareporters.com/2014/09/22/benjamin-adekunle-portrait-genocidist-ec-ejiogu%E2%80%8B8B>
- George, O., Yusuff, K.M. and Cornelius, N. (2017). The good, the bad and the ugly in the melting pot: the challenges of Nigerianising diversity management. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 36 (3), 238-254.
- Harvard Divinity School. (2024). The colonial era (1882-1960). <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/country-profiles/nigeria/colonial-era-1882-1960>
- Heerten, L., & Moses, A. D. (2014). The Nigeria–Biafra war: postcolonial conflict and the question of genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16(2–3), 169–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936700>

- Ias, D. (2021). The Liberal Theory of State. <https://www.drishtiias.com/blog/the-liberal-theory-of-state>
- Ibeke, O. (2025, September 10). Allegations of sidelining and marginalizing Igbos in Comptroller General of Customs tenure Extension: Setting record straight. Vanguard Online. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/09/allegations-of-sidelining-and-marginalizing-igbos-in-comptroller-general-of-customs-tenure-extension-setting-record-straight/>
- Igbekoyi, F. (2022, August 2nd) Police Kill IPOB Member Who Killed 3 Policemen in Delta. The Leadership Online News. <https://leadership.ng/police-kill-ipob-member-who-killed-3-policemen-ln-delta/>
- Igwe, P. A. (2024). Nigerian identity crisis: what's behind the growing insecurity and separatism? <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14725843.2023.2299367#abstract>
- Ikome, F. N. (2007). The nature and character of the postcolonial African state. In GOOD COUPS AND BAD COUPS: The limits of the African Union's injunction on unconstitutional changes of power in Africa. Institute for Global Dialogue. (pp.18–29). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07759.7>
- Imoh-Itah, I., Amadi, L., Akpan, R. (2016). Colonialism and the Post- Colonial Nigeria: Complexities and Contradictions 1960 – 2015: A Post -Development Perspective. International Journal of Political Science (IJPS), 2(3), 9-21. <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijps/v2-i3/2.pdf>
- Jauhari, A. (2011). Colonial and postcolonial human rights violations in Nigeria. Political Science & Global Affairs Faculty Publications. 5. https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/gov_fac/5
- Izuagie, L. (2016). The Willink minority commission and minority rights in Nigeria. African Journal Online (AJOL) 5 (1-2) <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ejotmas/article/view/141208>
- Kayode, A. (2015). Federalism and federal character principle in Nigeria: A dilution. Review of Public Administration and Management, 3(7), 32-44. https://www.arabianjbm.com/pdfs/RPAM_VOL_4_7/4.pdf
- Korieh, C.J. (2013). Biafra and the discourse on the Igbo genocide. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 48(6), 727-740.
- Laskar, M.E. (2013). Contract theory by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261181816_Summary_of_Social_Contract_Theory_by_Hobbes_Locke_and_Rousseau

- Loewe, M., & Zintl, T. (2021). State fragility, social contracts and the role of social protection: Perspectives from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. *Social Sciences*, 10(12), 447. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10120447>
- Loewe, M., Albrecht, H. (2022). The social contract in Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia: What do the people want? *Journal of International Development*, 35 (5), 838-855.
- McKay, A., & Thorbecke, E. (2019). The anatomy of fragile states in Sub-Saharan Africa: Understanding the interrelationship between fragility and indicators of wellbeing. *Review of Development Economics*, 23(3), 1073–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rode.12578>
- Maduekwe, V.C., Bosah, P.C., and Okoye, P.C. (2020). Social contract theory and civil disobedience in Nigeria: A case study of Boko Haram insurgency. *World Journal of Innovative Research*, 8 (2), 48-58.
- Mason, B. (2007). Britain rigged election before Nigerian independence. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2007/08/nige-a09.html>
- Mezie-Okoye, C.C. (2025). The marginalization of Igbo and the emergence of IPOB in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)*, 12(11):1048-1057. <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.12020083>
- Moruff, O.B. (2021). Lack of inclusive leadership in Nigeria: The challenges and the way forward. *Legal Ideas Forum*. <https://legalideasforum.com/lack-of-inclusive-leadership-in-nigeria-the-challenges-and-the-way-forward.html>
- Nation, M. (2019). Locke's social contract, is it legal? *CLA Journal*, 7, 85-95. <https://uca.edu/cahss/files/2020/07/Nation-CLA-2019.pdf>
- Nnachi, E. (2025, August 2nd). Ohanaeze faults tenure extension of Customs CG, demands fairness. *The Punch*. <https://punchng.com/ohanaeze-faults-tenure-extension-of-customs-cg-demands-fairness/>
- Nnorom, K. (2023). Managing diversity in Nigeria: Interrogating the development challenges of plural African state. *Social Sciences and Educational Research Review*, 10 (1), 64-72.
- Nsoedo, E.E. (2019). The marginalization of the Igbo people in Nigeria's political and Economic sectors: What is the way forward. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(7), 427-437
- NSACC. (2021). Security challenges in Nigeria and the implications. <https://nsacc.org.ng/security-challenges-in-nigeria-and-the-implications-for-business-activities-and-sustainable-development/>

- Obi-Ani, P. (2009) Post-Civil war political and economic reconstruction of Igboland: 1970-1983. Great AP Publishers Ltd.
- Ogbonna, E.C., Ayoola, A.O., Odeyemi, O.A. (2023). The Colonial Origins of African Military and its implications for African politics. In: Abidde, S.O., Kumah-Abiwu, F. (eds) The political impact of African military leaders. Contributions to political science. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31427-8_1
- Okibe, B.H. (2022). Ethnicity, religion, and polarization in Nigeria. Wilson centre. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ethnicity-religion-and-polarization-in-nigeria>
- Okonkwo, O. (2023). The making of modern Nigeria. The Republic, 8(2).
- Olasunkanmi, A. (2017). Interrogating Colonialism and Constitution-Making in Africa. International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies, 4(7), 13-19. <https://www.ijrhss.org/papers/v4-i7/2.pdf>
- Olugbile, F. (2019, August 23rd). Harold Smith, the big lie, and Nigeria 2019. Business Day. Share<https://businessday.ng/columnist/article/harold-smith-the-big-lie-and-nigeria-2019/>
- Omeje, U.P., Amiara, S.A. & Uchime, V.O. (2023). From friendship to foes: The history of Igbo pogrom and the state of nation in the 21st century intertribal relationships in Nigeria. South East Journal of Public Relations, 5 (2): 99-109.
- Onwumechili, C. (2014). Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo identity, and the imagination of war. In: Onwumechili, C., & Akindes, G. (eds) Identity and Nation in African Football. Global Culture and Sport. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137355812_8
- Oromareghake, P.B.O., Chul, A.A., Mohammed, I., and Johnson, T. (2021). Postcolonial Nigeria and economic dependency: issues, strategies and the way forward. Arts and Social Science Research, 11
- Ota, N.E. & Ndubuisi, U. (2025). Fudging the Numbers: Understanding the politics and dynamics of population census figures in Nigeria. Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations, 3 (2): 453-464.

- Oyeniyi, B. (2016). 6 Beyond the Blame Game: Theorizing the Nigeria-Biafra War. In T. Falola, O. Ezekwem, A. Odoemene, A. Adetayo, A. Okwu, B. Jeyifo, B. Oyeniyi, C. Opat, C. Obi, E. Uchendu, F. Bateman, F. Ugochukwu, G. Uzoigwe, H. Hodges, J. Bryce, M. Coffey, O. Ogede, O. Aito, O. Anyanwu, O. Ezekwem, O. Ojeleye, R. Njoku, T. Falola & W. Adebani (Ed.), *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* (pp. 111-129). Boydell and Brewer: Boydell and Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782047735-010>
- Salawu, B. (2010). Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: Causal analysis and proposals for new management strategies. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(3): 345-353.
- Siollun, M. (2021). *What Britain Did to Nigeria: A Short History of Conquest and Rule*. Hurst Publishers.
- Sternehall, T (2016) Understanding state fragility through the Actor-Network theory: A Case Study of postcolonial Sudan. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1044570/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Tagban, E.O. & Eugene, O.E. (2025). Nigeria: Fifty years after the civil war. *British Journal for Military History*, 11(1): 141-159.
- Thorbeck, E and Mckay, A. (2019). The Anatomy of Fragile States in Sub-Saharan Africa: Understanding the inter-relationship between fragility and deprivation. *Review of Development Economics*, 23(3), 1073-1100.
- The 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1960. Sec. IV (1).
- Kaita, H. (2025, October 9th). RULAAC seeks Kanu's release as key to restoring peace in Southeast. *The Niche*. <https://thenicheng.com/rulaac-seeks-kanus-release-as-key-to-restoring-peace-in-the-southeast/>
- The Sun. (2025). ADF tackles Tinubu over exclusion of Igbo in key appointments. <https://thesun.ng/adf-tackles-tinubu-over-exclusion-of-igbo-in-key-appointments/>
- Uduma, D.O. (2015). Marginalization syndrome in Nigeria's politics: The case of Ndigbo. *International Journal of Advanced Legal Studies and Governance*, 5(1), 91-98.
- Ugwu, C. (2022, September 28th). How Nigerian troops killed unarmed residents in Southeast, label them IPOB members. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/556549-how-nigerian-troops-kill-unarmed-residents-in-southeast-label-them-ipob-members.html>

Vallings, C., and Moreno-Torres, M. (2005). Drivers of fragility: What makes states fragile? Department for International Development, PRDE Working Paper No. 7.

Wiseberg, S.L. (1975). The statistics jungle: Measuring war, plague, fire and famine. *New Styles in Social Research*, 12:53–60.