

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

Abba Usman

Department of Political Science and International Relations
Taraba State University, Jalingo
abbausmanjalingo@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between ethno-religious politics and national integration in Nigeria. The main objective of the study was to examine how identity-based political practices, voting behavior, and discriminatory practices influence national integration in Nigeria. Guided by Social Identity Theory, the study sought to determine how ethnic and religious identities influence political participation, weaken national identity, and affect equal citizenship rights. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted, relying on documentary sources such as scholarly publications, government reports, constitutional provisions, policy documents, electoral records, and reports of national and international organisations. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings revealed that ethnicity and religion remain dominant factors in political mobilisation, electoral behaviour, public appointments, and resource allocation in Nigeria. Political elites frequently manipulate these identities for political advantage, resulting in political exclusion, social division, and weakened national unity. The study also found that identity-based voting patterns reduce cross-ethno-religious political participation, while discriminatory practices, including the indigene-settler dichotomy, ethnic and religious exclusion, gender inequality, disability discrimination, and unequal access to socio-economic opportunities, undermine equal citizenship and public trust in state institutions. The study concludes that the major challenge to national integration in Nigeria is not ethnic and religious diversity itself but its persistent politicisation and institutionalisation in governance and electoral processes. It recommends strengthening inclusive and merit-based governance, enforcing constitutional guarantees of equality, promoting civic and multicultural education, encouraging interfaith and interethnic dialogue, reforming discriminatory institutional practices, and promoting issue-based politics. These measures are essential for fostering national unity, democratic stability, and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Ethno-religious politics, national integration, identity, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Ethno-religious politics is a global phenomenon where ethnicity and religion intersect with political competition, often shaping governance, identity, and integration processes. Around the world, ethno-religious differences have both enriched political pluralism and deepened divisions, depending on how they are managed within state systems. For instance, in multi-ethnic democracies such as India and Lebanon, ethnic and religious cleavages frequently determine voting patterns and coalition-building, while also sparking periodic conflicts (Miller & Toft, 2020). This demonstrates that ethno-religious politics is both a challenge and an opportunity for integration in plural societies.

Globally, the failure to properly manage ethno-religious diversity often results in violent conflict, weakened governance, and challenges to state legitimacy. The United Nations and World Bank (2018) emphasize that fragile states typically face crises of ethno-religious exclusion, which undermine social cohesion and development. Where inclusive institutions are

absent, marginalized groups tend to resort to violence or separatist tendencies, thereby eroding integration. Conversely, countries with effective federal arrangements, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive constitutions have demonstrated that ethno-religious pluralism can be transformed into a foundation for sustainable democracy (Alesina et al., 2019).

In many countries, such challenges are often concentrated in particular regions where ethnic and religious divisions are historically pronounced. For instance, in Nigeria, ethno-religious tensions are more visible in areas such as the North-East, North-West, and parts of the North-Central region, where communal clashes, insurgency, and farmer–herder conflicts have affected stability. The Middle Belt region, in particular, has experienced recurrent conflicts rooted in ethnic, religious, and land-use disputes. Similarly, in the South-East, agitation for self-determination reflects perceived political and economic marginalization, while in the Niger Delta region of the South-South, resource control conflicts have historically fueled militancy and unrest.

These regional experiences illustrate how ethno-religious exclusion, when combined with economic inequality and weak institutions, can threaten national unity and integration. They also highlight the importance of inclusive governance, equitable development, and effective conflict-management mechanisms across all regions of a country.

In the African context, ethno-religious politics has historically shaped state formation, governance, and conflict trajectories. Post-colonial African states inherited boundaries that enclosed diverse ethnic and religious groups without adequate integrative frameworks (Mazrui, 2019). Consequently, the competition for political power has often been framed along ethnic and religious lines, fueling secessionist movements, civil wars, and governance crises. In Sudan and South Sudan, for example, religious and ethnic fault lines were central to prolonged conflicts, while in countries like Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, election outcomes have consistently mirrored ethno-religious divides (Ncube, 2021).

In West Africa, ethno-religious politics has been a defining feature of political life, with implications for both national integration and regional security. For instance, in Ghana, ethnic politics is visible but tempered by strong democratic institutions, allowing relative integration and stability. In contrast, Nigeria's neighbors such as Mali and Cameroon struggle with ethno-religious consis that undermine governance (International Crisis Group, 2020). These regional patterns highlight the double-edged nature of ethno-religious politics in Africa: it can either reinforce democratic integration or deepen fragmentation.

Nigeria presents one of the most complex cases of ethno-religious politics in Africa, given its over 250 ethnic groups and a nearly even Muslim and Christian population. According to the CIA World Factbook, Nigeria is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups, while religious composition is estimated at about 53.5% Muslim and roughly 46% Christian, reflecting a near balance between the two major faiths (CIA, 2018–2021). Since independence, political contestation has been shaped by ethnic and religious identity, from the Biafran War (1967–1970) to recurrent sectarian crises in the Middle Belt (Suberu, 2021). Ethno-religious politics has influenced party formation, federal character policies, zoning arrangements, and power-sharing formulas, reflecting both efforts at integration and enduring tensions. These dynamics continue to test Nigeria's democratic consolidation and unity.

At the core of Nigeria's ethno-religious politics is the challenge of managing diversity within a federal system. The federal character principle and zoning arrangements were designed to promote inclusion, but critics argue that they sometimes entrench identity politics rather than

transcend it (Omilusi, 2019). For example, debates over rotation of the presidency between the North and South reflect attempts at balancing ethno-religious representation, yet also reinforce regional divides. This paradox underscores the difficulty of fostering integration while relying on identity-based political formulas.

Ethno-religious violence has also undermined integration in Nigeria. Recurrent communal clashes, insurgencies such as Boko Haram, and sectarian riots in states like Kaduna, Plateau, and Benue illustrate how politicized religion and ethnicity destabilize governance and deepen mistrust among groups (Mustapha, 2020). The persistence of such conflicts suggests that Nigeria's integration project remains incomplete, requiring stronger institutions, inclusive governance, and effective conflict management mechanisms.

Nevertheless, ethno-religious politics in Nigeria is not entirely negative. Scholars argue that when properly managed, diversity can enrich democratic competition, broaden representation, and strengthen legitimacy (Akinola & Uzodike, 2022). Civil society, interfaith initiatives, and federal reforms have provided pathways for fostering integration. The challenge, therefore, lies in transforming ethno-religious identities from instruments of division into platforms for inclusive nation-building. This study situates itself within these debates by exploring how ethno-religious politics shapes integration in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a form of social identity based on shared cultural traits such as language, ancestry, customs, traditions, and historical experiences. It reflects a sense of belonging to a particular group that distinguishes itself from others within a broader society. Ethnic identity is often shaped by collective memory, myths of origin, and patterns of social interaction over time. Scholars view ethnicity as a dynamic and socially constructed phenomenon rather than a fixed or biological category. It is often reinforced through cultural practices, shared experiences, and political processes that define group boundaries and relationships. According to Eriksen (2015), ethnicity is a product of social interaction that becomes meaningful in contexts where groups define themselves in relation to others.

Ethnicity plays a central role in the organization of social and political life, particularly in plural societies. It provides individuals with a sense of identity, security, and belonging, which may influence their political preferences and social attitudes. In many developing countries, ethnicity has become a significant factor in political mobilization, resource allocation, and access to opportunities. Osaghae (2018) argues that in societies where state institutions are weak, ethnicity often becomes the primary basis for political organization and competition. This is because individuals tend to trust members of their own ethnic group more than those from other groups, especially in contexts of uncertainty and limited resources.

In Nigeria, ethnicity is a dominant factor shaping political behavior and governance. The country is composed of over 250 ethnic groups, with the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo being the three largest and most politically influential. These groups have historically shaped the country's political structures, party systems, and electoral outcomes. Suberu (2015) notes that Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial political arrangements reinforced ethnic divisions by institutionalizing regional and ethnic identities. As a result, political competition often takes place along ethnic lines rather than ideological or policy-based platforms.

Religious Identity

Religious identity refers to an individual's or group's affiliation with a particular faith, belief system, or spiritual tradition. It encompasses shared doctrines, rituals, moral values, and religious practices that shape individuals' worldview and social behavior. Religion often provides a sense of meaning, belonging, and moral guidance, influencing how people interpret social and political events. According to Pew Research Center (2015), religious identity remains one of the most powerful sources of collective identity across the world, shaping attitudes toward politics, culture, and social life.

Religious identity plays a significant role in shaping social relationships and political dynamics in many societies. It often influences patterns of trust, cooperation, and conflict among different groups. In plural societies, religious differences can either foster mutual understanding or create divisions, depending on how they are managed. Haynes (2016) argues that religion has become an increasingly important factor in global politics, influencing elections, policy debates, and international relations. In Nigeria, religion is a central component of social and political life. The country is nearly evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, with traditional religious practices also present in some communities. Religious identity influences political alliances, leadership selection, and public policy debates. Falola and Heaton (2018) note that religion has historically shaped political and social relations in Nigeria, often intersecting with ethnic identities to influence political behavior.

Religious identity can promote social cohesion by encouraging moral values, compassion, and community service. Many religious organizations in Nigeria provide education, healthcare, and humanitarian assistance to their communities. These activities contribute to social welfare and national development. However, when religion becomes politicized, it can lead to division and conflict. Politicians may exploit religious sentiments to mobilize support or discredit opponents, thereby deepening societal tensions.

Ethno-Religious Politics

Ethno-religious politics refers to the interaction between ethnic and religious identities in shaping political behavior, alliances, competition, and governance. It occurs when political actors mobilize support based on ethnic or religious affiliations rather than ideological, developmental, or policy considerations. In such contexts, political competition becomes centered on identity groups seeking access to power, representation, and state resources. According to Horowitz (2014), identity-based politics often emerges in plural societies where state institutions are weak or where citizens perceive unequal treatment among groups. Under such conditions, ethnicity and religion become powerful tools for political mobilization.

In many developing countries, ethno-religious politics has become a defining feature of electoral competition and governance. Political parties and candidates often appeal to identity sentiments to secure votes, especially in societies with deep ethnic and religious cleavages. Cheeseman (2015) argues that in African democracies, elections frequently revolve around ethnic and religious coalitions rather than ideological platforms. This pattern of politics tends to reinforce divisions among groups, making national unity more difficult to achieve.

Nigeria presents a clear example of ethno-religious politics in practice. Political alliances, party structures, and leadership arrangements often reflect ethnic and religious considerations. The informal practice of balancing political offices between Muslims and Christians or among major ethnic groups illustrates the influence of identity in governance. Suberu (2015) notes that

power-sharing arrangements in Nigeria are often designed to manage ethno-religious diversity, but they also reinforce the salience of identity in politics.

Ethno-religious politics also affects the distribution of public resources and opportunities. Government appointments, infrastructure projects, and social programs are sometimes perceived as favoring certain ethnic or religious groups. This perception creates resentment among marginalized groups and fuels political tensions. According to Mustapha (2017), perceptions of unequal treatment among identity groups are major sources of political instability in plural societies.

The manipulation of ethno-religious identities by political elites further deepens divisions. Politicians may exploit religious or ethnic sentiments to mobilize support or discredit opponents, especially during election periods. This strategy often leads to the spread of hate speech, misinformation, and violent clashes. International Crisis Group (2020) observes that political manipulation of identity has contributed significantly to communal violence in several regions of Nigeria.

Despite its divisive potential, ethno-religious politics can also serve as a mechanism for representation when managed within inclusive democratic frameworks. Identity-based mobilization can provide marginalized groups with a platform to demand fair representation and access to resources. According to Alesina et al. (2019), inclusive institutions that recognize and accommodate diversity can transform identity politics into a source of democratic stability rather than conflict.

National Integration

National integration refers to the process of bringing together diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural groups into a unified and cohesive national community. It involves fostering a shared sense of identity, loyalty, and belonging among citizens regardless of their differences. National integration is essential for political stability, social harmony, and economic development. According to Deutsch (2014), national integration occurs when individuals develop a sense of common identity and shared destiny. In plural societies, national integration requires inclusive institutions that accommodate diversity while promoting unity. Policies that ensure fair representation, equal opportunities, and equitable resource distribution are crucial for fostering integration. Lijphart (2017) argues that power-sharing arrangements and inclusive governance structures are effective strategies for managing diversity in divided societies.

Nigeria has adopted several policies aimed at promoting national integration. These include the federal character principle, state creation, and power-sharing arrangements among different regions and groups. The federal character principle, for example, seeks to ensure equitable representation of various ethnic groups in government institutions. According to Suberu (2015), such policies were designed to manage diversity and prevent domination by any single group. Despite these efforts, national integration remains a major challenge in Nigeria. Persistent ethno-religious tensions, political exclusion, and economic inequality continue to undermine unity. Many citizens still identify more strongly with their ethnic or religious groups than with the nation as a whole. According to Mustapha (2017), weak national identity and strong sub-national loyalties are major obstacles to integration in Nigeria. The lack of national integration has significant consequences for governance and development. It weakens trust in state institutions, reduces political stability, and increases the likelihood of conflict. According

to the United Nations (2020), countries with low levels of national integration often face governance challenges, social unrest, and slow economic growth. However, national integration can be strengthened through inclusive policies, civic education, and equitable development. Promoting a sense of shared identity and common purpose among citizens is essential for building a stable and prosperous nation. According to the World Bank (2018), inclusive institutions that promote fairness and equality are key to achieving sustainable national integration.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner in 1979. The theory emerged from Tajfel's earlier Minimal Group Experiments conducted in the early 1970s, which demonstrated that individuals exhibit preference for members of their own group even when group distinctions are arbitrary (Tajfel, 1970). Building on these findings, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed Social Identity Theory to explain how individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups and how such identities influence intergroup behaviour. Since its formulation, the theory has become one of the most influential perspectives in social psychology, political science, sociology, and conflict studies for explaining identity formation, intergroup relations, prejudice, discrimination, and political mobilisation.

Methodology

The research design adopted was a qualitative descriptive research design. This design is appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data related to how ethnic and religious identities shape political behaviour, social relations, and national integration in Nigeria. The qualitative/descriptive research design, widely used in the social sciences, enables the researcher to examine deep-rooted attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that influence ethno-religious interactions and political processes. This makes the design appropriate for analysing how ethnic and religious affiliations impact political participation, voting patterns, and intergroup relations in Nigeria. the study will capture key dynamics such as identity politics, political exclusion, communal conflicts, intergroup mistrust, and prospects for national integration.

National Question

The national question is the persistent challenge of building a united, stable, and inclusive nation from a society composed of diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, and regional groups. In Nigeria, the national question revolves around how different groups can coexist peacefully while enjoying equal political representation, economic opportunities, social justice, and constitutional recognition. It addresses issues such as power sharing, federalism, resource allocation, citizenship rights, state creation, minority protection, and national identity (Osaghae, 1998).

Mohammed (2018) asserts that national question can be viewed from two major perspectives. First, is the political union of diverse ethnic groups, nations, or peoples who are conscious of their diversities. Second, is the dimension concerns with class relations which manifest in inequalities that breeds contradictions and antagonism between the rich and poor in the society.

Nigeria's national question has its roots in the country's colonial history. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 brought together numerous ethnic nationalities with different political systems, religions, languages, and cultures under a single administrative structure without adequate consultation or integration. Since independence in 1960, successive governments have struggled to create a political system capable of accommodating these differences while promoting national unity (Suberu, 2001).

Ethno-religious politics has become one of the major dimensions of the national question in Nigeria. Political competition is often organised around ethnic and religious identities rather than ideology or national interest. Political elites frequently mobilise support by appealing to ethnic or religious loyalties, leading to electoral violence, discrimination, mistrust, and the marginalisation of minority groups. Such practices weaken national integration because citizens increasingly identify with their ethnic or religious communities instead of developing a shared Nigerian identity (Nnoli, 1978).

The national question is further reflected in debates over the federal character principle, zoning of political offices, state creation, and revenue allocation. These mechanisms were introduced to ensure fairness and inclusive representation among Nigeria's diverse groups. However, while they have reduced fears of domination in some instances, they have also reinforced ethnic consciousness by encouraging political competition based on identity rather than competence and citizenship (Mustapha, 2006). Consequently, many groups continue to demand greater autonomy, restructuring, or constitutional reforms as solutions to perceived political exclusion. Religious divisions also contribute significantly to the national question. The country's major religious communities often perceive government policies, appointments, and public resource distribution through religious lenses. Political actors sometimes exploit religious sentiments to gain electoral advantage, increasing social tensions and undermining peaceful coexistence. Episodes of ethno-religious conflict across different parts of Nigeria demonstrate how religious identity can become intertwined with political competition, thereby threatening national integration and democratic stability (Kukah, 1993).

Another important aspect of the national question concerns citizenship and belonging. Although the Constitution guarantees equal citizenship, many Nigerians continue to experience discrimination through the distinction between "indigenes" and "settlers." Access to employment, education, political participation, and public services is often influenced by state or local government of origin rather than national citizenship. This practice undermines equal rights, reinforces ethnic divisions, and weakens citizens' commitment to the Nigerian state (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Addressing the national question requires the promotion of inclusive governance, constitutional reforms that strengthen equal citizenship, equitable resource distribution, protection of minority rights, interfaith dialogue, and issue-based democratic politics. National integration can only be achieved when all citizens perceive themselves as equal stakeholders regardless of ethnicity or religion. Political leaders must therefore prioritise national unity over identity-based mobilisation while strengthening institutions that promote justice, accountability, and social inclusion.

In conclusion, the national question remains central to understanding the relationship between ethno-religious politics and national integration in Nigeria. As long as political competition continues to be shaped primarily by ethnic and religious identities, efforts toward building a cohesive and united nation will remain limited. Sustainable national integration depends on

resolving the structural and political inequalities that fuel identity politics while fostering a common national identity based on equal citizenship, democratic participation, and social justice.

Argument

Ethno-religious politics remains one of the greatest obstacles to national integration in Nigeria because political competition is increasingly driven by ethnic and religious identities rather than by national interest, ideology, or competence. Although Nigeria's diversity has the potential to enrich democratic governance, the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by political elites has transformed diversity into a source of political instability, mistrust, and social fragmentation. Consequently, national integration has become difficult to achieve as citizens often place greater loyalty to their ethnic or religious groups than to the Nigerian state. This reality supports the central argument of this study that ethno-religious politics significantly undermines national unity and inclusive development.

The first objective of the study examines the effect of identity-based political practices on national integration. Identity-based politics has become deeply institutionalised in Nigeria's political system through zoning arrangements, ethnic balancing, federal character debates, and patronage networks. While these mechanisms were originally designed to ensure inclusiveness and prevent domination by any particular group, they have inadvertently reinforced ethnic and religious consciousness in political decision-making. Political appointments, distribution of public resources, and access to state power are frequently perceived through ethnic and religious lenses, creating widespread feelings of exclusion among groups that believe they are politically marginalised. As a result, citizens identify more strongly with their ethnic and religious communities than with the Nigerian nation, thereby weakening national identity and social cohesion (Osaghae, 1998; Mustapha, 2006).

The second objective focuses on how ethnic and religious identities influence political participation and voting behaviour. Elections in Nigeria are rarely contested solely on the basis of policy alternatives or developmental programmes. Instead, electoral campaigns often rely on ethnic solidarity and religious affiliation to mobilise support. Voters frequently support candidates because they belong to the same ethnic group or religious faith rather than because of their competence or policy agenda. Such voting behaviour undermines democratic accountability by rewarding identity instead of performance and encourages politicians to continue exploiting ethnic and religious sentiments for electoral advantage. Social Identity Theory explains this behaviour by arguing that individuals derive self-esteem and social belonging from membership in social groups, making ethnic and religious identities powerful determinants of political attitudes and behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Consequently, political participation becomes an expression of group loyalty rather than civic responsibility, thereby limiting national integration.

The third objective examines the effect of discriminatory practices on equal citizenship rights and national cohesion. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, many Nigerians continue to experience discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or state of origin. The indigene-settler dichotomy, unequal political representation, religious bias in public appointments, and unequal access to employment and educational opportunities create perceptions of injustice and exclusion. Such discriminatory practices weaken citizens' trust in government institutions and reduce their willingness to identify with the Nigerian state. National integration cannot be

sustained where citizens do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities irrespective of their ethnic or religious identities (Suberu, 2001; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Overall, the persistence of ethno-religious politics demonstrates that Nigeria's national integration challenge is fundamentally linked to the politicisation of identity. Rather than promoting inclusive citizenship, political elites continue to manipulate ethnic and religious differences for political gain, thereby perpetuating conflict, distrust, and unequal participation in governance. Addressing this challenge requires strengthening democratic institutions, enforcing constitutional principles of equality, promoting issue-based politics, encouraging inter-ethnic and interfaith dialogue, and ensuring equitable distribution of political and economic opportunities. Only through these measures can Nigeria foster a shared national identity capable of transcending ethnic and religious divisions.

Therefore, the evidence suggests that ethno-religious politics remains a significant impediment to national integration in Nigeria. Identity-based political practices, ethnic voting behaviour, and discriminatory treatment of citizens continue to undermine national unity, democratic consolidation, and social cohesion. Therefore, sustainable national integration depends on reducing the influence of ethnic and religious politics while promoting inclusive governance, equal citizenship, and a common national identity founded on justice, equity, and democratic values.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that ethno-religious politics continues to constitute one of the greatest obstacles to national integration in Nigeria because political competition is largely organised around ethnic, religious, and regional identities rather than civic values, policy preferences, or national interests. Documentary evidence examined across the four objectives shows that political participation, electoral behaviour, citizenship rights, and intergroup relations are increasingly mediated through identity affiliations, thereby reinforcing societal fragmentation.

These findings corroborate Nyiayaana (2019), who found that voting behaviour during Nigeria's 2015 presidential election reflected entrenched ethnic and religious cleavages more than ideological preferences. Similarly, Aboi (2024) argues that politicians deliberately mobilise ethnic and religious identities because such appeals generate stronger electoral loyalty than policy debates. Studies examining the 2023 general elections in Nigeria further reinforce these findings. Abdullahi, Gani and Atobauka (2024), Eboigbe and Ajisebiyawo (2024), Namu and Attah (2024), Odogwu (2023), Adewale and Temitope (2024), Imokhai (2026), and Olawoyin and Olawale (2026) consistently demonstrate that campaign strategies increasingly appealed to ethnic and religious sentiments, thereby reinforcing political polarisation and reducing cross-group political engagement.

Braimoh and City (2025) similarly found that voting patterns in Edo State closely reflected ethnic alignments despite competitive party politics. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, these patterns illustrate how political actors activate existing group identities during elections, encouraging voters to evaluate candidates through the lens of group membership rather than governance capacity. Consequently, democratic participation becomes increasingly fragmented along ethno-religious lines, limiting the emergence of an inclusive political community.

Conclusion

This study concludes that identity-based political practices remain a major impediment to the development of a strong sense of national identity in Nigeria. Rather than fostering civic citizenship and collective national consciousness, political competition continues to be organised around ethnic, religious, and regional identities that shape elite mobilisation, political appointments, resource distribution, and access to state power. These practices reinforce divisions among citizens, weaken trust in public institutions, and encourage loyalty to ethnic and religious communities above allegiance to the Nigerian state. Consequently, national identity remains fragmented as political actors continue to exploit identity cleavages for electoral and political advantage, thereby undermining the prospects for sustainable national integration.

Recommendations

- i. Government, political parties, electoral institutions, educational institutions, and civil society organisations should strengthen civic nationalism through inclusive governance, merit-based public appointments, comprehensive civic education, and sustained campaigns that discourage ethnic and religious political mobilisation while promoting a shared Nigerian identity as the foundation for national integration.
- ii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, civil society organisations, and the media should promote issue-based electoral competition through continuous voter education, strict enforcement of electoral laws against identity-based campaigns, and inclusive political processes that encourage citizens to make electoral choices based on competence, policies, and national interest rather than ethnic or religious affiliations.

References

- Abdullahi, F., Gani, I. K., & Atobauka, I. S. (2024). Identity politics and elections in Nigeria. *Identity, social inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria*, 188.
- Aboi, E. J. (2024). Religious, ethnic and regional identities in Nigerian politics: a shared interest theory. *African Identities*, 1-18.
- Aburime, O. A. (2026). Women and political participation in Nigeria: reassessing the patriarchal impediments in a changing democratic landscape (2025-2026).
- Adabembe, K. O. (2022). Ethno-Religious Crises and Its Implications on Security and National Development in Nigeria. *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*.
- Adamu, A., & Ocheni, D. (2016). Ethnic politics and the challenges of national integration in Nigeria. *International Journal of Politics and good governance*, 7(7.2), 1-20.
- Adewale, S. A., & Temitope, A. A. (2024). Religion and ethnicity in Nigeria politics: An assessment of the Fourth Republic. *International Journal of Intellectual Discourse*, 7(4).
- Brass, P. (2016). *Ethnicity and nationalism: Theory and comparison*. Sage Publications.
- Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: In-group love and out-group hate? *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 429–444.
- Cederman, L.-E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2017). *Inequality, grievance, and civil war*. Cambridge University Press.

- Cheeseman, N. (2015). *Democracy in Africa: Successes, failures, and the struggle for political reform*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chidi, S. O. (2022). *Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (2015-2021): Implications for national security*. A Publication of Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Faculty of Social Sciences National Open University of Nigeria, 263.
- Chukwu, H. O., & Ota, E. N. (2025). Identity politics and the challenge of nation-building in Nigeria: interrogating the past and reshaping the future. *Journal of Igbo language, Literature, Culture, and Religious Studies*, 1(1).
- Eze, I. C. (2021). Ethno Religious Politics and the Challenges of Sustainable Development of Nigeria. *Trinitarian: International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 1(1).
- Jibril, R. S. (2026). Intellectual capital and environmental compliance of high-energy consuming firms: Does a female representative encourage sustainable development goals in an emerging economy?. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 27(1), 208-239.
- Madueke, O. (2025). Ethnic mobilisation and state fragility in Nigeria: an instrumentalist perspective. *National Identities*, 1-21.
- Mohammed, I. (2018). *An Introduction to Nigerian Government Politics*. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Muazu, A., Danjah, P. J., & Ogu, C. S. E. (2025). Dis-Unity in Diversity: An Assessment of the Roles of Identities in Political Mobilisation in Nigeria. *ABUAD Journal of Social and Management Sciences*, 6(1), 118-137.
- Mustapha, A. R. (2006). Ethnic structure, inequality and governance of the public sector in Nigeria. CRISE Working Paper No. 25. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity.
- National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS). (2019). *Ethnic relations and national integration in Nigeria: Policy perspectives*. Kuru, Nigeria: NIPSS.
- Ngozi, A. J. (2018). Religion and ethnicity: The need for national integration in Nigeria. *HOFA African Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3, 17-29.
- Nyiayaana, K. (2019). Voting without choosing? Ethnic voting behaviour and voting patterns in Nigeria's 2015 presidential election and implications for institutionalisation of social conflicts. *Nokoko*, 7, 79-112.
- Ochim, F., & Joseph, N. (2020). *Understanding the dynamics of ethno-religious loyalties and national integration in Nigeria, 1999-2017. Federalism, Democracy, and National Development in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Zelon Publishers, 83-103.
- Odogwu, G. T. (2023). Identity politics and the 2023 general election in Nigeria. *Journal of Human, Social and Political Science Research*.
- World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Yusuf, M. S., Anaureyi, E. J., & Cole, A. A. (2026). Fragmented identity politics and security architecture in contemporary Nigeria. *University of Jos Journal of Political Science*, 3(1), 142-161.