



## POLITICAL EXCLUSIONS IN NIGERIA: PERCEIVED INJUSTICES AGAINST NDIGBO AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF BIAFRA'S (IPOB) AGITATION

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper analyses perceived injustices against Ndigbo and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra's (IPOB) agitations in the context of political exclusions in Nigeria. The specific objective is to ascertain whether the political exclusion of Ndigbo is responsible for the IPOB's agitation. The theoretical framework adopted is the frustration-aggression theory. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. Primary and secondary data were analysed and relied upon in validating the theoretic argument about the political exclusion of the Ndigbo and the IPOB's agitation. The paper compared major ethnic groups and geopolitical zones in the areas of national political leadership; federal appointments; state structure and political representations. The finding is that: the Southeast (Ndigbo) have been grossly excluded amounting to injustices which precipitate their frustrations and aggression. Therefore, injustices arising from political exclusions of Ndigbo are implicated in the IPOB's agitation. The  $H_0$  is rejected and the  $H_1$  therefore accepted. It therefore recommended that Nigeria's political leaders should: ensure that the present national leadership upholds the constitution; engender national healing and serve with compassion; ensure regional and ethnic balance in national leadership, appointments and representations, among others.*

**Keywords:** Political Exclusions, Injustices, Nigeria, Ndigbo, IPOB's Agitation, Introduction.

The Igbo people also spelled "Ibo" and formally also "Iboe", "Ebo", "Eboe", 'Eboans", "Heebo", natively "Ndi Igbo" ("Ndigbo") are an ethnic group in Nigeria; primarily found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo state (Iweadighi, 2022). A sizable Igbo population is also found in Kogi, Benue, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Delta and Rivers State (Ugwu, 2022). Ethnic Igbo populations are found in Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, as migrants as well as outside Africa (Slattery, 2010). There has been much speculation about the origins of the Igbo people, which are largely unknown (Mba & Odo, 2003). Geographically, the Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal locations by the River Niger – one part on the eastern side (which is the larger of the two) and a smaller part on the western side. Their related ethnic groups include Ibibio, Efik, Ogoni, Idoma, Igala, Ogoja and more remotely the Yeai group within the Volta region in Sierra-Leone (Iweadighi, 2022). The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa; with a population of about 41,552,000 they constitute about



18% of Nigeria's very enterprising, economically viable and deterministic population (Ugwu, 2022).

As a result of the British economic imperialist agenda the northern and southern protectorates were merged in 1914, resulting in the creation of the Nigeria state, a federation which became independent on October 1, 1960 (Achebe, 2012). The Nigeria federation has been crises-ridden. As an instance, from 1967 to 1970 Nigeria fought a civil war with the secessionist Republic of Biafra declared by Ndigbo due to "the apparent determination of the other major nationalities in the country to exterminate the tribe" (Madiebo, 1980:86-7). Evidently, since then, not only has ethno-religious discontents and cultural disparities based on ethnic differences obscured the integration of Nigerians, the attendant conflicts and crisis accompanying them in recent time has created a lot of stereotypes - the perception of Ndigbo as aggressive, violent, deterministic and domineering (Okonkwo, 2023; Achebe, 2012). Apart from the long-running ethnic conflicts, Nigeria is now more than ever before affected by other ethno-politically related issues which include racial marginalization, segregation, superiority complex, interest politics and favouritism (Okibe, 2023). Included also are ethnic separatist agitations, resource allocation and resource control debacles, state and local government creation agitations to balance the lopsidedness in the Nigeria federalist structure, insecurity and corruption, economic challenges (debt burden, poverty, inflation, unemployment) infrastructural decay and deficits, among others (Mba, Ugwuanyi & Nweze, 2020).

Prior to independence, the Igbos have continually craved for a just society where every ethnic group is seen and treated as equal in the Nigeria federalist project and can compete favourably for political power (Ezekwesili, 2023). And where public goods are fairly and equitably distributed without bitterness, rancour, ill feelings, favouritism or thought of marginalization in the spirit of a popular political slogan in Igbo language, "*enye ndi ebea, si nyekwa ndi ebea ka udo were chia*" (Wike, 2022) which implies, "if you give to these people, you should also give same to the other people so that peace shall reign". As Martin Luther King Jr. asserted 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere', so equity, fairness and justice should always be observed to avoid discontents and uprising (Baba-Ahmed, 2023).

In the Southeast Nigeria, splinter groups (radical, pseudo-radical and non-radical groups) seeking for the fair treatment of Ndigbo have variously emerged just as in other parts of Nigeria (Okoro, 2003). These include but not limited to: The Igbo Concerned Citizens, Igbo Renaissance Movement, and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and most recently, the



Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018; Okoro, 2003). Nnamdi Kanu founded the IPOB separatist organization in 2012 (Ekpo, 2018). The movement, just as the-like discontent agitators in the Niger Delta, Yoruba, Middle Belt and Northern parts of Nigeria, wants Nigeria's South-eastern states, which are dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, to once again secede and create an autonomous nation from Nigeria to be known as the Republic of Biafra in the face of perceived injustices against them (exclusions) by other ethnic groups and successive Nigerian governments (Mba & Okwueze, 2019). To achieve this, the movement has been pushing for a referendum to resolve the Biafra Republic quest through a civilized and constitutional approach (Ugorji, 2021).

The IPOB separatist agitators and their resistance to state repressions have led to inter-ethnic divisions and other diverse negative implications. These include disruption of the education system due to youth involvement in protests; threats to peace and security within the region which scare local and foreign investors from coming to invest and tourists scared from traveling to these areas (Igwe, 2023). Others include economic downturn; emergence of criminal networks such as the “unknown gunmen” that in disguise, hijack the non-violent movement for criminal activities and confrontations with law enforcement agencies (Ugorji, 2021). These have all resonated against the deterioration of the country’s political, economic and socio-cultural institutions.

More so, most actions taken by the government of the federation in the conduct of its affairs clearly negates Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution which provides that: “The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies” (FRN, 2014:10).

### **Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature**

This paper adopts the Frustration-Aggression theory as its framework of analysis. The theory assumes that all aggression, whether interpersonal or international, has its root cause(s) in the frustration of one or more actor’s goal achievement (Okonkwo, 2021). Proponents of this theory trace the root of conflict to the non-fulfilment of personal or group objective(s) and the frustration that this breed. This theory developed by John Dollard in 1939 was further elucidated by scholars like Berkowitz (1962) and Yates (1962). The basic postulation of this theory is that interference by



opposing forces with goal directed behaviour creates frustration, which leads in turn to aggressive response(s) usually directed against the suspected or reputed frustrating agent (Yates, 1962).

Frustration-aggression theory also contends that individuals and groups have goals of some sort and that much of their behaviour is purposive in the sense of goal-seeking. Thus, if this behaviour is not prevented in some way, the group or individual is likely to behave quite peaceful. Since this condition is unlikely to be regularly assured in the human condition due to scarcity, it predicts that the result is likely to be aggressive behaviour elicited by frustration. The frustrated individual or group is likely to attack the believed source – which may not necessarily be the real source of the frustration, and if the attack fails to remove the frustration, the aggression is likely to re-occur (Berkowitz, 1962). This implies that if the attack does not succeed, the attacker will then have the tendency to reinforce and re-attack as further frustration is bound to occur. This idea forms the basic explanations of most current social conflicts in human society.

It further asserts that in social life, man comes to value many things such as wealth, status, power, security, equality, freedom, and so on. However, in an attempt at achieving one value and end up losing another, dissatisfaction, anger and often aggression always occur. This type of situation is a common place in many complex societies and is termed “relative deprivation”, often defined as the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the “ought” and the “is” of collective value satisfaction. The “ought to” referring to the condition of life men comes to believe they are entitled to and the “is” referring to their perception of the possible. Crucial to this idea is the perception of deprivation: the ideas that people have of the gap between what they believe they are entitled to and what they receive or believe that they can attain (Okonkwo, 2021). Whether or not objective observers would consider the deprivation real or apparent will highly influence their thought(s) and action(s).

Hence, relative deprivation is the degree to which the individual feels deprived and as such related to anger and aggression. Another fundamental proposition here is that the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members. (Berkowitz, 1962). Thus, if a group feels an intense sense of relative deprivation with respect to class of values important to it, then it has considerable potential for collective violence. If the group feels that collective violence is the only means to alleviate the discontent, then the likelihood of violence is greater. Alternatively, should the group feel that violence is illegitimate, or that it is unlikely to succeed, then, it is more likely to restrain itself and so, minimize



the potential for violence. Whether or not deprivation eventually culminates in violence depend on a number of factors, among them are, the intensity and scope of the deprivation (Yates, 1962).

It has been argued by critics of this theory like Baba and Aeysinghe, (2017) that most people at sometimes experience deprivation of one sort or the other, but this rarely led to or warrant collective violence. They contend that for this theory to be universally applicable it warrants that deprivation then must be sufficiently intense and experienced by a sufficiently broad sector or a strategically located sector of the society in order to create a potential for civil violence (Okonkwo, 2021).

Applying this to the context of the Igbo exclusions and the IPOB's agitation, we can see that the Igbos has over the years especially since the end of the Nigeria civil war of 1967 to 1970 perceived that they are being grossly marginalized in the scheme of things in the Nigeria federation (Ekeocha, 2023; Achebe, 2012). Their perception of how they "ought to" be treated in the Nigeria federation (as one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria) or what they feel they should get or are entitled to get (like appointments and elections into top political leadership positions) and how actually they are treated (as a dot in the Nigerian geopolitical space) and what they actually get (inconsequential appointments) vis-à-vis other major ethnic groups or components of the Nigeria federation is likely to be the source of their frustration which apparently informs the basis for their aggression as a way of venting their anger (Okibe, 2023; Ugorji, 2021; Amanambu, 2018).

The 1999 Constitution in Section 15(2) declared "... national integration shall be actively encouraged whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited" (FRN, 2014:26). It went further to state; "... the State shall foster a feeling of belongingness and of involvement among the various peoples of the Federation, to the end that loyalty to the nation and its objectives, principles and policies shall override sectional and tribal loyalties" (FRN, 2014:27). The Federalist Constitution of Nigeria without doubt unequivocally provided the basis upon which balance and fairness shall be achieved, but in reality, these are often jettisoned. Sequel to that and after two decades of post-civil war experience the Nigeria state has started again to witness new waves of separatist agitation from the Southeast. The overt reason for the current IPOB's agitation, a resurgent call for a Biafra state, are not far from being in tandem with that which led to the civil war in 1967 – injustices against Ndigbo.

The IPOB is a Nigerian Biafra separatist group. Its primary goal "is to bring the Nigeria



federation, a former British colony, to hold a secession referendum in Biafra, Southeast Nigeria” (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018:3). It has blamed the Nigeria state and its institutions for some perceived injustices and the gross exclusions of Ndigbo, hence its agitation for secession (Adedeji & Ezeabasili, 2018; Amanambu, 2018; Momah, 2013). Some of their activities and utterances have been seen to be threatening the continued existence of Nigeria as one indivisible country (NewsHub, 2023; Abubakar, 2018).

Despite the above, the fact still remains that all separatist agitations whether violent or non-violent acts provocatively and is a major indicator of agitations (Ekeocha, 2023). IPOB sometimes resort to agitation to confront and suppress negative sentiments and injustices directed against them by those who don't support their movement. As an instance, the government tackling IPOB forcefully both within and outside the confines of established rules and conventions of engagement such as the indiscriminate arrests, shooting and killing of their flag-carrying defenseless members during peaceful protests and rallies (at Onitsha, Aba, Umuahia, Orlu and Enugu) by the police and army, means that the government is not poised for negotiation and peaceful resolution of the conflict (Amanambu, 2018). Clearly, this is contrary to how it treats other agitators like the Niger Delta Avengers, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, and even other more security threatening terrorist groups like the Boko-Haram and bandits in the northern Nigeria (Abubakar, 2018).

As another instance, on June 1, 2021, Buhari threatened to “talk to IPOB in the language they would understand” for agitating for Biafra. In line with the threat Baba Usman the then Inspector General of Police, instructed the Nigeria police to ‘kill IPOB agitators not worrying about human rights’ (Okonkwo, 2023). Consequently, the military and police have unleashed mayhem across the southeast killing, maiming, burning houses and traumatizing the entire region. Regrettably, not only that the southeast governors, political leaders and the *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* did not condemn these atrocities, in many cases they were seen felicitating them (Igwe, 2023). As an instance, the Military and Police invaded Ebonyi and Imo States on the invitation of the governors of the states, (Dave Umahi and Hope Uzodinma respectively), apparently in a race for who would pacify their “master” more by killing the people they are supposed to protect (Olagunju, 2023; Okeoma, 2021). It is painful that as a manifestation of his bias in implementation of policy measures and unequal treatment of all sections of Nigeria, Buhari administration expressed determination to “get rid of miscreants” in the southeast (referring to IPOB agitators) while doing nothing about the super-miscreants and murderers - the Boko Haram jihadists,



ISWAP terrorists, bandits, and Fulani herdsmen militia - pillaging the north, kidnapping and committing mass murders on a daily basis threatening national security (Okibe, 2023; Osaretin, 2019).

It is therefore identifiable that some of the reasons of marginalization in Nigeria are systemic, while others derive from administrative decisions that discriminate against some parts of the country which inspire separatist agitations (Ugorji, 2021; Achebe, 2012). Without actually probing, one is unable to ascertain how the problem is manifesting in different colourations that appear peculiar to Igbos; the people responsible; and, the dangers they pose to the Igbo nation in particular and Nigeria in general (Okibe, 2023). Succinctly, it is argued by IPOB leaders that Nigeria political leaders are not concerned about the Igbos, their security, peace, economy and prosperity and hence the rots and decays in the state of their development infrastructures, exclusions in appointments and some detrimental policy actions. IPOB agitators believe that Ndigbo could regain their voice and relevance in Nigeria by regaining political inclusivity. Getting this will give them opportunity to rebuild their economy and the Igbo nation which has been mindlessly left by the Nigerian Federal Government to dilapidate. This is believed to have been done with the help of some internal collaborators such as these state governors and political office holders who collaborate with the government at the centre to incapacitate IPOB agitators into subservience (Okibe, 2023; Olagunju, 2023).

As noted by Othman (1984:17) "in any struggle for power and its spoils, there is usually a thin line between one's moral position and one's concrete material interests". Aside the realities of the problems bedeviling the Nigerian state, there have not only been manipulations, but also crisis of confidence on the attempts by the authorities to institute mechanisms such as national conferences, debates, questions, etc., relating to the restructuring (Agomuo, 2020). It is clear that Nigeria's political leaders are largely responsible for the failures of the Nigerian state as their major concern has always been how to share Nigeria's national resources, but not leading Nigeria out of the troubles they had embroiled her into.

Where Nigeria political leaders look away from carrying out their constitutional responsibility as contained in the directive principles of state policy to Ndigbo, the people have the right to redirect them by setting agenda for them (Duruji, 2012). It is believed, through that, peaceful resolution of conflicts can be pursued. Peaceful conflict resolution processes should therefore take into account a variety of collaborating units working with each other as equals to achieve common goals (Ugorji, 2021). Though sometimes this might be possibly easier in a unitary than a



federated state, if the latter is properly restructured to avoid repressions and exclusions, it will help to assuage the threats of agitations and secession and for peace to reign (NewsHub, 2023; Mohammed, Aisha & Saidu, 2018).

Therefore, IPOB's venting of anger on their perceived enemy (the Nigerian state, its institutions and leaders) is explained by this theory. Thus, it is apt to state that the IPOB's agitation for self-determination is sequel to their perception of the relative deprivations they suffer in terms of access to leadership positions, representation at the decision-making institutions of the government, among others in the Nigeria federation. Whether this is correct or wrong is subject to verification and empirical analysis and which were not seen in the literature reviewed. This paper intends to fill this gap in the subsequent sub-themes.

### **The Problem**

Igbos residing within the Igbo land, all over Nigeria or even in Diasporas has proven to be competent, trustworthy, hardworking, dependable, and peaceful and law abiding (Osaretin, 2019). People like Emeka Ayaoku and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have credibly held sensitive and leadership positions in International Institutions and Organizations. They have also been appointed as judges and ministers and are performing innovatively and competently in revered job positions in countries like Britain, America, Canada, Germany, France, among others (Odi, 2019). Only recently (July 5, 2024) Chi Onwurah and Kate Osamor were elected as Labour Members of Parliament for Newcastle Central and West and Edmonton respectively just as Chuka Umunna was in 2010. Power Mike Okpara, Mary Onyeali, Kanu Nwankwo and many others have won laurels and coveted prizes, given accolades and recognitions for their wonderful, credible, intelligent and exceptional performances in different fields in many parts of the world (Ezeibe, Abada & Okeke, 2016). Others like Allen Onyeama, Innocent Chukwuma, Maduka Samuel Onyishi have contributed immensely to the economic growth and development of Nigeria both from within and outside the country even more than people from the other parts of the country that are being more preferentially and fairly treated (Nairaland Forum, 2023).

Many countries (United States of America, Russia, China Japan, Singapore, Israel, and New Zealand) with or without intimidating mix of talent and abundant natural resources but have chosen to tap into their human resources, inclusiveness, equity, justice and utilizing the right talents for the right purposes are doing well in nation building and national development (Okeoma, 2021). Unfortunately, despite abundant natural and human resources, Nigeria continues to struggle in her nation building efforts as a result of their segregating practices (Itua, 2023). In spite of claims of "one





Nigeria”, there is rarely a national agenda that is not ethnically engineered by either the Hausa/Fulani or Yoruba ethnic groups whenever they are in power to short-change the Igbos even when it is clear that, no country will be one without inclusion, equity, and justice (Okeoma, 2021). In recent times (2015 to date) Nigeria administration has continued to alienate the Igbos in appointments into sensitive positions and elections into national leadership positions. Though they talk about “one Nigeria”, an Igbo man is not trusted to be the President of Nigeria; and recently, Senate President or Speaker of the House of Representatives (Asaju & Egberi, 2023). During the elections, many candidates were stigmatized, discriminated against even in their state of origin simply because their mother or grandmother is of the Igbo nationality e.g. Rhode-Vivor the 2023 Labour Party Governorship Candidate in Lagos State (George, 2023, Fashoranti, 2023). Igbos are alienated and reduced to second class citizens and made to undergo different untold hardships, mental and psychological stress and torture as their states are militarized (Okoro, 2003). The result therefore being the people’s disaffection and distrust in the “united Nigeria (federalist) project” (Idike, Ukeje, Iwuala, Onele, Ekwunife, Nwachukwu & Udu, 2019).

### **Purpose of Study**

**The broad objective of this study is to analyse** the injustices against Ndigbo that instigated **IPOB’s agitation. The specific objective is:** To ascertain whether political exclusions of Ndigbo in Nigeria is the reason for the IPOB’s agitation for self-determination.

### **Research Question**

The primary question to guide this discourse is: Is injustices (the political exclusions) against Ndigbo the reason for the IPOB’s agitation? Answer to this question shall help in determining the agenda to be set for Nigeria’s political leaders for peaceful resolution.

### **Hypotheses**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Political exclusions of Ndigbo are not the reason for the IPOB’s agitation for self-determination.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Political exclusions of Ndigbo are the reason for the IPOB’s agitation for self-determination.

### **Methodology**

Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. Two approaches were employed in the collection of data for this study: the primary and secondary



approaches. The primary approach was through interviews, while the secondary approach was by gathering information and data from textbooks, internet, journals, newspapers and government/official publications. The information and data collected were analysed and used in answering the above question and validating or otherwise, the hypotheses postulated. Based on the facts established, agenda were set for Nigeria political leaders for peaceful resolution.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

In the sub-titles and tables below the perceived injustices (exclusions) perpetrated against Ndigbo in Nigeria that informed the current agitation of the IPOB for self-determination are analysed.

#### *Exclusion in National Political Leadership*

The current agitation is linked with the injustices: the exclusions and subjugation of Ndigbo in national leadership. Table I shows the chronology of Presidents/Heads of State of Nigeria from 1960-2024 and how long and number of times people from the different geopolitical zones have assumed the office.

**Table I: Occupation of the position of Nigeria President/Head of State, 1960-2024**

Period	Head of State & Commander-In-Chief	Regime	State of Origin	Region	Geo-Political Zone
Oct. 1, 1960 - Jan. 15, 1966	A. T. Balewa	Civilian	Bauchi	North	North East
Jan. 15, 1966 - July 29, 1966	J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi	Military	Abia	East	South East
July 30, 1966 – July 29, 1975	Y. T. Gowon	Military	Plateau	North	North Central
July 29, 1975 – Feb. 13, 1976	M. R. Muhammed	Military	Kano	North	North West
Feb. 14, 1976 – Sept. 30, 1979	M. A. O. Obasanjo	Military	Ogun	West	South West
Oct. 1, 1979 – Dec. 30, 1983	U. A. S. Shagari	Civilian	Sokoto	North	North West
Dec. 31, 1983 – Aug. 26, 1985	M. Buhari	Military	Katsina	North	North West
Aug. 27, 1985 – Aug. 25, 1993	I. B. Babangida	Military	Niger	North	North Central



Period	Head of State & Commander-In-Chief	Regime	State of Origin	Region	Geo-Political Zone
Aug. 26, 1993 – Nov. 17, 1993	E. A. Shonekan	Civilian	Ogun	West	South West
Nov. 18, 1993 – June 8, 1998	Sani Abacha	Military	Kano	North	North West
June 9, 1998 – May 29, 1999	A. Abubakar	Military	Niger	North	North Central
May 29, 1999 – May 29, 2007	M. A. O. Obasanjo	Civilian	Ogun	West	South West
May 29, 2007 – May 5, 2010	M. Yar'Adua	Civilian	Katsina	North	North West
May 5, 2010 – May 29, 2015	G. E. Jonathan	Civilian	Bayelsa	South	South South
May 29, 2015 – May 29, 2023	M. Buhari	Civilian	Katsina	North	North West
May 29, 2023 -	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	Civilian	Osun	South	South West

**Source:** Compiled by the authors (2024)

As shown above, apart from Major Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi the military Head of State from January 15, 1966 to July 29, 1966, no South easterner (Ndigbo) has occupied the position of Head of State and Government and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria while other geo-political zones - the Northwest (5times) and the Southwest (4times) - has dominated occupation of the position from 1960 to date (2024). Table II below further shows the extent to which other key national institutional leadership positions (the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary) in the country have been occupied by people from the different geopolitical zones especially from 2015 to 2024.



**Table II: Occupation of Leadership Positions by Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria, 2015 – 2024**

S/N	Leadership Positions	2011-2015	2015 – 2019	2019 – 2023	2023 – Date
1	President	South South	North West	North West	South West
2	Vice President	North West	South West	South West	North East
3	Chief Justice of Nigeria	North East	South South	North West	South West
4	Senate President	North Central	North Central	North East	South South
5	Deputy Senate President	South East	South East	South South	North West
6	Speaker House of Representatives	North West	North East	South West	North West
7	Deputy Speaker, House of Reps.	South East	South South	North Central	South East

**Source:** Compiled by the authors (2024).

Shown above is that the Southeast geopolitical zone (Ndigbo) have not been equitably represented in the leadership equation as other geopolitical zones, having only occupied the position of Deputy Senate President from 2011 to 2019 and Deputy Speaker, House of Representative from 2011 to 2015 and 2023 to date, which amounts to political exclusion *nay*, injustice.

Furthermore, as expressed by Senator Okey Ezea in an interview specifically regarding the position of Chief Justice of Nigeria which is a career position, it has been occupied in the following chronological order from 1995 to date: Muhammadu Lawal Uwaise (1995-2006), Salisu Modibo Alfa Belgore (2006-2007), Idris Legbo Kutigi (2007-2009), Aloysius Iyorgyer Katsina-Alu (2009-2011), Dahiru Musdapher (2011-2012), Aloma Mariam Muktar (2012-2014), Mahmud Mohammed (2014-2016), W. S. Nkanu Onnoghen (2016-2019), Ibrahim Tanko Muhammed (2019-2022), and Olukayode Ariwoola (27<sup>th</sup> June 2022- ). Clearly, from 1995 to date (2024) no Igbo person was appointed or promoted to head the third arm of government in Nigeria, while persons from the North dominated the position, justifying the agitators’ perception of injustice to them in the Nigeria federation (Ezea, 2024).

***Exclusion in Federal Appointments***

The Federal Character principle was provided in the Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution (Third Schedule, Part 1c 8[1-3]) to ensure equity and fairness among all sections of the Nigeria federation especially in appointments and composition of federal governmental institutions. This is meant to ensure that no section of the federation



dominates or has undue advantage over others in terms of appointments into federal positions. Invariably, no section is to be dominated, marginalized or excluded for any reason in the sharing of public goods in the Nigeria federation (FRN, 2014). The above constitutional provision notwithstanding, as lamented by Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe in an interview, Buhari's regime had ten (10) Northerners occupying key and very sensitive Ministerial positions such as Finance and coordinating Minister of Economy, Defence, Internal Affairs, Justice, Petroleum, Education, etc, with other geopolitical zones occupying the Minister of State positions in disregard of the Federal Character principle. Noteworthy, no other ethnic group and region has been so marginalized or made subservient to others in the Nigeria federation as the Igbos in the Southeast, (Abaribe, 2024). Their exclusion was exemplified further in the lopsided manner in which the federal government made her appointments mostly in favour of the North all through Buhari's tenure (2015 -2023).

To substantiate this, Buhari administration skewed the following appointments to the North: Inspector General of Police, Director General of DSS, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, National Security Adviser, Chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Head of Immigration Services, Controller General of Customs, Comptroller Correctional Services (Prisons), Head of Civil Defense Corps, Chairman, INEC, Aide de Camp to President to President, Chief of Staff, Chief of Protocol/Special Assistant, Senior Special Assistant (Media & Publicity), Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Defence Intelligence, Managing Director Nigerian Ports Authority, Director General, Nigerian Maritime Administration, Safety and Security Agency, Executive Vice Chairman/Chief Executive Officer Nigerian Communication Commission, Director General, Budget Office of the Federation, Secretary, Government of the Federation. Others include the Group Managing Director, NNPC, Director, Department of Petroleum Resources, Commissioner for Insurance and Chief Executive, NICON, Senior Special Assistant on National Assembly Matters (House of Reps.), Chief Justice of the Federation, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation (Ozah, 2020).

The only appointment given to the Southerners are: Chief of Defense Staff (Ekiti, Southwest), Chief of Army Staff (2022-2023) (Delta, South-South), Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity (Osun, Southwest), Special Adviser, Niger Delta Amnesty Office (Bayelsa, South-South), and Senior Special Assistant on National Assembly Matters (Senate) (Akwa Ibom, South-South), Governor, Central Bank (Delta, South-South) (Ozah, 2020). Observably, one can decipher that the Southeast was completely schemed out in all these appointments. Regrettably, the present Bola Tinubu administration has not done much to assuage the Igbos' feeling as in his



appointments, his fellow Yorubas occupy the post of Chief of Staff to the President, Special Adviser on Media and Strategic Communication, Comptroller General of Customs, Inspector General of Police, among others. Likewise in the distribution of his appointment of Security Chiefs, the Northwest and Southwest got two (2) each while Northeast, South-South and Southeast got one (1) each with the North-Central having none, though they are not so disadvantaged as they occupy the Office of the Secretary of the Federation (SGF) with the Northeast occupying the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA) (Olagunju, 2023).

Presently, Tinubu's regime has as Ministers, ten (10) from the Northwest, eight (8) from the Northeast, ten (10) from the North-Central, thirteen (13) from the Southwest, eight (8) from the South-South but only five (5) from the Southeast and of the less significant ministries (Itua, 2023). As lamented by Hon. Ikenga Ugochinyere in an interview, just as Buhari did, Tinubu concentrated the control of all major national economic institutions in the hands of his tribesmen. Thus, the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of Economy, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Minister of Solid Minerals, Minister of Petroleum Resources, Minister of Water Resources and Blue Economy, Minister of Interior, Minister of Technology and Digital Economy, Director General of Nigeria Ports Authority, Director General, Federal Inland Revenue Services, Chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), among other key ministries directly related to the economy of Nigeria are all controlled by the Yorubas, Southwest Nigeria against the constitutional provisions on the federal character principle which amounts to injustice (Ugochinyere, 2024).

Regarding the postulation of the relative deprivation theory about the perception of the "ought to" and the "is" as sources of frustration which will trigger aggression, if a people like Ndigbo of the Southeast Nigeria is boxed into this situation of flagrant exclusion and marginalization, is it still wrong for them to show aggression to the Nigeria state? Is it wrong for them to demand for self-determination? Is their agitation therefore not justified? The answers to these questions would obviously be "No".

### ***Inequality in the Number of States, Local Government and National Assembly Representation***

State creation has become an albatross squeezing the life of the Nigerian polity. It was initially a demand of the minority ethnic groups to extricate themselves from the marginalization, strangulation and oppressive rule of the majority ethnic groups in the old Eastern, Western and Northern regions. Now, it has become a political instrument of self-balkanization by majority ethnic groups in their quest for balance



of power and domination of major share of the nation’s commonwealth. As Eme & Anyadike, (2012) rightly pointed out, with states receiving 50% of the national revenue as budgetary support under the 1979 Constitution and 36% under the 1999 Constitution, major ethnic communities in Nigeria have increasingly pushed for further subdivision into more states, each of which would receive its own allocation under the equality of state principle. Critically, this act grossly negates the principle of fairness as emphasis has now shifted to revenue allocation or distribution rather than to generation. The negative implication of this is that the largest ethnic communities (the North) had cracked the code of state creation recognizing that by demanding more states they could capture a greater overall share of federal resources.

As again expressed by Hon. Ikenga Ugochinyere, currently existing in the creation of states in Nigeria, the Igbos has been marginalized. Despite all agitations and reasonable arguments, the Southeast geo-political zone is the only zone with five states while others have six each with the North West advantageously having seven states. The Igbos is also short-changed in the distribution of Local Government Areas and since the inception of the Fourth Republic, has been agitating for an additional state on the grounds of fairness and equity (Ugochinyere, 2024). It is a clear fact that successive “Northern” military rule had favoured the North in the creation of states and local governments. The Southerners especially the Igbos have been insistent on the fact that central to the resolution of National Question is restructuring of the “unbalance” federation, (Adeyemi, 2013). A look at Table III shows that the local governments are also unevenly distributed across the geo-political zones.

**Table III: Distribution of States and LGAs by Geo-political Zones**

Zones	No of States	No of LGAs	% of LGAs
North Central (including Abuja)	6 plus Abuja	121 (including Abuja’s 6 Area Councils)	16
North East	6	112	14
North West	7	186	24
South East	5	95	12
South South	6	123	16
South West	6	137	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 (plus Abuja)</b>	<b>774 (including Abuja’s 6 Area Councils)</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Compiled by the authors from the 2014 amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.



As could be seen above, the North West zone has a quarter (24%) of the LGAs in the country while other five zones have between 12% and 18%. The number of LGAs in the entire Southeast is just slightly above half of those in the North West (95 vis-a-vis 186). Likewise, while the entire South has 355 local governments, the entire North has 419 LGAs, that is, 64 LGAs more than those in the entire South (Abu, 2022).

In terms of composition of the National Assembly, as a result of the imbalance in the structure of the federation, in the Senate, the highest law-making body of the country, the constitution in Section 48 prescribed that each state shall have three (3) Senators and one (1) for the FCT, Abuja. On the other hand, with regards to the House of Representatives, the Lower Chamber of the national legislature, Section 49 of the Constitution states: "Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the House of Representatives shall consist of three hundred and sixty (360) members representing Constituencies of nearly equal population as far as possible, provided that no constituency shall fall within more than one state", (FRN, 2014:45). In line with this, the country is divided into Federal Constituencies. The distribution of the composition of the National Assembly according to geo-political zones can be seen in Table IV below.



**Table IV: Composition of the National Assembly by States and Geo-Political Zones**

Geo-Political Zone	States	No of LGAs	No of Sen. Districts	No of Fed. Const.
North Central	Benue	23	3	10
	Kogi	21	3	9
	Kwara	16	3	6
	Nasarawa	13	3	6
	Niger	25	3	10
	Plateau	17	3	9
	FCT	6	1	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>121</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>53</b>
North East	Adamawa	21	3	8
	Bauchi	20	3	12
	Borno	27	3	11
	Gombe	11	3	6
	Taraba	16	3	6
	Yobe	17	3	6
	<b>Total</b>		<b>112</b>	<b>18</b>
North West	Jigawa	27	3	11
	Kaduna	23	3	16
	Kano	44	3	24
	Katsina	34	3	15
	Kebbi	21	3	8
	Sokoto	23	3	10
	Zamfara	14	3	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>186</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>91</b>

  

Geo-Political Zone	States	No of LGAs	No of Sen. Districts	No of Fed. Const.
South East	Abia	17	3	8
	Anambra	21	3	11
	Ebonyi	13	3	6
	Enugu	17	3	8
	Imo	27	3	10
	<b>Total</b>		<b>95</b>	<b>15</b>
South South	Akwa Ibom	31	3	10
	Bayelsa	8	3	5
	Cross River	18	3	8
	Delta	25	3	9
	Edo	18	3	9
	Rivers	23	3	13
	<b>Total</b>		<b>123</b>	<b>18</b>
South West	Ekiti	16	3	6
	Lagos	20	3	23
	Ogun	20	3	9
	Ondo	18	3	9
	Osun	30	3	9
	Oyo	33	3	14
<b>Total</b>		<b>137</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>70</b>

**Source:** Compiled by the authors (2024)

The implication of the above distribution is that the North has 58 Senators while the South has 51 which is a minority. Further broken down, while North West alone has 21 Senators, the Southeast has only but 15 with the other geo-political zones having 18 each. This negates the principles of equity, justice and fair representation (Ezea, 2024). On the other hand, regarding the composition of the Federal House of Representatives, the implication of the above distribution is that while the entire Southeast has only 95 local governments and 43 House of Representative positions, the South West has 137 local governments and 70 House of Representative positions. Likewise, the North Central has 121 local governments and 53 House of Representative positions. Advantageously, the North West has 186 local governments and 91 House of Representative positions. These depict the disproportionate



distribution among the component units, of aspects of Nigeria's commonwealth and the gross asymmetric representation of the geo-political zones in the federation at the detriment of the Southeast (Ugochinyere, 2024).

As a federation that professes equality, justice and fairness to all the constituent units, it presupposes that there should be a balance in the states and local governments that constitute the geographical structure of the country (Abaribe, 2024). Nigeria today falls short of this as gross imbalance exists in the Nigeria federalist structure. The deliberate misuse of power to alter the political landscape of Nigeria in the name of state and local government creation did not help matter as it has been a source of rancour and agitations among the marginalized constituent groups. State and local government creation has not only failed to solve the problem of ethnic minority rights, it has become a veritable instrument with which a string of Nigeria's past ethnocentric, selfish and unitarist leaders had dealt a fatal blow to Nigeria federalism (Mba, Ugwuanyi & Nweze, 2020).

Following from all the above, an evaluation of the level of the injustices: exclusions / marginalization of Ndigbo in the political equations in Nigeria and the implications thereto vis-à-vis other geopolitical zones and major ethnic groups in Nigeria that are equally part of the Nigeria federation, makes one to come to the judgment that justifies the IPOB's agitation (Abaribe, 2024). Nigeria is a federation as stated in the constitution and has many provisions clearly stipulated in this direction. It presupposes that all the component units should be treated as equals and none should be seen as superior or otherwise to the others. Yet, the spirit and letters of the federalist constitution is not being followed by the Nigeria leaders and thus has breaded most of the crisis in the federation (Ugochinyere, 2024).

The injustices of lopsided policies and actions of Nigeria leaders (the quota system; less developed and disadvantaged states policies, etc) have raised most of the controversies in Nigeria. As an instance, it's for this reason that some statesmen and leaders of Socio-cultural groups in the Southern region of Nigeria in 2020 dragged President Buhari before the Federal High Court in Abuja, insisting that most appointments under his administration breached some provisions of the 1999 Constitution and the Federal Character principle (Ozah, 2020). Many detribalized Nigerians aware of the plight of Ndigbo in particular in the Nigeria Federation and compassionate about their cry of unparalleled injustices against them since the end of the Nigerian civil war had spoken up against that (Igwe, 2023; Okibe, 2023). Notable people like Pa Edwin Clark, the leader of PANDEF of the Niger Delta and Pa Ayo Adebajo the leader of Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-cultural organization, Olabode



George, among others had maintained that since millions of Ndigbo live and spend their resources in different parts of Nigeria outside of Igbo land, no other ethnic group has a greater stake in the dream “united Nigeria” project more than them (Ozah, 2020).

In Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Sokoto, Port Harcourt, Jos, Katsina, Maiduguri, and many other parts of the country, Ndigbo have established business empires and companies, and other assets sometimes even more than the indigenes of these states. They economically contribute to more than 60% of the nation’s resources through their businesses scattered all over the country and beyond (Abaribe, 2024; Ugochinyere, 2024). In several other aspects of life Ndigbo have excelled and have even been seen to contribute substantially to the nation’s capital flight from abroad (Clark, 2022). Why they face risks to their life and belongings on a regular basis, as well as outright bigotry and marginalization in key fields of national concern is condemnable (Adebanjo, 2022). This has prompted Igbo youths to demand for the exercise of their fundamental right of self-determination as provided in Article 48 of the United Nations declaration on Human Rights (Abaribe, 2024).

The question being interrogated here is: Is the injustices (political exclusions) against Ndigbo in Nigeria implicated in the IPOB’s agitation? A look at the level of exclusions / marginalization of Ndigbo in the areas examined above and the implications thereto vis-à-vis what obtains in other geopolitical zones and major ethnic groups in Nigeria who are equally part of the Nigeria federation, one will come to the judgment that enormous injustices has been done against Ndigbo in Nigeria politics justifying IPOB’s agitation. Hence it can be rightly asserted that injustices against Ndigbo in Nigeria are implicated in the IPOB’s agitation. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) which states that political exclusions of Ndigbo are not the reason for the IPOB’s agitation for self-determination is hereby rejected. The facts presented clearly validate the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ).

## **Conclusion**

Following therefore from the argument of the frustration - aggression theory on which we hinged our position here, the main cause of the IPOB’s agitation is the denials of what Ndigbo ought to get and how they are supposed to be regarded and treated in the Nigeria federation vis-à-vis other major ethnic groups and geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Therefore, it is clear that the successive Nigeria governments are guilty of not ensuring that equity, fairness, and sense of justice are maintained in its policies and actions. In the present circumstance, to ensure the restoration of peace, Nigerian leaders, rather than coercion should have adopted dialogue and other



diplomatic means. The government should therefore refrain from further threats of “crushing” agitation or use of force against the IPOB agitators and should free unconditionally the IPOB agitators currently incarcerated. Condemning IPOB’s liberation movement still exacerbate the injustices which the Igbos suffers in the Nigeria federation, more so, since self-determination following United Nations declaration is allowed in the face of discontent and distrust among the component units in the dream “united Nigeria” project.

### **Towards Peaceful Resolution of the IPOB’s Agitation: Agenda for Nigeria’s Political Leaders**

The need to resolve the IPOB’s agitation and for peace and tranquillity to return in the South-eastern Nigeria in particular and among the constituent units in Nigeria in general is unquestionable. This is the panacea that could engender nation building and national integration. Therefore, the current political leaders ought to act differently from their predecessors. Thus, the following agenda are set before them for the restoration of peace between Ndigbo and the rest of the Nigeria federation and for the purpose of nation building.

First and the most important task before the political leaders is to ensure regional and ethnic balance in Nigeria’s federal structure and government. To this effect, more states and local governments should be created in the Southeast for balance in the commonwealth appropriations. Also, having all three arms of government headed by people from one or two regions is not healthy for national peace, integration and nation building. Hence, it would be unfair if the country’s leadership is concentrated and not spread among the different regions and ethnic groups that make up the federation. Therefore, equity and fairness demand that there should be some regional and ethnic balance in the leadership of Nigeria’s federal government and this should be transmitted into every other appointment done at the federal level. It is not about ethnicity or religion, but about ensuring that no part of the country feels marginalized or excluded from the political and social processes.

Second, Nigeria’s current political leadership should ensure that they always play by the constitution. They should realize that since Nigeria is a constitutionally recognized nation, her leaders should know and recognize the significance of supporting the rule of law and following judicial rulings. As Sani (2023) rightly asserted, Nigeria leaders should respect the law if the citizens should be expected to be law abiding and for the country to be seen as a law-abiding country; one that is being run according to the constitution and rule of law.



Third, leaders at all levels should engender national healing and should serve with compassion. It is a clear fact that incarcerated IPOB members' release would be interpreted as the extension of hands of fellowship to the Ndigbo since many people and groups have in the past made demand to the federal government in this respect.

Fourth is to ensure the genuine strengthening of security in the Southeast region in particular and the entire country in general. It is apparent that most of the security challenges especially those perpetrated in the Southeast by the unknown gunmen; the Fulani herdsmen militia and kidnapers could be adequately curtailed if the government puts in place a better security architecture in the country.

Fifth, Ndigbo are very economically enterprising people and need to be supported by the government both at the state and federal levels and this should be the concern of Nigeria political leaders. Since the bane of the IPOB's agitation is marginalization and injustices, political leaders should set up plan to grow the region's economy in the shortest possible time.

Another responsibility or task before Nigeria's political leaders is the issue of trust building (facilitation) for the "united Nigeria" project. This very important issue has been lacking and should be among the tasks before those in government now. It should also transcend the different institutions of Nigeria government. Individuals entrusted with responsibility in the country should not be bias in their discharge of the responsibilities. This is equally expected of the institutions of the state in the making and implementing of state policies.

Finally, is the need for ending the culture of impunity among the political leaders. At the level of individuals, the government, and its institutions, this would ensure that the process of healing and unity of the country can be achieved. Nigeria leaders at all levels should be statesman-like by the kind of appointments they make which should reflect a sense of equity and spread and the kind of policies they drive. The spread and inclusivity of the government's appointments, policies, programs and infrastructure development will drive the patriotism needed in the people of the Southeast and other Nigerians towards the "united Nigeria" project.



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