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## Development Held Hostage: The Roles of Ethnicity and Religion in the Quest for Achieving National Development

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### Abstract

*The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by the British colonial administration united peoples of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural-linguistic backgrounds into what has become the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This forced union, effected without due consultation, sowed the seeds of disunity (“unity in diversity”) that continue to undermine national development. Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition, compounded by political unrest, ethnic chauvinism, corruption, religious bigotry and other social vices, has crippled its progress. Against this background, the present paper examines the effects of ethnicity and religion on national development in Nigeria. The study employed a quantitative methodology, collecting data from 265 respondents via multi-stage cluster and purposive sampling techniques. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 22 with descriptive statistics. Divide and Rule theory provided the theoretical framework. Findings reveal, among others, that ethnicity and religion exert a significant negative impact on national development. On the basis of these findings, it is recommended, among other measures, that Nigeria requires purposeful leadership with a clear vision for placing its citizens at the centre of development, irrespective of ethnic origin or religious affiliation.*

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Religion, National Development, Development, Hostage and corruption.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is globally recognised as one of the most richly endowed nations in terms of human and natural resources and is often referred to as the "Giant of Africa" due to its great potential for development. However, like many other African nations, Nigeria continues to lag behind, plagued by a myriad of socio-political pathologies. These issues (social in nature, infectious in character, and chronic in persistence) have served as catalysts against national development, even into the 21st century, many decades after independence. Some of these impediments include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, corruption, religious intolerance, poor leadership, manipulation of the judicial and electoral systems, militancy, terrorism, and more. These are challenges that have become pervasive in the Nigerian polity.

The geo-political entity known today as Nigeria is the product of various structural modifications introduced by the British during the colonial era. As Afigbo Uya (2004) observed, the creation or evolution of Nigeria from about 1849 until its independence in 1960 was largely shaped by the transformational activities of the British on the people and cultures of the Niger-Benue area. One major aspect of this transformation was the amalgamation of various groups who had existed under different names and territories, each with distinct historical, political, geographical, religious, economic, and cultural identities. This forced unification, orchestrated by Lord Lugard in 1914 under the name Nigeria, was carried out primarily for the administrative convenience of the colonial rulers—not for the benefit, unity, or peaceful coexistence of the colonised peoples. As a result, Nigeria became a product of a political union not designed to bring harmony, but rather to serve the economic interests of its colonial architects.

From its inception to the present day, Nigeria's pursuit of sustainable national development, peace, and unity has remained elusive. Ethnic agitations and inter-group tensions have periodically erupted across the country, often resulting in loss of lives and property, and further deepening the divisions among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Today, ethnicity is a prominent factor in virtually every aspect of Nigerian life, including voting patterns, the distribution of political offices, employment opportunities, and the general dispensation of government patronage (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Moreover, when the topic of national development arises, it is nearly impossible to ignore the roles played by religious communities, including Christians, Muslims, African Traditional Religion adherents, and proponents of secular ideologies (Awonyi, 2015).

Religion, in contemporary Nigeria, has often been used as a political tool. Politicians frequently exploit religious sentiments to gain support, and religious identities are manipulated by political elites often to the detriment of the masses. Nigeria's experience includes the emergence of Islamic extremism and the tragic,

senseless killings and maiming of innocent citizens (Gbadgesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016). Given these realities, a study examining the effects of ethnicity and religion on national development in Nigeria is both timely and essential.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Ethnicity**

The concept of *ethnicity* has been variously conceptualised by scholars. According to Marshall (1998), ethnicity refers to individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to the same group, sharing common characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs that distinguish them from other groups in society, within which they develop distinct cultural behaviours. Similarly, Macionis (1989, 1998) defined ethnicity as a cultural heritage shared by a category of people who have common ancestors, language, or religion that together confer a distinct social identity.

However, these conceptualisations have certain limitations and may not fully capture the practical dimensions of ethnicity. In simpler terms, ethnicity can be described as a consciousness developed among people who share certain benefits or interests, especially when such benefits are scarce or manipulated to favour specific groups by those in positions of authority. The tendency of political leaders to manipulate state power and allocate resources in favour of their ethnic affiliations constitutes a practical manifestation of ethnicity.

Achebe (1981) described ethnicity as a form of discrimination against individuals based on their place of birth. Similarly, Jiboku and Jiboku (2018) observed that inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria have largely been characterised by conflict, arising primarily from ethnic chauvinism and manifesting as ethnic nationalism. Such tendencies have far-reaching implications for democratic sustainability and national development in Nigeria.

### **Religion**

Religion remains one of the oldest and most complex phenomena in human society and continues to elude a universally accepted definition. Theologians and social scientists interpret the concept differently based on disciplinary perspectives. Sociologists often see religion as a social construct with more sociocultural than political relevance, while anthropologists regard it as an integral component of culture (Barrett, 2003). For theologians, religion constitutes the essence of civilisation, shaping societal values, decisions, and expressions of collective identity (Muazam, 2006, as cited in Cinjel & Chujor, 2017).

Durkheim (1965) defined religion as a collective representation that imbues objects or beliefs with sacredness. Yusuf (2016) interpreted religion as the worship and service of divine beings. Mbat (1999), cited in Ilesanmi (2014), emphasised that religion plays a pivotal role in shaping traditional worldviews and influences the



emotional and intellectual dispositions of adherents. Karl Marx famously described religion as "the opium of the people," implying it is a tool used by the elite to pacify and control the masses.

While some believe religion completes one's identity, this perception is not universally shared. In Nigeria, the dominant religions are Islam and Christianity, though African Traditional Religion is also practised. These differing belief systems have contributed to numerous religious conflicts in Nigeria and beyond (Ilesanmi, 2014). Given the increasing rate of religious extremism and violence, some scholars argue that religion might hinder societal development and should therefore be de-emphasised in public life (Gbadgesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016).

### **Development**

There is no universally accepted definition of *development*, as the term carries varied meanings across disciplines and contexts. Ajaegbu (2012) described development as a process of economic and social transformation based on complex cultural and environmental interactions. Willis (2005) equated development with progress and modernity. From both liberal and Marxist perspectives, development is a multi-dimensional process that involves structural, attitudinal, and institutional changes, alongside economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Goulet identified three core values central to development: life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom. These values reflect universal human aspirations. The goal of development is thus to lift people out of poverty, ensure the provision of basic needs, and promote human-centred, participatory change.

Development must be both qualitative and quantitative, reflected in tangible improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, education, housing, and access to electricity and clean water. According to Seers (1999), the purpose of development is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Similarly, Sen (1999) viewed development as the expansion of human freedoms and the reduction of deprivations, such as hunger, insecurity, illiteracy, and lack of access to basic services. Lucas (1988) argued that per capita income growth, when accompanied by significant social progress, can be an indicator of national development.

National development, therefore, entails the ability of a state to provide and improve the welfare of its citizens through infrastructure, education, healthcare, job creation, and inclusive governance (Ajaegbu, 2012). Unfortunately, in Nigeria, development efforts since independence have failed to meet expectations. This has led to widespread disillusionment, often described as "flag independence." The country continues to suffer from poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare, lack of clean water, erratic power supply, and the exclusion of minority groups from political participation (Ighodalo, 2012). These developmental setbacks, exacerbated by poor leadership, corruption, insecurity, intolerance, and injustice, have hindered national progress. No nation can achieve sustainable development under such conditions.

## **Ethnicity and the Nigerian Constitution**

There is no doubt that the 1914 amalgamation was a strategic success in unifying territories of British interest under a common geographical entity called Nigeria. However, it failed significantly in unifying the diverse peoples' feelings, aspirations, identities, and values. This disconnect has had profound implications for Nigeria's developmental trajectory, as ethnic consciousness has continued to manifest in various dimensions of the country's socio-political life from the colonial period to the present day.

Following amalgamation, the first colonial effort at constitutional development was the establishment of the *Nigerian Council* in 1914 (Anyaele, 2003). The council consisted of 32 members, out of which only six were Nigerians serving as unofficial members appointed to represent chieftaincy interests. These included two Emirs from the North, the Alaafin of Oyo, and one representative each from Calabar, Lagos, and the Benin-Warri area. At this stage, ethnic sentiments were minimal, as the Nigerian members functioned merely in an advisory role to the colonial governor, with no legislative authority.

The second constitutional attempt was the *Clifford Constitution of 1922*, which introduced a Legislative and Executive Council comprising 46 members, including 10 unofficial Nigerian members. Of these, only four were elected (three from Lagos and one from Calabar), while the remaining six were appointed by the governor (Omipidan, 2015). Notably, the Northern Protectorate was excluded from participation, thereby planting the seeds of ethnic grievance and marginalisation. This exclusion marked the beginning of ethnic agitations in Nigeria and signalled the emergence of fractures in the fragile national unity project.

The *Richards Constitution of 1946* was a more ambitious attempt to foster national unity by enabling broader Nigerian participation in governance. It introduced a central legislative council for the whole country and established regional assemblies for the North, West, and East, ostensibly to reflect regional peculiarities. The central legislature had 44 members, including 20 Nigerians: nine from the North, six from the West, and five from the East, all serving in an unofficial capacity. While this arrangement aimed to balance representation, it inadvertently entrenched ethnic divisions by aligning regions with the three major ethnic groups. Moreover, the disproportionate representation favouring the North further deepened ethnic cleavages and reinforced sectionalism in Nigerian politics.

Both the *Clifford* and *Richards* constitutions failed to address the complex realities of minority concerns, prompting the introduction of the *Macpherson Constitution of 1951*. This followed the *Ibadan Constitutional Conference of 1950*, which sought to resolve representation imbalances. However, the allocation of approximately 50% of legislative seats to the North again ignited controversy. The remaining 50% was shared between the Western and Eastern regions. This distribution

of power continued to promote ethnic consciousness rather than unity, leading to persistent dissatisfaction.

The *Lyttleton Constitution of 1954* followed but did not fare better. Of the 184 seats in the legislative body, 92 were allocated to the North, while the remaining 92 were shared between the West and East. The North's numerical advantage was thus institutionalised, exacerbating existing fears of domination and marginalisation. This imbalance constituted one of the most significant dichotomies in Nigerian political history.

In response to mounting minority agitations, the *London Constitutional Conference of 1957* was convened, resulting in the establishment of the *Willink Commission of Inquiry* to investigate the fears of ethnic minorities. While the commission acknowledged the legitimacy of these fears, it failed to provide substantive remedies. Instead, it recommended the inclusion of a *Bill of Rights* in subsequent constitutions to safeguard minority interests (Anyaele, 2003). This measure was widely perceived as administrative tokenism and did little to address the underlying ethnic inequalities. The emergence of a new ethnic dynamic saw the consolidation of three dominant ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo) while minority groups remained politically marginalised within their respective regions. This tri-polar structure laid the foundation for continued ethnic rivalry and exclusion.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, ethnic tensions persisted. The early post-independence years (1960–1966) were marked by widespread inter- and intra-ethnic hostilities, culminating in the *January 15, 1966 military coup*, the *July 29, 1966 counter-coup*, and the *Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970)*—all of which had ethnic undertones. Although the creation of 36 states was intended to reduce ethnic tensions and decentralise power, feelings of domination, marginalisation, and discrimination remain prevalent, especially among minority ethnic groups. In such an atmosphere of mutual distrust and ethnic acrimony, sustainable national development remains elusive. Ethnic politics continues to shape Nigeria's constitutional evolution, undermining efforts at nation-building and inclusive governance. Without addressing these foundational issues, Nigeria's quest for unity and development will remain a distant aspiration.

### **Ethnicity and National Development**

Ethnicity, in itself, is not inherently problematic. It is natural (and even expected) for individuals to identify with particular ethnic groups, as ethnicity forms a core aspect of identity. However, the manipulation of ethnic affiliations for political and economic gain has proven to be detrimental to Nigeria's national development. According to Ogar (2018), studies on electoral patterns since Nigeria's independence in 1960 reveal a consistent trend of voting based largely on ethnic and religious affiliations. This practice undermines meritocracy, often leading to the election of leaders lacking competence, thereby resulting in poor governance and ineffective leadership.

Iyanga (2018) supports this view by asserting that multi-ethnic states are often characterised by conflictual and competitive relations, as various ethnic communities struggle to control political power and economic resources. This persistent contestation creates a hostile environment for political stability, economic growth, and cultural integration. Ethnicity thus becomes a platform for the mobilisation of group interests, primarily for self-serving, parochial economic objectives, rather than for the promotion of collective national progress.

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has grappled with several ethnic-related challenges that have significantly impeded its national development. These include persistent agitations for state creation, disputes over revenue allocation, deep-seated distrust among federating units, widespread electoral malpractice, regional restiveness and militancy, the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, ethno-religious violence, and inter-ethnic clashes. According to Jiboku and Jiboku (2018), these issues not only destabilise the political system but also disrupt economic planning and implementation, further derailing national development.

An illustrative example is the 2015 presidential election between Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. In the South-South region, predominantly Christian and Jonathan's home base, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) secured 91% of the vote, while the All Progressives Congress (APC) received only 10%. Conversely, in the Muslim-dominated North, the APC secured overwhelming support for Buhari (Ogar, 2018). This voting pattern highlights the entrenched influence of ethnicity and religion on political decisions in Nigeria.

From independence, the formation and character of political parties in Nigeria have reflected deep ethnic and religious divisions. During the First Republic, the Action Group (AG) led by Obafemi Awolowo was dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), under Nnamdi Azikiwe, was largely supported by the Igbos. Meanwhile, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), led by Ahmadu Bello and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was the political vehicle of the Hausa-Fulani. These parties were not national in outlook; rather, they were founded and supported primarily on ethnic and religious lines. This trend has persisted through subsequent republics, including the Fourth Republic.

Ethnicity remains one of the most powerful forces shaping Nigeria's political and social relations. It fosters division and mistrust, particularly among the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and Igbo) each of which tends to perceive Nigeria as a national "cake" to be shared based on ethnic entitlement rather than national interest (Iyanga, 2018). Consequently, ethnicity continues to pose a formidable threat to the institutionalisation of democratic governance and the attainment of inclusive national development in Nigeria.

## **Religion and National Development**

Religion remains a fundamental aspect of human existence, influencing not only individuals' lives and thought patterns but also societal values, attitudes, and relationships. It is widely acknowledged that religion plays a crucial role in fostering moral values and social cohesion, which are essential prerequisites for national development. As Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012) argue, religion is critical for achieving meaningful, total, and sustainable national development in any society. Supporting this view, Kant (1960) posits that only a religious community, functioning as a social force, can offer a stable foundation for morality, which is essential for achieving the highest good in human society.

In an environment where sound moral values prevail, it is expected that peace, unity, and stable political governance would flourish—conditions that are necessary for national development. Unfortunately, the Nigerian experience appears to be the opposite. Religion, which ought to inculcate discipline, integrity, moral uprightness, and reverence for God, has instead become a tool for reinforcing materialism, enabling corruption, and perpetuating societal division. Gbadegesin and Adeyemi-Adjolu (2016) maintain that for religion to meaningfully contribute to national development, it must challenge the prevailing culture of materialism and expose the mismanagement of national resources by corrupt elites.

However, in Nigeria, religion often functions in a counterproductive manner. Rather than being a unifying force, it has been used to incite violence, reinforce ethnic divisions, and advance personal or political interests. The two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity) originally founded on principles of peace, tolerance, and compassion, have increasingly become instruments for political manipulation. Politicians and power-seekers frequently exploit religious sentiments to inflame passion, incite violence, and consolidate their influence, often at the expense of national unity and public welfare.

Religious extremism and violence have significantly hindered Nigeria's socio-economic and political progress. Ajaegbu (2012) observes that religious terrorism poses a major threat to national development, especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. In states such as Yobe, Borno, Kaduna, Plateau, Kano, and Zamfara, persistent religious conflicts and insurgency have led to widespread destruction of lives and property, disruption of daily economic activities, and the displacement of communities. These crises have scared away both foreign and local investors, further stifling economic development in those regions. It is impossible for meaningful development to occur in a climate of instability, fear, and violence.

## **Religion, Ethnicity, and Conflict**

It is important to underscore the interconnectedness between religion, ethnicity, and conflict in Nigeria. Many of the violent conflicts experienced in northern Nigeria,



particularly in Plateau State (Jos), have strong ethnic and religious undertones. Religion and ethnicity, rather than promoting unity, often serve as vehicles for exclusion, polarisation, and violence. These elements are frequently exploited by elites to advance socio-economic and political agendas, often resulting in mass killings, property destruction, and long-standing communal distrust.

The manipulation of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria has created a persistent atmosphere of crisis that impedes development. No meaningful investment—whether local or international—can thrive in such an environment. The disruption of social and economic life in conflict-prone regions reduces the state's ability to provide public services, undermines democratic governance, and slows national development. There is, therefore, a strong negative correlation between national development and the misuse of religion and ethnicity. As demonstrated by the findings in this study, the politicisation and instrumentalisation of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria have become serious impediments to national unity, peace, and progress.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Divide and Rule Theory, a political strategy historically used to maintain control over diverse populations by fostering division among them. The term, derived from the Latin expression "*divide et impera*", is believed to have originated from Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, around 300 BC. The strategy was later employed by notable figures such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte and has been extensively documented by modern historians as a colonial and post-colonial tool for domination and control (Oji, 2011). Divide and Rule refers to a deliberate political tactic whereby a population is fragmented along social, ethnic, religious, or ideological lines, preventing them from uniting to challenge authority or demand collective interests. The ultimate objective of this strategy is to weaken opposition and maintain the dominance of the ruling elite. By pitting groups against one another, those in power can manipulate identities and sustain their hold over society.

In the Nigerian context, the Divide and Rule strategy was institutionalised during colonial rule and further perpetuated in post-independence governance. British colonial administrators exploited ethnic and religious differences by creating artificial administrative boundaries and promoting indirect rule through local leaders loyal to the colonial regime. This practice not only deepened existing divisions but also laid the groundwork for the ethnic and religious tensions that continue to characterise Nigeria's political landscape.

In contemporary Nigeria, political elites have sustained this divisive framework by manipulating ethnic and religious identities for electoral gain, resource control, and power retention. This has significantly impeded national integration, good governance, and sustainable development. As a result, ethnicity and religion have remained tools of exclusion and conflict rather than instruments of unity and national progress. Thus, the

Divide and Rule Theory aptly explains the persistence of ethnic and religious divisions in Nigeria, highlighting how deliberate fragmentation of the populace undermines national development and unity.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design employing a quantitative survey method to examine the relationship between ethnicity, religion, and national development in Nigeria. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was administered purposively to selected respondents. A total of 265 respondents were randomly sampled using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. To ensure national representation, six states were selected from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria—one state per zone. The selected states included Kebbi (North-West), Niger (North-Central), Cross River (South-South), Ogun (South-West), Bauchi (North-East), and Ebonyi (South-East). From each state, forty-four (44) respondents were selected, with an exception in one geo-political zone where forty-five (45) respondents were sampled to reach the desired total sample size. Within each state, three senatorial zones were identified, and purposive sampling was employed to select local government areas (LGAs) from which respondents were drawn. This approach ensured a broad and diverse representation across the different zones and ethnic constituencies.

The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through the administration of the questionnaires, while secondary data were obtained from a review of existing literature relevant to the themes of ethnicity, religion, conflict, and national development. Data collected were subjected to quantitative analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to analyse patterns and draw conclusions from the responses obtained.

### **Findings of the Study**

The findings of this study were analysed in accordance with the hypotheses formulated in their null form ( $H_0$ ). These hypotheses were designed to test the existing relationships between key variables—ethnicity and national development, as well as religion and national development. Quantitative data obtained through the administration of questionnaires were statistically analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation ( $r$ ) technique. This was facilitated through the application of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. The correlation analysis helped determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the identified variables, providing empirical evidence to either accept or reject the null hypotheses.

**Hypothesis I**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ethnicity and national development

**Table 1:** The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) analysis between ethnicity (ETH) and national development (NDEV) using SPSS

**Correlations between ethnicity (ETH) and national development (NDEV) (N = 256)**

	NDEV	ETH
Pearson Correlation	1	-.005
Sig (2-tailed)		.931
NDEV Sum of Squares and Cross-products	168.184	-.649
Covariance	660	-.003
N	256	256
Pearson Correlation	-.005	1
Sig (2-tailed)	.931	
ETH Sum of Squares and Cross products	648	83.609
Covariance	-.003	320
N	256	256

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 presents the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis between ethnicity (ETH) and national development (NDEV). The analysis revealed a negative statistically significant relationship between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.005$  and a  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ . Based on this result, the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>), which posits that there is no significant relationship between ethnicity and national development is rejected. The negative value of the correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.005$ ) implies an inverse relationship between ethnicity and national development. This suggests that as ethnic affiliation or ethnic consciousness increases, the likelihood of achieving sustainable national development decreases. Although the correlation coefficient is relatively weak, the statistical significance of the result indicates that ethnicity plays a detrimental role in national development efforts.

In addition, the covariance value of  $-0.003$  further supports the finding of a negative relationship. According to the decision rule of covariance, a negative covariance indicates that the two variables move in opposite directions; as one increases, the other decreases. Thus, the result implies that an increase in ethnic-based mobilisation and sentiments correlates with a decline in national developmental outcomes. These findings underscore the impediment posed by ethnic divisions to the process of nation-building and development in Nigeria.

## Hypothesis II

Ho: There is no relationship between Religion and National Development

**Table 2: The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) analysis between religion (REL) and national development (NDEV) using SPSS**

**Correlations between religion (REL) and national development (NDEV) (N = 256**

	NDEV	ETH
Pearson Correlation	1	-.084
Sig 2-tailed)		.180
NDEV Sum of Squares and Cross-products	168.184	-8.652
Covariance	.660	-.034
N	256	256
Pearson Correlation	-.084	1
Sig (2-tailed)	.180	
ETH Sum of Squares and Cross products	.8.652	62.871
Covariance	-.034	.247
N	256	256

Table 2 presents the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis examining the relationship between religion (REL) and national development (NDEV). The analysis reveals a negative and statistically significant relationship between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.084$  and a  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ . As a result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ), which states that there is no significant relationship between religion and national development is rejected. The negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.084$ ) indicates an inverse relationship between religious affiliation and national development. Although the strength of the correlation is still relatively weak, it is notably stronger than the correlation between ethnicity and national development reported in Table 1. This suggests that increased religious affiliation, fanaticism, or sectarian divisions are associated with a decline in national development efforts.

Also, the covariance value of  $-0.084$  supports this inverse relationship. According to the decision rule of covariance, a negative covariance implies that as one variable increases, the other decreases. In this context, the data suggest that rising religious intensity or religiously motivated divisions correlate with reduced prospects for national cohesion, peace, and sustainable development. These findings highlight the detrimental impact of religious extremism, polarisation, and politicisation of religion on Nigeria's developmental trajectory. Like ethnicity, religion has become a significant fault line that undermines national integration and good governance, posing challenges to socio-economic and political advancement.



## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study reveal a significant inverse relationship between the independent variables (ethnicity and religion) and the dependent variable (national development) in Nigeria. Specifically, the study found that ethnicity negatively correlates with national development, as evidenced by the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of  $r = -0.005$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) was rejected. This indicates that an increase in ethnic affiliation at the expense of national identity is associated with a corresponding decline in the nation's development efforts.

This outcome aligns with the work of Iyanga (2018), who affirmed that multi-ethnic states often face conflictual and competitive relationships among various communities struggling for political power and economic control. Such struggles have continued to undermine Nigeria's political stability, economic progress, and cultural harmony. The implication of this finding is that the persistent developmental stagnation in Nigeria can largely be attributed to ethnic allegiances that overshadow nationalism. This conclusion is further supported by Walter (2018), who observed that electoral outcomes since Nigeria's independence in 1960 have been shaped more by ethnic considerations than by merit or competence, resulting in the election of leaders who often lack the capacity or vision to drive national development.

The study also found a statistically significant inverse relationship between religion and national development, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.084$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that increased religious affiliation and fanaticism are correlated with a notable decline in national development. Consequently, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) was also rejected. This finding is consistent with Ajaegbu (2012), who noted that religious terrorism and sectarian conflict pose a significant threat to national development, particularly in the northern states of Nigeria, such as Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, Jos, Kano, and Zamfara, where social and economic activities have been severely disrupted. While Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012) have argued that religion can play a critical role in fostering morality, discipline, and social cohesion essential for national development, the current findings suggest that religion in Nigeria has increasingly been manipulated for political and socio-economic gains, often resulting in violence, division, and instability. Walter (2018) also supports this perspective, asserting that religious biases have hindered the emergence of credible leadership at various levels of government, thereby contributing to poor governance and developmental setbacks.

Overall, the findings of this study unearth the detrimental roles of ethnic and religious affiliations in Nigeria's developmental process. Rather than serving as unifying and moralising forces, ethnicity and religion have been politicised and weaponised, thereby impeding efforts to build a cohesive, peaceful, and prosperous nation.

## **Conclusion**

This research set out to examine the roles of ethnicity and religion in the quest for achieving national development in Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Divide and Rule theory, originally advanced by Gilbert Elliot-Murray, which explains how divisions along ethnic and religious lines are strategically maintained to weaken collective unity and hinder national integration. Two hypotheses were formulated to test the relationships between ethnicity, religion, and national development. Findings from the analysis revealed significant negative and inverse relationships between the variables. Specifically, the study established that increased ethnic and religious affiliations, particularly in their extreme or fanatical forms, correlate with a decline in national development both within the country and among Nigerians in the diaspora. The implication of these findings is profound: for Nigeria to achieve sustainable national development, there must be a concerted effort to de-emphasise ethnic and religious loyalties, which have historically undermined unity, good governance, and national progress. Promoting national identity over sectional affiliations is imperative to building a cohesive and development-oriented society.

## **Recommendation**

1. Secularism must be practiced by the leaders and people of Nigeria especially when issues of national interest arise
2. Religion and religious interest should not be projected when issues of national interest arise
3. National identity should be projected by the Nigerian government over ethnic affiliations
4. Religious and ethnic unity should be promoted as catalyst for national unity not of national divides
5. Election and electing leaders should be based on credibility and not on religious or ethnic affiliation.
6. The 'State of origin' should be discouraged or removed totally from the Constitution and replace by "citizenship" in the Constitution.

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