EXCLUSIONIST POLICIES AND THE EXACERBATION OF IDENTITY POLITICS IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC (1999–2024)

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Abstract
This study interrogates the link between exclusionist policies and the exacerbation of Identity politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2024), examining how political marginalisation, ethnoregional imbalance, and selective governance have fuelled Identity-based agitation, electoral violence, and secessionist movements. The study adopts a qualitative methodology and employs historical and documentary analysis, anchored in Social Identity Theory, Elite Theory, and the Horizontal Inequalities framework, to provide a nuanced understanding of the social-political consequences of exclusion. Research findings reveal that exclusionist state practices have deepened ethno-regional fault lines, compromised democratic ideals, and eroded national cohesion. while various policy initiatives, national conferences, and civic movements have sought to address these challenges, their impact remains limited without comprehensive political restructuring and a genuine commitment to inclusive governance.
Keywords: Exclusionist Policies, Identity Politics, Fourth Republic, National Integration, Ethno-regional Agitations

Introduction

Nigeria is a multicultural and deeply pluralistic nation marked by diversities in ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. This heterogeneity, while potentially a strength, has often been a source of violent contestation. Since independence, Nigeria's nation-building efforts have been persistently undermined by recurrent ethnic and religious conflicts that have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and widespread destruction of property.[1] The roots of these conflicts lie not only in historical grievances or social fragmentation but also in the deliberate political manipulation of identity. Political elites, in their relentless pursuit of power and control, have weaponized ethnicity and religion to incite division, foster antagonism, and mobilize support. Rather than promote national cohesion, the political class has remodelled identity affiliations into exclusive categories of belonging and exclusion, thereby deepening mutual suspicion and hostility among Nigeria's diverse groups.[2]

Identity politics in this context refers to the mobilization of ethnic, religious, or regional affiliations as the primary basis for political engagement and competition. It manifests in the creation of "us-versus-them" dichotomies that prioritize identity over policy, competence, or shared national interest.[3] Exclusionist policies, on the other hand, are political strategies and state practices that intentionally or systematically marginalize certain groups from access to power, representation, and resources based on these identity markers. These policies can be seen in skewed appointments, lopsided development, politicized census and electoral processes, and the marginalization of minority voices in governance.[4] When identity politics is reinforced by state-sanctioned or elite-driven exclusion, it intensifies the perception of injustice and fuels conflict, thereby threatening the very fabric of national unity.

The emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999 raised hopes of a democratic renewal after years of military authoritarianism. Democracy was expected to institutionalize inclusive governance, accountability, and national integration. However, over the years, the political landscape has become increasingly characterized by exclusionary practices and the intensification of identity-driven politics. Power-sharing arrangements such as zoning and rotation, while originally designed to ensure inclusion, have been subverted to serve the interests of dominant groups. Electoral processes have been marred by violence and ethnic polarization, while public appointments and resource allocation continue to reflect deep structural biases. The promises of federal character and equitable representation have been undermined by the politics of domination and selective inclusion.

As the Fourth Republic progressed, identity-based grievances became more entrenched, contributing to the proliferation of ethnoreligious agitations, secessionist demands, and communal violence. From the Niger Delta militancy to the resurgence of Biafra agitation and the crisis in the Middle Belt and North-West, exclusion and perceived marginalization have driven conflict narratives. The persistent failure to manage Nigeria's diversity through equitable policies and inclusive governance has enabled identity to remain the central axis of political mobilization and contestation. Against this backdrop, this study interrogates the role of exclusionist policies in exacerbating identity politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2024), looking at how such policies have deepened divisions and undermined national stability and democratic development.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Defining Exclusionist Policies

Exclusionist policies refer to deliberate political practices and administrative decisions that marginalise or deny certain social, ethnic, religious, or regional groups access to political power, economic resources, or social opportunities. These policies are not always overt; often, they are embedded in state structures and informal elite arrangements that favour dominant groups while systematically disenfranchising others. In Nigeria, exclusionist tendencies date back to the colonial period when indirect rule institutionalised ethnic hierarchies and administrative inequalities among regions. The North, West, and East were developed and governed differently, laying the foundation for uneven development and sectional distrust.[5] Post-independence governments continued this trajectory by adopting policies that disproportionately benefitted select regions or ethnic groups, particularly in appointments to public office, siting of federal projects, and distribution of oil revenues. In contemporary Nigeria, exclusionist policies have manifested in skewed federal appointments—such as the consistent dominance of a particular ethno-regional group in strategic ministries and security agencies—despite constitutional provisions like the Federal Character Principle enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution. This principle, which seeks to reflect the country's diversity in public appointments, has often been flouted or politicised.[6] The perception of marginalisation is particularly acute among the Igbo in the South-East and certain minority groups in the North-Central and South-South regions, who argue that the state apparatus has become a tool of domination rather than inclusion.

Understanding Identity Politics

Identity politics in Nigeria thrives on the politicisation of ethnicity, religion, regional origin, and political affiliation to determine inclusion and exclusion from the benefits of citizenship. Ethnicity is perhaps the most salient identity marker in Nigeria, with over 250 distinct ethnic groups competing for recognition, representation, and resources. Religious identity—mainly the Christian-Muslim divide—has also become a fault line, especially in the Middle Belt and parts of the North-West where communal tensions often escalate into violent conflicts. Regionalism further compounds the identity matrix, as the colonial regional divisions (North, West, East) have evolved into geopolitical zones that now frame national discourse. Political affiliations are often formed along these lines, with parties fielding candidates to reflect ethno-regional balances rather than ideological commitments. These identity markers become tools for negotiating access to state power and public resources. Politicians routinely exploit these cleavages during elections to galvanise support, framing national issues as ethno-regional grievances rather than policy challenges.[7] This instrumentalisation of identity undermines civic nationalism and institutional trust, as citizens begin to perceive government actions and outcomes through the prism of group interest. As a result, national unity becomes fragile, and political competition degenerates into a zero-sum game in which the victory of one group is perceived as the subjugation of another.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), offers a powerful lens through which to understand the dynamics of exclusion and identity politics in plural societies like Nigeria.[8] The theory posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. In the Nigerian context, ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations serve as primary identity anchors. When state policies or political processes appear to favour one group over another, it triggers intergroup comparisons that generate feelings of deprivation, marginalisation, and resentment. The "ingroup-outgroup" dichotomy becomes accentuated, and political mobilisation increasingly takes the form of defending group interest rather than pursuing national development. The constant reinforcement of group identity—especially in times of political contestation—leads to the entrenchment of stereotypes and prejudices, which can easily escalate into conflict. Hence, the theory explains how group affiliations influence political behaviour, elite mobilisation strategies, and the perception of fairness in governance.

Elite Theory

Elite Theory, as advanced by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and later refined by C. Wright Mills and Robert Michels, emphasises the role of a small, powerful elite in controlling political and economic resources within any society.[9] In Nigeria, this theory helps illuminate how the ruling elite manipulate identity cleavages to entrench their dominance. Political elites often divide the electorate along ethno-religious lines to prevent the formation of class consciousness or ideological unity that could threaten their grip on power. By institutionalising exclusionist policies, they maintain the loyalty of their ethnic or regional bases while marginalising rival groups. These elites rarely represent the interests of their communities but use identity narratives to access state resources and distribute patronage. Consequently, exclusion is not merely a function of identity but a deliberate strategy by elites to sustain asymmetrical power relations. This reinforces a vicious cycle where governance is reduced to ethnic arithmetic, and national development is sacrificed on the altar of elite self-preservation.

Horizontal Inequalities Theory

Horizontal Inequalities Theory, popularised by Frances Stewart, explores how inequalities between culturally defined groups—rather than individuals—create fertile ground for conflict.[10] These group-based inequalities may be economic, political, social, or cultural, and when they coincide with identity markers such as ethnicity or religion, they produce grievance-based mobilisation. In Nigeria, horizontal inequalities are evident in the uneven distribution of infrastructure, public goods, political representation, and educational opportunities. The Niger Delta agitation, the Boko Haram insurgency, and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement all draw on narratives of historical and structural marginalisation. The persistent failure of the Nigerian state to address these grievances through equitable policy interventions has led to growing disillusionment, especially among youths. As Stewart argues, such inequalities not only breed resentment but also legitimize rebellion when peaceful redress mechanisms appear ineffective. Thus, political mobilisation in Nigeria is often driven by real or perceived group disadvantages, which are amplified by elite actors for political gain.

Link between Exclusion and Political Mobilisation in Divided Societies

In divided societies like Nigeria, exclusionist policies often serve as the catalyst for identity-based political mobilisation. When access to state resources, political offices, or opportunities is perceived to be unevenly distributed, identity groups mobilise in defence of their collective interests. The mobilisation process frequently involves constructing historical narratives of oppression, marginalisation, or entitlement to galvanise support. These narratives are then reinforced through community leaders, religious clerics, local media, and political entrepreneurs who portray their groups as victims of state neglect or domination. Over time, identity becomes politicised, and the logic of exclusion leads to a form of reactive inclusion where groups demand representation not necessarily for national development but as a means of protecting their own. This has resulted in the proliferation of regional and ethnoreligious political movements, such as the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Ohanaeze Ndigbo, and Afenifere, which often engage more with identity assertion than nation-building. In such an environment, political discourse becomes polarised, and elections are reduced to ethnic headcounts rather than civic choices. Consequently, exclusion breeds not only grievance but also a dangerous form of mobilisation that threatens national integration and democratic consolidation.

Historical and Political Context: Exclusion and Identity Politics in the Fourth Republic (1999–2024)

The Fourth Republic, inaugurated in 1999 after nearly two decades of intermittent military rule, was greeted with widespread optimism. Nigerians expected the return to democratic rule to mark a turning point in inclusive governance, national cohesion, and equitable development. With President Olusegun Obasanjo's emergence—a southerner with strong military credentials and northern acceptability—the initial years of the republic symbolised the intention to bridge deep national cleavages. The 1999 Constitution embedded the Federal Character Principle as a constitutional safeguard to ensure that appointments and resource distribution reflect the diversity of the federation.[11] However, as the democratic process matured, these promises of inclusion began to falter. Political transitions in 2007, 2011, and 2015 were increasingly characterised by ethno-regional contestations and elite manipulations that undermined national integration. For example, the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2010 ignited intense debates over the informal power-sharing agreement within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), especially from northern stakeholders who felt the power shift to Goodluck Jonathan—a southerner—violated the principle of rotational

presidency. The result was political unrest and widespread ethno-regional tension, particularly in the 2011 general elections, which saw post-election violence leading to the deaths of over 800 people, mostly in northern Nigeria.[12] These developments suggest that political transitions have often exacerbated rather than ameliorated identity-based grievances in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The informal zoning and rotation agreement between the North and South was introduced by the PDP as a mechanism to promote power balance and a sense of belonging among Nigeria's geopolitical zones. Initially embraced as a stabilising tool, this arrangement soon became a source of contestation and exclusion. The North-South dichotomy entrenched a binary approach to power sharing that ignored minority regions and reinforced hegemonic control by the major ethnic blocs—Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. For instance, since 1999, the South-West has produced a president (Obasanjo, 1999–2007), the South-South a president (Jonathan, 2010–2015), and the North-West has dominated the presidency with Yar'Adua (2007–2010) and Buhari (2015–2023), while the South-East, despite being one of the major ethnic blocs, has remained conspicuously marginalised at the presidential level. This exclusion has fuelled secessionist agitations such as the resurgence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which gained significant momentum under Buhari's administration due to perceived ethno-political alienation. Furthermore, strategic appointments under successive administrations have often reflected regional biases. Under President Buhari, more than 70% of security chiefs were reportedly drawn from the North, triggering accusations of nepotism and ethnic favouritism.[13] These imbalances undermine the essence of zoning as an inclusive strategy and instead contribute to perceptions of domination and marginalisation, further polarising the polity.

The Federal Character Principle was designed as a legal and moral obligation to ensure equitable representation of all segments of the federation in public institutions and governance structures. However, in practice, its implementation has been selective, manipulated, or ignored altogether, thereby exacerbating ethnic and religious exclusion. Successive administrations have been accused of violating this principle in the appointment of ministers, heads of parastatals, and security agencies. For example, between 2015 and 2019, President Buhari's administration came under intense criticism for favouring appointees from the North, particularly from his native North-West region, in key national positions. This included the heads of the army, police, customs, and intelligence services, creating a concentration of power in a region already dominant in political representation.[14] Similarly, religious exclusion has featured prominently, with Christian minorities in the North and Muslims in the South lamenting systemic underrepresentation. The failure to enforce the federal character provision has created a perception that access to national opportunities is no longer merit- or constitution-based but determined by ethnicity and proximity to power. This perception not only erodes citizens' trust in the Nigerian state but also fuels resentment and the mobilisation of identity groups who feel disenfranchised. As Osaghae and Suberu contend, when identities are consistently excluded from governance structures, they become rallying points for opposition and rebellion, thus making federal character a critical yet flawed instrument of national cohesion.[15]

Nigeria's political parties have played a central role in deepening identity-based divisions through the institutionalisation of patron–client relationships that reward loyalty over competence and sectionalism over merit. Most political parties in the Fourth Republic, notably the PDP, the All Progressives Congress (APC), and their predecessors, have largely failed to develop ideological identities, relying instead on ethnic, religious, and regional configurations to build support. Party primaries and candidate selection are frequently manipulated by godfathers who represent ethnic or regional interests rather than national vision. This has led to the emergence of ethnic-based voting blocs, where citizens vote not on policy preferences or performance records but on ethnic and religious affinities. The political elite sustains this cycle through patronage systems that allocate public resources and political offices in exchange for sectional support, thereby entrenching a spoils-based system of governance. For example, the realignment that led to the formation of the APC in 2013 was not grounded in ideological convergence but in strategic ethno-regional alliances aimed at dislodging the PDP from power. Post-2015, the party became increasingly factionalised along ethno-regional lines, mirroring the same identity-driven contradictions it was meant to correct. Consequently, the party system has become a vehicle for elite contestation that reinforces exclusion, disrupts national integration, and delegitimises the democratic process. As Ibrahim and Ibeanu assert, Nigeria's political parties have functioned more as "ethnic coalitions for power sharing" than as democratic institutions, thereby undermining the prospects for inclusive politics.[16]

Manifestations and Consequences of Exclusionist Policies

One of the most visible manifestations of exclusionist policies in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been the rise in ethnic and regional agitations. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Niger Delta militants, Oodua People's Congress (OPC), and various Arewa groups have emerged or intensified their activities in response to perceived political, economic, and cultural marginalisation. IPOB, for example, was formed to demand secession for the South-East region, citing systemic exclusion from federal appointments, infrastructural neglect, and historical grievances dating back to the Biafran War. The group's activities—ranging from mass protests to the establishment of a militant wing—have provoked significant security responses, including proscription by the federal government and military operations in the South-East.[17] Similarly, the Niger Delta militancy, which reached its peak in the mid-2000s, was driven by the exploitation of the region's oil resources without commensurate development or political representation. The OPC, although less violent in recent times, emerged as a Yoruba nationalist response to perceived northern dominance in federal politics. Northern-based Arewa groups, including the Arewa Consultative Forum and the Northern Elders Forum, have also expressed grievances over political rotation, security, and representation. These agitations underscore the deep-rooted frustrations stemming from exclusion and highlight the failure of the state to create an inclusive national identity.

Exclusionist policies have also contributed to the prevalence of electoral violence and growing voter apathy, particularly in regions that perceive themselves as politically marginalised. In Nigeria, elections are high-stakes contests where the outcome often determines access to state resources, hence the resort to violence as a tool of political negotiation. The South-East and parts of the Middle Belt have witnessed increased pre- and post-election violence in recent cycles, with IPOB's threats of election boycotts contributing to reduced voter turnout in states such as Anambra and Imo. In the North-East, Boko Haram and other insurgent groups have created environments of fear and instability, severely hampering electoral processes and leading to disenfranchisement.[18] The phenomenon of voter apathy is not simply a function of political disinterest, but a reflection of disillusionment with a system perceived to be skewed against certain groups. Citizens in marginalised areas often believe that their votes do not matter in a system that operates on ethnic calculations and patronage rather than merit. As voter confidence declines, electoral legitimacy suffers, and democracy itself becomes increasingly hollow. The manipulation of electoral outcomes, voter intimidation, and the underrepresentation of minority communities in electoral commissions further erode trust and reinforce feelings of alienation.

The effects of exclusionist policies are glaring in the unequal distribution of infrastructure, development projects, and economic opportunities across Nigeria's geopolitical zones. Northern Nigeria, particularly the North-West and North-East, has suffered chronic underdevelopment, with poor access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, exacerbating youth restiveness and insurgency. In the South-East, infrastructural decay and minimal federal presence have become points of agitation and political discourse. For instance, the persistent calls for the rehabilitation of the Enugu-Onitsha and Enugu-Port Harcourt expressways have gone largely unheeded for years, reinforcing perceptions of federal neglect. Likewise, security deployment has been criticised for being uneven, with some regions enjoying robust security coverage while others remain vulnerable to banditry, communal violence, or insurgency. The economic marginalisation of certain zones also manifests in the allocation of investment incentives and industrial hubs, with states in the North-Central and South-East receiving less federal investment compared to Lagos, Abuja, or Kano.[19] These disparities reinforce a geography of privilege and deprivation that aligns with identity divides. As development becomes politicised, national economic planning is skewed, and social mobility becomes a function of one's ethno-regional background rather than individual merit or market dynamics.

Exclusion has provided fertile ground for the rise of separatist rhetoric and militant identity movements, which threaten the cohesion of the Nigerian state. The resurgence of secessionist ideologies, as evidenced by IPOB in the South-East, the Yoruba Nation movement in the South-West, and calls for autonomy by Middle Belt groups, points to a deep crisis of legitimacy. These movements are not only political but cultural, as they seek to reassert suppressed identities and reclaim a sense of dignity denied by the central state. The rhetoric accompanying these movements often frames Nigeria as an artificial construct that has failed to accommodate its constituent nationalities equitably. The South-South's agitation for resource control, as championed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), adds an economic dimension to this separatist impulse. While some of these movements have operated within the bounds of civil discourse, others have embraced militant tactics, resulting in violent confrontations with state security forces. The state's militarised response to these agitations often fuels further radicalisation, reinforcing

a cycle of violence and deepening the alienation of already marginalised groups.[20] The spread of such movements across multiple regions illustrates the national scale of disaffection and the fragility of the current federal arrangement.

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of exclusionist policies is the erosion of public trust in national institutions and the weakening of the very idea of Nigeria as a united entity. Trust is the bedrock of democratic governance and national cohesion, and its absence creates a vacuum in which alternative loyalties—ethnic, religious, regional—take precedence over national citizenship. In Nigeria, trust in institutions such as the judiciary, police, electoral commission, and even the presidency has been persistently low, particularly among communities that feel underrepresented or unjustly treated. The perception that the state operates on the basis of "who you are" rather than "what you merit" discourages civic participation and loyalty. This disillusionment is compounded by a weak national narrative that fails to resonate with the lived experiences of marginalised groups. As a result, calls for restructuring, decentralisation, or even disintegration gain traction. The failure to build an inclusive nation where all identities feel equally valued has fostered widespread cynicism and fatalism. National unity, therefore, becomes more rhetorical than real, and the social contract between the state and its citizens is severely strained.[21] The implications are profound: without urgent policy and institutional reforms to address exclusion, Nigeria risks sliding further into fragmentation and instability.

Efforts at National Integration and Policy Reversals

Nigeria's constitutional framework contains explicit provisions aimed at promoting national integration and mitigating ethnic and regional disparities. Chief among these is the Federal Character Principle, enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution, which mandates the composition of government institutions to reflect the diverse character of the country and to avoid the predominance of any ethnic or regional group.[22] The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), established in 1973, similarly promotes national cohesion by deploying graduates to serve in states outside their region of origin, thereby fostering cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, initiatives such as unity schools (Federal Government Colleges) were introduced to provide an integrated platform for young Nigerians from various backgrounds. Despite these well-intentioned mechanisms, implementation has often fallen short of expectations. Appointments to federal positions have frequently reflected ethno-political bias, with successive administrations accused of favouring their ethnic or regional constituencies. The Buhari administration (2015–2023), for instance, was heavily criticised for lopsided appointments that overwhelmingly favoured the North, thus undermining the principle of inclusiveness the Constitution sought to guarantee.[23] While these provisions are laudable in theory, the lack of consistent enforcement and political will has eroded public confidence in the state's capacity to administer equitable governance.

Efforts to redress national disunity have included the convening of various National Conferences, aimed at addressing deep-seated structural imbalances in the Nigerian federation. The 2005 National Political Reform Conference under President Obasanjo and the 2014 National Conference under President Jonathan both represented attempts to re-imagine the structure of the Nigerian state. The 2014 conference, in particular, made significant recommendations such as the adoption of state police, fiscal federalism, and rotational presidency. Unfortunately, these reforms were never implemented, largely due to political resistance and regime changes. Judicial interventions have also played a role, especially in enforcing electoral inclusiveness and rights to representation, although the judiciary often operates within the constraints of political interference. Moreover, the constitutional amendment process, intended as a route for reform, has been marred by legislative inertia and ethno-political bargaining. Reform bills addressing decentralisation and devolution of powers have consistently failed to garner the required consensus in the National Assembly. As a result, the Nigerian polity remains largely centralised, and the grievances arising from this condition have continued to fuel identity-based agitation and discontent.

Civil society and youth-led movements have increasingly emerged as vital actors in Nigeria's push for inclusiveness and reform. The #EndSARS protest of 2020, though initially triggered by police brutality, rapidly evolved into a broader demand for structural reform, good governance, and an end to exclusionary policies. The movement represented a cross-ethnic, pan-Nigerian coalition of mostly young citizens who demanded a voice in how the country is governed. Likewise, various advocacy groups have persistently pushed for restructuring, calling for a more decentralised and equitable federation. These movements often serve as critical counterweights to state power, raising awareness and pressing for institutional accountability. Faith-based organisations, trade unions, and rights-based NGOs have also played vital roles in mobilising public opinion against exclusionist tendencies. However, these movements frequently face state repression, media blackouts, and co-optation by political elites, thereby blunting their

effectiveness. Nonetheless, the resilience of civic activism remains a promising avenue for galvanising national unity, particularly among younger generations increasingly disenchanted with identity politics and political patronage.

While successive governments have attempted to promote unity through constitutional mechanisms, national dialogue, and civic engagement, these efforts have largely produced limited results due to inconsistent implementation and the dominance of elite interests. The Federal Character Principle, though noble, has often been manipulated to serve elite patronage rather than genuine representation. National conferences and reform initiatives have lacked follow-through, often discarded by new administrations more concerned with political survival than institutional continuity. Civil society interventions, though impactful, face systemic resistance and remain disconnected from formal policy-making structures. Furthermore, there is a lack of coordination among integration initiatives, and no central agency or mechanism exists to monitor and evaluate these programmes holistically. The structural inequalities in resource distribution, governance, and access to power continue to provide fertile ground for identity-based mobilisation. Ultimately, while the tools for integration exist within Nigeria's legal and institutional architecture, their success depends on political will, elite consensus, and a citizenry committed to transcending parochial divisions in pursuit of a shared national identity.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how exclusionist policies have intensified identity politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, spanning from 1999 to 2024. It explored how governance patterns and policies that favour certain regions, ethnic groups, and religious blocs over others have entrenched divisions and fostered deep-seated grievances among marginalised populations. By analysing the historical and political context of the Fourth Republic-including power transitions, zoning controversies, and the failure to implement inclusive constitutional provisions such as the federal character principle-the study has shown that the promise of national integration remains largely unfulfilled. The persistent politicisation of identity , manifesting in patron-client party dynamics and exclusionary governance, continues to exacerbate tensions within Nigeria's pluralistic society.

Key findings indicate that exclusionist practices have fuelled Identity-based agitations, voter apathy, infrastructural disparities, and growing mistrust in state institutions. Movements such as IPOB, OPC, and Arewa Youths exemplified the reactive posture of marginalised groups in a fractured polity. While efforts at integration-through national conferences, civil society activism, and youth-led protests-have provided moments of reflection and resistance, the structural deficits within Nigeria's governance architecture continue to obstruct substantive inclusion.

This study concluded that, without deliberate and enforceable mechanisms to promote equity, justice, and representation across all identity groups, Nigeria's fragile unity will remain vulnerable to chronic instability and a fragmented sense of nationhood.

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