

## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND NIGERIA'S RESPONSE TO ITS INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISES

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### Abstract

Synonymous with Nigeria is a deep political cleavage, which causes major political issues to be violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious divisions. Although efforts have been made to change these narratives through political re-engineering and public policy process, but all have failed to achieve the desired goal of national unity and security. Of what degree is the threats of internal crises to the existentiality of Nigeria? How best can the use of public diplomacy help mitigate the danger of Nigeria's internal crises? Fundamentally, public diplomacy has the capability to transform a country's socio-political and economic assets, while reversing the negative attitude of people towards these assets if handled very well. Using relational theory, the conflicts and hostility towards others is explained in relation to socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious intolerance amongst the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. The findings shows that the inability of Nigeria leaders to put the interests of the diversity of Nigeria first and respect the sensibilities of a fragile nation grasping for survival is the worst political crime, ever committed against the country. Concluding that inclusive collaboration and not unhealthy socio-economic and political competition would bring the ethnic groups in Nigerians closer than ever before.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, ethnicity, diplomacy, conflicts, Africa, development, intolerance, divisionism, economy, federalist

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### 1. Introduction

In the field of behavioural sciences, it is a common phenomenon to examine and study human actions in relation to the emerging socio-political structure and processes, involved in state formation and the overall development of such state. To a certain extent, every state strives on the premise of collaboration and co-existence of its citizens and neighbours and other state forces to survive notwithstanding the challenges and threats to social order, class relations and social existence [1]. Traditionally, every sovereign state has a twofold responsibility to provide information about the country and to timeously provide reliable information concerning socio-economic and political developments.

Public diplomacy was first proposed in 1965 [2]. Till date there are still scholarly discussions in this field on traditional public diplomacy and new public diplomacy. Further to this Wei is of the opinion that public diplomacy has shown signs of transition and transformation from the traditional to the new public diplomacy [2]. It is believed, that the new public diplomacy is horizontal in nature with multiple actors, characterized by communication and cooperation. It is seen as the upgraded version of traditional public diplomacy, which is hierarchical in nature where dissemination of information is centred on the government.

Gonesh and Melissen contend that public diplomacy was traditionally aimed at foreign audiences and consequently increasing the soft power of the state outside [3]. However, the new public diplomacy encompasses a more important role for domestic affairs. Thus, public diplomacy engages the world, while equipping the domestic audiences to understand its intricacies. It therefore means that public diplomacy can be described as a diplomatic activity, in which the government is the initiator, the public is the object, and relevant policy measures, including foreign policy, are introduced through cultural exchanges, media publicity and other means.

In this study, the relevance of public diplomacy as a central point to analysing the Nigeria's response to its internal crises, while striving to attain overall socio-economic and political stability cum development and security of the state, is examined. Thus, Nigeria as a political entity needs an enduring peace for sustainable socio-political and economic development.

Within the context of states' transformation and modernization vis-à-vis the effect of social changes and economic objectives that attends the creation and reengineering of the existence of modern states, it is of a necessity to look at public diplomacy as a means of creating new nation with territorial jurisdiction and political structures.

Synonymous with Nigeria is a deep division, which causes major political issues to be vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. The issues that raise the most dust in Nigeria are issues regarded essential for the existence and the validity of the state [4]. These issues include the control of state power, allocation of resources and citizenship. Osaghae and Suberu opine that, states with such divisions are predisposed to be delicate and unstable because such a state has little or nothing in common regarding their unity and harmony, which are necessary political tools to douse the flame of the centrifugal forces that may likely rip them apart [5].

Given this, any knowledgeable administrative analyst would suggest that Nigeria should adopt a robust public policy apart from the existing federalist political structure to ensure efficient administration of its vast territories, its ethno-tribal heterogeneous population, and its internal socio-political, economic, and security crises.

The current Nigerian political structure has its roots in the 1946 Sir Arthur Richard's constitution, and from its inception has shown symptoms of administratively sick system [6]. Although, the constitution was designed to promote national unity and participation of Nigerians in their own affairs. It is also believed, that the same constitution laid the foundation for disunity in the country on the basis that the regional assemblies [in the north, east, and western Nigeria], created by the 1946 constitution, sharpened and intensified regional diversities, thus making national unity a mirage [7]. Although this system allowed the three regions to develop at its own pace, but it resulted to such issues as the issue of resource control, outcry of marginalization, ethno-tribal and regional and religious discrimination, and lack of sense of belonging to the country.

Although there have been several efforts, made by Nigeria's political leaders to change the narratives of the people and the society through political reengineering of various government institutions as well as public policy process, but has failed to achieve the desired goal of ensuring sustainable development and national security. It is no longer news that Nigeria has been polarized into north/south dichotomy, thus deepening the level of divisionism and lack of trust among Nigerians and hence the seemingly internal crises that have engulf the country. It is against this background, and a strong conviction that this work has set to examine the instrument of public diplomacy as a means to an end vis-à-vis Nigeria's national identity and internal transformation wherein the government plays an indispensable and irreplaceable role as the initiator of public diplomacy, and the public as the object, and relevant policy measures.

There are two research questions that underpinned this study: (i) Does threats of internal crisis impact on Nigeria's existence as indivisible entity? (ii) How best can the use of public diplomacy help mitigate the danger of Nigeria's internal crises? These questions assisted the researchers to reflect on the possible solution to the internal crises threatening Nigeria as a political entity.

Peculiar to the Nigeria project is the inability of its political leaders to dissipate the internal crisis that has bedeviled the country.

It is therefore, the **aim** of this study to reflect on the possibilities of using public diplomacy to bridge the gap, created by political crises, while gunning for the development of stable political institutions, and economic development.

## 2. Material and Method

It is common to define the research method as a strategy of inquiry, which transits from the fundamental assumptions to research design and data collection process. Based on this assumption, this paper engaged a purposive sampling method [commonly used in qualitative research] to ensure that participants provide an in-depth and detailed understanding of Nigeria's response to its internal political crises using the instrument of public diplomacy. Cresswell and Plano Clark offer that this method involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of the research interest [8].

Three groups of informants comprising the Yorubas, Hausas, and Igbo extraction, all based in Lagos, were involved in the research. Data collection was done by semi-structured interviews with the participants [between October and November 2021]. However, participants were given consent letter to endorse before they were interviewed. Thus, the researcher was able to carefully gain insights of the perceptions and thoughts regarding its internal crises.

### 3. Results

#### 3. 1. Literature/theoretical explanation

Sociologically Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society, where the population is largely and deeply divided along ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious cleavages. Most of these ethnic groups are further divided into several and some, of many different traditional societies, with each having institutions peculiar to each group, which not only disconnect them with members of other traditional societies but somewhat oppose their inclinations[9].

Further to this, [9] the colonialists, from their perspective never see it as arbitrary the political amalgamation of unequal units with different political and economic orientation, this singular action of the colonialists to a certain extent was essentially arbitrary. In other words, the colonial socio-political and economic system was alien to Nigerians and thus was imposed on Nigerians, not minding its unfamiliar rules and regulations to Nigerians, and in disregard, often in ignorance, of Nigerian indigenous institutions.

Thus, the divided Nigerian plural society rather than being a blessing has turned out to be a clog in the wheel of its realization of modern, rational-legal institutions that initiate and promote peace and development. This is the true picture of Nigeria. The Nigeria state rather than being a force that engender peace and development has turned out to be a privatized institution where the economy is ill-managed and appropriated for private interests by the dominant elites to conceal the patrimonial and particularistic nature of socio-economic and political power [10, 11]. Thus, the intrinsic complexities in the formation of the Nigerian state by the British government has made the practicality of the prospects of the Nigerian state measuring up to the standard of the West less feasible.

Granting this, the Nigerian state have come a long way wading through the rough road of nation-building process, where most of its multinational or multi-ethnic groups have resorted to solving their inter-group relations challenges from their sociological and political divergences in their own way, thus, questioning the rationale behind the coexistence of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

By default, and with the propensity of blaming Nigeria's socio-political and economic woes on colonialism, the question is whether the nature of the inherited colonial legacy or the patron-client relationship and the exclusive devotion to a particular interest orientation of the competing power elites who took over from the colonialist is the problem. Whichever way the swing goes, Nigeria state remains pigeon-holed by the huge socio-political and economic disconnections among the various ethnic groups that lines the country.

Characteristically, conflict is and have become part of human existence, part of the dynamics that drives life into the future. However, conflicts need to be well managed constructively, but when conflict is associated with violence, destruction, and incessant killings, and when it becomes endemic, it is no longer a healthy part of human existence. Observably, violent conflict solves little or no problems, rather it creates many, and breed more unhealthy conflict. However, when conflict is understood, it is easier to find ways to predict, prevent, transform, and easier to resolve. Theoretically, and in relation to Nigeria, human behaviour in social contexts results from conflicts between competing groups, which suggests that different social groups have unequal power, though all groups struggle for the same limited resources.

Relational theory attempts to provide explanation for [violent] conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic, religious, and historical relationships between such groups [9]. Thus, relationships between individuals and groups are seemingly influenced by the cultural and value differences as well as group interests in different ways. Hence, Faleti's conclusion that there is possibility that conflicts may spring up because of past history of conflict between

groups that has ostensibly led to the development of negative stereotypes, religious and cultural intolerance as well as political and economic discriminations [12].

By implication, such negative exchanges between groups may make it a herculean task for efforts to integrate different ethnic and religious groups within the society to succeed because of their toxic past interactions, which might make it difficult for them to trust one another. This is the situation in Nigeria where it has been to a certain degree difficult for the major ethnic groups [Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and the Yoruba] in Nigeria to work together.

Invariably, the differences in socio-cultural and religious values among the ethnic groups in Nigeria has led to the contradiction of “We” and ‘Others’; ‘others’ are perceived as different and less or inferior by reason of the differences in their ethnic socio-cultural values. This eventually disrupts the flow of communication between us and them and to that extent, twists perceptions that we have about each other. Therefore, conflicts and hostility towards others is explained in relation to socio-cultural and religious intolerance amongst the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. Attesting to this, a respondent remarked that;

*not minding the fact that you a Muslim, if you are a Yoruba cum Muslim, you cannot be allowed to lead the Friday Jumat prayer anywhere in the north, because you are seen as an unbeliever or outsider.*

Debatably, a systematic application and conduct of public diplomacy in Nigeria will help to preserve and manage the toxic and conflictual relationship among Nigeria ethnic groups and possibly restore the dignity of the country within the comity of nations. To a certain extent, diplomacy can be described as the process of dialogue and negotiation where states in a system conduct their relations and pursue their interests by any means short of war. Adetiba thus believes that public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of smart power and therefore requires an understanding of the roles of credibility, self-criticism, and civil society, since it attracts potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing of cultural exports and arranging exchanges [13].

However, and, if the content of a country’s culture, values as well as socio-economic, religious, and political policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that transmits such cannot produce the necessary soft power in relation to public diplomacy, which rests on the ability of a state to regulate and shape the preferences of others states, to do what it wants without resulting to the use of force. Traditionally, public diplomacy aimed at communicating with the people outside and their governments, ultimately aiming at influencing their thinking towards the home government [14].

Nevertheless, the new public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy primarily in that it involves a more important role for domestic affairs, nongovernmental individuals, and organisations [15]. To some extent public diplomacy is more complex and sophisticated than standard forms of communication between governments. Specifically, public diplomacy explicitly targets specific sectors of foreign publics to develop and attract support for strategic domestic goals and may present many different views in addition to the official view of the government [15, 16].

Technologically, the tools of public diplomacy include tools, such as modern communications gadgets, used to broadcast the message, institutional tools, such as censorship, media pools, selective granting of access, selective granting of media credentials, appeals to patriotism of journalists, conduct of briefings, and grass roots organizing, which are used to mould the message into an accepted and specific form and direct it to the appropriate audience. Psychologically, public diplomacy tools are used to ensure that the message shapes and maintains public opinion toward the specific purpose, for which it is meant [17].

Crow offers that public diplomacy is usually confused with other forms of government communication, such as public relations, nonetheless while public diplomacy shares some common features with public relations, it is distinct in both its focus and the means, employed to convey the message [15]. Characteristically, public diplomacy is like public affairs, conducted by private entities. Thus, public affair is the provision of credible information to the public and other institutions alike concerning the goals policies and activities of a state. Further to this, public affair seeks to ensure the understanding of these goals through dialogue with individual citizens and other groups and institutions as well as international media. The thrust of public affairs, however, is to inform the domestic audience what public diplomacy really is.

But who controls the means of these communication? This question arises owing to the general perception that only states use public diplomacy. Thus, suggesting that a two-step process, which is direct communication, designed to produce supportive public opinion in another state, and pressure by the informed public on its government to adopt friendly policies towards the country employing public diplomacy is very important. What this suggests is that both state and non-state actors can use various channels of communication to influence the perception of people in other country about home government's socio-economic, cultural, and political policies.

What Gilboa cited in Adetiba defined as media-broker diplomacy where the media shoulder the responsibility of diplomats cum domestic actors, while serving as mediators in international negotiations [13]. What this translates to mean is that public diplomacy should be seen as an official communication, through which the foreign public is educated about a state's behaviour locally and in its international relations. Thus, promoting the idea of media diplomacy where both government officials, groups, and individuals engage the media, while investigating and promoting shared ethnic, [as the case of Nigeria] national interests, diplomatic negotiations, and resolution of conflicts.

Debatably, the technology-driven changes affecting public diplomacy can and have produced both risks and opportunities for states. These includes the opportunity to influence and speak directly and more frequently to large audiences, which will in turn feed into political influence, the opportunity to segment audiences and target messages to key groups, the challenge of competing for a voice when everyone can communicate and, in some cases, with individuals or organizations that are more successful at controlling a foreign policy message than governments. Thus, public diplomacy is a means of reaching out to the global public directly, rather than through their governments.

These revolutions within the international system have transformed the goals and means of foreign policy through the power of attraction and persuasion. Through global news networks, many societies have been transformed from an autocratic system to a democratic system, thus generating systemic growth in mass participation. Hence, public diplomacy is a process where the government of a country communicates with both the local and foreign audiences, explaining its policies that revolves round its ideas, ideals, institutions, culture, and national interests [18].

However, it is pertinent to state, that the effects of public diplomacy are likely to grow slowly over a period of time and relatively with no definite effects, thus making it to be a bit difficult to estimate. This is one of the reason many policymakers make the mistake of placing public diplomacy at the bottom of their proverbial statecraft toolbox when in fact, its utility has been growing steadily across states. Hence, the assertion that the ultimate goals of public diplomacy campaigns may not be readily apparent to outside observers [15].

It has been argued, that an attempt to influence others may involve multiple goals and targets, while assessing the utility of various techniques of statecraft [19]. Thus, public diplomacy operates in a way to make known the intention of a state. For example, economic sanction may be important not because of its impact but because economic sanctions demonstrate the intentions of the state imposing the sanctions. Ultimately, public diplomacy may not lead to alteration in the policy of a particular country, rather it will still be exerting certain degree of influence even if it only forces the target county's government to put forth more effort to prevail against the wishes of other state.

Communication scholars believe that the key to good public diplomacy is listening [20]. In communication, the target is the audience that listens to the actors communicating the message, hence the need to use the appropriate diplomatic approach, designed around the audience's needs, interests, and goals vis-à-vis those of the promoter, Zaharna [21]. This is considered a soft power strategy, which spurs change through attraction rather than coercion.

By the nature of the Nigeria state, the country should be committed to public diplomacy. In times and where there are several ethnic groups, and their actions affect one another, they cannot function in a vacuum of isolation, with each community considering only how to manage its internal affairs. Therefore, the need to understand and know what is going on in the minds of seemingly dominant ethnic group vis-à-vis other group in Nigeria is a function of effective, and practical public diplomacy relationships among different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.

### 3. 2. Reflection on the drivers of internal political crises in Nigeria

Historically, the modern Nigerian nation-state has been infused with turbulent, contentious, and often violent politics, marked by the fault-lines of ethnic, religious, regional, and sub-ethnic identities, along which political claims and violent conflicts [22, 23].

Nigeria is home to 250 ethnic groups, and more than 500 different indigenous languages with English being the official language. The three dominant ethnic groups in the country represent more than two-thirds of the population, as well as dominate the political system. They are the Hausa/Fulani in the far north; the Yoruba in the southwest; and the Igbo in the southeast [23]. For political purpose, Nigeria was divided into six geopolitical zones in 1996 by the military government under the leadership of late General Sanni Abacha, the zones are, North West zone, North East zone, North Central zone, South West zone, South East zone, and South South zone.

Reflecting on the causes of Nigeria's many ethnic, religious, economic, and political crises bedeviling the existentiality of the country, it requires the understanding of the political economy of the country. Owing to the plethora of the recent crises [the Boko Haram insurgence in the north east of the country, the menace of the Fulani Herdsmen penchant for killings, kidnapping, raping of innocent women, destruction of farms and disruption of farming system, insecurity across the country that have almost brought Nigeria to its knees], Bouchat comments that Nigeria represents the best and worst of what African states offer the world and also demonstrates many of the problems that plague much of Africa's stability and progress [24].

Without mincing words, Nigeria's larder of natural resources brings in much needed foreign revenue, but at the same time Nigeria is a vast source of corruption, which comes in many forms (bribes, patronage, nepotism, clientelism, cronyism) that internecine conflict, environmental degradation leading to the destruction of agricultural livelihoods, and a poor human rights record. All these combined together have hindered socio-economic and human development in Nigeria, which is why Bouchat and Adebajo refer to Nigeria as a troubled land that has not been able to deliver on its potential or realize its aspirations [24, 25]. By implication, the fundamental problems that have challenged Nigerian progress throughout its history have continue unabated.

As stated earlier, these problems have been ascribed to some multifaceted causes, which include colonial legacy, international maneuvering, poverty, religious and cultural conflicts, all have leave Nigeria on the edge of instability. However, the root cause of these and other socio-political and economic problems may be the result of the political economy of Nigeria and the resulting centrifugal and centripetal forces that hold the country as a unified state in the balance [24]. The term political economy has to do with the interconnection of economic and political structures in a social system [26]. Thus, the mutual influence of economic activities and policies on politics and its ideologies, involves several elements of the political economy, which includes formation of self-interest group action, redistribution of public economic gain and hence the woeful underperformance of Nigeria's economy.

Responding to a question, a respondent comment that,  
*a combination of factors, which include social apathy, economic deprivation, and political frustration, absence of good governance, has continued to contribute to the present socio-economic problem facing Nigeria and often Nigeria's government repeatedly lose sight of the real problem, which is internal disharmony that have wreaked havoc in the polity.*

This statement was corroborated by scholars, that the poor record of economic development in Nigeria is partly due to the inability of Nigerian leaders to work for and unite the fragmented geographic and ethnic components of the country and the unstable government structure, inherited from the colonialists [27, 28]. Before or during the colonial era, Nigerians never had a strong sense of unity thus, discouraging a sense of nationhood, which gave the British colonialist the impetus to actively pursued a divide and rule tactics in addition to exploiting Nigeria's resources and markets for their economic interests [29, 30].

Answering a question, another respondent reiterates that,  
*Nigerian politicians are highly manipulative, their goal has always been how to gain the control of the country using ethnic score card for their own interests, and because of this, the coun-*

*try has been divided and thus gives rise to internal separatist movements from both the minorities and some of the major ethnic groups, while mobilizing against central authority.*

This is in addition to violence between the Fulani herders and farmers, which has continued for decades in Nigeria's Middle Belt states of Taraba, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Adamawa.

The above statement fits into Claude Ake's description of the worsening challenge of corruption and good governance in Africa, a situation that perfectly fits into Nigeria's case. Ake reasons that decades of efforts of African leaders have yielded largely stagnation, regression or worse [31]. The tragic consequences of this are increasingly clear; a rising tide of poverty, decaying public utilities and infrastructures, social tensions, and political turmoil, and now, premonition of inevitable drive into conflict and violence.

At the heart of Nigeria's instability is its oil-dependent economy and its wealth [23]. Lending a voice into this statement, a respondent expresses the opinion that

*the discovery of oil in Nigeria rather than been a blessing has been a curse because every political leader in the country has made the control of the resources their target at the expense of diversification and general development of the economy, thus promoting poverty and inequality amongst Nigerians as well as fueling corrupt practices.*

Herbert and Husaini opine that the lack of appropriate wealth distribution in Nigeria often fuel grievances across the country in addition to economic disparities between the north and the rest of the country where the north has roughly half the GDP per capita as the south, hence the high rate of inequality, poverty, and lack of access to basic services that hold back development [23]. Of great concern is the limitation of economic inclusion with little generation of wage employment. The lack of employment prospects among the youths and poverty have made the younger generations to be open for mobilization for political rents apart from joining violent and criminal groups.

Nigeria [narrow-minded] politicians often exploit the country's diversity and use chauvinistic appeals based on ethnicity, religion, to punch up electoral support. For example, in 2011, the presidential election, which was contested between a southern Christian candidate (Goodluck Jonathan), and northern Muslim candidate (Muhammadu Buhari), split the country along ethno-religious-regional lines thus, leading to post election violence between aggrieved Muslim supporters of Buhari who was defeated and Christians, perceived to have supported Goodluck Jonathan, who believed that the elections had been rigged [32].

One assumption that has gained much ground in Nigeria's political space is the possibility of an electoral candidate to govern in favour of his or her ethnic and religion. To allay the fears of other ethnic groups, the zoning formula [an informal arrangement within Nigeria's political parties whereby the presidential candidate alternates between a northerner and a southerner after each has served two terms] was introduced, though not in Nigeria's constitution; with the intention to provide political equity across regional, religions, and ethnic divides. However, this system seems not to be working as expected. A respondent offers that

*the zoning system between the north and the south gives more power to the north in that the south consist of three politically antagonistic, ethnically exclusive groups with various post-civil war political differences, while the north consists of the Hausa/Fulani extraction except for the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt, and hence the difficulty in favourable representation of other groups in the south.*

Corroborating this, Mustapha and Oloko contend that this political arrangement is a ruse, a self-serving mechanism, devised by professional politicians to manage access to the national patrimony [what skeptics termed turn-by-turn presidency] and by implication has ended up furthering the entrenchment of group cohesion and elite manipulation, hence the claims and counter-claims of ethnic domination and marginalization, the result of which is a recurrent tension and conflict [33, 34].

Responding to a question on indigeneity, a respondent lamented,

*I left Kano for Ibadan in 2015 when my children who were born and brought up in Kano were denied admission into secondary school because they were unable to trace their ethnic and genealogical roots back to the community where they were originally born, in fact my children*

*were referred to as settler and not an indigene in their own country. I was also denied access to land to build a house in a state where I have stayed for more than 20 years.*

One would therefore conclude that the way the Nigerian state has handled the interaction between 'indigenes' and 'settlers' has become an integral to the problem of Nigeria. This is in contradiction to Section 25(1) of 1999 Constitution that promises a single Nigerian citizenship. Section 42 of the same constitution expressly forbids discrimination against other Nigerians based on the circumstances of their birth. Also, Section (4) of the 1999 Constitution stated the Fundamental Human Rights of all Nigerians, including the rights to be free from separation, while Section 41(1) gives each national the rights to move uninhibitedly all through Nigeria and to dwell in any part thereof, while section 43 of the constitution ensures each native 'the rights to procure and possess undaunted property anyplace in Nigeria' [35].

Another significant driver of conflict in Nigeria's polity is good governance deficit, which has invariably affected inclusive socio-political and economic development in Nigeria. Ake identifies two major governance issues that proved to be more devastating to development, lack of participation and consensus – building [31]. This is described as the lack of a sense of national community [36]. The second one is the lack of accountability and transparency.

The absence of these has led to the emergence of alternative conflict actors in an environment that engenders instability in the political system as the people yearn for the elusive dividends of good governance, hence the need for political stability, which requires the collective identity of the citizenry and an increase in the sense of national community, apart from struggling with poverty, insecurity and infrastructural deficits, which has become a national embarrassment to Nigerians. Thus, an informed civil society through public diplomacy is essential to balance the power of the Nigerian State, and by the time the public interest is reaffirmed in governance, the polity would exhibit the potential for growth and stability [36].

### **3. 3. Public Diplomacy initiatives and Nigeria's responses to its internal crisis**

Usman comments that Nigeria is at a crossroads with its fragile democracy under threat, occasioned by insecurity, which is adjudged to be the worst in decades. Further to this, he points out that Nigeria and its people are much less secure, poorer, and more divided than ever before and the mood of the citizenry is that of anger, depression, hopelessness, and terror [37]. While the government has constantly shown that it is incapable of fulfilling its primary responsibility of protecting and securing the people, and that it has run out of any fresh ideas on how to get the country out of the current security quagmire.

Debatably, competition over socio-economic and political power forms part of human existence. Since Nigeria is a combination of different ethnic groups with different socio-political background and orientations living together, competition over socio-economic and political resources is, therefore, inescapable. It thus means that for as long as ethnic groups with diverse socio-political and cultural backgrounds live together [in Nigeria], it will be difficult to avoid competition over the allocation of resources among them [38].

Often, there is a combination of socio-economic factors that have led to the outbreak of internal crises in Nigeria. Identifying and categorizing these factors might be a bit challenging, as well as difficult to outline which factor override the other factor. However, one thing that is relatively sure is that in Nigeria, it is believe that whichever ethnic group produces the country's president controls the polity and hence the reason, for which different ethnic groups are always keen to control the country not minding what it will cost the country and its citizens to do so. To this end a respondent comment that

*Nigeria for long has been crippled by its structural problems that needs to be attended to without any further delay, accumulated past political and economic blunders, unemployment, poverty, and endemic distrust and suspicion of each other, if Nigeria must move forward, there must be a transformation in its democracy as well as reform its political system and institutions, while enlightening the political elites and the electorates on the need to look beyond their parochial ethnic and political interests.*

This statement shows that Nigeria's internal crises are based not only on political factor but also on the shriveling and waning of its political system, coupled with the lack of political will to structurally put Nigeria in order.

As stated above, the outbreak of internal crises in Nigeria as a result of the combination of some socio-economic factors debatably exerts untoward pressure on Nigeria's soft power. Soft power is a form of power that employ strategies like public diplomacy, history, and culture [39]. Soft power rest on the capability of a state to influence people [of different culture and political believe] to diplomatically demonstrate their support for shared values, culture, sense of fairness, and belonging, while working towards achieving a collective and group's objective. Nigeria's diversity in culture, language and religion constitutes Nigeria's soft power and this depends on the willingness of Nigerians to accept this.

Responding to a question on the importance of Nigeria's diversity vis-à-vis its unity, a respondent expresses the opinion that,

*Nigeria though consists of different ethnic groups with different language, culture and political orientation has failed to utilize its diversity to punch up its exotic position as the most populous black nation rather it is unfortunate that Nigeria leaders have use the same diversity to their selfish advantage and destroy what would have turn out to be diplomatically used to attract tourists and foreign investors to Nigeria.*

Within the context of the internal crises in Nigeria, the major causal factors for these crises include the strong assertion of one ethnic group that they have the sole mandate to control the country politically, hence the challenges of poverty, and economic inequality amongst the various ethnic groups in the country. The response and the political body language of the Nigerian political leaders to a certain extent shapes the opinion of the public on the internal crises in Nigeria. This has made Nigerians most especially those residing outside their original ethnic group, to face threats of hostilities from their hosts.

It can be argued, that it is impossible to say what would have happened in the absence of past and current initiatives to douse the levels of hatred amongst the ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria. Therefore, the growing ability of individuals and small groups to threaten the security and the economic interests of Nigeria necessitates improved cooperation and empathy on the part of foreign publics as well as their governments. While undoubtedly Nigeria is increasingly constrained in its ability to further its national interests as a result of the attitudes and actions of some group of people in collaboration with their political friends in governments and, possibly foreign publics.

The need for public diplomacy is driven by one simple fact that the above problems make it clear that the public audience and international audience to accept Nigeria's means of influencing the behaviour of others requires an understanding of the society and the socio-cultural factors behind them. Public diplomacy [in Nigeria] represents the connection of government policies within the wider field of statecraft, which refers to the appropriate selection of diplomatic means for the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Thus, statecraft is an instrument that policymakers use to get others to do what they would not otherwise do [19].

Answering a question on the activities of the Fulani herdsmen in some part of the country and the damage it has done to the unity of the country, a respondent remark that,

*there is no creativity in how Nigeria is governed, no variation of opinion, particularly from the populace, the government of the day believe that the opinions of others stakeholders in the polity does not matter. At least, the government should embark on classified diplomatic communication with the various ethnic groups in the country before things finally gets out of hand.*

This is the reason why Crow remarks that all governments, while conducting public diplomacy, crusade attempt to portray their nation in favorable light to the target audience [15]. This is in fact; the primary means, by which the influencing nation seeks to alter the behavior of the target group.

It is no longer news, that the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria, surging banditry violence in the northwest, incessant farmer/herder conflict in the Middle Belt states and a growing Cameroonian refugee population in the south have contributed to a complex humanitarian crisis in the country. The activities of these bandits have led to the increase in the number of In-

ternally Displaced People (IDP) in Nigeria. The cold response of Nigeria government to this have negatively affected the national image of Nigeria.

The national image of a country is measured by the positive or negative character of the nation in the minds of the target audience. This also apply to the visibility of the positive or negative character of the image, held by the target audience. Crow opines that visibility of a country is determined by the number of [positive or negative] news stories relating to the country in question in the local media, just as the number and variety of media outlets providing information about the influencing country also have an impact on the country's visibility [15]. To this end, if Nigeria must remain highly visible, while conducting its public diplomacy campaign, the country must reside firmly on projecting a timely positive image by making efforts to dialogue and negotiate with actors both local and international, while seeking to reshape the battered socio-political, legal, economic, and security structures in the country.

The above corroborates a respondent's answer to a question that,

*Nigeria is presently, at a crossroad and needs the diplomatic acumen of the political leaders to do the needful. For example, he said the President should embark on diplomatic moves, particularly to French speaking west African countries, and France in particular, also the president should visit Russia, China and table Nigeria's requirements to fight the insurgents, he should visit Turkey and Morocco because of their connections with the Arab world, perhaps this will help Nigeria to reclaim its lost position as Africa's big brother.*

If Nigeria's public diplomacy must be successful, the role of the elites must not be pushed aside. What is referred to as elite orientation of the message [15]. Responding to a question, a respondent comment that,

*the solution to Nigeria's problem cannot be given by the political office holders alone, rather the elites, such as traditional rulers, Pastors, Imams, retired soldiers should be brought in and tapped from their experiences.*

To this end Adeboye [a well-known Preacher in Nigeria], quoted by NewsWireNGR, advised the [Nigeria] government that "in the future, men of God should be included . . . the chief imams, archbishops . . . when they (referring to the political office holders) are setting up their committees" [40]. This shows that elites play a critical role in determining which issues enter the public discourse, while also using their elevated status to shape the acceptable range of positions within the discourse to varying degrees. Therefore, any successful public diplomacy campaign, while remaining a program of largely mass communication, must encompass some diplomatic elements, directed explicitly at winning the support and trust of target audience elites because elites play a role in determining what information the mass public receives and how that information is perceived [15].

In the past years Nigeria has become infamous for conflicts of different kinds, ethnic differences, religious intolerance, deep-rooted political and economic development failures, leadership struggles or conspicuously inept political leaders, political marginalization, corruption, weak political institutions, unequal distribution of economic resources, poverty, and political greed. In one way or the other, the international community could be fingered. Mngomezulu and Fayayo offered that generally and in some instances, global players simply watch and do nothing, thus allowing the conflicts [in Africa] to continue unabated, sometimes deliberately as well as prevented by certain laws and procedures [41]. Observably, this is the situation in Nigeria.

While responding to a question, one the respondents remarked that,

*there wouldn't have been any country like Nigeria today if not for the selfishness of the British colonialists, and now that things have turn out to be what it is today, the British government should not pretend as if they don't know what is going on in Nigeria. He further said that the US government in collaboration with corrupt Nigeria political leaders should be held responsible for the crises in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.*

The above statement is in line with the statement that as ethnic conflicts erupted in Nigeria unabated, the British government and the international community watched from a distance [41]. In confirmation of the respondent statement, Mngomezulu and Fayayo opine that of all the countries that have fueled conflicts in Nigeria the US is chief and this is all because of its interest in Nigeria's oil, which has either blinded the US administration to atrocities, committed by the Nigerian polit-

ical leaders on Nigerians, or driven the US government to bend its own policies and fuel conflicts in Nigeria [41].

Unarguably, and across the world the US is believed to be defender of human rights and democracy apart from being at the top of its policy agenda. However, blinded for its penchant economic interest in general, and its interest in Nigeria's oil, the US has had to tolerate ruthless and inhumane regimes in Nigeria and turn a blind eye to the cries of the Nigerians. The persistent socio-economic and political conflicts and the attitudes of Nigeria political leaders have hindered Nigeria's prospects for inclusive development. What this translates to mean is that some of these conflicts are self-inflicted.

Traditionally, diplomacy was concerned with the conduct of relations among the governments of independent states, where negotiations on socio-political and economic questions of mutual interest, such as security, alliances, trade policy, and the like, take place. Generally, and in practice, the activities of diplomacy center around the circles of sovereign government. However, diplomacy does not seek to guide the internal development of other countries in any way that may be fundamental to such state. If that is the case, it means that the solution to Nigeria's crises lies within and among Nigerians. This confirms one of the respondents' comments that,

*Nigeria though of different ethnic group can build a diplomatic bridge across the three major ethnic groups through cooperation against insecurity, encouragement of the development of stable political institutions, and economic development, and the task of to perform the principal activity, goals, objectives amongst these ethnic groups is left with credible leaders of each ethnic group.*

#### 4. Discussion

Based on the results of this research, there are two findings that explain the possibility of using public diplomacy to address the menace of political crises in Nigeria, the first finding revolves round the deficit of good governance, which has invariably affected inclusive socio-political and economic development in Nigeria. The argument for the deficit of good governance in Nigeria is supported by Adeleke and Marcellinus' work on "*Good governance in Nigeria: a catalyst to national peace, stability and development*". They argued that good governance manifesting in areas of rule of law, transparency, accountability, citizens participation among others is sine qua non for national peace and development [42]. However, the lack of good leader, which tickles down to deficit in good governance in most of the Nigeria's 62 years of existence, has not only hindered the nation's development but has continued to threaten its peace and stability.

To have and to maintain good governance, transparency and accountability are indispensable. These two concepts are interrelated and complementary concepts. Therefore, to any political system to be labelled good, transparency and accountability remain requisite, and hence engender inclusive development. Adeleke and Marcellinus believe that they provide the basis for good policies formulation and implementation; emphasise the strategies for economic growth and development; and enhance efficient management of resources for the nation's sustenance and general development [42]. Hence, government functionaries should be prepared to be always answerable for their actions to members of the public and be able to justify their actions at the level of moral and ethical standard.

By implication, the practice of good governance, which must be visible in the areas of rule of law, transparency, accountability, citizens' participation in governance to a certain extent can guarantee national peace, stability, and development in Nigeria.

The second finding revolves around the diversity nature of the country. There is no doubt that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society, because of which the country has been bedevilled with conflicts arising from its ethnic and cultural diversities. Edewor, Aluko, and Folarin had argued that national integration in the Nigerian context has been an attempt to forge unity in diversity, seeking to wish away socio-cultural differences and imposing uniformity despite complex cultural diversity. However, this has created more conflict and posed obstacles to Nigeria's unity, peaceful co-existence, progress, and sustainable development [43].

Given the Nigeria's constitutional development experiences, there were concerned that the goal of managing ethnicity may be subverted, hence the adoption of federalism, creation of regions

and states and local governments, the shift from parliamentary system to presidential system, institutionalization of quota systems, prohibition of ethnic political parties, consociational politicking, and the adoption of the federal character principle to manage ethnic diversity [44]. However, the lack of political will, distortion of vision has been the major limitations to ethnic management policies in Nigeria. Notwithstanding the lack of political will on the part of Nigerian leaders, this work believes that national integration and its benefits can be achieved with the development and entrenchment of a supportive public culture; understanding, respecting, and tolerating differences, occasioned by socio-cultural diversity; as well as the development of new institutions and public diplomacy mechanisms, through which these can be achieved.

## 5. Conclusion

For long, the dominant narrative about Nigeria as a political entity has been one crisis to another. Nigeria seems to have become the epic center of socio-economic and political crisis, laden with patronage, corruption, injustice and impunity, poverty, and disease [amid plenty], insecurity etc. thus making the country a stain on the integrity of its former colonial master and to some extent the rich and the powerful countries.

Persistent socio-political skirmishes in Nigeria, undoubtedly, have hindered the prospects of inclusive development. Some of these conflicts as discussed above are caused by Nigerians, owing to the overt and covert role, played by Nigeria political leaders. Characteristically, the inability of Nigeria leaders to put the interests of the diversity of Nigeria first and respect the sensibilities of a fragile nation grasping for survival is the worst political crime, ever committed against the most populous black nation on earth, where the political leaders has failed to equalize access for all Nigerians across the ethnic groups, hence the extensive agitation for secession that started in the east and has spread to the west as well as the middle belt regions of the country.

To address these socio-political skirmishes, both political, traditional, religious leaders, non-governmental organisations and, by extension, international stakeholders should come on board to salvage the country. As it is Nigeria requires more than political rhetoric to deal with the plethora of conflicts bedeviling Nigeria. Nigeria as a political entity needs socio-economic and political preventative measures to douse the flames of the drivers of conflicts in the country. Often neglected is genuine and sincere internal resource mobilization for socio-economic rebirth. Debatably, this could be central to remedy internal conflicts in Nigeria. Inclusive collaboration and not unhealthy socio-economic and political competition would bring the ethnic groups in Nigerians closer than ever before. It is apparent, that once the ethnic groups in Nigeria are united, to play them against one another by some powerful states who only cares about their own political and economic gain as espoused by realism would be difficult.

## Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this paper, as well as the published research results, including the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining and using its results, as well as any non-financial personal relationships.

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