

The Moderating Effect of Rent Seekers on Sectarianism and Communal Crisis in a Multi-Ethnic Society

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Abstract: *The paper examined the moderating effect of rent seekers on sectarianism and communal crisis in a multi-ethnic society, using Nigeria as a case study through a systematic review method. Various secondary information were sources from several databases, journal, Newspaper, Magazines, and so on, and thematic analysis was used to subject the information to analysis, from which the findings are provided and inferences are drawn. The findings revealed that sectarianism, which is the politicization of ethnic identities has led to increasing competition for resources, discrimination, and have eventually spur communal crisis in Nigeria. This has resulted to loss of lives, increase fatalities, displacement of persons, abuse of human rights, livelihood destruction hence, affecting national security. This reveals the use of sectarianism to foster communal crises in the Nigeria society. In addition, the findings revealed that rent seekers used various activities such as corruption, inequality, tax, and so on to deploy sectarianism that tends to aggravate communal crisis in Nigeria due to the fight for available resources. Such crises have led to loss of lives and property, and in the long run hindering the sustainable development of the society. Moreover, rent seekers use the political influence obtained through sectarianism to generate more economic rents for their selfishness and hence, becoming major cause of communal crises that hamper socio-economic development goals in the Nigeria society. In addition, rent seeking is often used for conflict-amplifying mechanism in Nigeria hence, leading to severe communal crises that affect the socioeconomic development of people and of the nation. It recommended that the government should cut off any source of humanitarian rents and also reduce the potential of using sectarianism as a tool for capturing resources that should have been meant for the population towards enhancing the effective distribution of resources to the betterment of the citizens.*

Keywords: rent seekers, rent seeking, sectarianism, communal crisis, multi-ethnic society, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has approximately 371 officially recognised ethnic groups, each with its unique and different cultures, languages, traditions, and also historical identities evolving from generations unknown. It stands as the third globally recognised for diversity and multiple ethnic and culture groups after Cameroon and Chad (The Nigeria Guardian Newspapers, 2026). This multiethnicity has posed several heterogeneous problems in the nation (Omiunu, 2014) hence, the major problem of the nation has been to attain unity despite the multiethnic diversity (Aghamelu & Obinabo, 2018). The concept of multiethnic society implies a cultural diversified society with numerous and different ethnic groups cohabiting in the same society, and where a variety of different political groups and parties exist evolving from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to seek for political power to control the resources (Aghamelu & Obinabo, 2018; Femi, 2024). Such resources could include natural resources, languages, and others. Thus, these diverse ethnic groups, each possessing different cultural heritage, compete for resources, political power, and representation within the government system (Femi, 2024).

Such multi-ethnicity in Nigeria should have been a potential blessing that could be used to enhance national development and foster unity in the nation. However, achieving such unity within the multi-diversity ethnic groups in Nigeria has been a mirage, instead, this has led to several conflicts that tend to jeopardize the socioeconomic, cultural and political development of the nation. According to Aghamelu & Obinabo (2018), multicultural ethnic and diversity has caused several conflicts in Nigeria such as political crisis, intra-communal crisis and several other social unrests. Such conflicts are fuelled by ethnicity-based resource distribution, economic inequalities, uneven development across several regions of the nation leading to several communal crisis

Communal crisis is the manifestation of collective individuals or group of individuals who are non-state actors, which are carried out either inter or intra community. Opposing parties are chosen and taken their stands based on their communal affiliations and shared community identities, with each parties loyal to their particular communal groups and the opposing parties becomes the victims (Brosche & Elfversson, 2015; Okoli & Nnabuihe, 2019). Examples of such communal crises in Nigeria are the Ife-Modakeke, Zangon Kataf communal, the Bassa-Egbura crisis, the internecine Jukun-Tiv crisis, and several other major crises in the Niger-Delta region due to unequal and uneven distribution of oil resources and wealth.

Anierobi, Obasi, Nnamani, Ajah, Iloma, Efobi, Nwaoga, Ngozi, Okonkwo & Chigbe (2024) explained that communal crises in Nigeria takes several forms and patterns and have been mostly known to be linked with the issue of multi-ethnicity relations and in addition could also possess certain levels of religious and political issues intersecting and leading to a complex crisis that affect the lives, properties, communities and the nation's economy. Adapting the intersectionality theory of the Critical Race Theory, there seems to be a prevailing intersectional link among several other societal issues such as religion, politics, and others, on the issue of ethnicity. Hence, this leads to

the politicization of ethnic identities such that each boundaries of a given group become the key basis for initiating competition, discrimination, and violence or crisis, particularly due to competition for resources. This leads to the issue of Sectarianism.

Sectarianism is a persistent intersectional issue, originating from the issue of division on community identities such religious, race, ethnicity, class, geographic location, and so on (Mabon, 2022). Drawing from the intersectionality theory, causes of communal crises could be connected to two major aspects. The first is a typical communal crisis that is caused by ethnicity, and the second is the type that is caused by the interplay or intersection of ethnicity and other social issues such as religion, politics, and others. However, drawing from the issue of sectarianism, which is a major issue of focus in this paper, of communal crises becomes a product of the politicization of religious and ethnic identities for the basis of competition, discrimination, and violence. Sectarianism tends to operate through the narratives of prevalence of exclusion, which could be observed from historical grievance, and perception of threat hence, groups could hold the view that the state cannot or does not care and protect them. To this end, elites who could be or serve as rent seekers deploy the sectarian frames to better mobilize support that tends to accumulate to communal crises. Thus, rent seekers could serve as a moderating factor on the deployment of sectarianism for communal crises in societies.

Rent seeking implies the pursuit of wealth by certain powerful elites without contributing to the overall productivity or well-being of the society and it is often the manipulation of the political or regulatory environment towards gaining advantages at the detriment of the citizens, particularly the less privileged (Majaski, 2026). Also, the power of rent seekers is driven and aggravated by the issue of inequality in the society. Rent-seeking activities, which include corruption and tax could affect development hence, leading to market inefficiencies and also increases consumer costs due to several barriers to entry (Chakraborty & Dabla-Norris, 2006; Majaski, 2026).

Rent seeking behavior could be used to enhance sectarianism towards aggravating communal crisis in a multiethnic society. Fubara (2025) rent seekers could hire and maintain certain groups, through the effective use of sectarianism that could lead to violence in a society. In Nigeria, Osborne (2000) noted that the use of rent seeking has been a common issue to spur ethnic and communal crises. To this end, rent seekers becomes a major issue to contend with in a multiethnic society like Nigeria due to their negative effects on resource allocation and also on the development of the people and the nation. The moderate effect of rent seekers on the relationship between sectarianism and intra-communal crises could be explained from two major angles. The first is that, it could serve as a conflict-dampening or management mechanism, and the second is that it could serve as a conflict-amplifying mechanism using crisis as opportunity. In the case of Nigeria, drawing from the studies of Osborne (2000); Chakraborty & Dabla-Norris (2006); Fubara (2025) and Majaski (2026), it could be very obvious that the functioning of rent seekers are often deployed for conflict-amplifying mechanism but there is need to subject this assertion into investigation. To this end, this paper focuses on exploring the moderating effect of rent seekers on sectarianism and

communal crisis in a multiethnic society, with focus on the Nigeria society. The following research questions were used to drive this paper:

- i. How does sectarianism contribute to communal crisis in Nigeria?
- ii. What moderating effect do rent seekers pose on the implication of sectarianism on communal crisis in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria has often been experiencing an elevated and notorious communal crises which have often assumed complicated dimensions due to certain intersecting issues such as inequalities, poverty, religion, politics, and so on (Okoli & Ukwandu, 2022). Such crises have manifested in variously forms as ethnic, religious, sectarian, and several other forms of configuration and intersection of more than one type such as ethno-religion, ethno-political, and so on (Okoli & Ukwandu, 2022). These have led to loss of lives, destruction of properties, business short down and destruction, rape and several other problems that pose severe effects on the socioeconomic development of people and the nation at large. This could be why Plotnicov (1967) and Anierobi et al. (2024) affirmed that communal crises is a major toxic form of political violence and pose severe detrimental effects of lives, properties, businesses, and the socioeconomic development of the people and the nation. This has also given rise to the increase in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the nation (Anierobi et al., 2024).

Potential rent-seekers use such forms of ethnic, religious, sectarian, and several other forms of configuration and intersection of other issues to navigate across the society, hijacking huge amounts of resources, which often lead to increase crises in the society. The politicization of ethnic identities, which could be explained by the theory of intersectionality are used by rent seekers to initiate competition, discrimination, and crisis. Such politicization of ethnic identities is captured as sectarianism in this paper.

The intersectionality of sectarianism could be manifested across several domain of the society, ranging from political, social, to the economic spheres raises several that led to the occurrence of acts of violence or crisis inspired by sectarian differences (Mabon, 2022). Such instances of sectarian difference could be further exacerbated by national identities or rather ethnicity differences (Mabon, 2022). Thus, rent-seekers, known for their growing wealth through the manipulation of the public, policy and economic conditions could hijack such sectarianism opportunity towards creating negative effects on the society such as the occurrence of communal crisis (Patnaik, 2015). Rent seekers do not belonged to a monolithic class, but are often holding several positions such as formal office holders, but are also holding power as informal power brokers, mediating between the state and the society. Their income and wealth depend on the continued access to such political prowess and authority rather creating productive enterprise. As such, crises become so instrumental to them, they could support peace or violence, depending on which tends to better preserves or expands their economic rents.

In Nigeria, such communal crises are caused by different value system and the varying antagonistic struggle for the control over available resource between rival groups (Ikurekong, Udo & Esin, 2012). Such communal crises have constituted several monstrous social problems to the society which further threaten the wellbeing and quality of life of the citizens and also the survival of the human race due to elastic deaths, severely disrupting livelihood and hence, destabilize communities that are prone to various pandemic effects (Krause, 2018; Brosch'e, 2023). This also poses significant impact on the national security issue in the nation hence, making Nigeria to be a volatile business environment, particularly to foreign investors who wished to invest in the Nigeria environment and economy (Anierobi et al., 2024). This in the long run could hamper development of the nation, thus, the need for this study. To this end, this paper focuses on exploring the moderating effect of rent seekers on sectarianism and communal crisis in Nigeria, which serves as a major multi-ethnic society.

Theoretical Underpinning

This paper is informed by the intersectionality theory, which is a major component of the Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Taylor, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In this article, intersectionality is the major pivot on which the paper revolves. The theory reveals that certain social anomalies such as related to race, and ethnicity is intersected by several other forms of social issues such as income, class, religion, inequality, politics, and others. Hence, this often leads to the politicization of ethnic and religious identities that could be deployed by rent seekers hence causing several crises in the society.

According to Delgado & Stefancic (2023), this could compound certain societal problem such as communal crises in a society. This implies that several other socio-cultural issues such as income, class, religion, inequality, politics, and others intersect with the potentiality of the problem related to ethnicity in a multiethnic society that tend to aggravate and compound communal crises in the societies (Njeze, Bird-Naytowhow, Pearl & Hatala, 2020). To this end, the article explores how intersectionality could be used to explain the compounding issue of communal crisis through the lens of the effects of rent seekers on sectarianism in a multiethnic society.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts the systematic review method, and secondary sources such as journal articles, books, and several online materials were sourced for from various secondary sources such as journals, various databases, News, Magazines, among others, particularly with respect to the subject matter of the paper. Moreover, the process adopts a inclusion criteria of articles ranging from 2015 to 2026 hence, materials below this range were excluded from the systematic review of this paper to provide a better and quality analysis of the research questions. Also, Google, Google scholar, Semantic Scholar, and RefSeek were major search engines used to obtain information and materials used in this review article, with selected and choice of queries supplied and used for retrieval process. Despite the magnitude of information and materials obtained through the resultant searching process, only few (only eight) articles were selected and used to achieve the

focus of this article. Also, thematic analysis was used to provide response to the research questions of interest by grouping the selected information into important themes, particularly following the research aims and objectives. The findings were provided on this basis towards making conclusion and drawing inference to the area and population of interest.

RESULTS

Several studies such as Eze-Michael (2017); Gusau (2018); Ibenwa & Uroko (2020); Jev, Yenda & Sule (2019); Lambu, Gambo, Yalwa & Yakudima (2023); Megbolugbe (2024); Siyobi (2021); and USAID (2021) were selected and used in this paper. The article used systematic review method to analyse the secondary information for this study, with focus on the two research questions of the paper.

Sectarianism and Communal Crisis in Nigeria

Eze-Michael (2017) examined the issue of sectarian crisis in northern Nigeria, using primary and secondary data subjected to simple percentage and found that sectarian crises tend to create increasing ethnic differences and socio-economic problems in the society. This has to do with the increasing accusations and allegations of community neglect, fight for dominance, exploitation of rent seekers, victimization of the citizens leading to increasing discrimination and marginalization of certain people couple with the issues of nepotism and religious intolerance. This tends to create increase tension for communal crises in the society leading to humanitarian consequences such as loss of lives, fatalities, population displacement, abuse of human rights, destruction of sources of livelihood, and posing significant threats to public security.

Gusau (2018) identified the dangers and evil consequences of sectarianism and disunity and noted that sectarianism reveals itself in several ways based on time, place, people and sub-ideology, and brings about disunity thereby distorting the structure of the society. It is characterized by discrimination, or hatred that is arising from the attachment of relational inferiority and superiority to differences, particularly between subdivisions within a group or community hence, leading to disunity that could spur communal crises in the long run hence, posing severe destructive potential to the society and its people.

Jev, Yenda & Sule (2019) examined the various challenges of sectarianism, terrorism and socio-economic development in Nigeria using a descriptive design method and affirmed that sectarianism is a major canker worm that has destroyed the fabrics of the nation posing negative implications on citizens' well-being. They further highlighted that religion in Nigeria are being used for political gains and has resorted to the use of crises and violence to realize their objectives against the population of the nation. This portrays the use of sectarianism for fostering crises in the society.

Ibenwa & Uroko (2020) did a discourse analysis of causes of religion and inter-communal conflicts in Nigeria, using secondary sources and data and found that crises are rooted in certain basic

dissatisfaction or grievances at the slightest misunderstanding or even provocation. Also, religion is often used to spur up communal crises which have led to loss of lives and property, and in the long run hindered sustainable development in the society.

USAID (2021) identified religion, identity, and conflict as the major fears of the unknown in Northern Nigeria and affirmed that religion have been used by several sects to be a major source of conflicts in Nigeria due to growing resource competition between mostly Muslim herders and Christian farmers, which has led to several forms of communal crises that have led to loss of lives and destruction of properties, couple with the distortion and destruction of farming businesses.

Lambu, Gambo, Yalwa & Yakudima (2023) examined the significant effects and consequences of religious sectarianism in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria, using structured interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to elicit information on the subject matter from selected participants. The findings of Lambu et al. (2023) reveal that there is increasing pronounced sectarianism in the peri-urban areas of the state portraying sharp competition between certain groups leading to rivalry, competition and fight for relevance. This is attributed to the fact that elites used sectarianism for material benefit which lead to communal crises particularly during the rationing of campaigners' dividend or enthrone or dethrone officers after winning/losing the election. Also, certain sect was observed to have divided into several sectlets because of inter and intra religious, economic and political interest to achieve and attract more status, income and responsibility in the society. Also, politicking has penetrated into several noble positions of enthroning and dethroning Emirs, thereby mutilating cultural heritage, identity and values which could also lead to communal crises in the long run.

Moderating effect of Rent Seekers on the Implication of Sectarianism and Communal Crisis in Nigeria

Ibenwa & Uroko (2020) used secondary sources and data to explore the causes of religion and inter-communal conflicts in Nigeria, and affirmed that certain elites use religion as a political weapon, which eventually spur up communal crises leading to loss of lives and property, and in the long run hindering the sustainable development of the society.

Siyobi (2021) examined the impact of rent-seeking and patronage in perpetuating the resource curse, and revealed that elites in the society have huge access to resource rents and then distribute such to those who win their favour within their inner circle, thereby seeking further political influence to be able to generate more economic rents for their selfishness. This makes the elites to politicize such rent seeking opportunity to accumulate monopolistic control over resources and wealth, leading to inequality, hence, becoming a resource curse such as being used for communal crises and also hampering socio-economic development goals in the society.

Lambu et al. (2023) examined religious sectarianism and its effects and consequences in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria, through the use of structured interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) used to elicit information from selected participants. They found that during political campaigns,

certain elects who serve as rent seekers use potential influence of bargain positions, appointments and contracts, cash donations to endorse certain political party or candidate of their choice. This has led to clash that could spur up rivalry, competition and communal crises in the society.

Megbolugbe (2024) examined rent-seeking with regards to diasporan's perspective, and affirmed that rent-seeking activities in Nigeria has become normalized, and manifests in several ways such as manipulation, opportunism, deception, and self-seeking gains hence, focuses on generating income through the exploitation of existing resources, instead of assisting in the creation of additional wealth and value to the society through fair deal. Such rent seeking behavior in Nigeria tends to lead to increased corruption, inequality and social injustice, which could also lead to communal crises.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The paper examined the moderating effect of rent seekers on sectarianism and communal crisis in a multi-ethnic society, using Nigeria as a case study. The findings revealed that sectarianism, which is the politicization of ethnic identities has orchestrated competition, discrimination, and crisis in Nigeria. This structural nexus between sectarianism and communal crises in Nigeria could be explained by several issues such as weak institutions and increasing elite competition, historical legacies, particularly of the use of elites in Nigeria and security gaps in the nation, and so on. This bolsters the findings of Omiunu (2014) and Aghamelu & Obinabo (2018) that multi-ethnicity has posed several heterogeneous issues in Nigeria. This concurs with the findings of Aghamelu & Obinabo (2018) and Anierobi et al. (2024) that multi-ethnicity has been a major cause of several communal crises in Nigeria. This also concurs with the findings of Mabon (2022) that sectarianism serves as a persistent intersectional issue with several other social related challenges such as religious, status, inequality, class, geographic location, and so on. This concurs with the findings of Brosche & Elfversson (2015) and Okoli & Nnabuihe (2019) that people choose the stand they belong using such sectarianism as a basis on their communal affiliations with shared community identities, to fight with another opposing party, particularly for resource competition. This has led to increasing tension for communal crises loss of which has resulted to loss of lives, increase fatalities, displacement of persons, abuse of human rights, livelihood destruction hence, affecting national security. This reveals the use of sectarianism to foster communal crises in the Nigeria society.

In addition, the findings revealed that rent seekers used various activities such as corruption, inequality, tax, and so on to deploy sectarianism that tends to aggravate communal crisis in Nigeria. Such have led to loss of lives and property, and in the long run hindering the sustainable development of the society. They use the political influence obtained through sectarianism to generate more economic rents for their selfishness and are major cause of communal crises that hamper socio-economic development goals in the Nigeria society. This supports the findings of Chakraborty & Dabla-Norris (2006) and Majaski (2026) that rent-seekers use corruption and tax to affect development. It also concurs with that of Ikurekong et al. (2012); Patnaik (2015); Osborne

(2000) and Fubara (2025) that rent seekers hire and maintain certain groups, by the effective use of sectarianism that eventually spur several communal crises in a society. This type of crisis has become so difficult to tackle due to the influence of rent seekers through sectarianism which have pledge allegiance to their group. Drawing inference from the findings of Anierobi et al. (2024), such crises have posed significant negative impact on the national security, and also make the business environment to be volatile and prone to several threats, particularly preventing foreign investors to boost and contribute to the Nigeria environment and economy. The study also revealed that rent seeking is often used for conflict-amplifying mechanism. This concurs with the findings of Osborne (2000); Chakraborty & Dabla-Norris (2006); Fubara (2025) and Majaski (2026) that rent seekers in Nigeria often focus on amplifying crises in the Nigeria society.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the moderating effect of rent seekers on sectarianism and communal crisis in a multi-ethnic society, using Nigeria as a case study. The findings revealed that sectarianism, which is the politicization of ethnic identities has led to increasing competition for resources, discrimination, and have eventually spur communal crisis in Nigeria. This has resulted to loss of lives, increase fatalities, displacement of persons, abuse of human rights, livelihood destruction hence, affecting national security. This reveals the use of sectarianism to foster communal crises in the Nigeria society. In addition, the findings revealed that rent seekers used various activities such as corruption, inequality, tax, and so on to deploy sectarianism that tends to aggravate communal crisis in Nigeria due to the fight for available resources. Such crises have led to loss of lives and property, and in the long run hindering the sustainable development of the society. Moreover, rent seekers use the political influence obtained through sectarianism to generate more economic rents for their selfishness and hence, becoming major cause of communal crises that hamper socio-economic development goals in the Nigeria society. In addition, rent seeking is often used for conflict-amplifying mechanism in Nigeria hence, leading to severe communal crises that affect the socioeconomic development of people and of the nation.

Recommendations

Drawing from the article, several recommendations were provided below:

- i. The government should establish committees that handle community grievance associated faith leaders, women, and youth to be able to validate the lists of and also monitor the effective distribution of cash/food or any other empowerment related issues.
- ii. Government should cut off any source of humanitarian rents and also reduce the potential of using sectarianism as a tool for capturing resources that should have been meant for the population.
- iii. Government and policy makers should criminalize the increase use of militias in certain crises related issues and also prosecute their sponsors. This could help remove institutional arbitrage that rent seekers could use to exploitation for sectarian violence.

- iv. Government should give rent seekers a material chance towards sustaining peace rather than using their rent seeking potential to amplify crises.
- v. Government should ensure to build the society and media capacity to be able to track certain conflict rents.
- vi. Government should introduce a child benefit and social pension, particularly for citizens above 70 years as foundation programs.

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