

The Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict especially ethno-religious conflicts have become a major threat to peace and security across Africa hence, this study examined the impact of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria with particular reference to selected ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The paper argued that ethno-religious crisis can be curbed in Nigeria if the basic needs of the citizens are provided at an early stage including the right and liberty to practice their beliefs and ideology as enshrined in the constitution. Data for the study were curled from secondary sources while the analysis was done descriptively. The study also relied on the basic human needs theory in order to unravel the causes of frequent religious and culturally induced conflicts in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that ethno-religious conflicts occur as a result of several factors including neglect, marginalization and exclusion of certain groups especially minorities from the politics and governance of the country. To correct this anomaly, there is need for integration and restructuring of the country in order to give all ethnic and religious groups equal opportunities to practice their believes and ideology.

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Background to the Study

Conflict arising from political violence is fast becoming a common feature of African politics. In most African countries, political conflict and violence occur due to post-election political disputes such as the situation in Kenya, Egypt, Uganda, Central African Republic, Ghana, etc. In most cases, these conflicts have often caused the loss of several lives and property worth millions of naira. Scholars are however of the opinion that conflicts with ethno-religious backgrounds are difficult to resolve since they affect the lives and believes of the people. For instance, it is believed that if a Muslim die while fighting a Jihad, seven virgins will be waiting to receive him in paradise. This explains why they usually turn down peace offers and agreements even when they accept ceasefire. In the case of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts have taken place in Kaduna, Plateau, Borno, Maiduguri and several parts of the country. This paper therefore, examined selected ethno-religious conflicts that have taken place in different parts of Nigeria and their implications.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical and conceptual analysis play a major role in any research or academic investigation hence, Lieber (1992), argued that in every concept or analysis, there is a theory or view point which makes it possible for the presentation and interpretation of facts. Clearly therefore, for there to be reliability in an investigation, there is need to come out with models or theories. Empirical theory seeks to create knowledge that is impersonal, retraceable and cumulative (Lieber, 1992, 12). This study, therefore, relied on the basic human needs theory in order to explain the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Advocates of this theory maintain that when individuals, groups and communities are denied of basic needs and requirements conflict and disagreement becomes inevitable. According to Burton (1997), the needs of all individuals and groups must be accommodated in any decision-making process if peace and harmony is to prevail. In the words of Burton (1990), when individuals and groups are denied of their basic needs of identity, security, freedom etc.... deterrence cannot deter and coercive methods are not effective to modify behaviour when people and groups are compelled to act due to their desires. Within the context of this study, ethno-religious conflict occurs in different parts of Nigeria due to neglect and abandonment of the people by the state (government) in the area of governance and the provision of social amenities. Basic human needs theory helps conflict scholars and analysts to identify the needs, emotions and aspirations of groups and individuals before negotiation and settlement is agreed upon so that the outcome can be acceptable by all the parties. Proponents of the human need's theory include Burton (1997), Sites (1973), Maslow (1943) and Galtung (1990).

Case Study of Selected Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

This section of the study examin selected ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria as reflected bellows: The following conflicts have also threatened the political stability and peace of Nigeria: The Tiv-Jukun/Fulani conflict (2003), the Gwantu crisis (2001), the presidential election crisis of June 12 (1993) and (2011), the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in the 1980s and the Yantatsine riots in the early 1980s, the Zango Kataf crisis in Kaduna state

in 1992, the Shiites and military crisis in Zaria in 1998 etc. thus, conflict and call for restructuring and decentralization of security by minority ethnic groups have been entrenched in the multicultural nature and character of the Nigerian state. It will be recalled that in the South-west, the governors of that geo-political zone led by the governor of Ondo state, Oluwarotimi Odunayo Akeredolu have launched a regional security outfit code named "Operation Amortekun" (meaning Leopard). Other geo-political zones are also contemplating the need to launch their own security outfits hence; some Nigerians have continued to ask what will be the role of the Nigeria police with the proliferation of regional and ethnic based security organizations in the country. Case study of selected ethno-religious conflicts addressed in this study includes:

The Bauchi Pogrom (1990-1991)

Chapter 2 of the amended constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy clearly state as follows:

1. Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through the constitution derives all its powers and authority.
2. The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government; and
3. The participation of the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

The proliferation of militia and self-determination groups in the country coupled with the high rate of violence and insecurity clearly shows that successive governments in Nigeria (military or democratic) have continued to breach the above provisions of the constitution with impunity hence, exposing innocent Nigerians to all forms of terrorist and insurgent attacks. One of such exposure and carelessness on the part of the Nigerian state (government) was the Bauchi: Massacre of 1990 where some Christian secondary girls complained about the wastage of water meant for common use by their Muslim colleagues during the Ablution before Muslim prayers. Rather than address the issue of wastage of water raised by the Christian girls in the collage, the college management ignored the complaint and allowed the issue to degenerate and escalated from mere disagreement to a Christian-Muslim conflict which later spread to about ten secondary schools in Bauchi state. The infiltration of radical Muslim youths into the college motivated the Muslim girls against their Christian counterparts no doubt helped to aggravate more tension in the already volatile college and like a wildfire, the conflict spread to neighbouring schools and communities, claiming five human lives and leaving several others wounded. Within the same period, Bauchi state also witnessed another round of religious violence in 1991 in Tafawa Balewa during which Mosques, residential houses and churches were burnt to ashes. According to Uro C. "when the violence started in Tafawa Balewa town on April 20 1991, it was purely a communal one which took a religious dimension when it got to Bauchi, the state capital two days later". It was later discovered that leadership tussle in the Lere District of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Council was the major cause of the conflict. Perceived feeling of marginalization of the Sayawa indigenes (who are mainly Christians) by the Muslim

Fulani in the Lere District of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Council helped to further escalate the conflict. According to J. Walsh: Leaders are imposed on their community by the Emir of Bauchi, religious discrimination is apparent in all appointments, and the lack of schools, hospitals, and jobs has kept their community underdeveloped.

The nonchalant attitude of the Nigerian state towards the plight of minority ethnic groups in the country was expressed by Okungbowa (2005), when he stated thus: One of the albatrosses of the nation has been that of ethno-religious crises. They come like a flash ball. And when the dust settles down, the nation and its inhabitants are left to tell the tales and count their losses (cited in Alamiyeseigha, 2005, 77). Northern Nigeria (Kaduna state) Sharia crisis 2000 following the successful adoption and implementation of Sharia legal system in Zamfara state by former governor Ahmed Sani Yerima in 1999, the subject-matter (Sharia legal system) became a source of conflict throughout Northern Nigeria. Thus, attempts made by members of the Kaduna state House of Assembly to introduce Sharia Law in February 2000 left several people dead and others wounded in the state hence, the peace enjoyed by Christians and Muslims in Northern was again threatened. Although the introduction of the Sharia Legal system succeeded in Zamfara state, it was resisted in most of the Northern states and other parts of Nigeria (the middle belt and South-south states).

Zaki-biam, Jukun, Tivs and Fulani Conflicts 2001

The Zaki-biam, Jukun, Tivs and Fulani conflicts started as a communal dispute but degenerated into an ethno-religious conflict which claimed several lives of both Christians and Muslims in Benue state. The federal government's intervention in the conflict was perceived as an act of betrayal by some members of the Zaki-biam community hence, the aggrieved faction ambushed and killed about 22 soldiers. The discovery of the bodies of the slain soldiers in Zaki-biam led to brutal reprisal from the federal government. This development left over 300 people dead and about seven communities completely destroyed. The Chief Olusegun Obasanjo-led federal government was criticized by the international community for adopting military approach in what it termed a purely civil communal dispute.

The Miss World International Beauty Competition of November 2002

The disruption of the Miss World International beauty competition by religious fanatics was one of the most embarrassing acts of religious fanaticism that Nigeria has ever experienced in recent times. It will be recalled that the global events which had already taken place in Calabar, Port-Harcourt and Lagos was fiercely resisted by Muslim youths in Northern Nigeria who insisted that the grand finale scheduled to hold in Abuja must not hold because according to them, exposing of a woman's body was not only immoral but against Islamic teachings and values. Although the event was eventually moved to the United Kingdom, the violence that erupted led to the death of several lives and destruction of properties and burning of churches in Northern Nigeria. Some scholars and analysts blamed the organizers of the competition, the federal government and the international community for organizing such an event in the holy month of Ramadan, hence, undermining the Muslim community in Nigeria.

The Hausa Fulani, Berom, and Anaguta Crisis in Plateau State, 1990-2004

Violent conflicts in Jos, Plateau state started in the 1990s but the situation degenerated in 1994. According to Ajaero and Philips (2011), the genesis of the problem was the creation of Jos North local government in 1991, by the Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida-led federal government. These developments according to the people have sown the seed of discord that has continued to haunt the people of Jos. Thus, since the creation of the Jose North local government council, there have been fierce battles for the control of political power between groups and leaders of Berom ethnic group (who are mainly Christians) and the Hausa Fulani, who are regarded as settlers. The protracted crisis escalated in September 2001, when the city was engulfed in another round of ethno-religious crisis which claimed several lives. At the peak of the crisis in 2004, the then president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo declared emergency rule in the state and suspended the administration of former governor Joshua Dariye for six months. According to Best (2007), the Jos crisis can be analysed from the following perspectives:

The Hausa/Fulani Perspective: The Fulanis according to Best (2007) did not lay claim to the ownership of Jos and are never interested in the political issues that generated the conflict hence, they alleged that attacks on them by the indigenes are borne out of envy as a result of the cows they own and because they are Muslims like the Hausas. On their part, the Hausas also claimed that the land of Jos belong to the Hausa/Fulani who are the real founders of Jos – when it was a virgin forest and developed it into a modern town. They buttressed their claim by making reference to an Alkali court in the area which serviced the needs of the Hausa/Fulani population in Jos till 1950. They further alleged that the naming of the streets and areas in Jos with Hausa names such as Abba Na Shehu, Garba, Daho, Sarkin Arab, Gangare etc coupled with their political contributions, having served in different positions of responsibility dating back to the colonial era, clearly indicate that the land belong to them.

The Berom, Anaguta and Afizere Perspective: The three ethnic groups mentioned above also claimed that Jos belongs to them and that the name Jos was derived from their native language. For example, the Berom argued that Jos is derived from Berom traditional word Jot, meaning water spring which was corrupted by strangers like the Europeans and Hausa/Fulani who changed it to Jos. On the other hand, the Afizere and Anaguta also have their version of the derivation of Jos from their own native names. However, the three ethnic groups listed above and classified as indigenes argued that the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group were brought into Jos by the colonial masters as a result of the high demand for Tin in the Tin industry in Jos especially during the second world war hence, they debunked claims by the Hausa/Fulanis to have ruled Jos, and maintained that such leaders were only appointed as leaders over the Hausa/Fulani settlements. They further contended that by 1960, the Hausa/Fulani allegedly renamed most parts of the city of Jos with Hausa/Fulani names, which is now been used as evidence that they (Hausa/Fulani) founded the city of Jos. The table below also shows the impact of the Boko Haram (ethno-religious) insurgency in Nigeria.

Table 1: Boko Haram's Attacks and Its Impact from 2009-2012

S/N	Date	Incident	Impact
1.	18th June 2009	Shooting of 17 mourning followers of Sheikh Mohammed Yusuf by men of the Operation Flush in Maiduguri.	17 persons were killed and several others wounded
2.	26th July 2009	Clash between Boko Haram and the police at the Dutse township police station in Bauchi	The police opened fire and thirty-nine members of Boko Haram sect died instantly, including 2 policemen and 1 soldier. After the clash, houses belonging to sect members were destroyed by the police.
3.	27th July 2009	Police-Boko Haram clash during an invasion of Potiskum divisional police headquarters	The attack led to the death of three police men and one fire service officer.
4.	29th July 2009	Confrontation between the sect, the army and the police in Maiduguri which lasted for five days	The attack led to the arrest and eventual death of the sect's leader, Sheikh Mohammed Yusuf and fifty others, including the destruction of houses, properties and cash worth about one hundred and sixty million naira.
5.	7th Sept. 2010	Boko Haram sect freed over 700 inmates from a prison facility in Bauchi	Parts of the Bauchi prison was destroyed while six prison warders lost their lives in the process
6.	24th Dec. 2010	The sect carried out a bomb attack in Jos	Eight persons died in the process.
7.	31st Dec. 2010	Boko Haram sect attacked Mammy market and Army Mogadishu Barrack, Abuja.	Eleven persons died in the attack.
8.	28th Jan. 2011	ANPP governorship candidate, his brother and four police officers were attacked at Lawan Bukar Ward, Maiduguri	Seven persons including Alhaji Modu Faunami Gubio, ANPP Governorship candidate died in the attack.
9.	1st April 2011	Suspected Boko Haram members attacked a police station in Bauchi	No death was recorded but five policemen were seriously injured
10.	9th April 2011	A polling centre in Maiduguri was bombed	No death was recorded but several persons were injured.
11.	15th April 2011	The Maiduguri office of the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) was bombed	Several persons were shot and wounded in the attack.
12.	20th April 2011	Boko Haram sect ambushed a Muslim cleric and several policemen in Maiduguri	A popular Muslim cleric lost his life while several policemen were wounded.
13.	22nd April 2011	Boko Haram sect attacked Yola prison in Adamawa state	The sect freed several of its members in the jail break in Yola and injured several prison warders.
14.	9th May 2011	Boko Haram sect rejected an offer for amnesty made by the then governor-elect of Borno state, Kashim Shettima	The sect members intensified its bombings and released conditions for dialogue with the federal government.
15.	29th May 2011	Boko Haram sect carried out a spate of bomb attacks in Bauchi and Maiduguri	The attacks left about fifteen persons dead.
16.	1st June 2011	Boko Haram sect attacked the Shehu of Borno's brother, Abba El-kanemi	Alhaji Abba El-kanemi died in the attack.
17.	16th June 2011	Boko Haram sect carried out a massive explosion at the police headquarters in Abuja	The attack left eight persons dead and seventy-seven cars including properties worth millions of naira destroyed.
18.	26th August 2011	Boko Haram sect claimed responsibility for the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria	The attack left about twenty three persons dead, ten others in critical condition, including several others injured.
19.	25th Dec. 2011	Bombing of St. Theresa Catholic Church Madallah, Niger state.	The attack caused the death of over 45 persons and several others wounded.
20.	19th Dec. 2011	Boko Haram bombed factory used for manufacturing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) which exploded in Kaduna. state	No death was recorded but several Boko Haram sect members were seriously injured.
21.	20th Jan. 2012	Multiple explosions rocked police stations, the passport office, state security service headquarters and the immigration office all in Kano state.	The attack killed about 200 persons and left several others wounded.

Source: The Punch Newspaper vol. 17, No. 20905, 17th June 2011; Vanguard Newspaper 8th July, 2011; The Punch Newspaper vol. 7086, No. 1576, 27th August 2011.

The data above clearly shows that ethno-religious conflicts accounts for the death of several citizens across the country. In the same vein, it has also caused the destruction of communities, and properties including the displacement of large number of citizens from their ancestral homes. This explains why internally displaced persons camps are more in the northern part of the country especially in the north-east. This therefore implies that ethno-religious conflict in any form or level is counterproductive and anti-development to states and citizens hence, emerging states especially African states where ethno-religious conflicts are prevalent have continued to invest huge resources in interfaith religious dialogue and other peace building measures in order to curb the spread of such conflicts.

Conclusion

Ethno-religious conflict in any form or level is inimical and counterproductive to the development agenda and aspiration of any state or society hence, this study examined the impact of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria with particular reference to selected ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. For easy analysis, the study was further divided into the following sections: Abstract, introduction, and theoretical framework, case studies of selected ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, conclusion, recommendations and references. The study observed that ethno-religious conflict if poorly managed could escalate from community/local to regional levels hence; it is imperative for states and leaders to take necessary steps to address the needs of their people (citizens) in order to avoid acts of insurgency and uprising against the state. Based on the gaps observed in the study recommendations were also made in order to curb the spread of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will help to curb conflict especially ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria:

1. Even and inclusive development in terms of policy formulation and implementation will go a long way in reducing ethnic and religious tension in the country. This is necessary because when people are excluded from the affairs of the state it breeds frustration and aggression which could escalate to unimaginable heights.
2. Through policy measures, the federal government and its agencies should carry out deliberate efforts to address the fears of citizens especially minorities who are aggrieved and willing to engage in armed struggle against the state.
3. Ethno-religious leaders like church leaders, community leaders, imams, chiefs, pastors etc. should be invited for regular meetings (dialogue) with the government in order to chart a new way forward for peace and security hence, such inter-faith based meetings should be held regularly and periodically at all levels.
4. Captured insurgents and bandits who spark-off ethno-religious conflicts in the country should be prosecuted according to the law and constitution hence, the current amnesty extended to members of Boko Haram under what the

- government calls “Operation Safe Corridor” and “Operation Hadarin Daji” should be stopped immediately in order not to make insurgency a lucrative business in Nigeria.
5. Leadership positions and appointments into public service should be based on merit, equity and federal character as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution as Amended. This is imperative and fundamental because where appointments and promotions favour a particular tribe, ethnic group or religion, others will feel aggrieved and frustrated and this could lead to protests and revolts which may in turn lead to full scale uprising/insurgency.
 6. The military should be well-equipped to face any challenge or threat arising from ethno-religious conflicts that may rise against the capacity and capability of the Nigerian police. Thus, there is need to increase the funds allocated for the military and the ministry of defense as a whole in the nation's annual budgets.

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