Causes and Consequences of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract

Available records show that ethnicity is a major factor responsible for most of the conflicts in Africa. From Rwanda in the 1980s to Liberia in 1990, ethnicity accounted for the civil war that ravaged these countries leading to the death and displacement of large number of people hence, this study examined the causes and consequences of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria with particular reference to selected ethnic based conflicts in Nigeria. The paper argues that with effective and purposeful leadership (good governance) based on rule of law, equity, fairness and justice, Nigeria's ethnic diversity and multicultural disposition could be harnessed for the good and economic development of the nation. The study relied on secondary data while the analysis was done through the qualitative method (content analysis). The study also relied on the elite's political theory in order to give direction to the study. Findings from the study revealed that development policies are formulated and implemented to satisfy selected political elites and the geo-political zones (ethnic groups) they come from to the detriment of other parts of the country hence, creating disaffection and tension across the country. The study further revealed that the frustration and tension created often escalate and degenerate into conflict and the destruction of critical national assets and infrastructure including maiming and killing of citizens from all parts of the country. However, to ensure national unity and cohesion, there is urgent need for the convocation of a broad based multi-ethnic national conference that will carry out political, social and economic reforms for the good of all sections of the country.

Keywords: *Causes, Consequences, Ethnic conflicts, Nigeria, and Political elites.*

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Background to the Study

Most conflicts in Africa have been traced to ethnic rivalry between political and community leaders and stakeholders at all levels hence, such unhealthy rivalries often degenerate to alarming dimensions including the killing and destruction of critical public and private infrastructure. In Liberia for instance, the rivalry between the Americo Liberians led by Charles Taylor and the indigenous Liberians led by Sargent Samuel Doe led to political conflict which degenerated into a civil war which lasted for about four years. In the same vein, the rivalry between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda also caused the death and displacement of several citizens in the country. In Nigeria several ethnic based conflicts have also affected the socio-economic development of Nigeria. It will be recalled that the Ife-Modakeke, Tivs-Jukun, Ogoni-Andoni and the Indigeneous People of Briafra conflicts no doubt threatened the political foundations of Nigeria. Thus, ethnic conflicts remain a major problem facing most African states. The factors that give rise to ethnic conflicts and its consequences on the nation formed the major thrust of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Conceptual formation and analysis help to provide the foundation for any empirical research exercise. According to Carl Hempel (1966), in any scientific enquiry, concept formation and theory construction must go hand in hand since the quality of a concept not only determines the quality of theory, but also the meaning and significance of key concepts can only be interpreted within the context of a theory. To ensure reliability in any research/investigation therefore, there is the need to also come out with models or theories: For empirical theory seeks to create knowledge that is impersonal, retraceable and cumulative. This study therefore relied on the elite theory based on its interdisciplinary character which offers a penetrating insight into the subject-matter. The elite political theory as a framework for analyzing political systems and structures is derived from the works of Vilfredo Pareto and Gactano Mossca, Italian sociologists, who argued that society, is divided into classes, the ruled and those who control the machinery and power of the state. In a typical elitist state where this theory is practiced, the minorities always dominate and exercise political power over others. This is a fact because democratic norms and principles allows for the election of few persons into leadership positions to harness, control and allocate state resources for the benefit of the public/citizens. According to Pareto cited in Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013), elites are found in different occupations and strata of society and they are those who are wealthy and intelligent.

Within the context of Nigeria this theory is appropriate and useful because politicians have remained in leadership positions for decades without making any meaningful impact on the citizens. This explains why only few political parties have dominated the political space from 1963-date. Most of these elites in Nigeria are above the mandatory retirement age of sixty (60) yet have refused to leave the corridors of power instead they have imposed their children family members and political parties on the people through what Roberto Michels described as "Iron Law of Oligarchy". In most cases, government controlled by elites only promote policies that will benefit those in power and their allies (elites) hence, government programmes and policies are formulated to meet the aspirations of a few ruling class and not the entire citizenry (masses). In such a situation the majority (masses) in the society will have

no other choice than to constantly protest and agitate for good governance, rule of law, quality and justice. This further explains why Nigeria and other African countries often experience ethno-religious conflicts.

Conceptual Analysis

It is a fact that conceptual formation and analysis provides the foundation for empirical research exercise hence this section of the study examined key concepts that bothers on good governance and leadership in Nigeria. Achebe (1984) identified leadership as the major problem responsible for conflict across Africa. According to him, the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. Akinyanju (2000) also posited that conflict and unrest persist in Africa because leaders fail to adhere to democratic principles and norms. According to him, genuine democracy implies equal material capacity to reach and mobilize the people. He reiterated that political democracy cannot be achieved without economic democracy and that democratization results as a reaction to monocratic authoritarianism, personal regimes and the perceived gains of democracy. Thus, he gave the following as the general features of monocratic centralized regimes: Political exclusion, denials, resource concentration at the center, and concentration of constitutional and extra-constitutional powers in the lands of a few persons. In his words:

> *Monocratic regimes like we have run in Nigeria for the better part of the existence of country have produced disastrous effects; gross deprivation, pervasive corruption, economic decline, political violence and infrastructural decay. When it is then perceived that democratization fosters development and provides the basis for negotiations and bargaining in the polity, societies struggle to democratize. Democratization is very rarely voluntarily allowed. It is achieved as a result of pressure. The pressure could be internal or external but usually a combination of both. In Nigeria, the internal pressure to democratize had been against colonial or indigenous authoritarianism* (Akinyanju, 2000, 3).

Gurr (1994), affirmed the above position when he cautioned that if the rights of minorities are not respected and their feelings taking into consideration in the process of policy formulation and implementation, the rate of conflict and insecurity may increase in Africa in the 21st century. He reiterated that for effective consensus building process to translate into good governance and leadership in any political system, there must be territorial constitutional integration as well as minimum consensus. In the same vein, Jega (2007), maintained that for leaders and followers to experience good governance and effective leadership there must be transparency and accountability by public office holders in discharging their duties. In his words: A democratic political culture developed over time creates the basis for sustainable processes of good governance in democratic countries including Nigeria (Jega, 2007, 158). In the words of Eskor Toyo, democracy refers to the extent to which actual political power to determine their social destiny belongs to the vast majority of citizens who constitute the people distinct from a ruling oligarchy or class. This definition of democracy is in agreement with Abraham Lincoln's popular definition: Government of the people by the people and for the people. Thus, scholars have argued that no democracy can function without the people (citizens) hence, Ola Oni (1999) reaffirmed this position when he stated thus: democracy has

been variously defined as a political and economic arrangement of society such that the interest of the majority of people determine the management and direction of society benefiting the majority of the people. Why democracy is yet to benefit the majority of citizens in Africa remains a paradox which this paper attempts to address. However, while appraising the impact of democratic leadership on development and good governance at any level, Awa (1973), argued that whether it is situational, traditional or charismatic styles of leadership, scholars and researchers are unanimous that good leadership is necessary and crucial for the survival, growth and development of any society. This is because good leadership promotes equity, fairness and justice in the management and distribution of resources and power in any state/society. Case studies of selected ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are listed below:

The Bauchi Pogrom (1990-1991)
The proliferation of 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 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 Alamieyeseigha, 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 fanatism 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.

Apart from the loss of lives and properties, ethno-religious conflicts has promoted distrust and suspicion amongst citizens especially the minorities who seemed to have lost confidence in the nation called Nigeria. Despite the efforts of government and non-governmental organizations, insecurity and violence still persist in the country. Ethnic conflict in Nigeria reached an alarming dimension with series of attacks on Christian communities by Fulani herdsmen. The situation has degenerated to the point where security outfits across the country are now set up based on ethnic and religious considerations. However, the table below shows some of the attacks carried out by Boko Haram members against other ethnic groups in the country.

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 in the above table clearly shows that ethnic war lords often pretend or disguise as religious fanatics to advance their agenda. This explains why Boko Haram members attack mainly Christian communities and public infrastructure in different parts of Nigeria causing the death of several innocent lives in the north-east and other parts of the country. Public building and infrastructure have also been destroyed by the insurgents. Item six (6) on the data clearly shows that several cars were destroyed when the insurgents attacked the Nigeria police headquarters in Abuja. The above data also shows that the consequences of ethnic conflict in any form are counterproductive as it affects human lives and properties. Above all, it also hinders free movement of persons, goods and services.

Conclusion

Ethnic conflicts anywhere in the world are difficult to resolve hence, this study examined the causes and consequences of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria with a view to addressing the immediate and remote causes of the conflict. The study observed that successive governments in Nigeria have failed to address the fundamental problems fueling the conflict hence, it has remained unabated. Data for the study were curled from secondary sources while the analysis was based on the descriptive qualitative method. In order to explain why conflict especially ethnic conflicts persist in Nigeria, the study relied on the elite political theory as a framework for analyzing political systems and structures. This theory is derived from the works of Vilfredo Pareto and Gactano Mossca, Italian sociologists, who argued that society, is divided into classes, the ruled and those who control the machinery and power of the state. In a typical elitist state where this theory is practiced, the minorities always dominate and exercise political power over others. Based on the gaps identified in the study recommendations aimed at curbing ethnic conflicts in the country were made.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will help to curb ethnic conflicts in Nigeria:

1. There is urgent need to investigate and audit military/defence funds and budgets in Nigeria to ensure accountability and transparency in the procurement and management of defence weapons and expenditures. This is necessary because it is alleged that the Boko Haram insurgency and ethnic conflict in the country has remained due to large scale corruption by officers and officials of the federal ministry of defence.

2. There should be regular interactive meetings between community/ethnic leaders and government officials at the local, state and federal level. Such meetings will help to build confidence among all stakeholders.

3. Rather than promote ethnic sentiments in the activities of government in terms of employment and recruitment, the government (local, state and federal) should insist and adhere to the provisions of the constitution which encourages federal character. This will give all Nigerians equal opportunity.

4. Basic needs such as employment, good health and education facilities should be provided to enable all citizens have access to good and quality life at all levels. This is necessary because Gurr (1994) and Burton (1997) have argued that exclusion and absence of basic needs are the silent drivers of ethnic conflicts in most societies.

5. Religious clerics, community leaders etc. should be advised not to promote hate speeches and religious intolerance. This is important because some community/religious leaders in the country often threaten people who are opposed to their religious believes and ideology. It will be recalled that Bishop Hassan Matthew Kukah was recently threatened by a Muslim group over the Christmas day message he issued.

6. The federal government should intensify efforts to track the sponsors and financiers of ethno-religious violence and terrorism in Nigeria. This is important because only recently three Nigerians were arrested and convicted in Dubai for transferring huge sums of money to terrorist agents and their collaborators in Africa.

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