

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA: WHEN PEACE TOOK FLIGHT

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is to critically examine the phenomenon of ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria. Therefore, class interest, religious diversity and the manipulation in the phenomena of the struggle for the control of resources and power associated with the concept have led to escalation of conflict. Frustration aggression theory holds that aggression is always the result of frustration instead of an absolute standard of deprivation, a gap between expected and achieved welfare leads men to political instability. My research examines whether levels of social expectations, aspirations and needs that reflect frustration aggression correspond with an increase in ethno-religious conflict and political instability. This study models social system gap model analysis by examining the political instability which identified as aggressive behaviour have results from situations on unrelieved, socially experienced frustration. The results of my study suggest that there is a social relationship between the level of expectation gap and that of frustration, which means that there is a difference between what is received and what is expected. However, the level of frustration clearly indicates how the level of ethno-religious conflict and political instability is.

Keywords: Nigeria, ethno-religious, political instability and peace

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria from 1980s, discrimination, poverty, manipulation in the phenomena of the elites struggle for the control of economic power and ethnic diversity have led to conflicts of different dimensions in northern part of the country. Some scholars have tried to explain the concept as “Nigeria was a plethora of various nationalities (ethnic groups) many of which had no or little previous contacts. With the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba as the majority, Nigeria is comprised of over 371 other ethnic groups which are usually lumped together as minorities” (Otite 1990; Suberu 1996; Mustapha 1998; IDEA 2000 in Alubo 2008).

Its generally believe that world over the potential for political instability exists, this is because both developing and developed countries are economically interdependent, therefore, political instability becomes an issue of concern. This study observed that, the developing countries are more prone to the challenges of ethno-religious and political instability, for instance violent conflicts of 2011 in Egypt, Libya, Somalia and the emergence of the phenomenon of Boko Haram, fanatics and militant group in Nigeria.

A body of literature abounds (see Elaigwu 2005; Jega 2004; Ibrahim 2004) which shows that throughout the world, contemporary events provide enough evidence to indicate that societies which were hitherto co-existing peacefully now resort to the use of deadly violent confrontations along ethnic, religious, regional, economic, cultural and other divisions. Nigeria has become a killing field as a result of the growing social, ethnic and religious intolerance. In the past few years, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Jos and Yelwa the southern senatorial district in Nasarawa... were convulsed in inter-ethnic and religious crises in which thousands of people died, private and public properties worth millions of naira were destroyed (Adamu;2005:53).

One stimulating thing about the Nigeria state is its unity in diversity aside the naturally endowed resources that are scattered all over the nation. As expressed by Marx (1937) wrote in the communist Manifesto that “the history of all existing society is the history of class struggle”. Meaning that, whether for feudal agricultural society, ancient agricultural society or the modern capitalist society, conflict is inevitable because of stratum. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that ethno-religious and political conflict in Nigeria is as old as the Nigeria itself. Historically, the country has engulfed by civil conflict even before the independence in 1960, Adebisi (1999:21) opined that the seeds of ethno-religious conflict were sown by the British colonial policies in Nigeria with the adoption of a divide and rule tactics, which later robbed Nigerians of the common front for the national integration. This system according to him creates an avenue for the provision of ethnic bases leaders with political group whose manifestos build into ethnically defined interest.

Adeyemi (2006) opined that the growing incidence of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria is sufficiently worrisome to assert that the government that statutorily has responsibility for crisis management is not doing enough. Apparently, the government itself is generating crises directly by failing to appreciate the people’s aspirations. While some people crave for autonomy, resource control, some wants the Sharia legal system while others want (a review of the) revenue derivation principle, and so on. This is not surprising as the greatest opportunity denied Nigerians by the military and their civilian collaborator was the benefit of true federalism.

The period since the 1980s has been spectacular for many African societies as the harsh economic conditions of the people have resulted into an upsurge of internal crises. The period proved there is a symbiotic relationship between poverty and internal conflicts in these societies. The Nigerian experience to a large extent and that of Northern Nigeria in particular, fits into these characterizations as the country has witnessed ‘Civil War, ethnic, regional, religious class, political and communal conflicts that have taken a major toll on national development.’ (Kwanashie: 2005:110).

It is therefore purposed that poverty and unemployment are a major cause of frequent occurrence of ethno-religious and political conflicts in northern Nigeria. This is, in line with Makarfi (2005) position that “as economic crises dwindle peoples fortunes; they tend to perceive their enemies as those who belong to the other – ethno-religious groups” (2005, 28). The situations is further worsened by the conspicuous consumption of political office holders whose economic backgrounds, according to Elaigwu (2005) were well known before they assumed public offices. Therefore, people’s abject poverty in the midst of plenty not only alienates but could generate hatred (Elaigwu, 2005:73).

Elaigwu (2005) and Kwanashie (2005) positions have been substantiated by Jalingo (2001) who argues that in Kano state like other parts of Nigerian, the prevailing situation is abject poverty, which the situation in Northern Nigeria has contributed to the frequent occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in the state using the results of a study conducted in North-east region by Foad and Halliru 2010.

Conceptual Clarification

It is pertinent to explain the concepts of ethno-religious conflict and political instability. Religion is meant to draw man closer to his creator as well as serve as channel for communication. Contrary to this meaning in Nigeria, the role of religion as a way of communing with God has been greatly abused. Conflict according to Marx (1937) is perennial and an ingredient towards the actualizations of individual and group objective. On his view Otite (1999) conflict is a natural announcement of an impending re-classification of a society with changed characteristics and goals and with new circumstances of survival and continuity.

For Coser (1966) social conflict arises whenever there is struggle over political power, recognitions and status, and limited resources that the main aim of the parties involved are not only to gain the desired value but also to break through the general rules.

Ethno-religious conflicts on the other hand as opined by Elaigwu (2005) as “all conflicts which regiments primordial identities of a group in competitive relations with other groups” (2005:59) Ibrahim (2005) on her part defines ethno religious conflict as the ‘disputes arising from ethnic and religious differences. Such conflicts are often associated with ethnic or religious sentiments’ (2005: 321). The usage of the concept in this study denotes the fact that all crises that have religious and ethnic underline are ethno-religious conflicts i.e. either of the two can give way to the other.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical nexus of ethno-religious conflict, political instability and the state is better appreciated by looking at the contemporary descriptive typology of the Nigerian government. The Nigerian state has previously been characterized as patrimonial (Ibrahim 2000), prebendal and clientist (Joseph 1993) and rentier (Graf 1988). Scholars like Alubo (2008), Lawan (2000), Jega (2004) and Omorogbe, Omohan (2005) and Ifeanacho and Nwagwu (2009) argue that the increasing pauperization of Nigerians under the regimes of poor economic management has worsened the situation of the poor. Some have even expressed the situation either the government become irrelevant or failed. In Jega’s words:

Mass poverty and unemployment served to condition the minds and attitudes of Nigerian and made them susceptible to elite manipulation and mobilization of negative identities. As the state becomes unable to satisfy basic needs of the people, they in turn withdrew from the sphere of the state into ethno-religious and communal cocoons, with heightened sensitivity to the roles of the “others” in their marginalization and immiserations (cited in Lawan, 2000:54).

Lawan (2000) argues that poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are antithetical to the survival of democracy. Therefore, democracy is unsafe with the persistence of these factors in Nigeria. This

is because a poverty stricken and illiterate person can easily be mobilized in the event of ethnic and religious conflicts. Thus, poverty and illiteracy contribute to perpetuating and fuelling ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria.

Omorogbe and Omohan (2005), acknowledge the fact that societies the world over experience various forms of civil unrests irrespective of their level of development. However the frequent occurrence of ethno-religious and political conflict in Nigeria is of great concern to all stakeholders, because of the devastating effects of such conflict. They therefore deemed it fit to investigate, Omorogbe and Omohan explain that:

Given the position of Nigeria as the sixth oil producing nation in the world, one would naturally expect that the resources accruing to the country will be more than sufficient to cope with the needs of her citizens... Sad to say, that has not been the case. No year passes without the eruption of severe conflicts within and between ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria (2005:550).

They therefore conclude that among other factors, mass poverty experienced by Nigerians over the years is one of the factors responsible for the generally high level of instability in the country. Invariable, this has found expression in ethnic and religious outburst. To further give credence to the claim that poverty is the major cause of frequent ethno-religious crises in recent times in Nigeria. Jega (2004) argues that the failure of the Obasanjo regime to resolve the socio economic crises in the country on assumption of duty worsened the situation. He puts it thus:

The more the Obasanjo regime seemed unable or unwilling to address these problems, the more heightened the crisis of rising expectations. As all the major economic indices have not changed appreciably for the better, expectations have been shattered and disappointment and disenchantment, have increased and all these have created conducive atmosphere for rising protests and ethno-religious confrontation and conflicts (Jega;2004:8).

Worried about the spate of ethno religious and political instability especially in the Northern parts of the country, the Executive Governor of Nasarawa State, Alh (Dr) Abdullahi Adamu (2005) expressed his dismay when he stated that:

...Never in the history of Nigeria has it been as polarized as it is now. It is polarized, ethnic, religious and economic lines. The gap between Muslims and Christians is widening by the day. The same applies to the growing social inequality in the region... This growing inequality is a perfect recipe for social discontent. This is because pauperization of the people ultimately leads to social upheavals (Adamu, 2005:10).

There are existing theories that explain why poverty is one of the geneses of ethno religious and political instability in a society. Among such theories are Feirabend's and Feirabend's (1972) Frustration-Aggression theory, chock (1996) Cultural Model the Marxist (1887) theory of rebellion as well as ethnic mobilization and conflict theory.

This study however has adopted Feirabend and Feirabend's Frustration-Aggression theory as an explanatory framework of risen incidence of ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria, for the purpose of this study. To Feierabend and Feierabend (1972), political instability

is aggressive politically relevant behaviours which can be defined: [A]s the degree or the amount of aggression directed by individuals or office holders and individual and groups associated with them. Or conversely, it is amount of aggression directed by these office holders against other individuals, groups or officeholders within the polity (1972:136).

The Political Gap Hypothesis

According to Huntington (1968), political instability is the result of a widening political gap. He argued that, “The rates of social mobilization and expansion of political participation are high: while the rates of political organization and institutionalization are low.” He also remarked that, in large part, violence and instability are “the product of rapid social change and rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions Huntington (1968).

His argument therefore, seems to be concerned basically with institutional capacity, which explains the failure of institutions or the system to keep up with social demands. This study believed that, the political gap theory is however, described this phenomena clearly related to the Nigerian context.

Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

Feierabend and Feirabend’s Frustration aggression theory postulates that “aggression is always the result of frustration” (1972:136). Frustration may lead to other modes of behaviour. Thus, political instability is identified as aggressive behaviour which results from situations on unrelieved, socially experienced frustration. Such situations could result from conditions in which levels of social expectations, aspirations and needs are raised for many people for significant periods of time and still remain unmatched by equivalent levels of satisfaction. Feierabend and Feirabend’s frustration aggression theory can aptly give theoretical explanation of violent conflict of ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria. This is in line with the saying that a hungry man is an angry man.

This hypothesis, as it basically applied to individuals, is also applicable to groups. Gurr (1927) posits that:

For given groups and for some classes of societies, it is possible to identify events and patterns of conditions that are likely to be widely seen as unjust deprivation. Such events may occur abruptly, for example, the suppression of a political party or slowly, like the decline of a group’s status relative to other social classes. Such conditions can be called collective frustrations.

The argument of this theory is that people will become angry when they do not get what they want, or are prevented from getting what they want or are deprived of what they have or of the opportunity of getting it.

Gap Analysis Model

For the purpose of this study a model that will help to predict the phenomena of ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria can be called Social System Gap Analysis Model. The model simply explains as follows:

$$X = f(h) \quad f' > 0, f'' < 0 \quad \text{Equation (1)}$$

$$T = g(h) \quad g' < 0, g'' < 0 \quad \text{Equation (2)}$$

Where,

X = is the probability that ethno-religious conflict and political instability will occur
(Dependent

Variable)

T = the social level of tolerance.

$$h = H(x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots, x_n)$$

where x_i is the attribute of H which is the most important aspect, such as socio-economic

development, poverty reduction and employment opportunity.

Therefore,

$$\frac{\partial g}{\partial x_1}, \frac{\partial g}{\partial x_2}, \dots > 0 \text{ for all } X_i \text{ or } G' > 0$$

The Model Assumptions

The level of frustration clearly indicates how the level of ethno-religious conflict and political instability is.

There is a relationship between the social frustration and that of social tolerance.

There is a social relationship between the level of expectation gap and that of frustration, which means that there is a difference between what is received and what is expected.

The Model Application for the Study

Reference to the discussions of Frustration-Aggression theory especially the argument of Feierabend and Feirabend who outline the successful application and the relevance of the social gap analysis of the model the study found the social system gap analysis very consisted. However, the model can be used to study the phenomena of political instability and ethno-religious conflicts.

Causes of Conflicts

Nigeria has experienced uncountable ethno-religious and communal conflicts. Like other parts of the world, it had its share of violent ethno-religious and communal conflicts. The source of worry however is the frequency of ethno-religious and political conflicts. The source of worry however is the frequency of ethno-religious conflicts in the Northern States of the Federation

since the 1980's. For instance, between 1980 and 2007, there were at least 50 ethno-religious and political conflicts in the Northern State (Elaigwu, 2005).

According to Elaigwu (2005:6), tracing causality of conflicts is a very difficult business but all same, reasons must be adduced for all conflicts which had occurred in the northern state as illustrated in the following paragraph by the chronology of selected ethno-religious conflicts in the region. Between 1953 and 2007, not less than seventeen, ethno-religious and political conflict have occurred in Northern Nigeria. Out of these conflicts, only two i.e. those of the 1953 and 1966 occurred before the 1980s. Thus, the period since, the psychological impact of these crises remains with the citizens to date.

Alubo (2008) posit that civil disturbances may be broadly classified into religious, ethnic and political conflicts. In Nigeria's experience, religious disturbances mostly pit Christians and Muslims against the other, while ethnic disturbances involve one ethnic group against the other(s).Based on Nigeria's experience civil disturbances tend to revolve around politics of identity, for example the north-east region's conflict in Taraba State of 15 may 1999 where Cattle Fulanis and farmers clashed in Karim Lamido and Sanusi villages, as 20 villages were burnt and many lives lost, while about 50 heads of cattle were also being killed (the Standard 17 June 1999).

According to Ifeanacho and Nwagwu (2009) the social structure in Nigeria is categorized into either inter ethnic versus intra ethnic, religious versus intra-religious, clan versus land, region versus state. For instance, the clash between Christian and Muslim in Yalwan Bauchi on the 4th May 2004, in Bauchi state which leads to killings of many people. The blast unfortunately spread to Kano resulting to more lives and properties were destroyed.

For almost a decade, conflicts of ethnic and religious nature did not occur in northern Nigeria until October, 1991 when a German Preacher, Reirchard Bonke was invited by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Kano State Branch, to come and preach the Gospel in a crusade which was supposed to hold in Kano at the race course.

Table 1: Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Political Instability in Northern Nigeria.

S/N	STATE	INCIDENTS	YEAR-PERIOD	CASUALITIES
1	Adamawa	Dumo ethno-religious	2002	10cicilians dead 8 policemen dead
		Dumo ethno-religious conflict	2003-june	Mosques churches; private and public buildings set ablaze
		Numan riot and deposition of Homa Bachama		
2	Bauchi	Ethno-religious conflict	2001	No definite number killed
		Sharia conflict	2001	Many lives and property lost
3	Benue	Zaki- Biam massacre	2001	19 solders kidnapped and 16 soldiers feared

				killed. A number of civilians died and property destroyed
		Attach on Hausa community in 2001	2001	Houses, Mosques and property worth millions lost
		Ipav-Ukan crisis	2001	Many lives, and property worth millions lost
		Tiv-Jakun conflict	2002	Many lives lost. Some beheaded
		Oturkpo political conflict	2002	No definite record. Armed men killed
		Political conflict in Kwande LGA	2004	100 persons and displaced about 100 indigenes
4	Borno	Biu ethno-religious conflict	2000	N100 million worth of property destroyed. Ritual killings of a teenage girl.
		Danish cartoon riot in	2006	Over 900 refugees. Millions of property lost; Many killed in the North and South too
5	Gombe	Book launch and ethno-religious conflict	2001	Property of Christians destroyed.
6	Kaduna	Phases 1 and 1 sharia crisis	2000	No less than 3000 lives lost. Property in buildings and vehicles destroyed
		Burning of churches and Bajju-Ikulu ethno-religious conflicts	2001	Not definite
7	Kano	Reprisal ethno-religious conflict	2001	Lives and property lost
		Afghanistan – US ethno-religious conflict	2001	Hundreds of people killed;40 churches burnt, billions of Naira lost
		Jos Reprisal Ethno-Religious conflict	2004	Many lives lost property destroyed.
8	Kebbi	Ethno-religious conflict Jega Town	2004 June	2dead; several wounded; Property worth

				millions destroyed.
		Shite-police conflict in Kebbi	2004	Lives and property lost
9	Kogi	The Idoji and Idozumi inter-communal conflict in Okene	2001	80 people died. Property destroyed
		Local Council creation conflict in Okene	2002	5 people killed. Police vehicle burnt down Property lost
		Kabba Buna inter-communal conflict-Kabba	2004	Property worth N50 million destroyed. Lives lost; injuries
10	Kwara	Oodu'a People's Congress in Ilorin: 26,200 police clash with civilians	2000	Many suffered bullet wounds
11	Nassarawa	Conflict between Kwale-Tiv tribes	2001	4 peoples died. 40 houses burnt
		Azara-Tiv conflict in Nasarawa	2001	Several lives and property were lost
		Tiv militia attack on Angwan-Tashi	2001	9 people dead. 20 women and children injured.
12	Niger	Emir of Suleja conflict	2000	Few people were injured. Several arrests made.
		Kontagora L.G polls conflict	2004	Several vehicles and houses were burnt.
13	Plateau	Wase-ethno-religious conflict	2001	No clarity
		Quaan Pan ethnic conflict Quaan Pan LG conflict Spillover of Wase conflict to Langtang Jos Jumaat prayer conflict Jos North LG council conflict	All in 2001	Lives and property lost
		PDP LG congress crisis Fulani-Beron conflict in Barkin-Ladi Houses vs Taro ethno-religious conflict	2002	53,78 lives lost. Wives and children saw their husbands and fathers killed brutally. Widows and orphans produced.
		Jumaat prayer conflict in Dilimi Barlom; Ado ethnic crisis	2002	Lives and property lost
		Wuse-Ethno religious conflict 1 and 2	2004	No fewer than 1,500 Germai people killed;

		Fulani-Taro conflict over cow theft		60 refugees reproduced. Millions worth of property lost.
		Hausa-Fulani against indigenes conflict	2004	1,500 death toll; roasted or slaughtered About 350 people died. Several houses and property destroyed
14	Sokoto	Sharia riot in Sokoto	2000	Police on red alert. Few lives and property lost.
15	Taraba	Kuteb- Chamba sectarian conflicts	2001	200 people killed due to early army intervention
		Fulani-Mambila conflict	2002	Over 53,791 cattle were allegedly killed; several lives lost; about 23,647 pastoral Fulani fled to Cameroun
16	Yobe	Assault on Igbos in Potiskum	. 2003	Few lives lost. Millions worth of property destroyed
		Assault on Igbos	June 11 2004	Property lost
17	Zamfara	Bukuyum conflict Fulani herdsmen and Ruku Dawa farmers	2002	Few lives lost. Several property destroyed

Source: Extracted from Shehu Sani, *The Killing Fields: Religious Violence in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books Ltd., Chapters 4-7.

Horowitz vividly describes the consequences of such conflicts. When ethnic violence occurs, unranked groups usually aim not at social transformation, but at something approaching sovereign autonomy; the exclusion of parallel ethnic groups from a share of power. Conversely, ethnic minorities feel marginalized, excluded and neglected. Conflict lines are drawn and can easily turn to violent actions.

From the table 2 poverty and unemployment has 67 (34.9%), religious fundamentalism 61 (31.8%), ethnicity represent 22 with (11.5%) other factors has 18 (9.4%), lack of appropriate security measures 16 (8.3%) and Ignorance with 8 showing (4.2%). It is therefore, easy to infer that the poverty and unemployment are mainly responsible for ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria. This reason is further strengthened by what the interviewees asserted. For instance, Alhaji Sani politician (Interviewed May 13, 2010, Alhaji Adamu Sule (interviewed May 30,2010) Anthony Emeruju Catholic (interviewed May 15,2010, and the Zaphania Bulus (interviewed October 15,2010) all share similar views that poverty and youth

unemployment are the major causes of frequent ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria.

Table 2: Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflict and Political Instability in Nigeria

Sample	192
Poverty and unemployment	6 7(34.9%)
Religious fundamentalism	61(31.8%)
Ignorance	8(4.2%)
Ethnicity	22(11.5%)
Lack of appropriate security measures	16(8.3%)
Other factors	18(9.4%)
Total	192(100%)

Source: Survey Research 2010

From the interviewed conducted, Mallam Adamu and Yusuf held a common opinion that the attackers had the economic motives as their reason for attacking people without any justification behind, while Asabe (Interviewed, August, 23 2010) are of the view that, the possession of wealth by those who were attacked that attracted the attackers with the aim of looting their possessions for economic reasons (s) irrespective of whether the attacked persons were Christians or Muslims, in most strategic areas in Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Adamawa, Yobe and Taraba states respectively

Based on the analysis of the data in appendix A, it can be deduced that, unemployment and poverty situation in Nigeria is responsible for the persistence occurrences of violent conflict. Other reasons however abound. For instance, quite number of respondents constituting 22 (11.5%) is of the opinion that ethnicity is responsible for the escalation of violent conflict and political instability. This view is by scholars like Diamond et al who argued also in Ukiwo (2003) that, the dominating principle is problematic in plural societies because ethnic parties that lose elections tend to reject not only the election results but also the whole gamut of democratic institutions by appealing to violence. Studies in post-communist societies reveal a resurgence of ethnic conflict during democratic transitions, indicating the absence of credible and externally guaranteed commitments to respect minority rights (Gurr 2000).

Religious fundamentalism is another cause of frequent ethno-religious crises in the region attracts 61 (31.8%) of the respondents (See appendix A). While this number is significant, it should be noted that Islam is a religion of peace. Allah, the exalted says ‘Allah does not forbid you deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity’ (See the Noble Quran; Surah Al Mumtahanah, 90:08)

CONCLUSION

In this study, the paper tries to address the factors that are responsible for the persistence occurrence of ethno-religious conflict and political instability in Nigeria. The paper however, opined that poverty and unemployment are found to be the predominant factors among them. This is because the level of unemployment is always in high position which affected less

privileged youth to abject poverty this will continue to be a major source of conflict as the state in Nigeria has colonial origin. Frustration-Aggression theory especially the argument of Feierabend and Feirabend outline the successful application and the relevance of the social gap analysis of the model the study found the social system gap analysis very consisted. However, the model can be used to study the phenomena of political instability and ethno-religious conflicts. The study concludes that, there is a relationship between the social frustration and that of social tolerance.

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