

Boko-Haram and the Impact of Violent Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Matters Arising

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14579687>

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine the issues of religious conflict and as they affect peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. The objectives of this study are thus; to find out the meaning of conflict, the constituents of religious conflict, ascertain if Christian and Muslim ideologies support the use of violence, determine the relationship between extremism and religious violence in Nigeria and to determine the measures for preventing religious conflicts in Nigeria. The methodology applied in this study were the use of questionnaire in data generation and statistical analysis. (In analyzing the data collected.) Among the findings gotten were that, Conflict is an open clash or struggle between two or more people over opposing interests. The violent clash between members of two or more religious group and the violent clash within members of a religious group is also called a conflict situation. Religious extremism encourages the attack on members of other religions. Amongst suggested ways to checkmate religious conflict in Nigeria includes the strengthening and proliferation of interfaith religious councils to ensure constant dialogue between faiths. The use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods in the grassroots, and the strengthening of security measures for crack down on violence.

Keywords: Boko-Haram, Conflict, Nigeria, Religion and Violence.

Introduction

Nigeria's history has been marked by several episodes of religiously inspired bloodshed as well as religiously motivated unrest. From Muslim extremist groups like the Maitasine conflicts, Kaduna conflicts, and Shiites conflicts to the current scourge of the Boko Haram menace, all of these conflicts have presented themselves as the expediter of true and are divinely mandated to cleanse the respective faiths from any form of adulteration, and they also strive to reduce or completely eliminate the sway of opposing religious identities in politics. As a result, their viewpoints are oriented on a return to the literal interpretation of their sacred scriptures and, eventually, the

establishment of a religion-based society. Similarly, Lengmang (2011) stated that the majority of these religious conflicts are precursors to other sorts of violence and warfare produced by Muslim extremists' actions.

A tremendous amount of work has gone into easing Nigeria's religious problems. The majority of it focuses on the individuals responsible for collective violence, as well as the consequences of this violence on the victims, who are frequently caught in the crossfire between the instigators and perpetrators of the violence. However, very little or no attention has been paid to the powerful roles that the conflict's instigators have played in the war, despite the fact that these obvious conflict actors often receive extensive publicity and public attention. The unfulfilled goals of the instigators, who recruit an army of socioeconomically poor criminals to carry out acts of violence, are the most significant element leading to religious war in Nigeria, according to Danjibo's (2009) viewpoint. In the same manner that it is the government's tough obligation to identify and punish individuals responsible for beginning or contributing to a conflict,

Citizens must press religious leaders to recognise their involvement in avoiding acts of violence inspired by religious beliefs and practises. Religion, a prominent phenomena in modern culture, has piqued the interest of a sizable number of Nigerians. Even though religious practises were more widespread in pre-colonial Nigeria and continued to evolve during the colonial and post-colonial centuries, they are now increasingly becoming the key determinant of whether or not Nigeria would continue to exist as a nation. Nigeria is regarded to be a pluralistic society, which means that it is a country in which individuals of many religions can coexist peacefully and freely mix in order to carry out their daily activities. The three major religions practised by the country's people are Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (commonly known as ATR). The majority of Nigerians tend to be interested in obtaining what they perceive to be the spiritual, economic, social, political, and cultural benefits connected with religion.

Religion, ironically, has also been a source of violence and conflict, which is why it is referred to as a "double-edged sword" in certain writings (Obasi, 2009). In many cultures, religion has acted as a tool for community peace. It has, however, also been a cause of bloodshed and conflict. There are several hypotheses as to what causes violent religious conflicts in Nigeria, but little research has focused on the underlying ideological, political, and dominating forces that are responsible for not only what is considered violent religious conflicts, but violent conflicts in general (Juergensmeyer, 2000). The vast majority of these studies make no in-depth research into the immediate and evident issues that have led to religious conflicts in the country. According to Omotosho (2003), a study of the immediate and visible drivers of religious violence and wars in Nigeria, as well as an assessment of the deliberate use of religion as a tool for instigating warfare over the years, could help to unravel potential solutions to the country's religious conflict escalation. This would be useful in establishing whether or not there is a solution to halt the country's religious conflict.

According to Olojo (2013), the trend of religious extremism in Nigeria, exemplified by the current Islamic sect known as Boko Haram, has made Northern Nigeria, particularly the North-East (where their activities are rife), the most dangerous region to live in the country. Not only have the dynamics of and calls for total Islamization of the country, as well as the apparent support that the majority of followers of the Islamic religion have for it, raised basic national security concerns, but they have also raised questions about the role that religion plays in defining Nigeria's corporate existence. According to Onuoha (2010), the fact that churches and mosques have been attacked, which are symbols of both the religion with the largest following in Nigeria and the untold number of innocent Nigerians who have been forced to bear the brunt of religious strife, shows that Nigeria

is on its way to becoming a failed state.

It is against the above mentioned backdrop that this study tends to investigate into the religious conflict in Nigeria, with the aim of determining the various issues and solutions to mitigate the scourge.

Religion in Contemporary Nigeria

Modern Nigeria's religious tensions have their origins in the colonial State structure, which pitted one identity group against another to ensure the postcolonial Nigerian State's continued social, political, and economic dominance. One of the primary means by which colonisers established their political dominance was through the instrumentalization of religion (Kukah, 1993). This was made possible by missionaries who, under the pretence of spreading Western knowledge, were actually working to impose Western cultural norms on Africa (Ndeda, 2008). To rephrase what Grey (1982) said, "Christianity made its rapid advances precisely because its emissaries, the missionaries, were so closely linked with the whole apparatus of colonial rule." African Muslim societies that fought against Christian European powers through the force of arms but were ultimately unsuccessful struggled to adapt to the Eurocentric modernization processes without undermining their Islamic ideologies (Kukah, 1993)

Adama (2003) argues that Muslims' cooperation during colonialism came after a shift in attitude from tolerance to mutual distrust. Another major point in the history of native-foreign relations was marked by the end of Muslim political militancy (jihâd) as a result of Europeans bringing their superior technology to the region. In addition, this aspect would lead to the emergence of unexpected coalitions and the imposition of a radically new conception of the responsibilities of Muslims and Europeans (Adama, 2003).

The British colonial encounter with Nigeria had a defining effect on the development of the Nigerian state. According to Osaghae and Suberu (2005), identity disputes in Nigeria may be traced back to the British adoption of a system that produced and nourished identity consciousness. Some have claimed that the British hijacked the system of administration to maintain their hegemony over the Nigerian state in postcolonial and modern Nigeria, which alienated a number of identities. Tribal and religious affiliations are typically at the centre of political disputes that escalate into varying degrees of bloodshed and division. According to Salawu (2010), the colonial state discriminated against Muslims due to its Christian orientation, which is fundamentally at odds with Islamic tenets. The moral bankruptcy and extremely avaricious nature of the Nigerian State were blamed on Western principles, which were thought to be in harmony with Christianity. As a result, Islamic extremist groups arose in the North during colonialism to express their opposition to the colonial Nigerian government (Oyelade, 1986).

It has been reaffirmed in the modern context of Nigeria that the subversive and violent protest against the colonial State did not subside with the end of colonial control. In the post-colonial era, political elites have seized most, if not all, colonial inventions. These are visible in the postcolonial Nigerian State's sociopolitical, economic, and legal spheres. The British left control to Muslim identity group, although Nigeria's fundamental worldview or framework was Christian. Through the use of their political influence, the Muslim identity group in Nigeria tried to Islamize or restructure the Nigerian State by imposing Islamic law and ideals on all facets of government (Oyelade, 1986). Adopting the Sharia legal system and establishing a Sharia Court of Appeal are examples of Islamic movements. Also, the political affiliations with Islamic organisations, the founding of Islamic schools known as Mandrasas, and the more recent implementation of an Islamic banking system are examples of attempts by the Islamic group to islamise the Nigerian

state (Kukah, 1993). Christian identities in Nigeria have resisted the Islamization efforts of the political and Islamic elites in both peaceful and violent ways out of fear that Nigeria will follow Iran's path and become an archetype of true Islamic Umma (Islamic State) after the 1979 Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, relegating Christians to the political margins. Membership in the British Commonwealth and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was a point of contention and opposition for Nigeria in the 1990s.

The Nigerian legal system, which was inherited from the English common law, is another important aspect that nourishes this dread and, in turn, fans the fires of violence throughout Nigeria's political history, as Falola (1990) noted in the analysis of Anderson's (1959) works. The Islamic legal system, known as Al-sharia, was relegated to a secondary place during colonialism and has stayed there ever since. The Muslim Identity in Nigeria has often rejected the superiority of English common law, or what they have referred to as "Christian" law.

The "Christian law", although the British intended to appease the Emirs by instituting an appeals process in 1958, they may have actually sown the seeds of future conflict by doing so. Appeals had previously never been a part of Sharia law. The Muslim Identity, on the other hand, based their arguments on democratic principles, which require giving the will of the majority the upper hand. They argue that since the vast majority of Nigerians are Muslims, Islamic law should be the basis for national policy (Falola, 1990). Second, Muslims consider Al-sharia to be an integral part of their religious beliefs; "Muslims are bound by faith to order their lives by Al-sharia" (Rashid, 1988). Muslims have argued that the current legal system, corrupted by colonialism, must be replaced with an Islamic legal system in order to achieve independence from imperialism.

Muslim counterparts who do not want to implement the Sharia legal system in Nigeria believe that doing so would be indicative of government bias in favour of Islam and part of a larger strategy to Islamize the country. Various degrees of political violence in the 1970s and 1980s can be traced back to this issue (Kukah, 1993).

Falola (1990) expressed concern about the potential results of implementing sharia law. He claimed that under Al-sharia, only Muslims in Nigeria will be permitted to hold political office, marrying will be prohibited, and conversion to Islam will be punishable by death. The army would be used to enforce Islamic law and serve as a tool of Islamic struggle. Despite the fact that Sharia law is widely used in the North, the rulings of the Supreme Court are binding on all lower courts, including the Sharia Court of Appeal. This further cements the subordinate status of the Sharia legal system. This is opposed by groups of Muslim radicals who have recently used terrorist action to express their opposition to the current application of Sharia (Jonah, Adamu, and Anamesere, 2014). Nigeria's current religious tensions have their roots in the colonial state's framework, which pitted one identity group against another to ensure the Nigerian government's continued control over the country's economy and politics when colonial rule ended. Contemporary religious disagreements in Nigeria can be traced back to this framework. Kukah (1993) argued that colonisers' appropriation of religious practises was an important strategy for establishing political dominance. To this end, missionaries helped spread Western education over Africa while simultaneously establishing themselves as cultural rulers (Ndeda, 2008). This objective was accomplished thanks to the efforts of the missionaries. Those African Muslim civilizations that didn't resort to violence against Christian European powers had a hard time modernising in a way that didn't compromise their Islamic beliefs (Kukah, 1993). For example, Grey (1982) writes, "Christianity made its rapid advances precisely because its emissaries, the missionaries, were so closely linked with the whole apparatus of colonial rule."

According to Salawu (2010), the colonial state was fundamentally discriminatory due to its Christian orientation and consequently hostile attitude towards Islamic values. He thinks the state's

current policies are inherently at odds with Islamic principles. At least some of the corruption and greed of the Nigerian government can be traced back to the influence of Western principles seen as compatible with Christianity. Therefore, Islamic extremist pockets emerged in the north of the country under colonialism (Oyelade, 1986). These protests were predominantly violent and targeted the colonial Nigerian state. As has been emphasised in this context, the termination of colonial control in Nigeria did not mark the end of the violent, subversive rebellion against the colonial power. Instead, it survived long after colonial rule had been ended.

The political elites of postcolonial countries have internalised almost all of the colonial devices. The social, economic, and legal landscapes of post-colonial Nigeria provide clear evidence of this. Nigeria's core ideology or basis was Christian, despite the fact that the British turned control over to Muslim identity groups. By adopting Islamic ideas and executing policies that benefited Islam in the political and legal sectors of the political system, the Muslim identity group aimed to "Islamize" or "reconstruct" the Nigerian state (Oyelade, 1986). They were able to accomplish this by utilising their political standing to their advantage. Islamic movements include the growth of Islamic political parties, the development of Islamic schools known as mandrasas, and the most recent implementation of an Islamic financial system (Kukah, 1993). Christian communities in Nigeria, however, resisted Islamization efforts by the state and Islamic elites in the country by a mix of peaceful and violent means. Christian groups are worried that if Islamic programmes in Nigeria are successful, the country will rise to the level of Iran, which after the 1979 Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khoemini became an archetype of true Islamic Umma (Islamic State), relegating Christians to the political margins. The 1990s saw heated debate and criticism in Nigeria over the country's membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the British Commonwealth.

Falola (1990) noted throughout his research of Anderson's (1959) works that the adoption of English common law as the basis for Nigeria's legal system is another important component that fosters this fear and has contributed to the stoking of violence throughout Nigeria's political history. The Nigerian legal system is modelled after the common law tradition of England. The Islamic legal code, commonly known as al-sharia, was a subservient force under colonialism and has remained such ever since. The Muslim Identity in Nigeria has stated its dissatisfaction with the superiority of English common law, which they have referred to as "Christian law". Despite the fact that the British instituted an appeals system in 1958 in an attempt to please the Emirs, this measure eventually resulted in the sowing of the seeds for future conflict because Sharia law had never previously given for the option of an appeal. The Muslim Identity, on the other hand, based their arguments on the democratic principle of majoritarianism, which holds that the collective wish of the people should take precedence. They believe that because Muslims constitute the majority of Nigerians, the country should be governed by Islamic law because it reflects the choices of the majority of Nigerians (Falola 1990). "Muslims are bound by faith to order their lives by Al-sharia," they argued, arguing that the current legal system, polluted by colonialism, needed to be replaced with an Islamic legal system in order to break free from imperialism's bonds (Rashid, 1988). Second, Muslims feel that Al-sharia is important to their faith's principles. "Muslims are bound by faith to order their lives by Al-sharia."

Nonetheless, Christians in Nigeria were and are committed to the principle of church-state separation, so they saw no problem with not applying the Sharia legal system, especially outside of the northern region and among Christian Northerners throughout the 1980s (Falola, 1990). This was especially true among Christian Northerners. If Al-sharia were implemented in Nigeria, only Muslims would be eligible to serve as the country's leader, Muslims would hold all important governmental offices, non-Muslims would be officially regarded as lower status than Muslims, intermarriage would be illegal, and conversion to Islam would be illegal, according to Falola

(1990). The Sharia legal system is currently being implemented in the majority of Northern States, but it is important to note that Supreme Court decisions have precedence over those of any other appellate court, including the Sharia Court of Appeal, showing that the Sharia legal system is still subordinate even today.

The Effects of Religious Conflict on Nigerian Society

The unsavoury and unpalatable effects of religious conflict scourge are many. According to Awoyemi (2012) they includes:

Wanton Destruction of Lives and Properties

Since the operations of the group in Nigeria began to take on terrifying proportions in 2009, there has been wanton destruction of a large number of innocent lives as well as properties worth billions of naira. This can be deduced from the table of chronology that is located above that details the major attacks carried out by Boko Haram.

Internal Displacement of Persons.

This is another effect of the Boko Haram insurgency. Many people including women and Students have been displaced from their families; a considerable number of them, like the Chibok Girls, have been abducted, leaving them traumatised and damaging their future chances. Other survivors, whose homes had been damaged by fire and who had lost members of their families, were also compelled to flee their homes, bringing with them a slew of negative consequences. For example, once a state of emergency was declared in the North East, roughly 650,000 people were evacuated from the three states that comprise Borno, Adamawa and Yobe to neighbouring states, while thousands of them left the country. The government is currently making efforts to rehabilitate the recaptured victims of the Boko Haram onslaughts.

Infringement of Fundamental Human Rights

People who continue to reside in the conflict-torn region of Northern Nigeria are having their basic human rights violated, which is linked to the above addressed issue of displacement, their freedom of movement, association, and worship, as well as their right to housing and other requirements are infringed upon.

Threat to Democratic Consolidation and Nigeria Corporate Existence

The insurgency poses a significant threat to the country's democratic consolidation as well as Nigeria's business existence. The Boko Haram scourge poses a major threat to the country's national interests, peace, and security. The sect's threat to blow bombs in Abuja to disrupt the country's 51st anniversary rally alarmed many Nigerians. Even the administration was forced to cancel the traditional ritual (Adesoji, 2010). If this insoluble situation before the federal government is not solved immediately, the consequences could be another civil war, culminating to the country's dissolution.

Security Challenges

All insurgent groups, in the broadest sense, seek to cultivate fear and instability among the public as a means to achieve their ultimate goal of overthrowing the government. As a result, the Boko Haram insurgency has persisted as a threat to national security, endangering not only individual lives and property but also the very existence of the country. Boko Haram attacks have grown commonplace, putting the lives of a great many Nigerians, especially those in the north, in constant danger. The situation is so tense that barely a single day goes by without news of at least one murder being reported. By one count (Nwozor, 2013), the group carried out over 160 attacks and caused over a thousand deaths between July 2009 and January 2012. Many people no longer feel comfortable or are able to go about their daily lives for fear of being attacked by the rebels due to the prevalence of these attacks. Because of this, there is now a major security emergency. The insurgents' violent activities and the government's security measures designed to deal with the problem have the effect of restricting and infringing upon people's basic right to free movement. This is because both the insurgents' violent actions and the government's security measures are directed at curtailing the issue. It's also worth noting that some politicians and criminals are using the security dangers posed by the rebels as an excuse to settle political scores and indulge in other unlawful activities under the garb of Boko Haram. Mohammed (2009) lists the following additional effects:

The Effects of Boko Haram

The political elites of Nigeria's geopolitical zones, and especially those of the North and South, are not communicating as well as they once did because of Boko Haram's operations. This has led to officials from the South and the North accusing one another of fostering a terrorist group called Boko Haram for purely political ends. This is happening because Boko Haram is a politically motivated group. Northern political elites, for example, once accused former President Goodluck Jonathan's led federal government (a Southerner) of using the insurgent group to create insecurity, reduce the region's population (in general, especially Muslims), and destroy their economy in order to reduce their bargaining power before the 2015 presidential elections. Former president Jonathan's government, on the other hand, blamed northern political elites for establishing the rebel outfit in an effort to thwart the fulfilment of campaign promises made by his administration. The government concluded that Northern leaders were behind the Boko Haram insurgency in order to prevent him from running for president in 2015. Therefore, the government's capacity to carry out its plans was hampered by the acts of Boko Haram rebels. Politicians and government officials weren't the only ones who have noticed a pattern of attacks that they attribute to Boko Haram. Some politicians were deliberately engaging insurrection in preparation for the presidential elections in 2015.

Conclusion

The study researched into concept of religious conflict in Nigeria, focusing on the issues and solutions. After careful analysis of question raised and results of analysis from questionnaires, it was found out that; Conflict is an open clash or struggle between two or more people over opposing interests. The violent clash between members of two or more religious group is and the violent clash within members of a religious group is also called a conflict situation.

The constituents of religious conflict include the open clash between two or more religious groups as a result of goal difference. It also occurs within a religion as a result of disagreement between its members. This can be seen in the arming of religious members for the promotion of their

religion which leads to the wanton destruction of lives and properties.

Christians and Muslims ideologies do not support the use of violence in achieving their objectives. Christians only resort to violence only when they intend to defend themselves from attack while the Muslim religious clerics promote Jihad to further their personal interests.

Amongst suggested ways to checkmate religious conflict in Nigeria includes the strengthening and proliferation of interfaith religious councils to ensure constant dialogue between faiths. The use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods in the grassroots, and the strengthening of security measures for crack down of violence.

Findings from this study has also proven that, there is significant relationship between religion and conflict. There is significant relationship between religious contents and the promotion of conflict. There is significant relationship between religious extremism and the promotion of violence.

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations appear very necessary:

Recommendations

- o Efforts should be made to let the citizens understand the complex nature of conflicts.
- o Government should put in place measures to monitor the preaching in all religious centers in the nation.
- o The Federal and State government should design and implement religious programmes aimed at curbing the extremist tendencies.
- o Government should offer amnesty to prevent escalation of violence in Nigeria.
- o Government should adopt both the traditional and modern strategies of conflict management.
- o Religious communication infrastructure and ontological spirituality should be built into the synergized package for conflict management.
- o Government should use Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods in the grassroots.
- o Government should strengthen security measures for crack down on violence.

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