

The Effect of Religious Conflicts on Nigerian Economy: The Way Forward.

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how disputes sparked by religious convictions affect Nigeria's economic growth. It draws attention to the reality that religion plays a significant role in Nigeria, where Christianity and Islam are the two most popular faiths. This study looks at the effects of religiously motivated conflicts on Nigerian economic development. It underlines the significance of faith or religion in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam are the predominant religions. It contends that, while each of these religions preaches peace, differences over practice among believers are a permanent feature of national life, threatening peace and progress and depriving Nigeria of the necessary economic development. The paper employed descriptive analysis and a library research methodology. It observes that Nigeria is a secular state, thus religious influence is unnecessary. The research finds that long-term growth is only conceivable if the underlying causes of religious conflict, which are often driven by religious prejudice, are addressed. It observes that secularism's deemphasis has resulted in religion having an undue impact on the nation; thus, it proposes focusing less on religion to reduce disputes. To reduce violence, it also encourages religious harmony through conversation, as well as an emphasis on human rights and the constitutional right to worship freely.

Keywords: Religion, conflict, development, constitution, violence, economy

Introduction

Nigeria is not immune to the turbulence unfolding across the African continent. The African Union's admirable "silence the guns" programs aimed to abolish all wars, civil disputes, gender-based violence, violent conflicts, and genocide prevention across the continent by 2020, but this goal was not met due to current trends. When people with different attitudes, personalities, and belief systems come together, either variety arises or conflicts occur (Afolabi, 2018). People are unique, and their belief systems vary, with each belief system tailored to the needs of the people who use it. Depending on how they are implemented, the many ideologies they support may result in contradicting goals that undermine or promote peace and harmony, or cause conflict.

Social and political disputes are widespread throughout Africa, but religious conflicts are especially prevalent in Nigeria. Religious conflicts manifest as inter- and intra-faith discontent and violence, with the goal of winning new converts, asserting supremacy, or achieving political and ethnic objectives, which can be useful or detrimental. Conflict exists in all human relationships. Nigeria's diversity reflects a conglomeration of people from many cultural and religious backgrounds, bonded together by a constitution and in a relationship that supports their goals while preserving their religious interests, rendering them prone to conflict (Ukpe& Ogenyi, 2022).

In any society, conflict can manifest as disputes or violence, which can either build or destroy. Religious disputes promote unity among members while also influencing disagreement among members of various religions, resulting in mayhem, insecurity, and devastation that is harmful to economic progress. Religion is a powerful motivator and perpetrator of violence in Nigeria. Religious harmony in the face of conflict aims to develop the economy, but religious disagreement leads to disorder and confusion, which promotes insecurity and inhibits investment.

Moreover, violent Thousands of people have died as a result of religious conflicts in Nigeria, mainly those involving Christians and Muslims and the destruction of property valued at hundreds of millions of naira. For instance, 26 religious riots were reported between 1980 and 1992, with 6,775, according to government estimates, claimed lives. The Human Rights Committee, an impartial panel of eighteen experts chosen by the UN in 1993, defined religion or belief as "theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief".

Every society experiences conflicts, which can either be built upon or destroyed. Conflicts can take the shape of arguments or acts of violence. Religious disputes not only foster harmony within the community but also have a negative impact on disagreements between adherents of different faiths, leading to chaos, instability, and devastation that is detrimental to economic growth. Religion is a big factor in both inciting and carrying out violence in Nigeria (Oduma-Aboh, 2017). While religious disharmony between faiths tends to result in disorder and uncertainty that promotes insecurity and discourages investments, religious peace from conflicts aims to strengthen the economy.

Conflict in Africa is intensifying, hurting the government and governance system. Post-colonial norms, debt management, epidemics, poverty, corruption, and internal conflicts are among the challenges facing the continent's politically autonomous governments (Goodnews & Chioma, 2021). According to Alemika (2009), ethnic and religious conflicts have a number of negative consequences, including death and property loss, population displacement and traumatic experiences, poverty, and various forms of deprivation such as a lack of access to education, health care facilities, employment opportunities, and denial of human rights, among other things. Furthermore, confidence between and within organizations and communities is eroded, jeopardizing inter- and intracommunity collaboration and alliances that could promote community progress and unity.

Theoretical Framework

In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx, the creator and major thinker of Marxism, defined religion as "the soul of soulless conditions" or "the opium of the people." According to Marx, religion in this exploitative world serves as both an expression of distress and a protest against that pain. In other words, religion survives despite difficult societal circumstances. Religion will become obsolete if the oppressive and exploitative situation is eliminated. At the same time, Marx recognized religion as a means for working people to cope with their harsh economic situations and alienation (Raines, 2002).

According to Denys Turner, a Marx researcher and historical theologian, Marx's theories are compatible with Post-Theism, a philosophical worldview that regards god worship as a temporary but ultimately obsolete stage in humanity's historical spiritual evolution.

Marxist-Leninists see all modern faiths and churches as "organs of bourgeois reaction" utilized for "the exploitation and stupefaction of the working class". Several Marxist-Leninist governments of the twentieth century, including the Soviet Union under Vladimir Lenin and the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong, enacted policies establishing official atheism.

This work will be based on Marxist ideology. Marxism is an economic and political ideology that investigates the problems inherent in capitalism, notably through the work of German philosopher and economist Karl Marx. Marxist views influenced the creation of socialism, which calls for workers to share control of the means of production. Marx referred to religion as the opiate of the masses. He meant that it worked like a medication, protecting workers from the genuine anguish of being exploited in capitalist society.

Marx also referred to religion as the "heart in a heartless world" and acknowledged its attractiveness in a society otherwise devoted to commodities buying and selling, minority profit accumulation, and growing poverty among the majority. However, he perceived it as a negative impact. This was because Marx claimed that the proletariat should revolt against the bourgeoisie in a revolution. Religion was one of the bourgeoisie's control techniques; it was a component of their ideology.

Lenin reinforced Marx's theory, describing religion as spiritual poison. He claimed that the ruling class cynically used religion to create a magical veil that obscured reality for workers. This is quite similar to the belief that it is an opiate.

According to Louis Althusser, religion is an integral part of the intellectual state machinery. It, like education and the media, transmits the dominant ideology and reinforces false class consciousness. Religious teachings lead the proletariat to believe that the way society is organized is God's plan.

Various theories have been used to account for outbreak of conflicts. However, for the purpose of explaining the waves of violent religious conflicts in Nigeria, the Frustration-Aggression Theory has been adopted. This has been associated with a group of researchers, Dollard, Doob, Miller & Mowrer (1939, p.1) who postulated that man sets out to achieve intended ambitions and other set-out goals, but that when these expectations are not achieved, frustration will set in, which in turn, would lead to aggressive behaviour. The core assumption is that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. To the authors, the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.

Berkowitz, in a revision of the theory, has demonstrated that even though frustration instigates a number of different types of response, one of the most likely of these is aggression (Berkowitz 1980, 59-73). Both however agree that frustration causes aggression, but that when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target.

Given the above, the explanation for aggressive behaviour on the part of adherents of a particular religion in Nigeria can be found in their frustration with certain developments in the state, as shall be discussed later, such as economic, political and other unfulfilled religious injunctions, such as conversion of adherents of other religions in the country. Consequently, the frustration gave vent to the violence that subsequently followed. Research has also shown that the actual perpetrators of the religious violence were often those who felt economically deprived and belonged to the lower echelon of the social ladder. Those became ready and willing tools in the hands of the planners of the violence, partly because of the promise or reward of immediate economic benefits, which they felt schemed out of by the state or government. Under such inducement, they meted out violent aggression on innocent members of the society they could easily target.

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Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Today, religious violence in Nigeria is dominated by the Boko Haram insurgency, which seeks to establish an Islamic state. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the terrorist organization Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and other groups have murdered 62,000 Nigerian Christians.

There are about 182 million people living in Nigeria, most of whom either Muslims or Christians. These two main religions have coexisted amicably throughout history. However, there have been numerous ethno-religious disputes in the nation since independence. Extremist organizations like Boko Haram and extreme Fulani herdsmen have grown in number in recent years, which has led to an upsurge in violent attacks. These acts jeopardize national security and exacerbate already-existing ethno-religious conflicts. To bring Nigeria's population, which is multiethnic and multireligious, is changing must come from both the top and the back of the social hierarchy. Religious harmony as well as economic expansion are necessary for restoring confidence and stabilizing the country.

One way to characterize religious conflict is as 'the struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize or eliminate their rivals' (Abubakar, 2019). This word reflects, in large part, the struggle for political and economic dominance, as well as land and water resources, between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The nation has experienced several religious crises since gaining independence from the British in 1960, and these continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Several examples include the Kafanchan-Kaduna conflict in the 1980s and 1990s; the riots in Bauchi and Kaduna in 2000 and 2001, respectively, brought on by the implementation of Sharia law in those states; and the riots in Jos in 2001 which resulted from an appointment made by the government (Çancı, & Odukoya, 2016). These battles claimed hundreds of lives, and their consequences went beyond state lines.

The conflict between farmers and herders is another example of religious unrest in Nigeria. There are several possible explanations for the rise in violent conflicts between Christian farmers and radical Islamist Fulani herdsmen. One factor is the changing climate. The Fulani are semi-nomadic pastoralists who originated in the country's north, but drought conditions pushed them to migrate south in search of pastures and water. In turn, Christian farmers saw the Fulani, who are occasionally armed, as intruders on their land. The failure of

the government to manage land exacerbates the situation.

Religious Conflict and Economic Development in Nigeria.

Conflicts fuelled by religious extremism are widespread in Nigeria, impeding investment and economic growth. Aside from that, religious differences promote suspicion and animosity, resulting in competitiveness and corruption, all of which have a negative economic impact.

The religious crisis in Nigeria has had far-reaching consequences. It is present in every economic sector. In general, a crisis fosters mistrust, discrimination, insecurity, and sluggish economic growth. This is the situation in Nigeria, where homes valued at billions of naira have been destroyed in addition to needless killings and the maiming of thousands of people. Undoubtedly, the nation has lost a great deal of the labour force and services required to support the expansion of its faltering economy.

The impact of Nigeria's religious problem on the country's international standing is another significant side effect on the country's economic growth. Nigeria is now viewed as a terrorist nation by many nations, which has an impact on our businessmen and women who travel the globe to conduct business. According to Onwumah (2014), Nigeria's religious issue presents the country in a negative light abroad. It portrays our leaders as being weak, gullible, self-centred, and selfish at many levels and in various spheres of life. Under a strong, committed, and altruistic leadership, Nigerian society's diversity and complexity could have been effectively harnessed and directed towards national development initiatives.

Economic growth refers to the creation of money that benefits the community. It is more than just an employment program; it is an investment in expanding your economy and enhancing the prosperity and quality of life for all people, as opposed to community development, which is the process of making a community more habitable and productive. However, economic growth is defined as a consistent increase in the economy's production, often known as Gross Domestic Product (Obute & Koko, 2014). It describes an economy's increased output of goods and services. Economic growth is defined as a rise in real national income/output, whereas economic development is described as an improvement in quality of life and living standards, as measured by literacy, life expectancy, and access to healthcare.

A lack of economic progress and development can result in poverty. Poverty, according to Dauda (2016), is a challenge to all economies, a potential source of political and social instability, and can lead to internal security difficulties and criminal activity. He thinks poverty to be a deficiency and views it theologically as a divine action. Poverty, unemployment, and terrorist activities have had an influence on different sectors of Nigeria's economy, while policy instability and somersaults have discouraged international investment despite the country's vast domestic market and strategic position (Bature, 2016). According to Bature (2016), terrorism in Nigeria derives from widespread unhappiness with poverty.

According to Zamba (2016), legitimate grievances against terrorism in Nigeria have been diluted by banditry, insurgency, abduction, and drug and human trafficking, leaving the country's northeast and other northern regions unstable.

Terrorism in Nigeria is mostly linked to Boko Haram, a self-proclaimed Islamic sect. The Boko Haram terrorist organization is at war with the government over Western education, Sharia law enforcement, and open criminality (Zamba 2016). Boko Haram's operations have a severe impact on Nigeria's economy and foreign direct investment. In 2013, FDI inflows into Nigeria dropped by 21%. Boko Haram's activities have killed around 17,000 people, destroyed property and business premises, and forced the closure of formal schools in the affected areas. Boko Haram's actions have led in the establishment of a shadow economy, which is a weapon used by terrorists to fund their operations and includes underground, covert, or illegal trading in stolen goods, prostitution, gambling, smuggling, and other businesses.

Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Nigerians in the northeast have experienced varying levels of armed conflict since 2009, when the jihadist rebel organization Boko Haram announced plans to establish an Islamic State province in Adamawa, Borno,

and Yobe states. In 2013, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in the region, deploying police and military forces (OHCA 2019).

Following the mass kidnapping of female students in the Chibok region in 2014, the war received widespread international attention, as did the global "Bring Back Our Girls" movement. In 2015, Boko Haram, which was still known as Boko Haram, switched allegiance from Al Qaeda to the Islamic State and renamed themselves Islamic State in West Africa. Despite losing the majority of its former territory in recent years, Boko Haram and its affiliates continue to terrorize the region with military-style offensives and other types of violence, including suicide bombings and kidnappings. The conflict has significantly impeded economic activity and revealed vast socioeconomic differences between the North and South (Stoddard, Harvey, Czwaro, and Breckenridge, 2020).

As of 2019, an estimated 7.1 million people in northeastern Nigeria needed assistance, including 2 million displaced by the conflict, the vast majority of whom live in IDP camps within garrison towns established by the Nigerian military. These military settlements have received primarily humanitarian assistance from international aid organizations. As of late 2019, an estimated 1.24 million people required assistance outside of Nigeria's combat zones but were unable to get humanitarian relief. According to the UN, many people who have fled insurgent-controlled areas are malnourished and claim to have been held hostage by NSAGs for years, with no access to basic necessities and mistreated (OHCA, 2017; 2018).

In 2019, violence in northeastern Nigeria entered its tenth year. Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency and government military response have killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced millions in Lake Chad, which borders Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Although huge military efforts in 2015-2016 were successful in diminishing Boko Haram's geographical reach, the group's methods have proven to be extremely adaptable: attacks in Nigeria's Borno State resumed near the end of 2018 (Maclean, December 28, 2018). As President Muhammadu Buhari enters his second term, the battle in the northeast is far from ended.

Several efforts have been launched to solve the increasing and seemingly insurmountable challenges. These activities have been broadly characterized as three categories: programs to build local conflict prevention and mitigation mechanisms, programs to restore local governance and basic services, and programs to foster social cohesion/reintegrate former combatants (Brechenmacher, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Development of any kind never thrives in a crisis; the government must battle to rid the country of the chronic instability it has caused, because only a tranquil society would have citizens motivated to work toward the Sustainable Development Goals. People who are constantly in flight or danger mode cannot concentrate on facilitating procedures that produce the desired results. No matter how far we progress toward our sustainable development goals, we must recognize that one terrible conflict, such as the one in Syria, will destroy all of our accomplishments (Lawrence, 2018), thus we must strive not only to resolve the crisis on the ground, but also to actively prevent its spread or intensification. It is past time for the world to grasp that a peaceful world is far superior to a violent world, because development is a positive transformation that improves, promotes, and advances well-being and is a direct result of peace. Insecurity is the source of backwardness, which distorts, disfigures, weakens, and impairs his well-being. As a result, peace is essential for SDG development.

In addition, the frequent outbreak of religious upheavals has compelled some nations to issue travel advisories cautioning their nationals against visiting Nigeria due to the potential for sudden and severe religious unrest. Additionally, it traumatizes psychologically individuals who saw their loved ones killed and their properties set on fire. Similar to this, Nigeria has missed out on economic recovery prospects because of mistrust stemming from religious rivalry. Religions, in good faith, intended to unify people, regardless of nationalities or tribes, and to bring peace and stability to the globe. Furthermore, no one who comprehends religious doctrine will be able to relate the tremendous violence against religious missions is present in Nigeria. The study came to the conclusion that societal violence resulting from religious practice in Nigeria should be suppressed via the use of measures such as education, tolerance, conversation, and reconciliation.

This will guarantee that adherents of different religions, Christians, Muslims, and Traditionalists can all live in harmony with one another. Additionally, this would support Nigeria's national recovery of economy, stability, security, and peace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The enforcement of citizens' rights to freedom of worship is vital to rein in abuses could lead to crises and upheavals in religion.
- 2) Citizens should prioritize economic development above all else.
- 3) Prioritizing dialogue is important. Speaking in a dialogue with someone else means that they listen, react, and vice versa. It is important to maintain peaceful coexistence despite religious differences.
- 4) Violent and terrorist acts should not be the solution to social and political unrest.

It is recommended that the religion and the State: A National Policy and Strategy (NPSRS) implement a de-radicalization program aimed at progressively eliminating the terror ideology. Psychological profiling of religious cadres who are still radicalized should also be done. A strategy for the de-radicalization, disarmament, and rehabilitation (DD-RR) of militant religious groups chosen to engage in religious conflict as a career rather than merely being brainwashed should also be included in this program. In this regard, it is advised to build a deradicalization centre akin to the one in Saudi Arabia. Once all religious parties have reached a consensus on these concerns, it will be simple to delegitimize the forces behind religious violence through changes to laws, policies, and the constitution. This is due to the fact that a knowledgeable agreement would exist over the religious acts or inactions that break the law and should be prohibited by all religious communities.

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