

Causes and Implications of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria's Political System

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to identify the causes and implications of religious conflicts in Nigeria's political system as well as proffer strategies to avoid future occurrence. This study adopts the survey research design. The population of the study comprises all Christians and Moslems living in Zaria, Kaduna State in Nigeria. Personal observations and questionnaire were the major means of data collection. Out of the 65 copies of questionnaire engaged in the study, only 56 copies were retrieved and used for the analysis. To achieve the aim of the study, two research hypotheses were formulated. While data collected for the study were presented on tables and responses taking the form of a five point likert scale, the hypotheses were tested using one way analysis of variance. Major findings of the study reveal that the causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria include failure to move with change, conflicting doctrines, methods of conversion, utterances of religious leaders, and clothing of political objectives with religion, among others. The implications of religious conflict as reveal by the study include creation of mistrust among federating units, low productivity, job insecurity, migration, over population. Based on the foregoing, it is proposed that the issue of religious conflicting doctrines should be addressed by religious bodies who should meet on regular bases. Also, government should respond quickly to curtail conflicts and should not ignore any act that might cause conflict.
Keywords: Religious conflict, Nigeria, beliefs, doctrines

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural phenomenon or an inherent part of social existence unavoidable in human interaction in any society. It could be disagreement resulting from different interests, opinions, ideas, ideologies, attitude, orientations and so on. It could result as a mere differences of ideas, interest, viewpoints or it could manifest in the form of violent demonstration, riot or war. Conflict becomes a problem when it is based on religious beliefs which manifest in violence. This results from the inability of the religious parties to respect and accommodate each other and failure to resolve differences amicably. In Nigeria, there are two major religions with a proportional strength of followers which have been in competition for superiority. These religions are Christianity and Muslim. They have different signs and symbols, methods of conversion and other clear differences which has brought hatred among its members and the nations at large. According to Olupona (1992), these individual religions are characterized by

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sharp subdivision of the world into clear cut dichotomies; the “good” and the “bad”; the “we” versus “they”; the “saved” and the “lost”; the “brethren” versus the rest of the “world; and the “fidels” versus “infidels”, who are expected to share in the life hereafter. Fellow believers are seen as co-heirs to the heavenly kingdom and the peace of paradise, non-believers are seen as condemned people who are automatically destined for hell-fire and eternal damnation. Olupona went further to say that religion is potent brotherhood in Nigeria, displaying rather efficacious acquired family relationships on earth. Like exclusive clubs, cliques or cults, members offer each other immediate help, favours and considerations. There is truism in the postulations of Olupona as religious differences and fanaticism hampers mutual trust and confidence among members of each group. Such fanaticism brings confrontations, threat and clashes which makes national objectives unattainable.

The crux of the belief of Christian and Moslem religions

According to John in Watch Tower (1990) all religions believe that man cannot stand alone. He is vitally related with and even dependent on powers in nature and society external to himself. Dimly or clearly, he knows that he is not an independent centre of force capable of standing apart from the world. An important feature of religion is a longing for value in life, a belief that life is not accidental and meaningless and this search for meaning leads to faith in a power greater than human, the universal consciousness. This is the only way to maintain spiritual health and lead man closer to God. Going further, Watch Tower (1990) posits that the principal objective for the emanation of Moslem religion is the confession of faith, or the shahadah which every Moslem knows by heart. “La ila illa Allah; Mohammed rasul Allah” which means, no god but Allah and Mohammed the messenger.” These teachings are in the Quran and the Hadith. Where Mohammed example was not sufficient, the Quran advocates a holy war or Jihad. Sura 9:5 in Watch Tower (1990) said that where ever the idolaters are found, they should be slain, lay in ambush for them, but if they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allows them to go their way. On the other hand, the Bible, the book of Christians in Watch Tower (1990) teaches that Jesus was born of a virgin; His birth was instigated by the Holy Spirit. He was both man and God (Mathew 1:23) this depicts that the aim for the emanation of Christianity is for redemption through a mediator between God and man. Olupona (1992) postulates that religions are potent brotherhoods, displaying rather efficacious acquired family relationships on earth. Like exclusive clubs, cliques or cults, members offer one another immediate help, favours and considerations.

Causes of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Several factors lead to religious conflicts in Nigeria. Some of them are:

Failure to move with change: The real tragedy of religion is that it fails to move along with times. It is not progressive as it is driven by displeasure for modernization.

For instance here is the Boko Haram which is against Western culture, blaming the spread of materialism and capitalism as a major cause for decrease in morality in religion.

Conflicting Doctrines: The views of Islam and Christianity is radically different. They both have two different Holy books and two founders. Islam permits polygamy and makes provision for contract marriage while Christianity voids polygamy. This is one of the divergent views of their radical differences.

Methods of Conversion: Religion goes extra mile to evangelize for converts so as to have a dominant population. The desperate style to convert people can lead to conflict. Sometimes a particular religion can be imposed on people without credence to their faith. Agence France Presse (1991) says that there were violent riots in Kano on October 14, 1991. The riots were reportedly sparked off by Muslims demonstrators in protest against a visit by a German preacher Reinhard Bonnke who had allegedly managed to convert some Muslims to Christian Faith. As many as one hundred people reportedly died and house and vehicles were burnt down during the rampage.

Utterances of Religious Elites: Reckless utterances by religious elites or leaders can spark off conflict. The recent utterance credited to Apostle Suleiman of Omega Fire Ministry to kill any Fulani Herdsman trying to attack his church is enough to trigger violence. In Yalmaturu Deba of Gombe State, a religious leader accused a Muslim of deviating from expectancy by marrying many wives. According to him, it was a sin. The utterance brought maiming and burning of houses. The bloody clash claimed over two hundred lives.

Clothing/Political Objectives with Religion: Elites and other religious nationalists view religion as closely tied to their lives and any threat to it is a threat to their existence. These groups of people seek a political forum to hide and perpetrate evil so cheerfully due to their conviction. This shows how people find it difficult to separate religion from politics.

Illiteracy: The majority of religious fanatics are not schooled and this makes it easy for them to be bent. Believing whatever they are been told, and ready to do whatever they are been told to do.

Signs and Symbols: Religious signs and symbols are always used to forward ethnic cause. Yusuf (1982) says that hypocrisy, corruption and religious bigotry have all conspired to rob Nigeria of any regional leprosy. The misuse of religious signs and symbols can be a major cause of conflicts.

Poverty: This is a persistent problem that brings all types of evil in the society as a poor man does not have regard for any law governing the society. The poor is always unhappy and can brazenly destroy lives and property. The rich which is the “HAVE” can easily influence the poor or “HAVE NOT” to act under religion to implement their will.

Fight for Dominance: Christians and Muslims fight regularly to dominate or suppress each other. They use every available radical means as a necessary tool to silence those they see as their opponents.

Delay in Federal Government Management of Conflict: The way Government manages conflict can either lead to more conflicts or less conflict. They are slow most times in response or entirely ignore actions, acts or speech which might bring about full blown conflict. In January 2008, some Shi'ites blocked the convoy of Emir of Zazzau in Zaria, Kaduna State because they were celebrating their New Year. Federal Government did not respond immediately until it resulted into an ugly situation. Peter (2012) says that to remove discrimination for one group may affect rights of another group; simply replacing the rights of one group with the rights of another is no solution. It perpetuates discrimination in ways where the reconciliation of opposing demands is seen to be of interest to all groups as well as the general concern of the State.

Implications of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria Federalism

Innocent (2013) posits that religion with its moral principles and values are expected to direct societies and the lives of its adherents. Christianity and Islam, the two adopted alien faiths in Nigeria, have from their entrant into the society made social welfare services and educational development an important component of their activities. What is worrisome as he noted is the violence associated with this proselytizing religions. From Maitasine uprising of the 1980s to Boko Haram of today, it has been violence associated with religious beliefs that is almost bringing government to her knees, while peace and security remain elusive. Ezenwaji (2003) observes that religion has tried to undermine and make a joke of the country's constitution and in the process create a state of confusion and lawlessness in the country. The implications are discussed hereunder;

Mistrust among the Federating Units: Nigeria which has thirty-six (36) federating units or States has a high level of intolerance. It has wounds that cannot be healed. Any move by any religious group irrespective of how sincere it claims to be, is easily misinterpreted because everyone is suspicious of each other. This has affected free flow of communication due to the fact that any information sent out might trigger crises. Muslim States now associate with one another, and non-Muslim or Christian States in turn associate with their kind. Olupona (1992) opines that religious differences have high potentials for separating people from one another, many times, a certain fanaticism is associated with religious beliefs which exclude social relations with people of different religion, or hamper mutual trust and confidence when such relations happens to exist.

Low Productivity: Religious laws and crises are so severe that it affects workers motivation in Nigeria. People are no longer productive because they are not in a safe environment. This is altering organizational goal and Nigeria as a whole is suffering the

repercussion in the form of recession. Productivity is now low in the nation and the masses are suffering from such religious recklessness. Even able bodied men and women who would have contributed to the productivity of the nation are killed in religious war. Kassam (2010) says that violence leaves us with various forms of retardation and underdevelopment resulting from the destruction of lives and property.

Job Insecurity: Christians and Muslims find it difficult to relate with each other. They do not find it funny to work in an office with each other. Thus, each employer of labour of any of the religion prefers to employ people of their faith, thereby waving competency. According to Odey (2000), during the heat of organization of Islamic Conference, people like Tam David West, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi and others who did not support the signing in of Nigeria into the conference of Islamic Nations as a member country were all prematurely retired. Any slightest religious provocation or unresolved argument leads to loss of job. Most recent is the close down of Federal Government University in Dutsin-ma in Katsina State as a result of riots arising from accusation of employment of more Christians in the institution by the former Vice Chancellor. This incident has caused serious tension in the State. This perhaps is due to the fact that the two religions see themselves as being loyal to different Gods. If they see themselves as being loyal to same deity or God there would not have been much problem as it is experienced today.

Migration: As a result of consistent conflict, people in order to save their lives, migrate to more or relative peaceful States or places. The conflict zones become thinly populated. This affects their level of manpower. The remnants that refuse to migrate from such conflict zones or States become uncultured because they are not mixed up with other cultures, and it is a known fact that when a man becomes too far from reality, he becomes a beast. Whenever he travels out, he becomes culture shock as he or she will be surprised to find out that things are done in a way far different from their way of life.

Over Population: Migration from conflict zones to nearby or relatively peaceful States or places makes such states over populated and unhealthy, slums are built. Those migrant who do not have a readily source of income might turn to bandits and elude their host community or state of sleep. Their frustrations will be so visible that one wonders why they should transfer their aggression on those who in no way contributed to their woes. Again, more weight will be added to the existing social amenities of the host State. This type of migrant are not good citizens and vandalizing government property will be to them a way of getting back to government who refuse to be there for them when they were persecuted.

Lack of Trust in God: Since religion tends to fail man in showing him the part to God, mankind in Nigeria tends to lose confidence in religion and God. This is the major reason for crimes, corruption and the like. Religion has created two sets of men,

those aspiring for saintliness and the other majority pursuing inhumanity and terrorism. The majority pursuing inhumanity and terrorism has produced so much massacres and conflicts than the goodness produced by those pursuing saintliness.

The theoretical framework of analysis is the conflict and Group theory. Gluckman and Coser postulated the conflict theory. They conceptualize conflict as normal, widespread and a little positive to change or cause some change while not displacing the social order as such. The theory is divided into Marxian and Non Marxian. The conflict theory played a major role in this work due to the level of struggle for superiority, conversion, existence, and so on of both Christian and Moslems in most part of northern States. Group theory of Grift is the bringing together of people on a place or conducting people in some way as man only exist in groups of its kind. Group theory advocates for struggle where a stronger group pulls the weaker one to their side depending on the largeness or strength of coercion of the dominant group. It is the group theory that causes conflict in northern part of the nation. In the light of the foregoing, this study is set to look at the causes and implications of religious conflicts in Nigeria. The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

H₀1: Harsh method of conversion by religions is not a cause for religious conflict.

H₀2: The use of diplomacy in handling religious matters cannot help in curbing Religious conflict.

METHOD

The principal aim of this research is to examine the causes and implications of religious conflicts in Nigeria's political system. The survey research design was employed in the study. The population of the study comprises all Christians and Moslems living in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 65 respondents from the population. Personal observations and questionnaire were the major sources of data for this study. Out of the 65 participants administered questionnaire, only 56 copies of the questionnaire were successfully filled and returned giving a response rate of 86.15%. The responses were structured using a five point likert scale of agree, strongly agree, indifferent, disagree and strongly disagree. Also, Yes or No response patterns were used to address certain issues in the questionnaire. Data collected for the study were presented on tables using frequency count and simple percentage. A one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also used to treat the hypotheses formulated for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the table 1, there is inequality in the sampling unit. Christian respondents are 37.5% of the returned questionnaire and the others are Muslims with 62.5% of the respondents. From the analysis on table 2, 25% of the respondents strongly believe that the stipulated factors are causes of religious conflict. While 50% of the respondents

agree with the stated factors, only 16% and 9% of the respondents respectively disagree and strongly disagree. This simply implies that the majority of the respondents agree with the factors stipulated on table 2 as causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Table 3 shows that 76.76% of the respondents strongly agree, 7.14 % agree that there are known implications of the stipulated variables while another 7.14% were indifferent. 5.36% of the respondents disagree and 3.6% strongly disagree with the stipulated factors. The implied position is that 84% of the respondents agree that Low productivity, job insecurity and lack of trust in God, mistrust among federating units, migration and over population are the known implications of religious conflicts in Nigeria’s political system.

The analysis on table 4 shows that 84% of the respondents are of the opinion that the use of modern technology in religion, enactment of strict laws, regular meetings of religious bodies, solving the problems of conflicting doctrine and the use of diplomacy are possible the steps to be taken to curb religious conflict in Nigeria. On the other hand, less than 10% of the respondents have divergent opinion. However, this implies that if the stated steps are judiciously followed, religious conflicts in Nigeria will be managed effectively and efficiently. As shown on table 5, 78.57% of the respondents are not aware of any clear cut method adopted to curb religious conflict in Nigeria, while only 21.43% say they are aware of defined method adopted to curb religious conflict. The implication as revealed on the tabulation depicts that the method used to curb religious conflict in Nigeria is not successful, hence, the constant re-occurrence of religious conflict in the nation.

Table 1: Religious Classification of participants

Religion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Christians	21	37.5
Muslims	35	62.5
Total	56	100

Source: Survey, 2016

Table 2: What are the causes of religious conflict in Nigeria?

Variables		SA	A	Ind	D	SD	Total
Conflicting doctrines, reckless utterances by religious leaders, poverty and harsh method of conversion	F	14	28	-	9	5	56
	%	25	50	-	16	9	100

F = Frequency; % = Percentage; SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree, Ind. = Indifferent, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree **Source:** Survey, 2016

Table 3: What are the implications of religious conflict in Nigeria Federalism?

Variables		SA	A	Ind	D	SD	Total
Low productivity, job insecurity and lack of trust in God, mistrust among federating units, migration and over population.	F	43	4	4	3	2	56
	%	76.76	7.14	7.14	5.36	3.6	100

F = Frequency; % = Percentage; SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree, Ind. = Indifferent, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree. **Source:** Survey, 2016

Table 4: What are the possible steps to be taken to curb religious conflict?

Variables	F	SA	A	Ind	D	SD	Total
Use of modern technology in religion, enactment of strict laws, regular meetings of religious bodies, solving the problems of conflicting doctrine and the use of diplomacy.	56	43	4	4	3	2	56
	%	76.76	7.14	7.14	5.36	3.6	100

F = Frequency; % = Percentage; SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree, Ind. = Indifferent, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.

Source: Survey, 2016

Table 5: Curbing Religious conflicts in Nigeria

	F	YES	NO	Total
Has there been any defined method adopted to curb conflict in Nigeria?	56	12	44	56
	%	21.43	78.57	100
Is the method used to curb religious conflict in Nigeria Successful?	56	27	29	56
	%	48.21	51.79	100

F = Frequency; % = Percentage

Source: Survey, 2016

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

(H₀) Harsh method of Conversion by religious is not a cause for religious conflict.

Table I	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifference	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
	14	28	—	9	4	
$\sum X$	14	28	—	9	5	56
X	14	28	—	9	5	
	1.5125	1989	—	247.5	84	2322

$$TSS = \sum X^2 - (\sum X_1)^2/n = 2322 - (56)^2/5$$

$$TSS = 1694.8 = X = 56/5 = 11.2$$

$$TRSS = \sum nj(X_j - X)^2 \text{ i.e. } j = 1$$

$$((14 - 11.2)^2 + (28 - 11.2)^2 + (9 - 11.2)^2 + (5 - 11.2)^2)$$

$$TRSS = 333.52$$

$$ESS = TSS - TRSS = 1694.8 - 333.52 = 1361.28$$

Source	SS	df	ms	F = Ratio
Treatment	333.52	(5-1)4	83.38	
Error	1361.28	(5-5)1	1361.28	0.061
Total	1694.8	5		

$$F .05 (4, 1) = 0.02$$

From the table above, it is seen that the F calculated is greater than the F table. As such, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the harsh method of conversion by religions is a cause of religious conflicts in Nigeria.

H₀ 1: The use of diplomacy in handling religious matters cannot help in curbing religious conflict. To test the hypotheses, question No.5 table VII shall be used.

Table II	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifference	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
	43	4	4	3	2	
$\sum X$	43	4	4	3	2	56
X	43	4	4	3	2	
	14.975	110	110	90	60	385

$$TSS = \sum X^2 - (\sum x_i)^2/n = 385 - (56)^2/5$$

$$TSS = 242.2$$

$$X = 56/5 = 11.2$$

$$TRSS = \sum nj (Xj - X)^2$$

$$TRSS = 1$$

$$(43 - 11.2)^2 + (4 - 11.2)^2 + (4 - 11.2)^2 + (3 - 11.2)^2 + (2 - 11.2)^2$$

$$(1011.24 + 51.84 + 51.84 + 67.24 + 84.64) = 1266.8$$

$$ESS = TSS - TRSS$$

$$242 - 1266.8 = - 1024.8$$

Sources	SS	df	ms	F - Ratio
Treatment	1266.8	(5 - 1)4	316.7	
Error	-1024.8	(5 - 5)1	-1024.8	-708.1
Total	242	5	-1024.8	
		F . 0.05 (4, 1) = 0.02		

As shown above, the F calculated is greater than F table. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and the conclusion is that the use of diplomacy in handling religious matters can help in curbing religious conflict in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So far, there is no visible step taken by Nigerian government to curb religious conflict. This is why there is reoccurring issues of conflict in the Northern part of the nation. The aim of religion in Nigeria has been defeated. Some have seen it as money making venture and others have decided to cling to it to perpetrate their evil act. However, according to Ahmed in Jonah, *et al* (2014), we should all allow each other to practice our religion the way it is in our holy book. Similarly, Kazaure (1998) avers that all religions should co-exist peacefully with a high degree of tolerance. Nigeria is one and we should tolerate each religious practice to avoid conflicts and heating up the political system. Consequently, to curb Religious Conflict in Nigeria, the following are suggested.

- Religious sects must be encouraged to embrace the changing nature of things as the universe is moving from locus to locus.
- There must be serious laws which spells out adequate and implementable punishment for anyone who instigates or participate in religious conflict.

- The issue of conflicting doctrines should be redressed and religious leaders should be having regular meetings to iron out differences.
- Harsh method of conversion should be discouraged because everyone has the right to accept or reject any religion.
- Reckless utterances of both political and religious leaders should be guarded against because of the power in the tongue. There should be employment opportunities as most of the religious warlords do not have any job to keep them busy.
- Education should be encouraged and be made compulsory for all and problem solving should be through an open exchange of information and proper redress of differences so that none will feel dominated.
- Finally, Government should respond quickly to curtail conflicts and should not ignore any act that can cause conflict in the political system on Nigeria.

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