A Nation In Disarray: Communal Conflicts And Socio-Political Stability In Nigeria

[1]Dr. Lucky Emeka Nwaoburu; [2]Dr. Lauretta Adaobi Onyekwere & [3*]Dr. Anthony Egobueze

[1,3]Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

[2]Department of Sociology, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

*anthony.egobueze@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This paper investigated communal conflicts and socio-political stability in Nigeria. The Nigerian state has witnessed a lot of cataclysms arising from misunderstanding or disarticulation of interest between or among communities and this has affected the political stability of the State. Methodologically, the study adopted secondary data which was analyzed through content analysis. The Frustration and Aggression theory was adopted as the framework for analysis. The study observed that land disputes, chieftaincy rivalries, natural resources, elections, and others are the causes of communal conflicts in Nigeria and recommended amongst others that the Government should acquire any parcel of land in dispute to build public facilities, such as health centre, school, amusement parks, market, and any other social infrastructure.

Keywords: Communal, Conflict, socio-political, State, Stability

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a fundamental part of human existence and pervades human social settings, leading to structural imbalance. In every society where people relate and interact, there is bound to be conflict (Adegbami & Adeoye, 2021). It lives in the polity, causing political instability. The economic cost of conflict is very high, due to its impact on society (Mercy Corps. 2020). Conflict also appears to have been part of the soil resulting in land disputes and clashes as well as cultural misgivings. Injustice, denial, or marginalization results in conflict. The concept of conflict or conflict management and resolution has led to terminologies such as peacekeeping, conflict prevention, third-party intervention, mediation, preventive diplomacy, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding as measures to curb this social menace.

The implications of conflict in Nigeria are too far-reaching to be ignored; for the inhabitants of this area, there are constant communal hazards and security threats, land disputes and chieftaincy war, cultism and youth violence as well as conflict related to the oil-led development. The Nigerian government also has a share of the impacts of the Rivers State Communal conflict as, it lost over N 150.5 Billion in revenue, just in eight years (Nwankwo and Ezeobi, 2008). This is only in Rivers State, not the entire nation.

There is no way communal conflict and its resolutions could be ignored, considering its negative effects on society, and the deplorable conditions it has made man pass through. Under the circumstances of economic scarcity, and electoral violence, disputes primarily over land resulting in inter-communal conflicts might be frequent but can be settled peacefully and fast when the government is not partial.

The increasing incidences of inter-communal conflicts in Nigeria have created unmitigated and destructive cases of cultism, unemployment/poverty, violent politics, the proliferation of small arms

and light weapons, drug abuse, chieftaincy tussle, and inequality to name but a few. Until these inter-communal conflicts are eliminated or curbed to the lowest level, the issue of economic development and the socio-political space will continue to experience unmitigated instability in Nigeria. As a result, it becomes only pertinent and timely to carry out this study, on communal conflicts and socio-political stability in Nigeria.

This paper seeks to examine, social contradictions of political structure, variables in land dispute, conflict of tribalism and ethnic cleavages, and conflict in petro-dollar business. All these are major causes of communal conflicts in Nigeria. It also reviews measures to ameliorate or eliminate such conflicts to guarantee socio-political stability and engender development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the Frustration - Aggression theory propounded by Dollard (1939) and further developed by Miller (1948) and Berkovits (1969). The theory opines that aggression is the result of blocking, or frustrating, a person's effort to attain a goal. Frustration - Aggression theory states that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. In attempts to explain the cause of violence, Dollard (1939) posited that frustration causes aggression and when the sources of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced into an innocent target. Aggression is defined as an action with the intent to harm and can be physical or non-physical. Frustration on the other hand is the condition that exists when a goal-response suffers interference. The failure to obtain a desired or expected goal leads to aggressive behavior. In political science, the frustration-aggression theory has been used to explain violence and conflicts, especially wars.

Mbah (2014) identified four mediating factors which influence aggression. These are:
1. Magnitude of frustration
2. Aggression cues
3. Arbitrariness of frustration, and
4. Cognitive and emotional processes (p.128).

As to the principal hypothesis, Dollard (1939) stated that the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.

The revised Frustration-Aggression hypothesis maintains that first, frustration instigates behavior that may or may not be hostile or aggressive and secondly, any hostile or aggressive behavior that occurs is caused by frustration. In other words, frustration is not a sufficient, but a necessary condition, for hostility or aggressive behaviour. However, the theory of aggression as developed by Dollard (1939), specified that motivational strength toward aggression is a function of:
a. The reinforcement value of the frustrated goals response
b. The degree of frustration of this goal response and
c. The number of frustrated response sequences.

This theory is indeed germane to this study because, most communities in the Nigerian State have over time suffered various degrees of intimidating, unjust, and frustrating treatments from successive governments or regimes, the multinational corporations, local giant companies, and politicians that milk the economy. These frustrating treatments, therefore, have led to the thwarting of great expectations of the indigenous people of Nigeria, especially, the destruction of their lands, water, and air and several killings of the people. The manipulation of the electoral processes, culminating in the fraudulent stealing of the people's mandate, and thwarting the voters' expectations of choosing their leaders, had all resulted in frustrating the people to violently taking up arms to defend their mandate, like in the case in most of the country during the 2019 General Election of 23rd February 2019. So, violence is generated by rising frustration due to unfulfilled expectations of free and fair elections. This led to voter apathy. The expectations of some communities in Nigeria were thwarted and still thwarted and as it were, the people experienced a profound sense of dissatisfaction, fury, and anger.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF KEY TERMS
Conflict
Conflict is a common phenomenon in every society, and affects us as individuals, families, communities, organizations, nations, and states. Indeed, conflict does affect every individual group's behavior (Aja-AkpuruAja, 2007). Egobueze (2023) perceives conflict as "a disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility (p.168)". This is usually propelled by the opposition of one party to another in an attempt to achieve an objective different from that of the other party. He further opines that conflict is a state of discord cost by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests between people. It can result in stress or tension and negative feelings between disputants, to mention but a few.

Conflict may be seen as a result of a dynamic relationship between interested parties, struggling to gain control of valuable resources. According to (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019; Otite, 2001), conflict arises when individuals or groups in a defined environment pursue divergent goals, interests, and ambitions when there is a change in the social environment, for instance, the discovery of new resources from development in the physical environment, a fertile ground for conflict is created. The ensuing conflict usually involves individuals and groups who are interested in using the new resources to achieve their goals.

The concept, of conflict, has been variously conceptualized over time; Coser (1956), opines that conflict is "a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the opponents aim to actualize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Conflict occurs when competing groups, goals, objectives, needs, or values clash aggressively, although not necessarily violence (p.8)".

The conflict has remained a dominant feature of modern democracies because of the lack of service delivery by the state to the citizens, the unhealthy rivalry of the ruling elites for access to political and economic power, and widespread corruption (Egobueze, 2016). Nations are almost sliding to self-destruction as a result of conflicts; civil conflict has become the dominant mode of violence in the post-code war era.

Put differently, conflict, though has its denotation when considered as a single word, but its connotation, which may convey factors of underdevelopment may be pursued, conflict, a point of movement of history could be located at various levels of human social interests, and could be sharpened by power. All be it, every conflict can emanate from associations between persons and may escalate to national conflict if such persons represent nations. However, conflict could be located at the family, workplace, community, national, regional, and global levels.

Folarin (1998) identifies the following as sources of conflict:
1. Competition over goals and interests that cannot be shared.
2. Usurpation or attempt to usurp the goals of one component by another component of a society.
3. Inconsistencies in goals, while allowance may be made for pockets of indeterminacies in all human goals, too many unjustifiable inconsistencies in the goals set by individuals or groups in a society may become a source of conflict.
4. Scarcity or inadequacy of resources to meet the needs of the various communities and components.
5. Communication breakdown.

The author further observes that other scholars have proposed several categories of conflict. He considers his four-fold categorization to be the simplest. According to him, conflict could be divergent, symmetrical, complementary, and parallel:
1. Divergent conflict: a divergent conflict occurs when every member or group within the society is practically pursuing individual goals that are different from the corporate goal of the society, and which are difficult to reconcile with the extant goals. Consequent to the failure to agree, the society ends up with not just two factions, but several. In recent Rivers State and Niger Delta crises, not all the abductors are freedom fighters. Several groups have been responsible for kidnapping motivated possibly by payment of ransom rather than with the struggle for development and financial freedom. In this case, the area ends up having many factions who may not even be interested in the resolution of the crises.

2. Symmetrical conflict: this type of conflict arises when cooperation is hindered by the pursuit of the same goal by two or more separate entities or groups. Due to the indivisibility of the goal, there is a breakdown in the existing relationship.

3. Complementary conflict: this type of conflict is a product of a misinterpretation of the goals or intentions of the party by another. Though the goals of one group complement those of the other, they are mistakenly perceived as being contradictory or opposed to one another. There have been several clashes between the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police Force. Though the goals of these forces are complementary, they erroneously perceive each as antagonists.

4. Parallel conflict: in this type of conflict, each party reserves the right to make its decision and execute it. For instance, while labor unions reserve the right to call for strike action and manage it, the management of an organization also has the legitimate right to take all lawful steps to ensure the security of its property. The extent to which such rights and powers are exercised, however, depends on several factors, such as the personality of each participant and the historical perspective of the existing relationships among the parties. Parallel conflicts are relatively harmless, in so far as each of the parties recognizes the limits of its rights and powers and does not go beyond them (p. 50).

Indeed, the Nigerian has witnessed a plethora of conflicts, this has been significantly due to the fragility of the federal structure with weak institutions. The institutional failures have not only exacerbated conflicts but have heightened subnational revolts and uproars. The Niger Delta uprising still rages, and the same is the Buko Haram insurgency, and even kidnapping, pastoral conflicts, and Indigenous People of Biafra imbroglio. The socio-economic loss to conflicts in Nigeria is enormous.

Communal conflict

Communal conflict is seen as a violent conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity. Communal conflicts may result in violence, which in most cases have underpinned the currency of happenings in most communities in Nigeria. Violent conflict refers to the fact that the parties use lethal ferocity to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resources, such as a piece of land, source of economic wealth, natural resources, or local political power. This follows a generally accepted conceptualization of armed conflict. The groups involved are non-state groups, meaning that neither actor controls the state and armed forces (although state actors may be involved as important supporting actors in a communal conflict). The cases of Tiv and Jekun in Taraba State, Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra State, Ife and Modakeke in Osun State, and Okrika and Eleme, among others are instructive. Some of these conflicts are associated with identity crises because unity is undermined.

Some scholars may equate the concept of communal identity with ethnic or religious identity, but as conceived here, the definition is purposefully left more open, since group identity can be considered as socially constructed rather than a static phenomenon. "Instead, communal identity is conceptualized as subjective group identification based on, for instance, a common history, a common culture, or common core values Gurr, (2000: p. 4-5, 16-20)." However, the concept of communal conflict is further narrowed down to communal disputes, regional wars and or ethnic confrontations, and perhaps, religious riots. All of these have a common property of causing social, moral, infrastructural, political, and religious decadence in society. On the other hand, it builds up suspicion, mistrust, and lack of confidence, insecurity among actors works of life. In general, the causes of some national problems have always been regional disputes narrowed down to cultural and historical differentiations. Communities have often carried the incidence of cultural and historical lineage so far and this also causes conflicts. An aggregate of these communities with the same incidence of cultural history constitutes a segment of a region, if not the region at large. Regions carry the burden of communities and regional burdens are communal burdens. Therefore, regional conflicts are communal conflicts, even when such a region has cultural differentials. Therefore Miriam (2009) in Otite and Olawole (2004, pp. 142-143) argued that "differences in culture and background by regions and religions often manifest obvious conflict (pp. 142-143)".

Conflicts arise from land ownership, defense of community pride, property, and people. Example of this is the Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra state, and Abara and Odufor in Etche Local Government

Area of Rivers State. The cause of their conflict has been the protection of their ancestral property. Conflict in the Southern part of Nigeria has one unique nature-inter-communal scuttles, which is a case of disagreements between two or more groups exerting certain differences over region and interest. Some of these disputes are associated with ownership of farmland, fishing ponds, oil deposits, and solid mineral deposits. Communal conflict is often catastrophic in nature, very intense, and as destructive as major civil wars and even more deep-rooted and creates deep-seated resentments.

Socio-political stability
According to Sofiri (2007), the concept of political stability is very controversial. He argued that a first broad definition refers to the absence of domestic civil conflict and widespread violence. In this sense, a country could be considered rid of instability when no systematic attacks on persons or property take place within its boundaries. Secondly, classical interpretation equates stability with government longevity. Thirdly, political stability draws on the lack of structural change, that is, the absence of internally or externally induced change in the basic configuration of a polity. Political stability covers four dimensions: stable government, stable political system, internal law, and external stability. These four dimensions are sufficient for the explanation of political stability.
Political instability means giving an insight into political stability as the propensity of a government collapse, either because of conflicts or because of rampant competition between various political parties. According to Ricardo (2010), political stability is an essential ingredient for economic growth because it enhances productivity, as well as the development of human and physical resources for development.
Political instability as a concept develops along four themes; namely; government, political system, external environment, as well as order. The government is crucial to stability and economic development in a country because it holds the responsibility of developing legislation. A country's socio-political system develops according to the directive given by the government through a constitution. In achieving socio-political stability in a country, it is also important to ensure that both the internal and external environments of the government are safe and secure.

Communal Conflicts and socio-political stability
Conflict-torn communities and states have over time been said to have experienced harsh social conditions, economic underdevelopment, and political quagmire. Such communities also experience unparalleled deprivations, hunger, and abject penury (Olagbaju & Awosusi, 2019). Such deplorable conditions are indeed a serious concern as the immediate and remote causes of these conflicts; however, they cannot be equated with the harsh outcome of these problems. According to Faleti (2005), in some cases where conflict has degenerated into the point of crisis, it is common that those involved will even find it difficult to remember what led to the initial disagreement. Starvation, famine, and eventual death are often more effects of conflict.
According to Ibeano (2006), "Peace is the absence of war, and logical extension war is the absence of peace (p.3)". Peace will exist in a society devoid of war; peace is whole, resulting in justice, development, respect, and tolerance between people. The State is vested with the power to protect lives and properties. Given this seeming importance of the State, the socio-political environment of the state needs to be safe. Most communities in Nigeria face a are in conflict, which undermines social order. Thus, the environment and lives of citizens of most of the communities are destroyed, therefore slowing down any form of development in the communities.
Nigeria, before the contemporary and ongoing democratization process, had experienced a comparative and relatively peaceful condition capable of mutually integrating forces of tribes, ethnic groups (Nwaoburu, 2023), communities, and religions. However, in the wake of the present epoch, the tension and violence of ethnic militias, especially in the context of the last two decades provides additional evidence of the conflictual ethnic and regional identity in the construction of state power. Put differently, in the predominantly Yoruba-speaking South-West region of Nigeria, an ethnic militia: Odua people's Congress (OPC) has emerged to articulate what it called a Yoruba agenda within the autonomy and the restructuring of the Nigerian federation along ethnic lines. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB) and the Indigenous

People of Biafra (IPOB), feed on the alleged marginalization of the Ibo-speaking people of south-east Nigeria, are asking for independence from the Ibo-speaking population. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, of which Rivers State is considered the epicenter, provides a classical example of the unfortunate tendency to resort to the ethnic platform to resist the political domination of overbearing central state power and to also press their demands. Therefore not surprisingly, coinciding with the growing influence of the activities of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), also within, communities in Rivers State and the mobilization of international opinion, a series of inter-ethnic violence broke out between the Ogonis and their neighbors; the Ogoni-Adoni conflict, the Ogoni-Okrika conflict, the Egbesu Boys agitation, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) used as a conduit by the power elites through oil theft and petrol-business, a source that underdevelops the state and Nigeria at large. This is imperative to this study, as the attitude of political elites mobilizing their tribes and ethnic extraction violently has also permeated into the very fabric of states. The political power-seeking elites mobilize various militant groups in their areas to manipulate and weaken the opposition. Ibeanu, (2001), points out the recurrent pattern of violence and local responses, pointing to the willingness of local communities to be crafted into the agenda of domination and exploitation fostered by the alliance between the state and alliance business. It points to direct state involvement or inducement for communal conflict. However, it is the willingness that is driven by the class and material interests of individuals in response to the deepening crisis of material production (Nwaoburu, 2023). The consequences of all these are that different ethnic-cultural interest groups are pitched against each other in deadly confrontations. Even more worrisome is that in some cases, it is cumbersome to identify who owns what, forcing groups in conflict to deploy or even twist history in the contestation of identity and claims.

As noted earlier, communal conflict is a situation where individuals or groups will and employ every means to outweigh each other towards having possession of a community's resources. The following are a handful of factors usually responsible for conflict in the communities.

    i) Land dispute/boundary disputes
    ii) Chieftaincy tussles
    iii) Elections
    iv) Cultism
    v) Natural resources
    vi) Environmental degradation and pollution resulting from the activities of Multinational and Local Companies
    vii) Government bias/marginalization.

The prevalence of the above-listed cases, basically makes the community vulnerable to conflict, thereby creating a state of political instability.

Political stability, in a nutshell, is a situation where there is the public continual support and unalloyed cooperation with government policies and programmes. A government is accountable obeys the rule of law, and practically enjoys political stability. Any community bedeviled with conflict faces, unemployment, youth restiveness, poverty, social disarticulation, retardation of economic development, and political instability. Therefore communities, the government, and other stakeholders should endeavor to make the communities conflict-free.

CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Egobueze (2023) observes that "Nigeria as a State has a lot of diversity which are consequential to meaningful cohesion and peacebuilding in the State (p.179)". Since independence till date, several conflicts have occurred in Nigeria, and these conflicts left harrowing experiences. Some of the consequences of the conflicts are:

    i) Loss of life
    ii) Displacement of people
    iii) Destruction of property
    iv) Destruction of the local economy
    v) retardation of infrastructural development
    vi) Destruction of foreign direct investment and local investments
    vii) Refugee crisis

viii)   Deployment of socioeconomic resources to peace-building initiatives

ix) Increase in poverty

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In considering communal conflict and its effect on the socio-political stability in Nigeria, it is glaring those communal conflicts retard development, devastate the environment, and constantly create panic, fear, tensions, and biased interests in the community which result in conflictual situations. The consistency of conflicts leads to social dislocation and retards development. Peace is considered the best path to stem communal conflicts. As it were, the cheapest war or conflict is more expensive than the most expensive peace. Every individual is a stakeholder in peace maintenance, and therefore, must be involved in all the processes at sustaining peace. Towards abating communal conflicts, the following recommendations advanced:

1.   The government should acquire any parcel of land in dispute to build public facilities, such as health centres, markets, or other social infrastructure. This is perhaps the best way to settle such matters. Once title is transferred from the communities to the government the dispute resolves itself.

2.   The government should always resort to the traditions and customs of the community in determining who the traditional ruler in a community should become. The government should not impose any traditional ruler on any community or recognize any person from outside the community whose right it is to produce a traditional ruler.

3.   Most cases require the government to engage the people and not the elites. Town hall meetings and dialogue avail the government robust opportunity to interfere directly with the people in the communities. It puts the government and the people on the same page and douses the temper of the people which may result in destructive conflict.

4.   Multinational companies are advised to change their divide-and-rule approach in their relationship with the host communities but employ global best practices. They should change the destructive strategy of divide-and-rule which pitches community members against each other, and in most cases lead to armed violence.

5.   The government should be smart and intelligent enough to notice the early warning signals of conflict. Impartial and prompt intervention are keys to preventing a conflict that hurts socio-political institutions and society. The government should not wait until guns start blazing and heads rolling or buildings razed down before weighing into communal disputes.

REFERENCES

Adegbami, A. & Adeoye, J., O. (2021). Violent Conflict and National Development in Nigeria, *Hatfield Graduate Journal of Public Affairs*, 5 (1), 1-22.

Ajah-Akpuru-Ajah (2007). *Basic issues and strategies of peace and conflict resolution.*   Serial 43(8), 7-10.

Berkowitz, L. (1969). The Frustration Aggression Hypothesis Revisited in Berkowitz, L. (ed).

Coser, L A. (1956). *The function of Social Conflict*. London: The Free Press.

Dollard J. (1939). *Frustration and Aggression*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Egobueze, A. (2023). Conflicts in Nigeria: causes, types and consequences. In Ogbujah C. N.   & Egobueze A (Eds), *peace and conflict resolution: an anthology*, Enugu, Nigeria: Snap Press (Nig) Ltd.

Egobueze, A. (2016). *The legislature in conflict management*. Germany: Scholar's Press.

Faleti, S. A. (2006). Termination of protracted social conflicts in Africa. In I. O. Albert (Ed.), *Perspectives on peace and conflict in Africa*. Ibadan: John Archers Ltd.

Folarin, B. (1998). *Issues in applied communication*. Ibadan: Nigeria Stirling Horden Publishers Nigeria Ltd.

Gurr, T.R. (2000). *Peoples versus states: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington   DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Hussein, A., F., Y, & Al-Mamary, S. (2019). Conflicts: Their Types, and their negative and positive Effects On Organizations. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology   Research,* 8(8), 10 – 13.

Ibeanu, O. (2000). Oiling the friction: Environmental conflict management in the Niger   Delta, Nigeria. Environmental Change and Security Project report 6, 19-32.

Mercy Corps. (2020). The economic costs of conflict in Nigeria. Retrieved from https://www.mercycorps.org/researchresources/economic-costs-conflict-nigeria

Miller, N.E. (1948). Classics in the history of psychology, *Psychological Review*, 1(48),   337-342.

Nwaoburu, L. (2023). Ethnic Politics and the challenges to national integration. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 13(2), 246 – 263.

Nwankwo C. & Ezeobi O. (2008). Nigeria lost N150b to pipeline vandals in eight years. (Weblog post). Retrieved from punchng.com/articles.aspx.

Olagbaju, O. O. & Awosusi, O. E. (2019). Herders-Farmers communal conflict in Nigeria: An indigenized language as an alternative resolution mechanism. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 7, 615-623

Otite, O. (2001). *Conflicts, their resolution, transformation and management*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd post office.

Ricardo, D. (2010). *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. London: Oxford University Press.

Sofiri J. (2007). Militarization of Nigeria's Niger Delta: The genesis of ethnic militia in   Rivers State, Nigeria. Working paper no 21, Institute of International Studies,   University   of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: SOFi.21 (berkeley.edu)

Vahabi M., (2004). *The political economy of destructive power*. New York: Edward Elgar publishing