National Identity and Conflict Prevention in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between national identity and conflict prevention in Nigeria rather than conflict resolution which has been the main focus of many scholars. Using the descriptive survey design, through the coding and analysis of 150 purposively selected and administered questionnaires, the study discovers the lapses in the various efforts channeled toward conflict prevention by Nigerian Security Forces in maintaining law and order in society. The research equally found that Nigeria's conflicts are both religious and political in nature. The efforts to control the state by some ethnic (majority groups) and resistance by minority groups have fueled the crisis in the nation. The study concludes by stressing the positive impacts of National identity on conflict prevention and recommends that emphasis should be placed on national identity as a way of conflict prevention rather than the seemingly fruitless efforts placed on ammunition and expansion of security forces.

Keywords: National Identity; Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution, Patriotism, Nationalism

Introduction

Modern Nigeria emerged through the merging of two British colonial territories in 1914. The amalgamation was an act of colonial convenience. British colonizers desired a continuous colonial territory stretching from the arid Sahel to the Atlantic Coast, and because Northern Nigeria, one of the merging units, was not paying its way while Southern Nigeria, the other British colony, generated revenue in excess of its administrative expenses. It made practical administrative sense to have one coherent British colony rather than two. It also made sense to merge a revenue-challenged colonial territory with a prosperous colonial neighbor, so the latter can subsidize the former (See http: www.ranker.com/review/American-india-literary-nationalism/22998).

The amalgamation made little sense, otherwise and has often been invoked by Nigerians as the foundation of the rancorous relationship between the two regions of Nigeria. Northern Nigeria, now broken into several states and three geopolitical blocs, which is Muslim-dominated was the center of a pre-colonial Islamic empire called the Sokoto Caliphate, and its Muslim populations, especially those whose ancestors had been part of the caliphate, generally look to the Middle East and the wider Muslim world for solidarity and sociopolitical example. The South, an ethnically diverse region containing many states and three geopolitical units, is largely Christian. The major sociopolitical influences there are Western and traditional African. These differences have been a source of

political disagreements and suspicions between the two regions since colonial times.

In today's world, there is growing attention that it is less expensive and more beneficial to prevent violence and crises before they are been instigated r a t h e r than to attempt to halt them once they have burst forth. Nevertheless, in the framework of the modern international system, the dominance of state sovereignty and a lack of political will to intervene have greatly limited the inclination and ability of external actors to intervene in states at-risk of violent conflict unless such actors observe that it will be to their own interest to get involve. It is more saddening that these are more pronounced in Africa (Nigeria is therefore not an exemption), where state sovereignty is a continued issue of contention and Western interest has declined markedly since the end of the Cold War. Yet according to a report by Campbell- Patton 2007, "by the end of the 1990s, more people were being killed in sub-Saharan Africa's wars than the rest of the world put together". Given the clear predominance of violent conflict in Nigeria, it is more and more important to examine conflict prevention measures and strategies in this Nation (Nigeria) in order to reduce violent conflicts on a global scale.

Nigeria, a great country in West Africa, serves as a particularly interesting case study of conflict prevention in Africa. Nigeria has thus far experienced series of violent conflicts ranging from political, religious, ethnic and resources crisis, despite internal and external measures put in place. Colonial rule created by merging people of diverse cultural beliefs created a strong loss of National identity and shared sense of belonging as people tend to be more loyal to their ethnic group than the national interest. The Colonial system never helped in promoting national unity and bridging ethnic and regional divisions among the people of the country. This 'exclusive nationalism' and history of mass mobilization remains a major problem in Nigeria and have reduced the potential to be a positive force in the prevention of violent conflicts in the country.

To understand conflict prevention in Nigeria, it is important to examine actions at the international, national, regional, and local levels in response to both external and internal instability. The capacity to unite the country against government corruption and to promote good governance and democracy will be a critical factors in preventing the outbreak of conflict in Nigeria in the coming years. In this context, conflict prevention activities are likely to be most effective at the grassroots level; however, they require significant international and regional support to be successful. It is on this note this work took a giant stride in examining the relationship that exist between national Identity and Conflict Prevention in Nigeria.

The Concept Of Patriotism And Nationalism
Many social scientists view patriotism and nationalism as distinct in terms of historical development, their association with nations or states, and their characteristics. For example, Phares, (1993) argues that patriotism is an older concept pertaining to "love of one's homeland" while nationalism is comparatively new and associated with the development of nation-states in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Hutchinson and Smith, (1994) traced patriotism to the Greek and Roman Empires, but tie the development of nationalism to the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century.

Some social scientists argue that patriotism is associated with the state, while nationalism is associated with the nation. For example, while nationalism is associated with an "ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious identity," patriotism is "a strong sense of identity with the polity" (Brubaker, 2012). Spurrier, (2018) similarly argues that patriotism is simply "loyalty to a territorial community," while nationalism highlights one's nation relative to all other nations, creating "warring camps" and a "repudiation to civility and tolerance for difference."

National identity can be categorized into the following which is determined by the prevailing constitution of that nation. In other words, one's national identity is determined by the following:
▪ Residency
▪ Nativism
▪ Ancestry
▪ Registration (Marriage)

Still, other social scientists view patriotism and nationalism along a continuum of intensity. Kedourie, (1994: 49-50), for example, defines patriotism as simply "affection for one's country," while nationalism adds "xenophobia" (hatred of foreigners), creating an "us versus them" mentality. Many authors view nationalism as irrational, fanatical, xenophobic and aggressive, while viewing patriotism simply as love of country. Regardless of how one defines patriotism and nationalism, both rely on the promotion of a state's iconography.

Nationalism And National Identity In Africa

Several books have been written on the significance of nationalism and the development of national identity over the course of history, such literature as (Kohn, & Calhoun, 2017: the idea of nationalism; Weaver, Womack, & Warrior, 2006: American Indian literary nationalism; Khalidi, 1997: Palestinian identity; Laqueur, 1958: communism and nationalism in the Middle East; Suny, 1996: Transcaucasia, nationalism and social change; Farah, 1996: Lebanese Christian nationalism etc).

The concept of nationalism is inseparable from that of the 'nation,' which has been defined and understood differently by scholars (Marx, Engels, & Weber, 2010) across disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, political science etc. In general, there are two main trends of thought on what constitutes a nation. The first holds that the nation is a natural, primordial entity in which individuals share a common history, language and territory. Supporters of this view, such as Smith and Hameso, argue that nations cannot be separated from the core ethnic identities that compose them. Under this view, nationalism is rooted in a sense of shared cultural identity, generally referred to as 'cultural nationalism'

National Identity can be defined as a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language. One's national identity refers to the sense of belonging one has to a state or a nation, or a sense of solidarity one feels with a particular group without regard. Compared to the volumes written on nationalism and conflict, very little has been written on the connection between nationalism and conflict prevention. In recent years, however,

leaders, policymakers and scholars have begun to pay more attention to the importance of conflict prevention and the positive potential of building national identity.

Nationalism And National Identity In Nigeria

Nationalism and national identity in Nigeria have been shaped by a complex historical and socio-political context. Nigeria is a country with rich cultural diversity, comprising over 250 ethnic groups and numerous languages. Building a unified national identity and fostering a sense of nationalism has been a significant challenge due to the presence of ethno-regional divisions and historical grievances.

1. Colonial Legacy: Nigeria's national identity was influenced by its colonial history under British rule. The imposition of artificial borders and the amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups into one political entity created challenges in forging a cohesive national identity.

2. Ethnic Diversity: Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition has led to the coexistence of various cultural traditions and languages. However, it has also been a source of tension and competition for resources and political power, leading to ethno-regionalism and identity politics.

3. Religious Pluralism: Nigeria is divided along religious lines, with a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south. Balancing religious pluralism within the context of national identity has been a delicate task for policymakers.

4. Political Leadership: The role of political leaders in promoting a shared national identity has been crucial. Different leaders have employed various approaches, ranging from inclusive nation-building efforts to divisive policies that appeal to specific ethnic or religious groups.

5. National Symbols and Celebrations: Nigeria has adopted national symbols such as the flag, anthem, and coat of arms to represent its unity. National holidays, such as Independence Day, provide opportunities for Nigerians to celebrate their nationhood and shared history.

6. Economic Disparities: Economic disparities between regions have also influenced national identity. Addressing these inequalities is essential for promoting a shared sense of identity and unity.

7. Social Cohesion and Citizenship: Encouraging a sense of national belonging and active citizenship can help strengthen national identity beyond ethnic or regional affiliations.

Efforts towards building a unified national identity in Nigeria have been ongoing, with varying degrees of success. The challenge lies in promoting inclusivity, addressing historical grievances, and fostering a shared vision of a united Nigeria. Emphasizing common values, history, and aspirations while acknowledging and respecting the diversity of its people will be crucial for Nigeria's journey towards a stronger and more inclusive national identity.

The Concept Of Conflict

The term 'conflict' refers to an incompatibility in a multi-party or multi-issue situation, or a state of affairs in which two or more irreconcilable views or options are posited towards the solution of a particular problem. Conflict refers to the violent expression of incompatibility of irreconcilability. It can also be described as a state of tension which exists when one party perceives its goals, needs, desires or expectations as being blocked by another party. Conflict is the struggle over values, claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opposing parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. Conflict is a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends (which) may either manifest, through actions or behaviours, or latent in which case it remains hidden for some time as incompatibilities are unarticulated or built into systems or such institutional arrangements as governments, corporations or even civil society.

In everyday life, we are all involved in one conflict or the other be it small (for example, a person may ignore us while we are talking) or more seriously (for example, two persons behaving violently towards each other). Conflict may occur within (intra-group conflict) and among groups (inter-group conflict), communities or nations; which may be triggered by ethnic, economic, racial or religious differences; differences in attitudes, beliefs and values as well as environmental problems. Conflict does not only occur at the personal level, but also at the national and even international level. Apart from external conflicts between individuals or groups, there can also be internal conflicts within an individual. Changes in the social environment, such as contestable access to new political positions or perceptions of new resources arising from development in the physical environment, are fertile grounds for conflicts involving individuals and groups who are interested in using those new resources to achieve their goals. Conflict can be viewed as a way of settling problems emanating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. This led to Park and Burgess' argument that "conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity even if it is through the total annihilation of one of the conflicting parties". It is difficult to differentiate between good and bad conflict, since there is no measure or framework against which it can be evaluated. If the result of a conflict is positive, then the conflict is considered "good" and if the result is negative, then the conflict is considered "bad". Conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication, together with, though distinct from competition, struggle, and contests, etc. Conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce.

Although, conflict may generally exist whenever incompatible activities occur and may result in a "win-lose" situation, the resolution, transformation and management of conflicts may produce a "win-win" situation- *identity, participation, distribution and legitimacy* (Achankeng, 2013).

Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention is a proactive approach aimed at identifying and addressing the root causes of potential conflicts before they escalate into violence or destructive situations. It involves various measures and strategies to promote peace, stability, and dialogue among parties to prevent the outbreak or recurrence of conflicts. Conflict prevention is often considered a more cost-effective and humane approach compared to conflict resolution or intervention after violence has erupted.

In the book "Understanding conflict prevention: A framework for analysis and action," the authors, Brigid Gavin Jones and Oliver P. Richmond, present a comprehensive framework for analyzing and implementing conflict prevention measures. The book delves into the conceptual understanding of conflict prevention, providing insights into its theoretical underpinnings and practical applications in various contexts. The framework outlined in the book helps policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to:

1.   Identify Root Causes: By analyzing the underlying factors and drivers of potential conflicts, decision-makers can take preemptive actions to address the grievances, inequalities, and injustices that might lead to violence.

2.   Promote Inclusive Dialogue: Conflict prevention involves creating platforms for open and inclusive dialogue among stakeholders, fostering communication, understanding, and collaboration to prevent misunderstandings and tensions.

3.   Strengthen Institutions: By strengthening governance structures, rule of law, and accountable institutions, conflict prevention seeks to build resilience against potential conflicts and establish mechanisms for peaceful resolution of disputes.

4.   Address Socio-economic Factors: Addressing economic disparities, poverty, and lack of opportunities can reduce potential triggers for conflict and enhance societal cohesion.

5.   Regional and International Cooperation: Conflict prevention often requires regional and international cooperation to address cross-border issues and promote peacebuilding initiatives.

Overall, conflict prevention is a proactive and multi-faceted approach that involves a range of interventions and strategies to mitigate the risk of conflicts and promote sustainable peace. The framework presented by Jones and Richmond provides a valuable guide for understanding and implementing conflict prevention efforts in diverse contexts around the world.

C. Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. Conflict resolution is different from conflict management. Conflict resolution unlike conflict management, implies approaching conflict in a problem-solving, constructive and non-violent way and recognizing the value of the identities of all parties most especially their needs and interests.

Conflict resolution involves processes that are tailored to ensure that conflict is handled in such manner as to take advantage of its positive tendency while doing away with the negative. It has been generally defined by scholars as a peaceful and mutually satisfactory way to end or significantly de-escalate a conflict situation (Yahaya, 2019). For Schmid, (1998), the term conflict resolution refers to peaceful means of terminating bitter confrontations. In describing conflict resolution as an intervention process that addresses groups, the elements of non-violence mutual satisfaction and permanent de-escalation is often emphasized by scholars. Conflict resolution encompasses (conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict settlement and conflict transformation).

Theoretical Framework

The theory that was adopted for this research is the John Paul Lederach a prominent peacebuilder and scholar known for his contributions to the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. In his influential work "Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies" published in 1997, Lederach presents his comprehensive peacebuilding theory. The theory emphasizes the importance of addressing both the structural and relational aspects of conflict, and it is often referred to as the "Lederach's Pyramid." Lederach's peacebuilding theory revolves around several key concepts:

1.   Conflict Transformation: Lederach emphasizes the need to move beyond merely managing or resolving conflicts and focus on transforming the root causes and dynamics of the conflict. Conflict transformation involves addressing the underlying issues that fuel the conflict and working towards building sustainable peace.

2.   Sustainable Reconciliation: Reconciliation is at the heart of Lederach's peacebuilding approach. He emphasizes the importance of creating conditions for genuine and lasting reconciliation among parties in conflict. This

reconciliation is not just about reaching agreements but about changing relationships and fostering understanding and empathy between conflicting parties.

3. The Pyramid of Peacebuilding: Lederach's peacebuilding theory is often depicted as a pyramid with four levels of peacebuilding processes: a. Level 1: Peacebuilding in the person - Individual peacebuilding, inner peace, and personal transformation. b. Level 2: Peacebuilding in the relationship - Healing and reconciliation between individuals and groups in conflict. c. Level 3: Peacebuilding in the community - Restoring and rebuilding social bonds and connections at the community level. d. Level 4: Peacebuilding in the society - Addressing structural and systemic issues that contribute to the conflict.

4. Positive Peace: Lederach emphasizes the concept of "positive peace," which goes beyond the mere absence of violence to promote social justice, equality, and human rights. Positive peace focuses on addressing the root causes of conflict and creating conditions for a just and sustainable society.

5. Inclusive and Participatory Approach: Lederach advocates for an inclusive and participatory approach to peacebuilding, where all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process. This approach ensures that the solutions are locally relevant, owned by the parties involved, and more likely to be sustainable in the long run.

Lederach's peacebuilding theory has been widely influential in the field of conflict resolution and peace studies. It emphasizes the importance of addressing both the human and structural dimensions of conflict and promoting reconciliation and positive peace in divided societies.

According to Sandole, (2010), peace-building is a dynamic approach and framework for strengthening positive peace through some third-party interactions with different actors performing different tasks at the same time or at different points in time. Proactive peace-building would require third-party interveners to attempt and implement an intervention before a conflict occurs to "prevent the house from catching on fire" (Sandole, 2010, p. 13). Comprehensive peace-building is often undertaken for regional and global governance to deal with deep rooted causes of conflict from prevention through resolution to transformation. Peace building theory assumes that there is first a conflict requiring reactive or proactive intervention by a third party. Peace building in theory and practice envisages a multilateral rather than a unilateral process of active pro-social civic engagement behaviours.

Research Methodology

The study employs a flexible research design using a modified case study approach. the research questions were concerned with practical solutions to the issues of conflict in Nigeria and providing a preventive measure for future occurrence rather than theoretical explanations, it makes sense that the research design was based on this method. The research equally carried out a literature review on national identity and the impact on conflict prevention in Nigeria, Materials for literature review have been drawn from libraries and archives in Nigeria, academic and other resources available on the internet, and local publications purchased and borrowed to gather data. Also, administering of questionnaires, personal and phone interviews, e-mail exchanges, internet research were done to compile information regarding the historical development of nationalism in Nigeria as well as current peace-building efforts within Nigeria.

Sobowale, (1983), contended that sampling is done in order that the researcher may take some elements, subjects or respondents in the population to represent that population. Random sampling techniques were adopted by randomly selecting 150 respondents and administering the questionnaires to the respondents which cut across the different categories of people in the society and consciously included people of different religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, political affiliations, social classes (lower, middle and upper class), age bracket and the two sexes.

The questionnaire administered covers a series of questions relating to the causes of conflict in Nigeria, methods of curbing conflict and prevention of future occurrence. The questionnaires are partly open-ended (unstructured) and partly close-ended (structured) so as to give room for respondents to

express themselves in some questions which require practical experience or involvement in conflict.

The data analysis was done using the simple percentage method to help in presenting the information gathered through the questionnaires administered. Data presentation and analysis are basically in frequency and percentage. For easy eyes location of data, its results were deemed fit to be presented using tables and other graphical representations.

Result And Discussion

Out of a total number of one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires administered to produce the information required from the respondents on the subject of discourse, only a total number of hundred and thirty-five (135) were returned. Therefore, the result and discussion were based on responses to the questionnaires that were returned.

Table 1: Analysis of Data Collected

S/N	Research Questionnaires	Frequency (Percentage)			
		In Agreement	Disagreed	In-Deferent	TOTAL
1.	Is ethnic diversity a major cause of conflict in Nigeria.	85 (63%)	42 (31.1%)	8 (5.9%)	135
2.	Religion affiliation is a determinant of ones disposition to involvement in Conflict?	86 (63.7%)	49 (36.3%)	0 (0%)	135
3.	National identity is a key instrument to conflict prevention in Nigeria.	77 (57%)	48 (35.6%)	10 (7.4%)	135
4.	Conflict situations are more of political than religious in Nigeria.	80 (59.3%)	46 (34%)	9 (6.7%)	135
5.	Conflict has negative effects on a society than positive effects.	82 (60.7%)	45 (33.3%)	8 (5.9%)	135

Source: Researcher fieldwork 2023

From the table above it shows that 63 % (85) of the respondents believed that ethnic diversity is a major cause of conflict in Nigeria, 31.1 % (42) disagreed with the opinion, while 5.9% (8) of the respondents were indifferent. It is clear that the percentage of the respondents who say yes is greater than those who disagree which means ethnic diversity has an impact on the conflict situation in Nigeria. 63.7 %(86) of the respondents believed one's religious affiliation is a determinant of one's disposition to involvement in conflict, 36.3 % (49) disagree with the opinion that one's religious affiliation is not a determinant of ones disposition to involvement in conflict, while none of the respondents was indifferent. It is clear that the percentage of the respondents who agreed is more than those who disagreed. 57 % (77) of the respondents believed that National Identity can help in preventing conflict situation in Nigeria, 35.6 % (48) disagree with the opinion, while 7.4% (10) of the respondents were indifferent. It is clear that the

percentage of the respondents who agreed that National Identity can prevent conflict is more than those who disagree. 59.3 % (80) of the respondents believed Nigeria crisis is basically political than religious, 34 % (46) disagreed with the opinion, while 6.7% (9) of the respondents were indifferent. It is clear that the percentage of the respondents that agree that Nigeria crisis is basically political than religious is more than those who disagreed. 60.7 % (82) of the respondents believed that conflict can have both positive and negative effect on the society, 33.3 % (45) disagreed with the opinion, while 5.9% (8) of the respondents were indifferent. It is clear that the percentage of the respondents that agreed that conflict can have both positive and negative effect on the society is more than those who disagreed.

Discussion

The respondents of this study consist of people that cut across all spheres of life who have one time or

the other experienced the negative or positive impacts of conflict situations. They were well informed people who could not be influenced by anything to give wrong or biased information. The result of the impact of National Identity on conflict prevention is expected as the saying that "the house divided against itself cannot stand". The power of oneness cannot be over-emphasized as unresolved diversified views are prominent factors for instigation of violence in any giving setting or society.

This research work has examined the level of relationship that is possible to exist between national identity, mass mobilization and conflict prevention in Nigeria. Policymakers, analysts, academics and civil society leaders all agree that this is a critical time for Nigeria. Rather than just examining all of the factors that have the potential to incite violent conflicts in Nigeria, this paper has taken the approach of appreciative inquiry to uncover the capacity to respond to these factors at the international, regional and local levels. The recent protests and rise in violence show that the country has woken up in the face of internal instability and is ready for action. Whether this action will be violent or nonviolent depends on the ability of civil society to promote national unity and mobilize the people to push for change. These efforts require the support of the international community and regional organizations, both through funding and diplomatic pressure on politicians to respond to the needs and demands of the people for democratization and transparency. Through mass mobilization around a common national identity, the people of Nigeria are best equipped to achieve this change. Specifically, women's groups have been particularly effective in the past at promoting unity across ethnic, regional and political lines and are a driving force behind conflict prevention efforts in the face of current instability.

Youth groups are also a critical force for change in Nigeria and have the capacity for both violent and nonviolent actions. There are significant social, political and economic problems facing the country and the situation in Nigeria requires substantial attention at the international and regional levels to prevent further outbreak of violence. Within this context, the most important locus for conflict

prevention activities must be at the grassroots and must work to cultivate this sense of national unity. The study revealed that emphasis placed on cultural background in gaining access to any opportunity such as admission into tertiary institutions, employment and even political appointments are factors militating against national identity.

The work has equally shown that Nigerian conflicts or crises are both religious and political in nature. The effort to control the state by some ethnic (majority groups) and resistance by minority groups has fueled crisis in the nation. Also, most of the time violent behaviour is perpetrated by hiding under religious believes e.g. Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Based on the findings and results obtained as shown above, the researcher recommends that the following measures should be taken in order to prevent outbreak of conflict in Nigeria in the future as well as to solve the current crisis or insurgency

▪ Emphasis should be placed on merit-driven distribution of resources and appointment to positions of authority rather than ethnic affiliations.

▪ Secondly, awareness and campaigns should be organized to draw people's attention to the need for national interest rather than just loyalty to one's ethnicity. By this, the National Orientation Agency should intensify their efforts in creating awareness and mobilizing the masses in achieving unity among the diverse ethnic groups in the nation.

▪ Thirdly, preaching peace and the need for peaceful coexistence in Nigeria should be the responsibility of the religious leaders to their faithful followers. It is discovered that followers of religious leaders tend to adhere to the dictate of the spiritual heads rather than the nation's constitution.

▪ Also, there must be in place mechanisms that will ensure proper rotation of political positions among the diverse ethnic groups in the nation. When this is done, fighting over political positions among the various ethnic groups will be solved.

▪ Finally, sincere efforts must be put in place by the government to address the root cause of the current conflict situation in Nigeria and devise a means of transforming the conflict situation and thereby achieve a resolution and sustainable development.

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