

A Nation in Disarray: Communal Conflicts and Socio-political Stability in Nigeria

Chamberlain Kingdom Nwogu^{1*}, Anthony Egobueze², Laretta Adaobi Onyekwere³

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 center, school, amusement parks, market, and any other social infrastructure. It is recommended that multinational corporations adopt global best practices while modifying their divide-and-rule strategy in their interactions with the host communities. They ought to abandon the damaging divide-and-rule tactic, which incites conflict among neighbors and frequently results in violent conflict. The government ought to be perceptive and knowledgeable enough to identify conflict's early warning signs. The best way to stop a conflict that damages society and sociopolitical institutions is to intervene impartially and quickly. Before intervening in intercommunal conflicts, the government shouldn't wait until there are shootings, heads rolling, or structures being demolished. This essay looks at the social contradictions in governmental structure, the factors involved in land disputes, the fight between ethnic cleavages and tribes, and the conflict in the petrodollar industry. In Nigeria, these are the main reasons behind intercommunal disputes. It also examines ways to reduce or eliminate these conflicts in order to promote growth and ensure sociopolitical stability.

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. Conflict is inevitable in any community where individuals interact and react to one another [1]. It lives in the polity, causing political instability. The economic cost of conflict is very high, due to its impact on society [2]. 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 [3].

***Author for Correspondence**
Chamberlain Kingdom Nwogu
E-mail: guru4real1@yahoo.com

¹⁻³Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Received Date: January 03, 2024
Accepted Date: January 11, 2024
Published Date: February 11, 2024

Citation: Chamberlain Kingdom Nwogu, Anthony Egobueze, Laretta Adaobi Onyekwere. A Nation in Disarray: Communal Conflicts and Socio-political Stability in Nigeria. *OmniScience: A Multi-disciplinary Journal*. 2024; 14(1): 28–35p.

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 [4].

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 [5].

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 [6].

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Frustration-Aggression hypothesis, first proposed by Dollard J. [7] and expanded upon by Hussein and Al-Mamary [8] and Folarin [9], was used in this study. According to the notion, an individual's attempt to achieve a goal is thwarted or frustrated, which leads to anger. Frustration: According to the aggressiveness theory, frustration is the ultimate cause of hostility [7]. Proposed that aggression stems from frustration, and that hostility is directed towards an innocent victim when the roots of the frustration are not confronted. This theory aims to explain the origins of violence. An act of aggression can be either violent or non-physical, and it is always done with the intention of causing harm. Conversely, frustration is the state that results from interference with a goal-response. Aggressive conduct arises when a desired or expected aim is not achieved. The frustration-aggression theory has been applied in political science to explain violence and conflicts, particularly wars [8].

Identified four mediating factors which influence aggression. These are:

1. Magnitude of frustration
2. Aggression cues
3. The irrationality of frustration
4. Emotional and mental functions [9]

Regarding the main premise, Dollard J. [7] claimed that the presence of frustration is a necessary condition for the development of aggressive behavior and, conversely, that frustration itself invariably precedes violence.

According to the updated Frustration-Aggression hypothesis, there are two key points of contention: (1) frustration can initiate conduct that is hostile or violent, and (2) frustration itself is the root cause of any hostile or aggressive behavior that does arise. Put differently, irritation is a prerequisite for animosity or violent conduct rather than a sufficient one. However, according to Dollard J. [7] theory of aggression, the following factors determine one's motivational strength toward aggression:

- a. The reinforcement value of the goal response that is frustrated;
- b. The degree of frustration of this goal response; and
- c. The quantity 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

Every culture has conflict, which has an impact on every one of us as individuals, families, communities, organizations, states, and nations. Conflict does, in fact, influence the behavior of each distinct group [10]. "A disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility" is how Egobueze A. [11] defines conflict (p. 168). This is typically driven by a party's hostility to another in an effort to accomplish a goal that differs from the other party's. He goes on to say that conflict is a condition of disharmony brought about by real or perceived differences in needs, attitudes, and interests amongst individuals. It can lead to a variety of undesirable outcomes, including stress, tension, and animosity between the parties involved.

A dynamic connection between interested parties vying for control of important resources may give rise to conflict. Egobueze A. [12] contends that conflict emerges when people or groups within a defined environment pursue opposing objectives, passions, and aspirations. Conflict is also fostered by changes in the social environment, such as the discovery of new resources as a result of environmental development. Usually, people and organizations interested in using the new resources to further their objectives go into conflict.

For time, the definition of conflict has changed. According to Mercy Corps. [13], conflict is defined as "a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the opponents aim to actualize, injure, or eliminate their rivals". When opposing groups, aims, purposes, needs, or ideals clash violently—though not always violently—conflict arises (p.8).

Because of the state's poor performance in providing services to the populace, the ruling class's unhealthy competition for control over political and economic power, and pervasive corruption, conflict has persisted as a defining characteristic of contemporary democracies [14]. Conflicts are driving nations dangerously close to self-destruction; in the post-code war period, civil conflict has taken the lead in acts of violence.

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.

The author further observes that other scholars have proposed several categories of conflict. He believes that his four-fold classification is the most straightforward. He said that conflicts could be complimentary, parallel, symmetrical, or divergent.

1. *Divergent conflict*: this type of conflict arises when each individual or group in the society practically pursues personal objectives that are at odds with the organization's overarching

objectives and that are challenging to reconcile. There are multiple groups in the society as a result of the inability to come to an agreement. Not all kidnapers in the recent crises in Rivers State and the Niger Delta are freedom fighters. A number of organizations have been implicated in kidnappings that may have been carried out for ransom rather than as a means of achieving economic and social independence. In this instance, there are a lot of factions in the area that could not even care about the issues being resolved.

2. *Symmetrical conflict*: this kind of conflict occurs when two or more distinct entities or organizations pursue the same objective at the expense of collaboration. As a result of the goal's indivisibility, the current relationship has broken down.
3. *Complementary conflict*: this kind of conflict results from one party misinterpreting the objectives or intentions of the other. It is a common misconception that the objectives of two groups are incompatible or contradictory, even when they are complementary to one other. The Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police Force have clashed multiple times. Despite the fact that these forces have complimentary purposes, people mistakenly view them as rivals.
4. *Parallel conflict*: each side retains the authority to decide and carry out its choice in this kind of conflict. For example, although labor unions have the authority to declare and oversee strikes, an organization's management is nevertheless entitled to take all reasonable measures to protect its assets. However, a number of variables, including each participant's personality and the historical context of the parties' current interactions, influence how much of these rights and powers are used. As long as both sides understand their own boundaries and refrain from extending them, parallel disputes are often benign.

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 uprisings. 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

Violent confrontations between non-state groups unified by a common communal identity are viewed as communal conflicts. Violence can arise from communal tensions, and violence has historically been the foundation of events in most Nigerian communities. When sides employ deadly ferocity to seize control over contested and perceived indivisible resources—such as a plot of land, a source of money, natural resources, or local political power—this is referred to as violent conflict. This is in line with how armed conflict is typically conceptualized. The groups in question are classified as non-state groups, which implies that neither one is in charge of the government nor the armed forces (though state actors might be crucial allies in a battle inside the community). 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.

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, Sofiri J. [15] in Otite and Miller NE [16] 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. 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 Nwankwo and Ezeobi [17], the concept of political stability is very controversial. According to his argument, the first broad definition pertains to the lack of widespread violence and domestic civil war. In this sense, if there are no organized assaults on people or property inside its borders, a nation may be said to be free of instability. Second, stability and the duration of administration are synonymous in classical understanding. Thirdly, political stability depends on the absence of structural change, or the modification of a polity's fundamental structure brought about by external or internal forces. There are four components to political stability: internal law, external stability, stable political system, and stable administration. Political stability can be explained by these four factors alone.

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 [18]. 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.

“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 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, 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 classic 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 under develops 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. 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. 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 programs. 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 in 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)" [11]. 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

CONCLUSION

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 centers, markets, or other social infrastructure. 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 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

1. Adegami A, Adeoye JO. Violent conflict and national development in Nigeria, *Hatfield Graduate J Public Affairs*. 2021; 5 (1): 1–22.
2. Akpuru-Aja A. *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution: Nigerian-African Conflict Case Studies*. Keny & Brothers Ent. (Nig); Centre for International & Strategic Studies; 2007.
3. Berkowitz L. The frustration-aggression hypothesis revisited. In: Berkowitz L, editor. *Roots of Aggression: A Re-Examination of the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis*. Atherton Press; 1969.
4. Coser LA. *The function of Social Conflict*. London: The Free Press, 1956.
5. Besong EN. An appraisal of three Nigerian poets' perspectives on trends plaguing contemporary Nigeria. *Int J Art Lit*. 2019;3:9–18.
6. Ibeanu O. Oiling the friction: Environmental conflict management in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Environ Change Secur Proj Rep*. 2000; 6: 19–32.
7. Dollard J. *Frustration and Aggression*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939.
8. Hussein AF, Y Al-Mamary S. Conflicts: their types, and their negative and positive effects on organizations. *Int J Sci Technol Res*. 2019; 8(8): 10–13.
9. Kur JT, Agudoso FI, Orhewere JA. Managing multicultural diversities in Nigeria: What role for the mass media? *Omnes J Multicult Soc*. 2015;5:115–145.
10. Gurr TR. *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000.
11. Egbueze A, Ojirika C. Electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for political stability. *J Sci Res Rep*. 2017;13:1–11. DOI: 10.9734/JSRR/2017/20750.
12. Egbueze A. *The legislature in conflict management*. Germany: Scholar's Press, 2016.
13. Mercy Corps. (2020). *The economic costs of conflict in Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.mercycorps.org/researchresources/economic-costs-conflict-nigeria>

-
14. Faleti SA. Termination of protracted social conflicts in Africa. In I. O. Albert (Ed.), *Perspectives on peace and conflict in Africa*. Ibadan: John Archers Ltd., 2006.
 15. Sofiri J. Militarization of Nigeria's Niger Delta: The genesis of ethnic militia in Rivers State, Nigeria. Working paper no 21, 2007, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: SOFi.21 (berkeley.edu)
 16. Miller NE. Classics in the history of psychology, *Psychol Rev.* 1948; 1(48): 337–342.
 17. Nwankwo C, Ezeobi O. Nigeria lost N150b to pipeline vandals in eight years. 2008, (Weblog post). Retrieved from punchng.com/articles.aspx.
 18. Nwaoburu L. Ethnic politics and the challenges to national integration. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy.* 2023; 13(2): 246–263.