

Religious Impacts of Armed Conflict on Christians in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into “Armed Conflict and Its Impacts on Christians in Adamawa State, Nigeria”. The existence of armed conflict in Adamawa state has created a severe and protracted crisis that has left part of the population in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, which turns out to have positive and negative impact on them. The main objective of the study is to investigate Religious Impact of Armed Conflict on Christians in Adamawa State, Nigeria and the specific objectives is: to assess armed conflict and its impacts on the religious lives of Christian in Adamawa State. A survey research design method was adopted for this study, with a population of 2,125,950 Christians in the state and a sample size of 1,337 Christians in the state. A structured questionnaire was used, with a descriptive data analysis using means and independent t-test. The major findings of the study are: the study unveils that, churches were burnt in the face of the conflict. The conflict reduces religious activities such as mid-week prayers and night Virgil in Adamawa state. Some Christians have resorted to traditional practices for protection from the conflict. A great deal of Christians were firm in their faith in the face of armed conflict in Adamawa state, and many intensified their prayers to God for protection. The following recommendations are made: Pastors should stretch hand of fellowship to any group that is ready to make peace and have a free conflict environment that can be used to practice their faith.

Keywords: Religious, Impact, Armed, Conflict, Christians

Introduction

The Bible reveals that armed conflict leads to the destruction of lives and property, and have always been integral to human society. The story of Cain and Abel (Genesis. 4, 1-15) is one of the earliest of such armed conflict. It is therefore obvious that armed conflict can occur at different levels, from that between individuals to that within and between groups of people, within and between communities, within and between ethnic groups, and present different consequences on lives and property. Armed conflict means devastating loss of civilian life, massive displacement and violations of human rights and international law. No matter the cause of arm conflict or the forces involved, the results are often the same. Armed conflict ensues when there is conflict between a state and one or more non-state armed groups or among non-state armed groups. A situation of armed conflict is reached when a certain level of protracted violence is being used

between two conflicting parties. These parties can either be two states (international armed conflict) or a state and a non-state armed group (non-international armed conflict). Many countries in Sub-Saharan region in Africa have been plagued with ethnic and religious conflicts. Africa comes second in the number of armed conflict per region with more than thirty-five (35) Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs) taking place in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan and Somalia. Several armed groups fighting against government forces and or against each other. Western powers and neighbouring countries are intervening in the Non-International Armed conflicts (NIACS) that take place in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Somalia. Central African Republic is on the top of the list with several Non-International Armed Conflict involving multiple armed groups. The Government is collaborating with NIACs against wide array of rebel groups, including the *anti-Balaka* and the *ex-seleka*. There are also parallel non-international armed conflict due to the infighting between various armed groups.

Nigeria as a nation has witnessed a number of armed conflict in the last twenty years than it ever witnessed in the preceding years of post-independence. The irony is that, Nigeria as a sovereign state is composed of groups of people that are yet to break out of their shells of individuality and community identity. Armed conflict has marked Nigeria's history since pre-colonial times, but has intensified in the current dispensation. In 1967, a civil war between the Nigerian Federal Government and the Biafran secessionists erupted and quickly escalated into full-scale armed conflict before ending in 1970. Since then, Nigeria has been bedeviled by religious, communal, and civil strife. Nigeria is prone to several shades of armed conflicts, owing largely to its heterogeneous nature in terms of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversities (Bertoni, Di Maio, Molini, & Nistico, 2019). The nature of armed conflicts vary from one region to another, different types of conflicts are prevalent in different areas (Abidoeye & Cali, 2021). For example, riots and civilian protests are commonplace in the southern part of the country. (Marc, Verjee, & Mogaka, 2015). Over the years, especially after Nigeria's independence of 1960, the relationship between Christian communities in Adamawa state and their neighbours have been cordial. They exchanged pleasantries during festive periods, which cemented their peaceful coexistence over the years. Cases of armed conflicts amongst them were minimal because of level of trust that cast out any form of doubt and suspiciousness. What appeared to be a mere disagreement over things have grown into full-fledged armed conflict leading to bloodletting. The arms only used by security agents are seen being carried around by some of these non-state actors. Armed Conflict is no longer resolved through dialogue or mediation, but through language of arms.

Research Question

What are the religious impacts of armed conflict on Christians in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

H01. There is no significant difference between the opinions of married and single Christians on armed conflict and its impacts on the religious lives of Christians in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Arms

Every day, civilians suffer the consequences of the accumulation, diversion, illicit transfer and misuse of arms. The term ‘arms’ covers weapons, comprising small arms and light weapons, armoured combat vehicles, battle tanks, attack helicopters, warship and missiles, ammunition and munitions among others. All states have obligations under international human rights law applicable to transfer conventional arms. Collins (2022) describes armed as someone who is carrying a weapon, usually a gun. Merriam- Webster (2022) discloses armed as furnished with something that provides security, strength, or efficacy. To the researcher armed is not just possessing those sophisticated weapons made locally or professionally but how a persons’ state of mind acts towards these weapons in a positive and negative way. A negative mind can cause havoc with a least of an arm in his or her possession and a positive mind set can harness every opportunity for good.

Conflict

There is no single universally accepted definition of conflict (Afzalur, 2013). Afzalur notes that one issue of contention is whether the conflict is a situation or a type of behaviour. A conflict is a struggle and a clash of interest, opinion, or even principles. Conflict will always be found in society; as the basis of conflict may vary to be personal, racial, class, caste, political, religious and international. Conflict may also be emotional, intellectual, and theoretical, in which case academic recognition may, or may not be, a significant motive. Intellectual conflict is a subclass of cultural conflict (MacDonald, 2019). A conflict that tends to grow over time due to different cultural values and beliefs.

Ademola (2015) reveals that, conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, power and status in which the opponents seek to neutralise, injure and eliminate their rivals. Ademolas’s definition underscores the violent motive behind conflict but Olaosebikan (2016) avers that violence is not an inherent aspect of conflict but rather a potential form that conflict may take. This is in agreement with Heitler (2014) who posits that conflict is a disagreement which does not necessarily involve fighting. Sev (2016) affirms that conflict is a condition of objectives’ incompatibility between values or goals which results in deliberate interference with other goals, achievements and emotionality in terms of hostility. It is when the objectives of people living in a community clash, that conflict erupts. This view is shared by Fleetwood (2017) refers conflict as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideals, beliefs, values or goals.

Causes of Conflict

Eidelson and Eidelson (2013) investigate some of the important factors that may play in triggering or constraining conflict between groups. On the basis of a review of relevant literature, five factors domain stand out as especially noteworthy: Superiority, vulnerability, distrust, helplessness and injustice.

i. Superiority

Individual-level core belief: This is a belief that an individual is better than anyone else and therefore many of the social constructs because the individual sees their own thoughts as a privileged and therefore do not get along well with others. People with this belief often have attitudes of specialness, deservingness, and entitlement. Group-level worldview: When moving from the individual-level core belief to the Group-level worldview most of the concepts stay the

same. The major difference is that these attitudes apply to large groups instead of individuals. One example of this is ethnocentric mono-culturalism, a term meaning that one sees their own cultural heritage as better than another's.

ii. Vulnerability

Individual-level core belief: This is a constant anxiety. It is when a person feels that he/she is not in control and feel as though they are living perpetually in harm's way. Group-level worldview: A group that feels vulnerability due to an imagined threat in the future. This strengthens the group's ties and allows them to "focus group behavior in specific directions that include hostility.

iii. Distrust

Individual-level core belief: This is based on a presumed hostility and malignant intent seen in others. It drives one to act in hostile ways and prevents the creation of healthy relationships. Group-level worldview: This separates the in-group from the out-group in a way that is not easily rectified, as the in-group forms a lasting stereotype that is applied to the out-group and must be disproven by the out-group.

iv. Helplessness

Individual-level core belief: A deep set belief that no matter what an individual does the outcome will be unfavorable. As though the individual is lacking the necessary ability or a belief the individual did not have sufficient help or the environment is against them. Group-level worldview: When a group has those same beliefs of dependency and powerlessness. This also reflects how much growth the environment has to offer.

v. Injustice

Individual-level core belief: This belief is that an individual has been mistreated in a way that affects them in a major way. This mistreatment is most often an interpretation of disappointment and betrayal. Group-level worldview: This is the receiving end of the superiority group-level. This group takes grievance at another group for the same reasons an individual takes grievance at another. For perceived injustices from disappointment, betrayal, and mistreatment.

Armed Conflict and its Religious Impacts

The term religion comes from a Latin word religio, the ultimate origins of which are obscure. One possibility is derivation from reduplicated Religare – meaning, being bound or meaning, “gather together,” an interpretation traced to Cicero connecting Lego “read”. The major role of religion, therefore, is to bind or bring together people in harmony irrespective of tribe or other differences. The term is used today is more from the word relegere (read again) that is, turning to something again and again or to consider it more carefully (Ngbea, 2017). Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to experience of the holy in its various aspects. Conelly (2014) attempts a meaning that takes certain factors into account, according to Conelly, Religion originates in an attempt to present and order beliefs, feeling, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual.

When one thinks of religion, different things may come to mind. A sense of comfort for some, a search within oneself for faith and strength, or an appreciation for the divine. Religion has

existed, in one form or another, throughout the history of humanity, carving and shaping societies. It has somehow managed to influence, affect and move people to do great things, in a strife for peace and love propagated by Holy texts. Somewhere along the way, religion had taken on such a significant role both in individual lives and society overall, that people went to great lengths to pursue and protect what they found sacred – even sacrificing themselves and others.

Thus, religion and armed conflict have been intertwining for centuries, as people have tried to prove that their faith is more holy than that of others. Although prominent theories, such as Modernization Theory, predicted a decrease in the presence and relevance of religion as societies modernize, empirical evidence over the recent decades has shown quite the opposite. In a world moving towards peace, the number of wars involving religion has been increasing since the 1980s (Nordquist, 2015).

Ideology may directly provide motive and indirectly capacity for collective violence, thus making armed conflicts longer and bloodier. Ideological beliefs form “just causes” that can motivate actors to continue fighting even under adverse circumstances. Longstanding Communist insurgencies in Columbia and India provide anecdotal evidence that ideology drives conflict protraction, while bloody Jihadist insurgencies in Iraq, and Syria have been sustained and arguably intensified by external patronage (Toft 2021). During the Cold War, proxy wars in countries like Afghanistan and Vietnam were prolonged and intensified by the massive support for ideologically aligned armed groups by rival superpowers and their allies.

Following armed conflict incidents, individuals may alter their behaviours and religious beliefs. Some individuals may cope with violence related trauma by increasing praying frequency, attending religious services more often, or returning to God to be saved from future adverse incidents (Henrich, 2019). Zussman (2014) uses cross-sectional datasets to show that terror attacks and war exposure made Jews and Muslims more religious. Furthermore, Henrich using a post-war dataset on 1709 individuals in Uganda, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan, show that those with greater exposure to armed conflicts were more likely to participate in religious groups and rituals. Cesur (2020) reveals that soldiers who were deployed in combat regions increased participation in religious services and private prayer. In contrast, Cesur contends that after armed conflicts traumatic events, other individuals may stop following religion and decrease their faith in God, because they think God failed to intervene, or was not present to save them during experience.

Thus, with climate change, competition over limited resources and environmental threat to the ways of life of communal, the use of terror and its religious justification has been intensified, particularly in Benue, Nasarawa and Kaduna states. Non- state actors use terror tactics, displacing local communities from their land to make room for their atrocities, to occupy those lands and many believed to be a way of spreading religion (Ahmed, 2018). Non-state actors use sophisticated weapons and ammunition, in Nigeria, there is a resurgence of violent conflict perpetrated by armed groups in major parts of the Middle Belt region, particularly Plateau, Benue and Nasarawa States. Another phase has been the resurgence of the religion infiltration, invasion and occupation of local communities, farmlands and territories belonging to Christians in central and southern Nigeria. Thousands of churches have been destroyed and thousands of Christians have been killed, displaced or injured.

Ngbea (2017) discloses that the armed groups who cause armed conflict have been named one of the deadliest terror groups in the world comparable to Boko Haram, ISIS, the Taliban and

Al-Shabab. They brutally killed natives of various communities including women and Children. Church leaders in Nigeria have come up to lent their voices that attacks on Christian’s communities by armed groups constitutes a war to eliminate Christianity in Nigeria. Recently, an attacked in Benue state dated on 1st January, 2018 most especially in Guma and Logo Local Governments over 70 people were killed (Channel headline news 10-1-18). In 2014 as reported by Abdulbarkindo and Alupsen (2017) the Tiv Christians in Guma, Gwer, Gwer – West and Makurdi and other town on the border recorded approximately 458 deaths and attacks on over 350 communities with their inhabitants now living in refugee camps, a situation that is still on till date. The sporadic killing of Tiv farmers and destruction of their property in Benue and Nasarawa states by the non-state actors continue till date with impunity. The church in Nigeria criticized armed groups who have carried out a series of fatal attacks on Christians. However, Clark (2018) asserts that, it is a challenge for the armed groups to change their ideology and way of life and to adjust another.

Methodology

A cross sectional survey research design method was adopted for the study. Structured questionnaire was used by the researcher on the religious impacts of armed conflict on Christians in Adamawa state, Nigeria. The respondents comprises 1,337 married and single Christians in Adamawa state Nigeria with a population of 2,125,950 Christians.

Results

Table 1: Opinions of the Respondents on Armed Conflict and its Impacts on the Religious Lives of Christians in Adamawa State

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std
1	Many churches are burnt in the face of the armed conflict	296	245	87	664	2.1	0.98
2	Armed conflict led to reduction in religious activities such as, midweek prayers and night vigil	742	374	78	98	3.4	0.89
3	Many Christians stand firm in their faith in the face of armed conflict	348	794	62	88	3.1	0.90
4	Some Christians have resorted to traditional practices for protection from weapons in the armed conflict	473	641	96	82	3.2	1.03
5	Christians intensify their prayers to God for solution in the midst of the conflict	533	491	128	140	3.1	1.13
6	Church members and pastors are being killed as a result of the armed conflict	460	616	62	154	3.1	0.89

Total	3.0	0.97
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The negative impacts of armed conflict resulting in burning of places of worship is seeing on item 1 of table 09. Where two hundred and ninety-six (22.9%) and two hundred and forty-five (19.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that churches were burnt during the conflict. Only eight-seven (6.7%) and six hundred and sixty-four (45.0%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the item. With a mean score of 2.1 which clearly indicates that most Christians do not admit on the item.

Item 2 on the table addressed how armed conflict reduces religious activities. The respondents seven hundred and forty-two (57.4%) and three hundred and seventy-four (28.9%) strongly agreed and agreed that religious activities such as mid-week prayers and Virgil were affected by the conflict. But seventy-eight (6.0%) and ninety-eight (7.6%) of the respondents differ in their opinions. The item has a mean score of 3.4 which represented the consensus opinions of the majority Christians on the suggested item.

Item 3 on the table dwelled on whether many Christians maintain strong faith in the face of the conflict. Three hundred and forty eight (26.9%) and seven hundred and ninety-four (61.5%) of the respondents strongly agree and agree that many Christians were firm in their faith. But sixty-two (4.8%) and eighty-eight (6.8%) of the respondents expressed different opinions on the item. Given the mean score of 3.1 suggests that, majority of the Christians expressed unified opinions on the item.

Item 4 on the table revealed how some Christians resorted to traditional practices for protection. The respondents four hundred and seventy-three (36.6%) and six hundred and forty-one (49.6%) strongly agreed and agreed that many embraced traditional practices in the face of the conflict for protection. Only ninety-six (7.4%) and eighty-two (6.3%) of the respondents debunked the suggestion on the item. A mean score of 3.2 is a pointer to the fact that the item shows negative impact on large number of Christians.

Item 5 examined the intensity of how Christians invoke God in the conflict as their ordeal increases. The respondents five hundred and thirty-three (41.3%) and four hundred and ninety-one (38.0%) strongly agreed and agreed that they prayed fervently for God to intervene in the conflict. But only one hundred and twenty-eight (9.9%) and one hundred and forty (10.8%) of the respondents expressed negative opinions on the item. Having mean score of 3.1 suggests that most respondents intensify their prayers to God which represented the opinions of the majority.

Another negative impact is how members and pastors are killed in the conflict. Which the respondents four hundred and sixty (35.6%) and six hundred and sixteen (47.7%) strongly agreed and agreed that Christian pastors were killed in the conflict. Only sixty-two (4.8%) and one hundred and fifty-four (11.9%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the item, with a mean score of 3.1. The general interpretation is that, majority of the respondents are in agreement with the items as indicated in the cumulative mean score of 3.0 (Std. 0.97) which is higher than the decision mean score of 2.5.

Table 2: Two Sample t-test Procedure on the Impacts of Armed Conflict on the Religious Lives of Christians by Married and Single Respondents

Status	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.error	t-value	DF	P-value	Remark
Married	550	106.83	10.86	0.399	1.25	1290	0.207	Not Sig.
Single	742	106.087	10.07	0.429				

(t-critical at 1.96 DF=1290 at P=0.05)

The observed t-value (1.25) obtained at 1,290 degree of freedom for the test is lower than the critical value of 1.96 at the same degree of freedom. The observed level of significance (0.207) is higher than the probability level of 0.05 ($P > 0.05$). These are clear indications that the two groups did not differ significantly in their opinions on the moral/religious impacts of armed conflict. The test did not provide sufficient evidence for the rejection of the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis that, there is no significant difference between the opinions of married and single Christians on the armed conflict and its impacts on the moral/religious lives of Christians in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Discussion

The finding from the hypothesis further revealed that churches were burnt in the armed conflict, religious activities being truncated, Christian pastors were killed. This is in line with the report of Ahmed (2018) that non-state actors use terror tactics, displacing local communities from their land to make room for their herds, to occupy those lands and many believed to be a way of spreading religion. The study is also consistent with Ngbea (2017) that they brutally killed natives of invaded farming communities including women and Children. Church leaders in Nigeria have come up to lent their voices that attacks on Christian's communities by herdsmen constitutes a war to eliminate Christianity in Nigeria. Interviewee in an interview on August, 1st 2023 contends that, many youths have engaged into stealing people's property due to hardship after the armed conflict. Some girls have made themselves so cheap and indulged in prostitution. Interviewee reveals in an interview conducted with her that, so many youths have engaged into alcoholism and substance abuse as a way of life. Sarah further discloses that, the use of substance abuse is to give the youths more courage to confront the non-state actors, because they act as police and soldiers on the streets.

Conclusion

It is also concluded that, armed conflict has both negative and positive impacts on the religious lives of Christians. Armed conflict can make relationship between Christians and people of other faith to wax cold.

Recommendation

Pastors should stretch a hand of fellowship to any group that is ready to make peace and have a free conflict environment that can be used to practice their faith.

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