

## **Ethnocentrism and Ethno-Political Conflicts in Northern Nigeria: A Critical Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria is a hotspot for numerous conflicts, especially in the postcolonial times. These intractable conflicts include ethnic, religious, political, sectarian, communal, Settlers-Natives and Pastoralist-Farmers dimensions. On this occasion, different scholarly arguments were advanced to know whether there is a generalizable cause for the menace. Much of these studies focus on conflicts associated with federal structure, uneven development, resources control and marginalization explaining the wider context of the problem. This article explores the significance of understanding the historical context of ethno-political conflict in Northern Nigeria and examines why conflicts keep reoccurring between different communities in the region. The article also assumes that, it is significant to note the influence of politicization of ethnicity, selective injustice and elite manipulation in conflict analysis in Nigeria. It concludes that ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria are fundamentally influenced by bad politics and bad governance. Therefore its management has become a mirage in spite of series of interventions to put the conflicts to an end.*

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**Keywords:** *ethno-political conflict, ethnic politics, bad governance, historiography, elite manipulation*

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### **Introduction**

Conflict as a social phenomenon is unavoidable in human society. As a global phenomenon, no single society is free from conflict, whether heterogeneous or homogeneous in nature. But the contexts in which conflicts occur vary from one environment to another. A number of recent studies covering both heterogeneous and homogeneous societies have identified various reasons for intra-group and inter-group conflicts (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, & Zartman, 2008; Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997; Miall, 2004; Nnoli, 1978; Oberschall, 2007). Nigeria as a country is heterogeneous in nature with diverse societies, cultures, religions, ethnic groups, languages and different historical antecedents. Violence against groups and individuals has been in the history of Nigeria since colonial rule and beyond. Some of this violence have been associated with regional politics, tribalism and ethnicity, and elitism (Fagbadebo, 2007; Jega, Kano, & Wakili, 2001; LeVan, 2014; Metumara, 2010; Ogundiya, 2009; Reno, 2002; Sklar, Onwudiwe, & Kew, 2006). The frequent occurrence and reoccurrence of the violent conflicts are peculiar to northern states of Nigeria in particular. Out of the total 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 19 states are from the north.

In a public speech, former Governor of Bauchi State Alhaji Ahmadu Adamu Mua'azu (now Chairman of Peoples' Democratic Party) on behalf of Northern State's Governors lamented that from the early 1980s, the Northern States were turned into killing fields as a consequence of growing social, ethnic and religious intolerance between different groups of the society. It is as a result of that that hundreds of people were killed in sectarian and inter-ethnic crisis that billions of Naira worth of public and private

properties was destroyed and millions of people were forced to be refugees in their own land. To him, these hostilities have negative effects on the people and also have shaken the very foundation of our hitherto peaceful disposition of the region. Thus, the magnitude of which these atrocities were committed have rose and manifested a serious challenge to the continued stability of Nigeria (Bauchi State Government, 2006). There are numerous reasons for these conflicts in Nigeria. Ineffective state, poverty and unemployment, corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, injustice, political instability, poor social amenities and underdevelopment are considered to be the main factors for growing violent conflicts in Nigeria (Coleman, 1965; Hunwick, 1992; Joseph, 2014; Maduagwu, 2012; Mbaya, 2013; Metumara, 2010; Milligan, 2013; Orji, 2010; Osaghae, 1995; Salihi, 2010; Ukiwo, 2003). In the northern Nigerian context, the influence of stakeholders and the process by which political elites make decisions has more to explain why ethno-political conflicts dominate the political landscape of Nigeria.

To address the question of why ethno-political conflict affects the political land scape of Nigeria, this paper has identified elite manipulation and selective injustice as mechanisms fueling contradictions, incompatibility and polarization. However, numerous scholars often show that ethnic and political conflicts in Africa have been connected to its colonial history and high level of corruption. This article aims at exploring the dimension of high degree of violent conflicts bedeviling the northern region of Nigeria. The study points out the significance of examining the effects of ethno-political conflicts in northern Nigeria on governance and human security in historical context. In due course, the paper argues that politicization of ethnicity has created an avenue for elites for divide and rule tactics. Studies by Kendhammer (2013) and Milligan (2013) show role played by political elites has been the major factor fueling conflict of different sort along ethnic lines in Northern Nigeria. It is assumed that politicization of ethnicity and bad governance are the major factors for the underdevelopment of the region. Though other studies have pointed out salient factors of conflicts in the northern region, they failed to recognise its historiography in connection to role elitism play in perpetuating the menace under different structures. Using some available data, this article presents arguments using textual analysis of secondary data. The article argues that political elitism has link with occurrence and reoccurrence of violent conflict in northern Nigeria since before and after independence.

### **Conceptualizing Ethno-Political Conflict**

Scholars such as Costalli & Moro (2012), Dyrstad (2012), Ellingsen (2000), Franck & Rainer (2012), Ganguly & Taras (2000), Gibson & Hoffman (2013), Milligan (2013), Ryan (1995) and Wolff (2006) pointed a number of factors as the main sources of organized ethnic conflict which comprise historical and cultural differences, discrimination and abuse of human rights, marginalization, contestation over identity, high degree of ethnic fractionalization, struggle for self-determination, institutionalized group representation, resources distribution along ethnic lines, nepotism, ethnic polarization of power sharing and attitudes of ethno-nationalism. Therefore, the negative behavior of one ethnic group over another is what motivates rapid and violent conflict to escalate. Thus, research into the causes of ethnic conflicts has taken several approaches towards understanding its sources.

Ethnicity as fueled by organized ethnic groups' symbolized situation where parties involved, believed that, divergence or incompatible goals exist between them and also motivate their behavior. For instance, Wolff (2006) noted that, historical and cultural differences between ethnic groups as well as deliberate economic and social neglect by one group against the other might lead to perception of discrimination and violation of human rights which rightly provide essential insight of understanding rapid and violent escalation of ethnic conflict. This argument sees ethnicity as a common denominator to organized groups' conflict upon struggle over values which could be self-determination, resources, land, security or power.

Costalli & Moro (2012) argue that ethnicity is a reason or an important source of conflict. They posit that conflict is undoubtedly involved in shaping rivalry between groups. Thus, the authors noted

“ethnic polarization, in particular creates strategic incentives for severe violence as armed groups try to create ethnically homogenous territories in the first place of the war” (p. 801). It is against this background that other researchers have found that, ethnic civil wars have the potential to increase ethno-nationalism and polarized society as well as to generate mutual distrust among groups (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Petersen, 2002; Snyder, 2000). The argument raised in this literature sees ethnicity as a broad force explaining sources of conflict, but is not enough to generalize condition under which ethno-political conflict escalate. Therefore, other important factors need to be investigated to understand and find out more factors other than ethnicity within which ethno-political conflict will be comprehended.

In addition, other researchers have extended their understanding of sources of conflict and agreed on political sources as rightly connected to role of the state and regime type in relation to social groups within a state. For example, Ellingsen (2000) argued that apart from ethnic differences which have strong impact on domestic conflict in a society, type of political regime and level of socioeconomic development as well influence the way multi-ethnicity determine domestic conflict. Others have identified a strong link between the incidence of conflict with political activities and role played by politicians. Mohammed (2012), for example argued that the process of democratization and politics of power sharing in the Nigeria’s political sphere has resulted to recurrent conflict situation pointing out the influence of bad politics as the likely cause of conflict. Where conflicts are inter-groups in nature and have certain influence of political elite in particular, they have manifestation of ethno-political dimension.

Conflict of ethno-political dimension has been inexorably increasing over the years in the northern part of Nigeria and also has its devastating effects socially, politically and economically. Therefore, ethno-political conflict is understood here when identity groups seek to obtain some benefits, values or goals through violent means with either institutional support or political elites backing. A group can be favoured and motivated by ethnic, ideological, religious, or political goals to undertake certain illegal act or pursue their interest with means of coercion without any penalty thereafter. Even though conflict of this nature most have been viewed as undesirable, and negative for stability, sustainable development, and human development, yet enjoy the support of politicians in an effort to advance their interest at the expense of other groups. Cases of such conflict can be considered ethno-political in nature since their causes have direct or indirect connection with both ethnicity and politics. Dunning & Nilekani (2013), Franck & Rainer (2012) and Posner (2004) note the existence of ethno-political manipulation and its implication on socioeconomic aspects of society affected in their studies. Conflicts which occur in struggles for identity and political gains, access to control of political power, political mobilisation and distribution of resources are what we refer here as ethno-political conflict in Northern Nigeria. To understand the character and intensity of ethnic-political conflict in northern Nigeria, we must situate it within the broader historical context of Nigeria before and after independence. Consequently, the lack of clear picture of distinct approach as to why competing ethnic groups use political sphere to advance their interest has obscures the understanding of the causes. The increasing threats of ethnic-political conflict over the years have changed the way ethnic groups or clusters of ethnic group pursue their interest in the political landscape of northern Nigeria.

### **Ethnic Conflicts: A Theoretical Approach**

In this section, social identity theory of conflict and human needs theory of conflict are explored to comprehend different perspective of conflict in human existence. Theories in conflict analysis have been a working framework for explaining what is happening in a society. Thus theories can help us deal with the conflict in Northern Nigeria. Social identity theory is one of the important theories of conflict situated within behaviorist school which believe in human nature and human behavior to explain the root causes of conflict within micro-level of analysis. As such, social identity theory of conflict developed by Tajfel (2010) has demonstrated an insight by which conflict like that of northern Nigeria can be understood. The theory is distinct in its focus on attitude and behavior of individual in relation to group relations. So, the theory assumed on connection between social identities and external relations. Thus, individual attitude

and behavior are usually transferred to the behavior of groups in the society. This means that hostile behavior of individuals tend to reflect their collective actions which explains social identity. The unit of analysis is related to in-groups and out-groups psychological process of individuals in a society. Attitudinal and behavioral differences within which groups represent themselves can be clearly understood as the root cause of ethno-political conflict in Northern Nigeria considering the nature of relations between different ethnic groups in the society. So where political maneuvers resulted to uneven treatment of social groups might likely bring in negative perception of marginalization, domination, frustration and injustice; and that can lead to a situation of dissatisfaction and disagreement between groups thereby resulting to situation of conflict as the case may be in different parts of Northern Nigeria.

The theory is clear about the interaction of groups on the basis of perceived instability and illegitimacy of particular social structure or system within which differences are more likely to determine social action and social change in the way individuals interact. The perceived marginalization, domination and injustice among ethnic groups, especially, minority ethnic groups in northern Nigeria were significant factors that clearly led to various conflicts in Northern Nigeria. The cases can be well understood in pastoralist-farmers conflict, ethno-religious conflict between Muslims majority and Christian minority groups, settlers-native conflict and political conflict to name but few. The theory is useful in explaining individual and group behavior more especially in dealing with majority-minority social groups relations.

On the macro level of analysis, where theories focused on interaction of groups, classical ethnic conflict theory like Human Needs theory developed by Burton (1990) can also shed light on the issue of conflict in northern Nigeria. On the whole the macro level theories are significant in dealing with conflict on the conscious level of intergroup interaction. The Marxist and realist approaches to study of conflict have lot of arguments on the role power play in generating conflict. Competition over resources, control of power and representation between groups in the northern region of Nigeria has become an important element of conflict. Ethno-political conflicts find ways into the northern region due to numerous issues. However, power struggle is central which show conflicting interest over the control of corridors of power to ensure groups' needs are met. Similarly, Human Needs theory too have demonstrated conscious interaction of groups going by its assumption that human basic needs in a society have to be met for peaceful coexistence to prevail among societies. The theory is about what groups want, value and count as necessity of life which if denied might result in conflict. It is significant to note that, this theory sheds light on identity needs and the likelihood of disagreement if it is not met. The theory is relevant to describe myriad of conflicts flashpoints in northern Nigeria. Because ethno-political conflict is all about the needs of groups or individuals representing groups where one is struggling to meet his/her needs at the detriment of the other. So once this human needs struggle continue and cannot be dealt with conflict is inevitable in the society such as Northern Nigeria.

The two theories are suitable to guide clear understanding of historical context of ethno-political conflict in northern Nigeria. The Multi-ethnic and domestic violent conflict in some of the 19 states of the northern region has demonstrated how social identity and human needs become the hub of conflict flashpoints for decades. The bold assumptions of the theories highlight how significant social identity and their needs in the northern region of Nigeria tend to bring about domestic conflict. Thus, the theories are significant in recognizing how polarised pursuit of human development needs and interests in multiethnic societies can lead to conflict. And where selective injustice persist along political maneuverings one identity needs blocking the other, instability and conflict are inevitable.

### **Northern Nigeria and its Historiography of Ethno-Political Conflict**

The Northern region of Nigeria known as Northern Nigeria is a colonial creation which between 1900 and 1945 was politically delineated to establish federal constituent of Nigeria. After long period of colonial administration, the region has become the most populated with people of different social structures, languages and ethnicity. The region is Muslim dominated area with a number of minorities following

other religions such as Christianity and traditional religions. Thus, the region was solely a colonial adventure which overtime became the present Northern Nigeria with 19 states and Abuja which is the capital territory of Nigeria. From the six (6) geopolitical zones of Nigeria, three are in the northern part comprising North-East zone, North-West zone and North-Central zone. The balkanisation and amalgamation of Nigeria for political expediency before independence was the root cause of politics of tribalism, ethnicity and tribalism during colonial system of administration of divide and rule. After independence, Nigeria also witnessed the intensity of polarization between the south and the north, likewise within the north as well, between different groups dividing along ethnic and religious lines. This polarization was instrumental to violent conflict outbreaks, civil wars and long period of military regimes in Nigeria (Paden, 2006).

International Crisis Group (2010a), has shown that violence in northern Nigeria has flared up periodically over the last 30 years. But the long history of violence in the area to present time is an important background to understanding the reason behind its reoccurrence. The region has so far been turned into complex social, political and economic debacles, which effects are quite unprecedented and with devastating destructions. The results of devastating intrastate conflicts ever experienced in other part of the country were numerous. It has demonstrated the extent to which tensions and violent conflict undermined domestic peace. And also, threatened national survival in the country, particularly the northern region of Nigeria. Studies show that the role of elites in ethnocentric politics, politicization and manipulation of religion and poor distribution of resources have contributed to outbreaks of conflict as the case may be in Nigeria and in the north in particular (Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, & Weinstein, 2007; Jega, 2000b; Nnoli, 1978; Reynal-Querol, 2002; Ukiwo, 2005). This has been the reason why the region is becoming Nigeria's most affected part with numerous conflict situations. Though, conflicts are not new in Northern Nigeria, its persistence and reoccurrences has been a continuous terrain putting the region in a state of malice over the years. An upsurge of conflict outbreaks has destructive effects on the society and the economy (Ake, 2001; Ibrahim, 1991, 2000; Jega, 2000a; Onimode, 1978; Osaghae, 1999; Reno, 2002; Sklar et al., 2006; Van de Walle, 2001).

Perpetual reoccurrence of conflicts in Nigeria at large, and Northern Nigeria in particular, has been attributed to colonial history that brought people of different background and history to live together. Thus, struggle over developmental needs between different groups raised the level of violence since tolerance has declined. The cases are numerous and worse when in particular special focus is on Northern Nigeria since independence to present time. What people are experiencing today is a manifestation of a historical antecedent and the nature of politics that has made conflicts inevitable and even the feature of social structure in the area. Studies periscoping the dynamics of social existence from precolonial time to the present time have juxtaposed what large number of people is witnessing in the north today. It is actually the manifestation of enormous tensions, contradictions, instability and system failure that exist in Nigeria as a whole. For example, Sama'ila (2010) state that 'one of the legacies of colonialism was the proliferation of identity based conflict in which many lives and properties were lost' (p.24).

Prolong military rule in Nigeria also played an important role in the way political activities and social relationship exists, which in several instances heightened rivalry and distrust among the inhabitant of the country. International Crisis Group (2010a) for example, states that 'for most of the period of military rule, the federal government was dominated by northerners' (p.8). The military rulers faced numerous challenges and confrontation from the southern region, agitating for marginalization, domination and power sharing. Studies show that military authoritarianism, nepotism, and intolerance had contributed greatly in the creation of deep institutional corruption, personalization of power, criminalization of public wealth and primitive accumulation of resources which resulted to contradictions and feeling of domination in the country (Hunwick, 1992; Jega, 2000b; Kendhammer, 2013; Maduagwu, 2012; Milligan, 2013; Nnoli, 1978; Paden, 2006).

The worst is political competition among elites and ethnocentric politics which to date remain the bane of Nigeria's economic development as well as political stability. Military dictatorial tendencies coupled with the political background of the country had influenced the federal structure which further deepened the crisis both at the national and regional levels. As a result of that, fear of domination between ethnic and religious groups heightened posing challenges to peaceful coexistence of the people in the northern region. The role played by ethnic politics after Nigeria return to civil rule demonstrated how politicians ravage the federal solution of unity in diversity. The current intensity of the situation has left Nigeria in general backlash compare to other developing countries of the world. The problem is associated with the challenges it pose to national unity and national survival.

The boundaries and social structure within which northern Nigeria is, demonstrated why and how ethno-political conflict persist which invariably undermined the development of the people of the region over a long period of time. Based on realities on ground tensions such as settlers versus natives conflicts, sharia laws controversy, minority versus majority domination, ethno-religious divides, pastoralists-farmers conflict, youth unemployment and mass illiteracy, cases of drug abuse, ethnic politics, are still being the major challenges fuelling ethno-political conflict in the northern region of Nigeria. Various incidences of conflicts and politicization of ethnicity after 1999; and failure of governance are clear manifestation of current state of the northern region. The power elites in the political terrain of Nigeria have also become sources of worry and part of the problem as well.

**Table 1: Major Ethno-Political Conflict in Northern Nigeria from 1951-date**

S/N	PERIOD	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS
1.	1951	Kano	Kano riot
2.	1966	Kaduna, Kano,	Military bloody coup in which major Northern political leaders were assassinated.
3.	1967-1970		Coups and Civil war between Biafara and the other regions
4.	1979-1986	Kano, Maiduguri, Gombe, Yobe	Sharia controversy and riots
5.	1986		Division over Nigeria's membership in OIC
6.	1991	Bauchi	1991 conflict among Hausa, Fulani & Sayawa
7.	1993		Annulment of June 12 General Election
8.	1994	Plateau	1 <sup>st</sup> Jos violence between Jasawa and Natives
9.	1999	Kano	Reprisal killing over Shagamu Killings
10.	2000	Kaduna	1 <sup>st</sup> Riot over sharia law introduction in the state, many people lost their lives
11.	2001	Plateau, Bauchi	Violent conflict between Settlers and Natives in Jos about 1000 people killed, Crisis in T/Balewa,
12.	2001	Nasarawa and Benue	crises between Fulani herdsmen and Tiv farmers
13.	2001	Benue	Extrajudicial Executions and Destruction by the Military
14.	2002-2004	Plateau	Jasawa (Settlers) and Natives conflict
15.	2009	Plateau	A disputed local government chairmanship election in Jos.
16.	2011	Kano, Bauchi, Kaduna, Gombe, Niger Jigawa, Katsina Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara, Borno, Adamawa	2011 post-election violence

		and Yobe	
17	2013	Nasararwa	Government and Ombatse militia group conflict
18	2013- 2014	Abuja	Crisis of legitimacy on National conference
19	2015	Bauchi and Katsina	Stoning of PDP Politicians during Campaign

Sources: International Crisis Group (2010a), Human Right Watch (2002), Paden (2006), Muhammed (2012), Emelonye & Buergethal (2011), Ishaya (2014)

### Political Ethnocentrism and Conflict

Competition over resources, power and representation has being identified the major forces through which identity groups became contradictory in their relationships, therefore, leading to severe destructions of life and loss of property (Best & Rakodi, 2011; Kendhammer, 2013; Milligan, 2013; Orji, 2010; Paden, 2006). Within the first decade after independence, conflict in northern Nigeria transformed from situational to behavioral especially among elites. However from 1990s up till the return to democratic rule, the north saw numerous conflict outbreaks in places such as Plateau, Kaduna, Bauchi, Taraba and Kano arises from bad politics and politicization of religion. Though conflict in northern Nigeria is associated to identity, economic problems and politics, it is true that elite's manipulation is also an important element in understanding ethno-political conflict in the northern region of Nigeria since before 1999. Habu Muhammed, for example, argued on the flashpoints of conflict which can be explained not only in terms of the mere contradictions between different ethnic groups but by the competitiveness of elites using the political system in favour of one group at the detriment of the other (Mohammed, 2012).

Another study by Huber (2012) also demonstrated how politicised ethnicity affects voting behavior. This illuminates how ethnicisation of politics is essentially becoming a means of incorporation of identity groups by the politicians for competition and manipulation as the case may be in Nigeria. The emergence of such politics and the persistence of ethnic struggle for developmental needs have caused elites to become more powerful in their competition for wealth accumulation and political domination. Since political elites can make use of ethnic-based politics, non-represented or underrepresented groups, however small they may be, can feel frustrated or marginalized. Hence conflict is bound to arise between identity groups directly or indirectly. Hunwick (1992) and Paden (2006), show that Nigeria since independence had demonstrated symbiosis between ethnicity and political power struggles between the south, north and eastern regions that were predominantly divided between Muslims and Christians. It was the aftermath of the revenge coup that Nigeria found itself in civil war between 1967-1973 being the worst period in the history of Nigeria where conflict of identity groups led to the mass killing of Igbos in the north that increasingly destroyed relationships among the diverse ethnic groups.

Politicization of religion and sharia controversy within the period between late 1970s through 1980s also demonstrated the precise polarization between religious lines. This is when Christian minorities in the north agitated fear for Islamisation of Nigeria through Sharia legal system supported by northern elites to be enshrined into 1979 constitution. The crisis over sharia law and sharia legal system had exposed both open and hidden controversies between northern elites. While Muslims saw the law and its application only for followers of Islam, the Christians on the other hand perceived the terrain as plan to Islamize the Nigerian state. Such situation has embedded into the psychology of most elites in the country at large and in the north in particular, so much so that the political and socioeconomic life of the people was influenced with religiosity and bigotry. It could be argued that the religious dimension of the elites' politics and ethnocentric politics had seriously affected the way present politicians conduct their political game in the country. The array of making the religious dimension more instrumental issue is seen in almost all the conflict flashpoints in the northern region. Sama'ila (2010) for example, observed that 'the worst period in the history of inter-group relations in Northern Nigeria is obviously the postcolonial epoch of which the various ethno-religious groups in the region faced each other in an increasingly hostile and volatile milieu' (p.37).

Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 seems to have been the worst period when politicization of religion and politics became an open ball game in the political system. Inter-group conflicts in the northern region have increased with severe destruction of lives and property. There has been an intensity of political and religious conflicts in Plateau, Kaduna, Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba states of the northern Nigeria since the return to civilian rule in May 1999. The growing tension and conflict escalation has been the departure from long military rule which opened up room for demands, agitations and competition among groups. The liberty and freedom enjoyed in democracy have further increases rivalry and politics of identity. While the number of conflict keeps increasing the failure of governance also assisted greatly in their spread and widening. Different studies linked the level of violence grow in the north with high rate of poverty, unemployment, multiethnicity and long history of political rivalry embedded more in the political, ethnic and religious aspects of the people. For example, Salihi (2010) linked ineffectiveness of the state in the provision of public goods and lack of justice to be the major reasons for widespread use of violence by groups such as: MASSOB, OPC and Boko Haram. And to him, mismanagement of resources, political repression and electoral malpractices are the main indicators of failure of governance in Nigeria.

From 1999 to 2002 Sharia law was adopted by twelve northern states and had led to violent conflict which caused the death of thousands of lives and destruction of property. In Kaduna state alone the Sharia implementation crises of 2000 and 2002 had resulted to the killing of more than 2,000 lives and displacement of more than 14, 000 from their homes (International Crisis Group, 2010b). The Plateau state violence is also another important flashpoint in the ethno-political history of the northern region. Best & Rakodi (2011), have pointed out power struggles, institutional representation and indigene/settler as the major factors in Jos violent conflict which to a greater extent religious differences intertwined with ethnic rivalries set out recurrent episodes of killings and devastating destruction of wealth. It was the aftermath of 2002 and 2004 crises which led to death of over 1,000 people in 2002 and the Yelwan Shandam violence in 2004, President Obasanjo declared state of emergency in Plateau state. The successive Plateau state Governors were suspected since 1999 for being passive in their attitude towards dealing with violent conflict in the state (Muhammed, 2012). The spate of the conflict is still bedeviling the peaceful coexistence of Jos, the central city of Plateau state of northern Nigeria which further degenerated to other states of the region. Those affected usually suffered reprisal attacks after the conflict occurred.

As part of the problem of politics in Nigeria, the 2011 post-presidential election violence also symbolized how polarization along ethnic and religious lines embedded into the political system of the country. The electoral violence in 2011 was the worst since Nigeria return to civil rule in 1999. According to one account, April election was considered amongst the best and fairest in Nigeria's history but turned out to be among the bloodiest (Maduagwu, 2012). The violence started with serious rioting when the result of general election was announced in favour of Goodluck Jonathan who is a southerner and Christian against Muhammadu Buhari who is a Northern Muslim. The skirmishes affect places like Kano, Bauchi, Kaduna, Gombe, Niger Jigawa, Katsina Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states of northern Nigeria leading to the death of more than 800 people and displacement of thousands of people.

### **Analysing the impact of political ethnocentrism**

On November 21, 2014, International Crisis Group presented a report predicting the future of Nigeria titled *Nigeria's Dangerous 2015 Elections: Limiting the Violence*. In this report, the Crisis Group have projected that Nigeria's survival has direct bearing on the successful conduct of its general election scheduled for February 2015 and tackling insecurity. The report further stresses that the election will be more contentious than usual due to certain irregularities, heightened political rivalry and high level of human insecurity in the country (International Crisis Group, 2014). Three factors are instrumental in the report signaling the possibilities of more outbreak of violence. First, similar to what had happened in



2011 which resulted in violent conflict after general election that ushered in the incumbent government. That is tension within and between the two major political parties, APC (the strong opposition party) and PDP (the ruling party). While the competing claim to the presidency is between northern candidate Muhammadu Buhari and the incumbent President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan from the Niger Delta, it is also a political competition along religious lines.

Second, the inadequate preparations by the electoral commission and apparent bias by security agencies remains an important indication that the country is heading toward a very volatile and vicious electoral contest. Third, the activities of radical Islamist Boko Haram insurgents and increasing communal violence in several northern states which the government failed to control. Following these important signals is the warning that; if the violent trend continues, and in particular the vote is close, marred or followed by widespread violence, it would deepen Nigeria's already grave security and governance crises.

The fear of outbreak of violent conflict and the likelihood of civil war in Nigeria is one of the clear manifestations of political insanity caused by identity politics and politicization of religion by the politicians. As noted in the previous section of this paper, political interest of the elites has been the major factor backlashing proper ways of dealing with public affairs beyond the scope of rule of the game. Though, the social structure of Nigeria has contributed to what the political terrain is today, the political influence of politicians and their ineffectiveness in dealing with public issues is central to disastrous potential damages and bad governance in the country.

To begin with political manipulation and politicization of religion, Nigeria especially the Northern region has exhibited wide range of using ethnicity and religion to canvass for political support during election campaigns. This perpetual political dependence on ethnicity and religion by the elites remain the major factor relevant for empirically derived assessment of flash points of ethno-religious and ethno-political violence in northern Nigeria. Many of the factors, as described by Milligan (2013) – particularly the ethnic representation and institutional identity power sharing in Jos, Plateau state of Northern Nigeria has explained how political manipulation keeps conflict reoccurring in the state. Other scholars also discussed the impacts inherent in various violence ravaging peaceful coexistence in northern states and the particular effects on human security and development (Akinwale, 2010; Hunwick, 1992; Kendhammer, 2013; Maduagwu, 2012; Muhammed, 2012; Orji, 2010; Salihi, 2010). For instance, civil society group called Coalition for Justice criticizes the Nigerian state for failure of leadership and being partisan as well, in dealing with social group conflict in Plateau state. The group states that “the scale, and degree, of communal and state violence being currently unleashed on ordinary Nigerians need to be seen as the expression of increased state failure in the country: at all levels of government as well as in the conduct of affairs in all other sectors of our national life” (Coalition for Justice, 2010, p. 2).

### **Intervention towards Peacebuilding and conflict Management**

There are three areas to look at as measures aimed to end or resolve the conflict. First, role of the state as the traditional means of dealing with the spate of insecurity and violence bedeviling the national survival and second, is the role of traditional rulers intervening to calm down the conflicting situation due to respect they enjoys from the community they rule. And last, is the emerging trend where NGOs participating actively as an important catalyst to manage conflict to avoid further escalation. The state has been the main institution responsible for enforcing law and order. The traditional use of force is one of the strategies used by authorities in Nigeria to promote peace and security. The approach of the state has been largely coercive. The police and army in several occasions continually use direct force in conflict zones of the northern region. The use of force approach is always the immediate response to situation of conflict where security personnel are deployed to calm down the atrocities. But the state involvement in conflict resolution has proven ineffective despite use of force in the management of violent conflict in the North. Akinwale (2010) Illustrates how the state uses of force during violent conflict as violation of human

rights, especially when the military are involved in the process. A good example is the extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the military in Benue state in October 2001. According to Human Right Watch's report, the military operation have resulted in the death of more than two hundred people in various locations in Benue State in October 2001 which took place after a clash between opposing groups which has been a longstanding intercommunal conflict in Benue (Human Right Watch, 2002). Such act indicates the ineffectiveness of state to resolve the conflict due to lack of appropriate means of solving the menace. However, government could be praised for containing the conflict to return normalcy in the society, which is not more than marginal approach for short term solution.

The state is also known for setting up of commission of inquiry to investigate the cause of conflict and damages resulted during the events. In some instances, the commissions were set up by the states where the conflict occurred; a case in point is the General Sabo commission (2007) and Tanko Dutse commission (2009) in Bauchi state after 2007 and 2009 conflicts. In Plateau State Government's commissions were headed by Justice J. Aribiton Fiberesima (1994), Justice Niki Tobi (2001) and Justice Bola Ajibola (2009) after series of inter-ethnic conflicts. At the Federal level governments of Olusegun Obasanjo and his predecessors also set up committees' panels and commissions of inquiry after flash points of conflicts in Jos, Plateau state, Kaduna state and the 2011 post general election violence. These are Justice Suleiman Galadima Commission of Inquiry (2001), Emmanuel Abisoye Presidential Panel (2009), Chief Solomon Lar Presidential Advisory Committee (2010); and Sheikh Ahmed Lemu committee (2011). The panels were established to investigate the matters and advise government on solutions (Emelonye & Buergethal, 2011). For political reasons the reports submitted by these committees were not being implemented which symbolises the lack of political will by the government to put an end to inter group conflict in Nigeria.

Another important method of intervention is the role played by traditional rulers in dealing with conflict situation in Nigeria. Traditional rulers are the respected community leaders and their role in conflict transformation and conflict resolution is long in the history of northern Nigeria. Their active involvement to resolve conflict had an important strategic contribution in conflict resolution. Studies show that traditional/community leaders are good in reactive strategies and have involved in some sort of conflict management. But they have proven much less effective in dealing with confrontations for religious and political reason. These significantly limit the extent to which they can deal with conflict without political or religious influence (Blench, Longtau, Hassan, & Walsh, 2006).

The new emerging trend is the involvement of NGOs in the activities of peacebuilding and preaching for peaceful coexistence in Northern Nigeria. The role played by NGOs in containing and limiting conflict in northern Nigeria has contributed significantly in reducing the effects of conflict in the region. There are important key roles they play which help in inculcating the culture of peace and tolerance in the society. Such important NGOs are Interfaith Mediation Centre, in Kaduna, Christian Muslim Peace Movement in Bauchi, and Bridge Builders in Plateau state. Their major areas are advocacy, peace education and sometimes direct involvement to facilitate negotiation or mediation. NGOs have played a number of important roles but also have limitation due to political reason and limit scope of operation (International Crisis Group, 2010a; Paden, 2006; Ringim, 2012). NGOs both conventional and interreligious in Northern Nigeria are instrumental in peace making and conflict transformation; their activities need integrative effort with stakeholders to ensure a shift towards sustainable peace. Since conflict is a normal social occurrence (Paffenholz, 2014), a comprehensive approaches is needed from various sector combining the state stakeholders and government institutions. The practical involvement of NGOs and their support strategies are mostly instrumental in modern conflict management in Northern Nigeria. While NGOs have limitations in conflict management strategic actions, their proactive role suggest that NGOs have been helpful in peacebuilding, conflict transformation and social change (Best & Rakodi, 2011; Haynes, 2009; International Crisis Group, 2010a; Miall, 2004; Oberschall, 2007; Paffenholz, 2014; Ramsbotham, Miall, & Woodhouse, 2011; Ringim, 2012).

## Conclusion

Since before independence, ethno-political conflict has systematically become instrumental and well recognized factor threatening the peaceful coexistence of Northern Nigeria. Though the social structure of the region is one of the important factors, the postcolonial period had experienced numerous domestic conflicts that are increasingly destructive to present time. The politicization of religion, ethnicity and perpetual polarization among the vast majority throughout the history of Nigeria has shown negative implications for sustainable peace and development in the northern zones of Nigeria. This is not only associated with conflict reoccurrence or escalation, but also in terms of socioeconomic problems, instability, underdevelopment and failure of governance. Ethnocentrism is essentially the means which political elite have tended to exploit. Thus, the account of ethno-political conflict in northern Nigeria has greater litmus for the pattern of political influence of elites during and after independence. It is true that multiethnicity is always negatively used at the detriment of vast majority of people.

Violence by itself is asymmetrically the result of political decisions as well as ethnocentric leaders' interest which usually provoke the masses to react violently as the case may be during Sharia law implementation. Thus, this paper has identified the negative role of elitism as the broad causes of perpetual ethno-political conflict in Northern Nigeria; the resurgence of identity groups rivalry and fear of domination has spread all over the region and made politicization and elite manipulation a political weapon against the majority will. The long political rivalry and conflicts are true manifestation of what in real sense the system become and resulting to serial setbacks.

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