

**A SURVEY OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S  
NASCENT DEMOCRACY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study examines the spate of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper highlights a number of factors responsible for the malady which ranges from weak state status of Nigeria to corruption cum religious intolerance and problematic citizenship as the bane of the polity. Between 1999 when civil rule was inaugurated till date, the rate at which civil unrests occurred is not only appalling but a potential threat to the survival of democracy. The paper however infers that until poverty is greatly reduced and good governance promoted that the country may begin to move gradually away from a failing state status. The strongest recommendation of the paper no doubt is that federal government needs to step-up actions on *normadic* education so that the large chunk of northern children (most especially the Hausa/Fulani herds) who are out of school that are always ready tools in the hands of the over zealous elites to foment trouble shall reduce drastically.

Keywords: Democracy, Ethno-religious, Corruption, Violence, Security.

**INTRODUCTION:**

More than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the pervasive insecurity of lives and property, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, assassinations, *ethnic and religious conflicts*, coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts. The situation is worsened by the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities (*Nigerian Tribune*, 2002).

The above quotation from an editorial comment by a national daily, indeed, epitomizes the central argument of this paper, the aim of which is to analyze the nexus between democratic nurturing, sustenance and eventually consolidation *via-a-vis* ethno-religious violence, conflict and crises. The paper argues that with the upsurge of violence, seeing it as the most significant factor impeding constitutional democracy (Joseph, 1998) not only in Nigeria but in Africa generally is a source of serious concern. Social disintegration could well be the most acute danger facing democracies, undermining the human rights and civil liberties on which democracy stands (Przeworski, 1995). It is inauspicious for democracy that many of Africa's elected governments are confronted with groups that use brutality, terror and physical intimidation to further their ends (Baker, 2000) as it is in contemporary Nigeria.

The question arises, therefore, as to how much internal violence a nascent democracy like Nigeria can sustain or whether the violence itself can be sufficiently contained for democratic institutions to float above being relatively untouched? (Baker, 2000). Violence not only drains government resources and diverts attention from other government issues, but frequently provokes undemocratic responses from the state in the form of security forces acting outside the law and legal processes being suspended among others.

However, the relevant question is: at what level does a crisis situation arise? Or what tempo or tenor of crisis can threaten democracy? According to Friedrich, 'crisis', "is a key term in search of scholarly meaning" (Friedrich, 1998) in sociological term, 'crisis' is a turning point, often brought about by a convergence of events which creates new circumstances threatening established goals and requiring action. It is further characterized by presumed tensions and uncertainties (Friedrich, 1998). Furthermore, it is an acute, rather than a chronic situation enduring over a very considerable period of time or persistent disturbances of system integration (Dudley, 1973; Dudley, 1970; Aboribo, 1985). Although, the term 'crisis' may be applied in a wide range of contexts, this paper is concerned with the political elements. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, it is a relativistic term applicable to a political situation in which dramatic changes; conflicts and tensions exist to which active responses are called for. It is however, imperative to emphasize that all parties involved in a crisis must be psychologically disturbed for such a situation to be qualified as a crisis-ridden one.

As shall be demonstrated later in this work, ethno-religious conflicts have led to: loss of several hundreds of lives, destruction of private and public property worth billions of naira, discouragement

of foreign and domestic investors cum retardation of national unity and integration, damage to the nation's image and psyche, and slowed pace of national development among others (Nwolise, 2001). It is imperative to note that Nigeria has been rated as the eighth country with people under threat of genocide or mass killing, a new report by the Minority Rights Group International in its 2008 Global Ranking of People under threat, has revealed. With a composite score of 18.90%, MRG listed groups under threat of genocide, mass killing or other systemic violent repression in Nigeria as Igbo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yourba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North (The Punch, 2008). Amid growing insecurity and political uncertainty, a report has listed Nigeria as the 18<sup>th</sup> most unstable country in the world. While the country shares the unenviable position with war-ravaged Lebanon; other countries in the list of the 20 most at-risk states include Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Chad, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The report jointly issued by Foreign Policy magazine and the Fund for Peace and titled "The Failed States Index 2008" also classified Nigeria with countries that are either just coming out of gruesome civil wars, like Ivory Coast, or states torn apart by sectarian violence, like Pakistan and Bangladesh (The Punch, 2008). It defines a failing state as one whose government does not have effective control of its territory, is not perceived as legitimate by a significant portion of its population, does not provide domestic security or basic public services to its citizens and lacks monopoly on the use of force (The Punch, 2008).

In 1999, when the country came out of 15 unbroken years under military dictatorships, the hopes were high that democracy would restore political stability, engender rapid economic growth and improve the people's wellbeing. But as at 2004, it was estimated that some 10,000 people had been killed in clashes between rival ethnic and religious groups across the country while 800,000 others were displaced from their homes (The Punch, 2008).

Given the aforementioned scenario and going by the tortuous democratization march and coupled with a number of inhibiting factors to democratic sustenance (Baker, 2000; Beetham, 1994; Chazan, 1992; Ojo, 1998; Aylwin, 1998; May, 2000; Suberu, 2001) one cannot but attempt a prognosis of the possibility of survival of the nascent democratic experiment and suggest possible recipes. To achieve this objective, the paper is organized into three main sections. The introductory part emphasizes the debilitating potentials of ethno-religious conflicts and briefly paints the picture of what spate may eventually turn it into a crisis situation. The second part which is the thrust of the paper surveys the conflict in virtually all the regions of the country to show the intensity of the crisis. The third part dwells on the implications of same for Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper infers that if nothing

concrete is done to stem the tide of ethno-religious crisis in the country, the possibility of consolidating the nascent democracy may be a mirage after all as anti-democratic elements in the military may perhaps like to cash-in on the over heated polity. Claude Welch (Jr.) expressed this fear long before the transition to civil rule of 1999. In his words, “were the armed forces of Nigeria to disengage, they would in fact, be equally likely to hasten back. They are subject to contradictory pressures, meaning both countervailing efforts for restructuring and depoliticization and considerable pressures for renewed political involvement. The tension between these, neither one fully congenial to the senior officers, help explain the back-and-forth movements of Nigerian civil-military relations” (Welch, 1995). With the foregoing in our mind, we now proceed to survey ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 that the military quit the political scene and year 2010, more than a decade after the inauguration of civil rule.

### **SURVEY OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS – 1999 – 2010**

Nigeria has demonstrated a very high propensity for ethnic and religious violence in the past three decades. In more recent times, however, there has been a dramatic surge in xenophobic expressions, the hardening of ethno-regional positions and the proliferation of ethnic militias that have unleashed varying degrees of violence and terror on the polity (Egwu, 2001) In spite of concerted efforts being made to curtail tribal wars in Nigeria, the problem has been on the increase, especially since the return of democracy in May 1999 (Newswatch, 1999). Ikengah-Metuh, identified three broad types of religious violence in Nigeria viz: (i) intra-religious disturbances which occur between different denominations or sects; (ii) inter-religious conflicts prevalent between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimension; and (iii) inter-religious conflicts which, though, have socio-economic origin, end up in the form of religious conflicts. He noted further in respect of Nigeria that “most inter-religious disturbances usually develop into inter-ethnic conflicts even where they began as purely religious disagreements. The reverse is also often the case; namely, some socio-ethnic conflicts are deflected and fought out under inter-religious banner” (Newswatch, 1991). This is hardly surprising because as will be demonstrated later with empirical data, there is a very strong correlation or overlap between ethnic and religious boundaries in Nigeria’s plural setting. The tendency for the boundary between the two forms of identity to collapse during moments of conflicts and violence has been captured in the phrase, “ethno-religious” violence (Egwu, 2001).

A survey of ethno-religious conflicts, between 1999 till date, shows that the crises are worrisome development, which threaten harmonious co-existence and jeopardize the unity of the Nigerian nation-state and its fledging democratic experiment far more than any other challenges of democratic consolidation. But the government seems to lack proper perspective on the handling of the reality of religion in Nigeria. Nigeria is a complex society with a multiplicity of religious and cultural allegiances and sensibilities. The least the government could do is to come to terms with the reality of Nigeria's multi-religious status, recognize religious rights and ensure that religious rights of all Nigerians are equally protected (The Guardian, 2002).

From data gathered, ethnic conflicts have persisted in all geo-political zones of the country. Commencing from the south-west zone of the country in Ondo State, the Ilaje and Ijaw Arogbo have been fighting tribal war since September 1998 till August 5, 1999 when ceasefire was achieved. Ondo State government had to set up a 24-man committee to work out the process of resolving the crisis permanently. Within one week of conflicts, which involved the use of sophisticated weapons, they eventually succeeded in destroying 45 communities with more than 1,000 people killed while 18,000 people were displaced! According to Olusola Oke, spokesman of Ilaje, he said the Ijaws razed down more than 13,000 residential buildings when the conflict started in 1998, September 19. Oke said no fewer than 180,000 people from 68 communities were chased out of their domains (Newswatch, 1999; National Interest, 2002).

In Eastern part of the country, protracted fratricidal conflict among the three contiguous communities of Aguleri, Umuleri and Umuoba Anam of Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State, had left the area sordidly devastated, as several hundreds of lives, houses and economic valuables including motor vehicles were lost. Following the fragile peace currently holding in the area, pockets of sporadic attacks are still witnessed in spite of heavy presence of mobile policemen drafted to ensure peace there (Newswatch, 1999). The protracted ethnic conflict started as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before April 1999 incident, two major conflicts have taken place ever since. One of the conflicts occurred in 1993 leading to the setting up of a commission of enquiry headed by Moses O. Nweje, a retired judge. The recommendations of the commission were yet to be implemented before war broke out years later in April 1999. Ohaneze Ndigbo – the pan-Igbo association - which has been assisting to promote peace in the area said over 1,000 people has so far been killed. In a communiqué issued in April when a peace committee set up by the group met with leaders of the three warring communities, they said that “a conflict that has claimed over 1,000 lives and reduced

over 500,000 citizens of Nigeria to refuge status in their fatherland is grave enough to attract a rapid intervention by a sensitive and responsive government". The present government in the Anambra State has been involved in a number of measures aimed at bringing lasting peace in the state. Apart from holding series of meetings with representatives of the people, Chinwoke Mbadinuju, the State Governor, visited the scenes of war and promised scholarship to students from the area in exchange for peace. He told a reporter: "I am saying that for the three communities without houses, without residence, without whatever civilized means, they are all destroyed ... I pronounced compulsory free education for these three communities and scholarship as a way of inducement for these people to come back" (Newswatch, 1999). One can then imagine the extent of damage as a result of civil strifes in that community.

In Warri, Delta State, in the Mid-western part of the country, the war which the 1997 creation of Warri south-west local government sparked off, is yet to subside. When the regime of late Gen. Sani Abacha created the local government, serious fighting erupted between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri after the local government headquarters said to have been initially located at Ogbe-Ijoh, a riverine Ijaw community which was later moved to the Itsekiri town of Ogidigben. Ever since the war started, it has remained a ding-dong affair, current estimate of people so far killed since 1997 stands at over 3,000 lives, which included soldiers, policemen and oil company personnel in addition to residents in the area. More than 30 billion naira both in oil revenue and valuable property were said to have been lost too. The crisis in the area at one time became so expanded that the Urhobo were forced to join the war. That was July 1999 when Itsekiri youths stormed the palace of Oresuen of Okere-Urhobo, newly installed traditional ruler of the Urhobo of Okere, Warri, and burnt it to ashes. Five people were killed in the attack, among them an old man of 76. The State government had to impose curfew on three occasions in the area before peace could return. Now, there is full but fresh indications point to the possibility of another round of fighting in the area (Newswatch, 1999).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the ethnic war in Taraba State of the Northern region of the country is perhaps the most complex and sophisticated in Nigeria. It is centered on efforts at the control of Takum by three ethnic groups, the Jukun, Chamba and Kutep, which dates back to the colonial days. In wars which the groups have fought, the Jukun and Chamba communities usually fought against the Kutep group. The first leg of the crisis is centred on conflict of interest between the Jukun/Chamba and the Kutep over who ascends the Jukun monarchy. Historical sources revealed that prior to 1914, Jukun and Zumperi had existed as separate districts with the Jukun and Chamba

inhabiting Jukun while Zumperi (now Ussa was inhabited by the Kuteb). By the amalgamation of 1914, the two groups were merged. The clamour now is for a separate chieftdom for each of the two communities. This deep rooted animosity resulted into war in 1997 with over 200 people killed, several hundreds maimed and property worth 300 million naira destroyed. On June 18, 1999 fresh hostilities erupted in the area resulting into what is now known as Chachanji war with casualties on both sides, with more than 10 villages burnt down in the fracas. The old wound reopened and took a dramatic turn in October, 2001 when ethnic militia group suspected to be Tivs in Vaaser which falls into Benue State captured 22 Nigerian soldiers on peace mission in the area and slaughtered them! (The News, 2001; Tell, 2001). This gruesome murder of soldiers provoked the federal government. Few hours after burying the soldiers killed in Zaki-Biam, Benue State, and the military invaded Tiv land and killed at least 70 people in the revenge mission at the first instance. At the end of the revenge mission, hundreds of Tiv people were killed and the house of former Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Victor Malu was burnt down. However, rather than resolving the crisis, the military invasion has compounded the problems (The News, 2001).

The Yoruba western part of the country has equally not been spared from the orgy of ethnic violence. In August 1999, 'Area Boys' hijacked the annual 'Oro' festival in Sagamu, Ogun State, which triggered off avoidable clashes between Yoruba and Hausa. At the end of the clash which started on the night of July 17, Moses Ogunlaja, the Lisa of Sagamu and Chairman, press briefing committee on the clash had reported the killing of 100 Sagamu indigenes and burning of over 120 vehicles belonging to them by the Hausas at Sabo, a part of Sagamu with Hausa concentration. He said over 130 indigenes were on danger list in various hospitals in the town (Newswatch, 1999). The Hausas lost no fewer than 50 lives in the clash. Ogunlaja said over 2,000 Sagamu indigenes have also left the town (Newswatch, 1999). In August 1999, serious ethnic clash erupted in Kano, between Hausa and the Yoruba. It was a rebound of the earlier clash between the two ethnic groups in Sagamu, July 15. The Sagamu clash witnessed the exodus of Hausa to their various homes in the northern part of the country. It was gathered that two trailer loads of corpses and survivals of the clash arrived Kano July 25 and were put on display at Kanti Kwari, a densely populated commercial area of Kano municipality. The survivors who included pregnant women and children were said to have told tales of horror and suffering in the hands of the Yoruba in Sagamu. This was said to have infuriated the young men in the city. That night young Hausa men went on a rampage attacking Yoruba residents of the city. At the end of the fracas over 50 houses and shops and about 30 vehicles belonging to the Yoruba were razed before the Police could quell the anger.

The irony about ethnic conflicts in Nigeria is definitely that of the Yoruba speaking Ife and Modakeke communities. The conflict had been on for several years back. But after a long truce, the Ife and Modakeke communities of Osun State began another round of blood letting in March 2000. The old war rages on for days that had to necessitate imposing a dusk-to-dawn curfew for well over a week because of the massive destruction of lives and properties. The bone of contention is rooted in their history. To the Ifes, the Modakekes are squatters on their land. This kind of colonial and domineering and hegemonic traits is deeply resented by the Modakakes, who believe that a separate local government should be created for them to get them detached from the historical appendage of the Ifes. But their population size is far below satisfying the condition for the creation of a local government area, which is another dimension to the dilemma of the two warring communities. The most unfortunate thing however, is that politicians have been playing politics with the issue. It will be recalled that the defunct National Party of Nigeria (NPN) used the Modakekes to rig the gubernatorial election in old Oyo State in the second republic. In the current democratic dispensation too, the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is equally cashing-in on the crisis to spite the Alliance for Democracy (AD) that is presently Osun State. If communities that share the same culture, language and religion could not stay together, the extent of the disintegrative potentials of the polity can be understood. The Ife/Modakeke war had been on since 1997 before it was resolved two years ago. The aforementioned are just a few cases out of the numerous instances of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

If ethnic conflicts are worrisome, religious conflicts have been dastard too. After the transition from the long years of military rule to civil rule in May, 1999, by 27<sup>th</sup> October that year, Zamfara State government elevated the Sharia to the status of the English common law that has formed the bedrock of Nigerian judicature. With the adoption and application of Sharia law coupled with the promise of its extension to other northern states, the whole country was polarized into two opposing camps of Moslems in support and Christians in opposition camp (The News, 2000). In March 2000, Kaduna State government – another northern state – introduced Sharia law. This sparked off an orgy of violence unprecedented in the history of that state. It was so bad that “the senseless destruction of lives and property would not ordinarily abate” (The News, 2000) despite a till-further-notice restriction was placed on Kano metropolis. At the end of the day, well over 200 lives and properties worth about ₦1 billion naira had been destroyed (The News, 2000). When the Nigeria Police became helpless, soldiers were called in to quell the crisis with

unquantifiable casualties (Tell, 2000). The Kaduna religious conflict instigated a reprisal move by the Igbos in the Eastern parts of the country who equally attacked Hausas for inflicting injury on their kits and kins in the Northern parts of the country.

This survey will be incomplete without an allusion to the recent *Boko Haram* crisis. *Boko Haram* had its antecedents in the quasi-mystic movement of 1980 called '*Yan Tatsine*, which violently revolted in Kano and other northern cities leading to the massacre of over 10,000 people. The '*Yan Tatsine* were anti-establishment crusaders that challenged both the Islamic and political authorities. They believed that they were the only true and righteous servants of God and dismissed other Muslims as those who had gone astray. Their belief revolved around the notion of "Qur'an only" to the exclusion of the Hadith, Sunnah and other universally agreed secondary sources of Islamic law, conduct and norms (Ibrahim, 2010).

The *Boko Haram* crisis started in Bauchi on 26 July, 2009, and over the next two weeks, hundreds of people were killed both by the sect members and by the security forces. *Boko Haram* made the fatal mistake of engaging in open revolt against the state. The response of the security forces, the police in particular, was the summary execution of the leadership that had been captured alive. It showed clearly once again that Nigeria still has a long distance to go in edifying the rule of law in the country. While it was clear that the security forces had become the objects of attack by the group and many had been killed, their response showed an inability to strike a balance between security operations and human rights. No one should be killed in a summary manner whatever action they have engaged in. The imperative of the rule of law is that all suspects should be taken to the courts for judgment (Ibrahim, 2010).

Ethno-religious skirmishes continued unabated in different parts of the country until early hours of Friday, November 28, 2008. Jos the capital of Plateau state erupted in an unprecedented ethno-religious crisis. At the end of the conflict more than 300 people were killed, while properties worth several millions of naira were destroyed in three days of 'madness' in Jos (Newswatch, 2008; The Guardian, 2008). The remote cause of the crisis bothered on four main ethnic groups that constitute Jos North Local Government Area who claim to be indigenous. These are Birom, Afizere (Jirawa), Anagorta and Hausa (Jarawa). There are also other ethnic groups like the Igbo and Yoruba in the area. Ownership of Jos North is being claimed by the four ethnic groups. Birom people claim that the Hausa in the Area are not indigenous of the area. According to them, the Hausa came and settled in

the area. But the Hausa insist they are indigenes of Jos North. Sequel to this, the election of, or appointment of any person from any of these two tribes to lead the local government council is perceived as a triumph over the other. For this reason, election issues are quite volatile among the groups in the area.

Another factor that is said to have ignited the crisis is that over the years, the Hausa in Jos North has been itching to have the traditional stool of the Emir in the council. But successive governments in the council had refused to do so because doing so would be tantamount to legitimizing the claim of ownership of Jos North by the Hausa ethnic group. Jos used to be one of the most peaceful cities in Nigeria. It however lost its innocence in 2001 when the struggle for power among politicians in the state led to sectarian violence. The 2001 mayhem later snowballed into the declaration of a state of emergency on Plateau state by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. The state of emergency which lasted for six months temporarily eased Joshua Dariye, then governor out of office. Again in 2004, violence broke out in Yewa area. Thousands of people lost their lives in the crisis (Newswatch, 2008).

Sadly, early hours of Sunday, March 7, 2010 was another day of horror when suspected Fulani herdsmen invaded Dogo-Nahawa and three other neighbouring villages on a genocide attack killing and maiming hundreds of people. The other villages attacked are Zot, Reput, and Kutgot, all in Shen district of Jos South local government area. These are all Birom villages. Dogo-Nahawa was in ruins, grief and in mourning mood on Monday, March 8, when about 400 corpses of the victims of the massacre were given a mass burial and tears and wailings by their relations. Despite the appeal by the clerics, aggrieved Youths took to the streets of Jos shortly after the mass burial to protest the gruesome murder of people. Some of the placards carried by the protesting Youths read: "Genocide: Hausa-Fulani Muslims killed over 400 Christians at Dogo-Nahawa" (Newswatch, 2010).

Other than the troubling ethno-religious conflicts, to many Nigerians, a more worrying development has been the emergence of ethnic militias whose goal is to protect the identities and interests of the groups they represent within the federation. These include the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), the Igbo People's Congress (IPC), the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Egbesu Society of the Niger Delta, and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSSOB). Others include the Ijaw National Congress and the Urhobo National Union among others (Akinyele, 2001). Similarly other than the civil society becoming catalyst for democratic sustenance they have been bastardized in view of usual democratic liberty they now have (Ikelegbe, 2001), thus, transforming

them from civil society to ‘civil riot’. The above graphic illustration of the state of ‘anomie’ is indeed far from being a cheering one for the nascent democracy. We now proceed to consider the impacts on the polity.

### **IMPACTS OF THE CRISIS ON THE NASCENT DEMOCRACY**

The psychological dimension to the crisis concerns the assurance of the state of every citizen of his or her physical safety. This is crucial because as Zabadi observes:

It is often asserted even at the level of the individual that self preservation is the first law of nature. That unless one can be assured of his physical security or safety everything else will be meaningless (Zabadi, 2001).

Thus, the protective role of the state is paramount if democracy will be sustained. The tendency has always been to emphasize the nexus between economic healths of the state vis-à-vis democracy at the expense of national security. In his all time book *Comparative Political Institutions*, Daniel Wit (1953) noted that the traditional efforts to maintain law and order also must be included in any discussion of the governmental objective of internal, security. The maintenance of order is an essential aspect of governmental authority because of its bearing on government’s monopoly of extreme coercion. The inability of a government to maintain order is a sign of the decay of its power and hence its ability to successfully pursue any of the objectives of the community.

Following from the foregoing, an insecure, crisis and violence ridden polity can never attract foreign investments. No investor knowing fully well that the polity is a security risk would venture his capital there. A survey by the German Industrial Funds, for example, reveals that the most important constraint to the investment is the difficulty in dealing with government authorities and the security problem (Ajagu, 2002). Where the polity is scaring away foreign investments, the economy becomes stagnant and democracy divided equally becomes a mirage. Whereas, the general assumption is that democracy must necessarily bring out better life. The expectation is very high, though, Walter Winchell, holds a contrary view, that “too many expect wonders from democracy when the most wonderful thing of all is just having it” (Nigerian Tribune, 2001). But in poverty ridden polity like Nigeria, a one time Minister of Information, Jerry Gana, holds a contrary view thus:

You know the mentality of our people. If democracy does not produce clean water, if democracy does not produce good roads, transform agriculture, cultivate industrial development, sanitize society, give us

power supply, democracy will lose credibility and they may say, *na democracy we go chop?* (Aiyede, 2001).

What the minister was trying to say in ‘pidgin’ English is that people may not be able to defend democracy or become catalyst for democratic sustenance if they are hungry or denied good things of life, which, ordinarily, are the primary responsibilities of the state. The caveat is that where democratic processes do not yield economic returns, a regression to dictatorship cannot be ruled out. This point is clearly stated by Larry Diamond thus: “... many new democracies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa will probably break down in the medium to long run unless they can reduce their often appalling levels of poverty, inequality, and social injustice, and through market oriented reforms lay the basis for sustainable growth” (Diamond, 1994 and 1995). Perhaps the most debilitating impact of ethno-religious conflicts to the nascent democracy is the problem of how to conduct another election. One of the prerequisites for conducting a free and fair election is doing that in a peaceful political milieu. The military has been using this as an excuse to truncate democracy in the past. The snag in this context is that the civil society has been over militarized with infiltration of arms used in unleashing violence on the body politic. The current trend in terms of voter turn out is indeed a very low one. Reason, quite a number of voters find it difficult to take such risk of going out to vote at elections simply because of the fear of the unexpected.

Experiences in the past have shown that political thugs were better armed than the regular police turning elections to the survival of the fittest. Consequently, political participation is at its lowest ebb. The caliber of people required to properly administer the state avoid politics like leprosy in view of the tempo of violence already injected into the system. No doubt violence is antithetical to democratic ethos and values. It is on record that the 2007 general elections in Nigeria witnessed unprecedented violence as a result of arms build up long before the elections. The form and character of Nigerian state that is not only weak but a failing one in all ramifications compounded the problem. Despite all appeals and state intimidation, it has been difficult to achieve arms mop up. One other greatest challenge is the porous border of the country. On several occasions, mercenaries were imported into the country to fight on the side of whichever religion they are defending.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the foregoing, we have surveyed ethno-religious conflicts in virtually all regions of the country. The survey revealed both the intensity and pervasiveness of the crisis which is indeed a potential

threat to the nascent democracy. Though, a number of steps are being taken by the federal government to curb ethnic crisis in terms of placating the restive minority groups but much seems not to have been achieved. For instance, government has strived to embark on a number of equitable policies to give every Nigerian a sense of belonging. When no segment of the citizenry sees itself as marginalized or oppressed, its loyalty to the state and government would be maximized. And the result would be that civil disturbances that call the police and other security services to task would be minimized or rendered non-existent. For example, government has established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to address the problems of the Niger Delta as well as populist policies to carry Nigerians along. The kind of lasting impact from the NDDC is a matter of time. As regards the ethnic militias across the country, wrecking havoc, a bill is already in the National Assembly to outlaw them, but, whether legal approach rather than political solution is to be the way out is another missing link in solving the problem of militant ethnic groups. It will be recalled too that with the advent of the nascent democracy, government has embarked on massive recruitment of more policemen, which has been a continuous exercise. As the police is being equipped, other allied intelligence agencies are equally being taken care of.

However, the above measures are not taking cognizance of the inadequacy of the present constitutional arrangements for internal security (Policy Briefs, 2000). Although these arrangements make State Governors Chief Security Officers of their states, they have no relevant control over the state police commands. This has resulted in calls for the establishment of State Police as obtains in other federations like the USA, Canada and Australia. There is need, therefore, to set in place appropriate machinery to see that unfair use of the force to advance parochial interests, as happened during the Abacha era, can no longer happen again. Additionally, it is important that the constitutional dilemma posed by the inability of State Governors to enforce their responsibility as chief state security officers be addressed through agreed constitutional amendment. It is of no use to have a security responsibility without the enforcement capability (Policy Briefs, 2000).

Nevertheless, beyond mere institutional reforms and constitutional niceties, Nwolise (2002) has come up with a number of suggestions for taming the monster of domestic conflicts. His recommendations are that practical (field) use should be made of all the institutions existing in Nigeria which are concerned with peace and conflict resolution. To be able to contain violent conflicts, where preventive measures fail, the Federal Government should establish a National Domestic Peace-Keeping Force (NDPF). To reduce the number of miscreants and 'area boys', unemployment should be combated with all seriousness and patriotism, in order to dry up the pool of hungry and angry

people from where destroyers are recruited for political thuggery, terrorism, religious riots and communal clashes (Nwolise, 2002).

Furthermore, government need to mount a serious public education and enlightenment programme to let citizens know that in a democracy, the most important (political) values is respect for the rule of law and the opinion of other citizens. Similarly, federal government need to establish a Peace Education Programme taught with relevant syllabus from primary school to the University. This is geared towards producing new generation of Nigerians imbued with the culture of peaceful settlement of conflicts. In the studies, the awful experiences of nations ruined by religious and ethnic intolerance such as Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Sudan, and Somalia etc. should be invoked. In another vein, full scale real war must be launched against poverty in Nigeria. Poverty has placed millions of Nigerians on edge psychologically, and any little quarrel which, under a different better socio-economic milieu would not have caused any crisis, gives rise to a wide scale conflagration.

In the extant literature, the nexus between violence and poverty cum deprivation has long been established. A country that is otherwise typical but has primary commodity exports of around 25 percent of GDP has a 33 per cent risk of conflict, but when exports are only five per cent of GDP the probability of conflict falls to six per cent. The correlation between armed conflict and a state's endowment with natural resources has only linked some commentators to the existence of 'resource cause', where resource-rich countries exhibit stunted development (Punch, 2008). This is particularly the case in Africa, where struggles over the exploitation of resources have further led to the development of conflict economies, from diamonds in Sierra Leone, oil in Sudan and Nigeria, to minerals, timber and gas in the Democratic Republic of Congo (The Punch, 2008). A hungry man it is said is an angry man.

Be that as it may, a deliberate and systematic programme of confidence building (measures) should be put in place across religious, states, ethnic groups, local governments and political parties. These are meant to generate mutual confidence, deeper understanding, love, acceptance and unity. Political equality and national citizenship engineering, personal nature of religion, Nigeria's secular nature, and the need to respect each others culture and rights should feature significantly here. For nation building to proceed smoothly, the concept of state indigeneship must give way to national citizenship (Nwolise, 2002; Ojo, 2006).

Conclusively, virtually all integrative devices put in place to consolidate Nigeria's federal structure have collapsed like pack of cards in the face of the frightening and overwhelming domestic ethno-religious conflicts because what successive regimes have been doing is to try to integrate the elites or the middle class with 'criminal' neglect of the grassroots, and, this has not achieved much. Whereas, the masses which are ready tools in the hands of the elites to foment trouble need to be targeted for integration something urgent should be done to assist the nascent democracy (Ojo, 2009).

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