Armed Security Forces' Management of Ethno-religious Conflicts in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the Armed Security Forces' management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to find out how the Armed Security Forces handle ethno-religious conflicts in north-central Nigeria and to examine the challenges faced by the Armed Security Forces in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria. Two Research questions and hypotheses were formulated in line with the objective and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Survey research design was used for the study. Questionnaire was the instrument used to gather data and was analysed using statistical package for social sciences. The study reveals that the Armed Security Forces handle ethno-religious conflicts by engaging in weapon searches at check points, collection of illegal weapons in conflict areas, regular patrolling of well-known flashpoints, dialogue with stake holders and engaging perpetrators of ethno-religious conflict, but there is no prompt and adequate deployment of security forces to conflict areas. The study therefore recommended that the Security Forces and stakeholders in the affected areas should embark on a cooperative approach towards effective management of the conflicts and prompt deployment of the adequate number of personnel with sufficient equipment to conflict areas. The security forces should abide by their training on the protection of lives and property in their areas of coverage.

Keywords: Armed Security Forces, Conflict, Ethnicity, Management, and Religion**.**

Introduction

This research focuses on the armed security forces' management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria. Armed security forces in this work means the Nigeria Police and the Army. Ethno-religious conflict is the combination of ethnic and religious sentiments that produce clashes among different groups of people. Ethno-religious conflict, if it is not properly handled, may lead to the breakdown of society. Therefore, ethno-religious conflict is something that cannot be ignored. In Nigeria, ethno-religious conflict has been one of the major problems experienced since independence. It has piqued the interest of many researchers, and this study is another attempt to investigate the phenomenon through the armed security forces' handling of ethno-religious conflicts and the challenges they face.

Ethno-religious conflicts are among the most recurring issues in Nigeria. It dates back to the pre-colonial period and continues to date. Conflict management was carried out by designated institutions and individuals. These institutions are aimed at mitigating inter-human and intra and inter-communal conflicts. The management of ethno-religious conflicts was carried out by chiefs or priests, who were primarily responsible for cleansing the land and reconciling the conflicts within the ethnic groups. The conflict is brought to an oath resolution by the parties concerned not to go into conflict again. During colonial times, the British colonial legacy put in place structures of fearful future crises and used superior arms to suppress the people. Pre-colonial societies are reputed to hold secrets of peace making and conflict resolution embedded in their customs and traditions. Courts were established by the colonialists to settle cases based on their legal system, whereas the Armed Security force was set up to handle cases that were to be handled by the indigenous peace institutions (Ademowo, 2015). The proverbial and symbolic communicative resources, like the people's oral tradition, good reputation, experience at the disposal of the mediator and a measure of objectivity on the part of the reconcilers, were not recognized by the colonial masters as the canons of conflict management. It is this development that motivated the study on "Armed Security Forces' management of ethno-religious conflict in North Central Nigeria".

Conceptual Clarification

This study focused on armed security forces management ethno-religious conflicts. This section reviewed literature on the concept of conflict, conflict management, ethno-religious conflict, Armed Security Forces and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria and the Challenges of Armed Security Forces in Ethno-Religious Conflicts.

Conflict

There is no universally accepted definition of conflict. Conflict refers to a situation or behaviour in which the desires, needs, objectives, or values of the parties concerned conflict with one another or are considered to conflict with one another. It is a serious disagreement, an escalation of disagreement between parties that triggers strong emotions (Usoro, Ekpenyong & Effiong, 2014). It is a serious conflict between parties that has escalated to the point of eliciting intense emotions, understanding what causes disputes and why they happen is essential to being able to resolve them. When properly handled, conflict can be a constructive and effective force for change that leads to growth and development (Olufemi & Adawale, 2012).

Conflict Management

Conflict Management is concerned with the processes for controlling and regulating conflict to ensure that it does not escalate. It is also concerned with techniques involved in the avoidance, prevention, containment and satisfactory resolution of the catalytic factors in a conflict. In the context of this study, it also involves the actions or inactions of armed

security forces to avoid, prevent and tackle ethno-religious conflicts. Rahim (2011) states that conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of a conflict while increasing its positive aspects. It is a principle that all conflicts can not necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Conflict management, according to Dalung (2013), involves the long-term management of intractable disputes. Dalung went on to say that there are various ways in which people deal with complaints, by speaking up for what they believe is right and against what they believe is wrong. As a result, conflict management entails learning conflict resolution skills, self-awareness of conflict styles, conflict negotiation skills, and building a framework for resolving conflict in the workplace. It is a procedure that encompasses all articulated tactics, initiatives, and systemic processes for preventing conflict from escalating (Usoro, Ekpenyong & Effiong, 2014).

Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Different expressions have been invoked by people to explain ethnicity. In Ladan (2010), an ethnic group is described as a community distinguishable from others on the basis of specific characteristics that include cultural, linguistic, physical and biological. Ethnicity has been a source of conflict in Nigeria. However, the characteristics of ethnicity in themselves do not spell out conflicts among different groups. In Nigeria, ethnic conflicts are caused by socioeconomic imbalances or economic, which are frequently political terms. This is because the control of the political machinery creates easy access to national wealth, not only for the individual in authority, but also for his immediate family members and ethnic groups. In general, race as a source of tension arises from long periods of dominance and unequal treatment by the politically dominant ethnic group, as well as unresolved socio-economic and political imbalances, injustices, and inequities (Stephen, 2012).

Religion, on the other hand, is the belief in God, the creator of the universe and all that is in it, to whom the worship, homage, and obedience of man is due (Ladan, 2010). Religion does not create instability or destabilizing effects on a nation. On the contrary, it is a means of upholding justice and equity. It is an agent of stability, peace, love and unity for all of mankind. "Religion as a source of conflict is the result of religious intolerance, fanaticism, and politics. In Nigeria, the case has consistently been made that Nigerians are religious people and, whatever religion they practice, they all desire to live in peace and worship in peace" (Ladan, 2010:5).

The combination of ethnic and religious sentiments that results in clashes between different groups of people is referred to as 'ethno-religious conflicts'. Many observers keep on questioning the reasons for the ethno-religious conflicts in a richly blessed country like Nigeria. It is baffling to note that for the past twenty years, there has been a resurgence of ethnic and religious violence in the nation (Igbuzor, 2012). These ethno-religious conflicts, according to Musa (2004), assumed a massive scale in the 1980s and the 90s. Today, these conflicts have devalued the social and cultural fabric of the nation. Musa (2004) argues that

Nigeria is a country with appropriate credentials for inter-communal conflicts. The diversity in language, religion, culture, history and even attitude, which could serve as an enriching variety in a pluralistic society, are the factors Musa considers as yielding to a huge harvest of conflicts since independence.

Armed Security Forces and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Armed security forces in this work refer to a combination of the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Army, whose primary mission is to protect the state from external aggression and internal insurgency while sustaining peace and order, as established by the constitution. According to Dode (2012), the expected task of the Security Forces in a contemporary democratic state is to do nothing that would detract from the establishment and consolidation of the system. In doing so, emphasis is placed on ensuring that the Security Forces never intervene in state politics, because democracy and the Security Forces are diametrically opposed. The Security Force is the antithesis of democracy with regard to its forms, values, purpose and structure.

According to Beloveth (2015), over the years, the Nigerian government has adopted some rhetorical measures in its efforts to manage the ethno-religious conflicts littering the country's political landscape. Some scholars have argued that the measures are not effective given the continued escalation of conflicts such as the 2002, 2004, and 2008 Jos upheavals, the dreadful Boko Haram attacks and the most recent Fulani/herdsmen clashes (Adeola, 2010). Omorogbe and Omohan (2005) state that the two measures mostly adopted by the government of Nigeria are coercive and judicial methods. Krause (2011) states that the use of force as a coercive measure entails the deployment of armed security forces that regularly patrol well-known flashpoints within the city to quell further unrest, engaged in weapons searches at checkpoints on the roads leading to conflict areas, which has only served to exacerbate the situation. This strategy seems to have failed because it entails a large number of shootings in which innocent people are often the victims. This form of dispute resolution approach excludes comprehensive mediation because military officers do not seem to have the necessary experience to resolve disputes (Nawankwo, 2015). Similarly, Nwagboso (2016) states that the national security policy of Nigeria, which internal security is a sub-unit, was weak to tackle violent security problems that confronted Nigeria. This was partly due to policymakers' lack of expertise in developing robust internal security policies and successful counter-insurgency strategies in the region. Since 1999, ad hoc intelligence outfits have tended to control Nigeria's internal security governance. Nwagboso states further that the adoption of the 'fire-brigade' approach, such as the continuous use of the Joint-Task Force (JTF), to address Nigeria's internal security problem, only succeeded in minimizing violent attacks on the state and her citizens, without addressing their root causes and re-occurrence (Omorogbe & Omohan, 2005).

Challenges of Armed Security Forces in Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Taking into account the amount of quality protection provided by the security forces for the entire population and the level of confidence and encouragement it enjoys from these people, one cannot conclude that the armed security forces' performance is far below the expectations that many people place on them. There are several cumulative problems that contribute to the abysmal performance of the security forces. This ranges from material to human and external challenges (Adegoke, 2014).

Widespread corruption among members of the armed security forces is alarming. This has greatly soiled the image of the security forces. Obarisiagbon (2017) states that the police connive with kidnapping offenders to help them out of police custody after collecting money from them and their relatives and subsequently closing the case file or writing a report that favours the offender. David (2019) further attests that the rate of corruption in the security forces is a serious problem, according to the author, since they are supposed to be moral as law enforcement agents. David reveals that the armed security forces' corruption is a major contributor to Nigeria's internal insecurity. A commonly mentioned effect on society is the loss of lives as a result of extrajudicial killings, arrests, and illegal detention of citizens orchestrated by armed security forces, as well as citizens' unwillingness to report suspected cases of crime to security forces, making such crimes difficult to curb. These, among many others, are: connivance with some individuals to help free offenders out of custody after obtaining money from suspects, closure of case files, escorting vehicles loaded with contraband goods and stolen items, stealing from suspects and from accident victims, stealing from crime scenes, supply of arms and ammunition with the security forces' uniforms to criminals for monetary gain, among others (Oluwarotimi, 2012; Omagie & Obarisiagbon, 2018).

According to Abdulkadir (2004), poor remuneration for both officers and men of the Nigerian armed security forces is a major obstacle that hinders their optimum performance and has created abysmal performance for the security forces in carrying out their constitutional duties. Nigerian security forces lack adequate equipment such as communication devices, vehicles, computers, patrol boats, and ammunition to assist them in combating crime in society. In the same vein, Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpan-Robaro (2013) inadequate equipment both in weaponry and training is the major challenge facing the armed security forces in their management of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. This is in addition to security personnel's negative attitudes and behaviours. Many times, security staff assigned to specific security incidents lack the skills and resources necessary to manage the situations in a way that prevents them from happening. Even when these occur, some staff are easily swayed by racial, religious, or communal sentiments, and their personal desire to represent their people rather than the nation takes precedence. Instead of serving as national watchdogs, defending national interests and traditions, and protecting citizens from criminals, they quickly become government saboteurs, promoting and fuelling insecurity by leaking sensitive security information or assisting criminals in obtaining weapons or evading the long arm of the law (Okwonkwo, Ndubuisi & Anagbogu, 2015; Amao, 2019). According

to Peterside (2014), most of the time, the security forces involved in internal security operations are not properly equipped for the task. Armed security forces engaged in internal operations that are only equipped with guns will definitely use them if their lives are threatened by a hostile mob. Similarly, the Nigerian Army was quoted as saying the insurgents now use anti-aircraft guns mounted on trucks to fight the nation's soldiers, likely outgunning the country's overstretched forces (Vanguard Newspaper, 2013:7).

Statement of the Problem

North central Nigeria has over the years become a permanent flashpoint of violent clashes. The zone, which had previously been one of the most relatively peaceful in Nigeria, has become deeply entangled in ethno-religious conflicts that have resulted in genocide attacks, bombings, maiming, and killings of several people, causing poverty and poor education. Within the space of nineteen years, several violent ethno-religious conflicts have been reported in the zone and all efforts to restore peace using the security forces as a way of managing conflicts have not achieved the desired end. The aftermath of these conflicts is an increase in criminal activities, drug-related cases, and a progression of armed robbery, kidnapping, assassination and ritual killings in the zone.

The armed security forces deployed to curtail ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria are faced with the spiraling incidence and intensity of armed violence due to a deteriorating security situation in the area in the face of increasing acts of lawlessness and social disorder. The situation presents serious internal security challenges for the security forces to deal with. The residents of the North Central geo-political zone have become accustomed to road blockades and checkpoints mounted by security operatives for the past decade in the zone where they hitherto moved freely but were forced to face the reality of insecurity. The changing nature and the persistence of the conflicts in the zone make it look as if there is a failure in the management of the crisis by the Armed Security Forces. Considerable work has been done on the issue of Ethno-Religious conflicts in Nigeria, but management of ethno-religious conflicts by the Armed Security Forces remains scanty. It is in recognition of this problem that this study on "Armed Security Forces' Management of ethno-religious conflict in north central Nigeria" set out to address.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives to achieve

1. find out how ethno-religious conflicts are handled by the Armed Security Forces in north-central Nigeria.
2. examine the challenges that armed security forces face in managing ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions

1. How do the Armed Security Forces handle ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria?

Null Hypotheses
1. There is no significant difference in the opinions of security forces, urban and rural settlements on how the ethno-religious conflicts are being handled by armed security forces in North Central Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the opinions of male and female respondents on the challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design and the target population are the security forces personnel, male and female inhabitants of rural and urban settlements of North Central Nigeria. A sample population of 1208 respondents out of the population of 8,696,663 was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire using the modified four-point Likert rating scale response of Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2) and Strongly Disagree (SD=1) for scoring. The instrument was divided into two sections (A and B) with seventeen (17) questions, validated by four research experts. The reliability was determined by administering the instrument to 50 participants who were not part of the research in Jos North L.G.A. The data collected was statistically analysed using Cronbach's Alpha method, which yielded a reliability co-efficient value of 0.81 and 0.83.

A total number of 1208 copies of the vetted questionnaire were further distributed to the respondents randomly selected from twelve (12) L.G.As and 1089 copies representing 90.2% were duly filled and returned with the help of two trained research assistants. The data were analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20, and the hypotheses were tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and two sample t-test at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The mean scores for the items were based on a four point scale and the midpoint average for decision was fixed at 2.5. A mean score of 2.5 and above implies that the respondents agreed with the notion of the item, while a mean score lower than 2.5 suggest that the respondents did not agree.

Results and Discussions

From the data collected, the perception is that the strategies used by security forces during conflicts have not yielded the desired result.

Research Question 1: How do the Armed Security Forces handle ethno-religious Conflicts in North Central Nigeria? Table 1 shows the opinions of the respondents on how ethno-religious conflict is handled by armed security forces.

Table 1: Opinions of the Respondents on how ethno-religious conflict is handled by armed security forces in North Central Nigeria

S/n	Management of ethno-religious conflicts by armed security forces.	SA Freq	A Freq.	D Freq	SD Freq.	Total	Mean
1	Collection of illegal weapons in conflict areas	109	617	181	182	1089	2.6
2	Regular patrols of well-known flash points to quell further unrest.	181	544	182	182	1089	2.7
3	Engagement on weapon searches at checkpoints	182	544	182	181	1089	2.7
4	Rapid and quick intervention in trouble spots	72	327	544	146	1089	2.3
5	Quick response to distress calls	55	126	363	545	1089	1.7
6	Arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of ethno religious conflicts	182	181	545	181	1089	2.3
7	Regular deployment of security forces' personnel in trouble spots	91	453	363	182	1089	2.4
8	Engaged perpetrators who came to, kill, loot and destroy property	109	490	435	55	1089	2.6
9	Security forces dialogue with stake holders	254	635	163	37	1089	3.0
	Aggregate mean Score						2.5

Table 1 shows that the respondents agreed with items that the armed security forces in handling ethno-religious conflicts engaged in weapon searches at checkpoints, collection of illegal weapons in conflict areas, regular patrols of well-known flash points, dialogue with stakeholders and engaging perpetrators who came to kill, loot, and destroy properties of people. But the respondents disagreed that there is rapid and quick response and intervention by armed security forces in trouble areas, arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of ethno religious conflicts and regularly deployment of armed security forces' in trouble sports. This is in line with Krause (2011) that the security forces regularly patrolled well-known flashpoints within the city to quell further unrest and also engaged in weapons searches at checkpoints on the roads leading to conflict areas.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria? Table 2presents the opinions of respondents involved in the assessment.

Table 2: Opinions of the Respondents on challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of ethno-religious conflict in North Central Nigeria

S/n	Challenges faced by armed security forces.	SA Freq	A Freq	D Freq	SD Freq	Total	Mean
1	Some members of the armed security forces' are directly involve in extra judicial killings	381	490	163	55	1089	3.1
2	Delay in giving operational orders	362	581	73	73	1089	3.1
3	Some security forces' personnel Operate in collusion with vested interest groups to perpetuate violence	218	618	181	72	1089	2.9
4	Some security forces' personnel exhibit ethno-religious prejudice in the discharge of their duties	363	636	54	36	1089	3.2
5	Deployment of insufficient number of armed security forces to conflict areas	363	363	181	182	1089	2.8
6	Insufficient provision of modern equipments	181	544	182	182	1089	2.7
7	Insufficient supply of arms and ammunitions	363	489	55	182	1089	3.1
8	Some armed security forces extort money from the people they are supposed to protect	509	362	164	54	1089	3.2
	Aggregate mean Score						3.0

Table 2 shows that the respondents agree with the response items that armed security forces experience delays in giving operational orders, some of them directly involved in extra judicial killings, Operates in collusion with vested interest groups to perpetuate violence, exhibit ethno-religious prejudice in the discharge of their duties, and also extort money from the people they are supposed to protect. The table also shows that armed security forces face challenges such as the deployment of an insufficient number of personnel to conflict zones, the provision of insufficient modern equipment, and an insufficient supply of arms and ammunition. The findings agree with Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpan-Robaro (2013) and Obarisiagbon (2018) that inadequate equipment both in weaponry and training and some

armed security forces personnel's attitudes and behaviours of conniving with some individuals to help free offenders out of custody after obtaining money from them, supply of arms and ammunition with the security forces' uniforms to criminals for monetary gain are the major challenges facing the armed security forces in their management of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Null Hypothesis I: There is no significant difference in the opinions of security forces, urban and rural settlements on how Conflict Management by Security Forces in the North-Central zone is handled. Table 1, was used as the dependent variable in the hypothesis while the result of the test is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 shows a one-way analysis of how armed security forces handle ethno-religious conflicts.

Sources	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.73	2	0.36	0.137	0.872
Within Groups	288.493	1086	0.266		
Total	288.566	1088			

(F-critical=3.00, P<0.05)

The result of the test as indicated in Table 3 revealed that the groups did not differ significantly in opinions on how armed security forces handled the ethno-religious conflict in north central Nigeria. This is deduced from the observed F-value of0.137 and an observed level of significance of 0.872 (P > 0.05). From these observations, there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 4 presents the mean scores of the respondents by their group on the variables.

Table 4. Mean scores on how armed security forces handle ethno-religious conflicts.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Urban settlements	477	2.48	0.516	0.024
Rural settlements	418	2.48	0.514	0.025
Security Forces	194	2.46	0.515	0.037
Total	1089	2.48	0.515	0.016

Table 4 above shows that respondents from urban settlements, rural settlements, and armed security forces did not differ significantly in their opinions on how armed security forces handle ethno-religious conflict in North central Nigeria as all the groups involved in the test had an equal mean rating of 2.5. Based on the aggregate mean score of 2.5 on the four-point scale used in the study in table 1, it shows that the three groups have a consensus agreement on how armed security forces handle ethno-religious conflict.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the opinions of male and female respondents on the challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of

ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria. The result of the two-sample t-test is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Two Sample t-test on the challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t-value	DF	P-value
Male	540	3.005	0.516	0.022	0.184	1087	0.854
Female	549	2.999	0.521	0.022			

(t-critical = 1.96, P < 0.05)

The result of the test in table 5 indicate that there was no significant difference between the opinions of male and female respondents on the challenges faced by armed security forces in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria. This is indicated by the calculated t-value of 0.184 and P-value of 0.854 is less than the critical value of 1.96 of the Table. These observations did not provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis is therefore retained.

Discussion of Findings
1. The armed security forces in handling ethno-religious conflicts engaged in weapon searches at checkpoints, collection of illegal weapons in conflict areas, regular patrols of well-known flash points, dialogue with stakeholders and engaging perpetrators who came to kill, loot, and destroy properties of people. The study also discovered that there is no rapid, quick response and intervention by armed security forces in trouble areas, arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of ethno religious conflicts and regular deployment of armed security forces' in trouble sports.
2. In dealing with ethno-religious conflicts some armed security force personnel directly involved in extra-judicial killings, exhibit ethno-religious prejudice in the discharge of their duties and delay in giving operational orders. They operate at a level of deficiency due to the deployment of insufficient number of armed security personnel to conflict areas, insufficient provision of modern equipment, supply of arms and ammunition and some armed security forces extort money from the people they are supposed to protect.

Conclusion
From the study, it may be concluded that the Armed Security Forces, as a body charged with the responsibility of protecting life and property, handle ethno-religious conflicts by engaging in weapon searches at check points, collection of illegal weapons in conflict areas, regular patrolling of well-known flashpoints, dialogue with stake holders and engaging with the perpetrators of ethno-religious conflict. Furthermore, some security force personnel operate with a vested interest, thereby leading to delays in giving operational

orders and also being involved in the extra judicial killings of people they are meant to protect.

Recommendations

1. The Security Forces and stakeholders in the affected areas should embark on a cooperative approach towards effective management of the conflicts and prompt deployment of the adequate number of personnel with sufficient equipment to conflict areas.
2. The security forces should abide by their training on the protection of lives and property in their areas of coverage.
3. The security forces should be monitored by their intelligent Units such that erring individuals are sanctioned accordingly as a way of ensuring discipline among them.
4. The judicial system should be made to be functional by all levels of government in the country since justice is hierarchical. This will ensure that justice is always carried out with sanctions for any individual who violates the law.

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