State under Challenge: Discerning the Imbroglio of Nigeria's Religious Conflict and Security Implications

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Abstract

Religious conflict has been something that fills Nigeria's plate in the past decades. The palpable terror and suffering the conflicts have brought are undeniably dangerous for both the state and the people. Given the intricacy and immense impact the religious conflict has, the article seeks to shine a light on this particular problem in Nigeria. The article provides its findings through the qualitative research method that utilizes data gathered from previous research, media coverage and other sources. The concepts of national security along with Galtung's violence triangle are also used to better understand the issue at hand. The article touches upon the ongoing, what is at stake over the issue as well as the available means to face the issue. It is found how the numerous atrocities that take the guise of religious reasons can be caused by other issues like poverty, the presence of political entrepreneurs and other manure piles as well. On the second point, the risk of having the problem spreading to neighboring states along with the conflict's overall exacerbation. In the third point, the government may resort to means like securitization of the issue and keep up its effort in running interfaith dialogue and collaborating with foreign partners. Finally, Indonesia is a go-to partner for Nigeria as it is experienced in the handling of religious conflicts as apparent in its past events and capacity to adapt.

Keywords: religious conflict, Johan Galtung, Nigeria, security, terrorism

Introduction

Conflicts within society are nothing to be surprised of. Within a huge society like states, such things are bound to occur. In this regard, social conflicts have numerous sources, ranging from racial, political and even one between social classes (Soekanto, 2009). Another important source where conflicts may stem is religious matters. Such a thing is common at the domestic level in comparison to emanating from other countries. However, should it be left ignored, negative impacts are to be expected. Such a case is present in a country known as Nigeria.

Located on the Western Coast of Africa, the country hosts countless tribal groups, roughly around 371 (Aguwa, 2019). Nigeria has a roughly balanced Muslim and Christian population. The clashes between the two communities have been the source of religious conflicts there. While it is true that both sides of the community have suffered respectively, the attack or persecution towards the Christian community has rather been on the rise. The poignant feature of the religious conflict is not only that it threatens the Christian community but also other groups within that particular community as well, like women and children (Owojaiye, 2022).

In the first six months of 2020 alone, there have been more than 1,200 Christians killed in Nigeria (Gilbert, 2020). Killings

and kidnappings are nothing short of the kind of problems Nigeria has in relation to the religious conflict. Unfortunately, despite the obvious issue of religious conflict, it goes without saying that the issue is more complicated than that. Of all the sources that can be traced, many of them can actually be pointed out to other share of problems Nigeria has.

Many may not be surprised at all at the state's plate of conflicts. This can be attributed to the seemingly bad governance the country has been undergoing. As shown in the 2021 Transparency International report, Nigeria only scored 24 out of 100 on its corruption perception index (Transparency International, 2021). That data alone can give us a glimpse of the country's terrible issue of corruption within the government. That particular issue, unsurprisingly, does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, its presence would open the door for other more pressing problems to emerge. One of them would be the very issue Nigeria is facing, that is its religious conflicts and violence.

The gravity of the situation has attracted sundry research in the past. Take for example the research titled "Religious Conflicts and Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Security" which was done by Ushe Mike Ushe (2015). The article focuses on the role of education as one of the means to face the religious conflict in Nigeria. Another example is the research by O. Paul Jegede (2019) titled "Implications of Religious Conflicts on Peace, National Security and Development in Nigeria". Through the use of historical approach on the many religious conflicts in Nigeria, the many implications of the conflict are then analyzed. It then can be understood how the conflict has multisectoral implication especially towards Nigeria's national security and development. Despite the plenty of basis and insight given through the two and many other articles, there lies other considerations and aspects to the conflict that are worth noting. This article will add a more in depth look towards the driving forces behind the conflict through the theoretical lens of Johan Galtung's violence triangle. Following that, considerations towards national and human security are also added to the table. On top of that, the article also posits how Indonesia is a suitable partner for Nigeria in the grant effort of overcoming religious conflicts.

The pressing matter present in Nigeria and its seamless webs of variables make it an interesting endeavor to undertake. Not to mention that the issue has remained omnipresent across the decades there too. It is against that backdrop that this article is written so as to provide better understanding of the issue as well as the fitting prescriptions for it.

Research Method

In presenting the explanations in the discussions, the article utilizes the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method is put to use as it allows the researcher to interpret the forces at play in the social settings of the issue. The article grounds its analysis on the many data it gathered through the internet and document-based research as well. The data are collected from past and recent relevant studies as well as the ones from relevant institutes. Following the collection of data, they would be analyzed qualitatively and concluded once the findings are obtained (Bryman, 2012). To support the analysis, the two concepts of Galtung's violence triangle and national security are also made use of. The two concepts fit well with the article as religious conflict has severe implications on the effort to uphold national and other dimensions of security. As for the former, the seamless webs behind the religious conflict make it necessary to consider not only the conflict but also the behind the stage factors. Following that, the article then explains the following points regarding the present religious conflict in Nigeria, what's more to come should the conflict remain untreated as well as the proper response to the issue. The article also discusses later down the road how cooperation with Indonesia can be a viable path for Nigeria.

Results and Discussion
National security and Galtung's violence triangle

States are rational actors that reside in an

anarchic international system. States would find themselves competing against each other with the absence of a higher authority to protect them. It is inevitable that in such an environment it puts its own security at the top of its list. This focus on its idea of security, known as national security, has two dimensions or outlook to it that are inward and outward.

National security, in the past, has primarily revolved around the states as their referent object. Nowadays, for the government, they have a longer list of referent objects in order to maintain a state's national security. The new referent objects range from individual, food, economic and many other security issues.

The new dimensions of security issues pave the way for many more means to deal with them. Taking the anachronistic lens of the Cold War, it is true that in the past military forces were the central actor in the issue of national security. But as of now, a wide range of other actors are also involved on this matter, from the other ministries of a government to even non-state actors like NGOs. Also, in contrast to the Cold War era, now states must take into account sources of threat that lie within their sovereignties. This can take the form of issues that have not been handled properly (domestic issues within the society in economic, food and even cultural fields). At worst, they must also face armed groups that originate from their own national boundaries, like secessionist groups to terrorist or radical groups which are growing more prevalent nowadays (Rajanayagam, 1994).

Governments, apart from being the overarching actor in their respective sovereignties, must also face the possibility that they can be the source of the threat as well. The threat that the government can pose is strongly felt by the individuals that relegate their consent to the ruling government. In this sense, they can be a threat as a result of intended or unintended conduct. For the former, the construction of policies that harm the people or other referent objects can be taken as the examples (Manullang, 2022). For the latter, it can be seen in governments' incapacity to properly deal with the many issues at hand, which would open the door

for many other threats to emerge.

To face certain threats, both external and internal ones, states would need a considerable number of resources and leeway to execute their ideas. Moreover, in addressing the many issues that may threaten national security, states would resort to formulating relevant policies. In order to get the policies accepted by the public, the government can resort to the securitization scheme (Balzacq et al., 2015).

In the securitization scheme, there are some variables to it, which are the threat, referent object and the securitizing actor. The first refers to the threat that is being faced. The second points to the object or what is needed to be protected against that aforementioned threat. The securitizing actor on the other hand is the actor that will decide whether or not a problem can be considered as a threat. In defining a certain issue as a threat to national security, the government, as the securitizing actor, would engage in a speech act. As Wæver put it, the speech act is an important part in security studies as it explains how certain issues can be viewed as a threat to national security and others not (Wæver, 1995). The act can be understood as an attempt to frame or move an issue under the security light, therefore bringing it away from normal politics. In doing so, the securitizing actor would show the evidence and set of policies to convince other parties of how the issue at hand is indeed a security issue as well as how the actor would face it. This is in line with how subjective the notion of security can be. Certain issues, putting aside their impact and intensity, can attain more attention or sense of insecurity from particular states due to historical or political matters.

Through that speech act, the government then can get the green light they need to pass the bill. It is also here that the government can mobilize a greater amount of resources as a means to confront the threat it previously announced (Huysmans, 2011). Hence, maintaining their national security and perhaps other sets of national interests as well.

Moving on, another concept the article uses is Johan Galtung's violence theory. The theory posits that violence in society can be

categorized into three categories as follows: direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence (Dutta, 2020). Direct violence can be understood as the type that can be experienced directly by the people, it can be physical or psychological. Structural violence is the type that is caused by the structural setting of the society. This type is caused by things like social institutions, norms and even laws that make way for violence to materialize. Finally, cultural violence is the one caused by behavior and beliefs that are internalized by the people within a society.

Among the three types, a line can be drawn that separates them into two categories. This difference refers to the visibility of it where direct violence would be the one that is visible and the other two as the invisible ones (Fadilah & Halim, 2021). The latter ones can be taken as the contributing factors for the presence of the former. But taken as a whole, all three types play an important role in perpetuating the cycle of violence which should be taken note of.
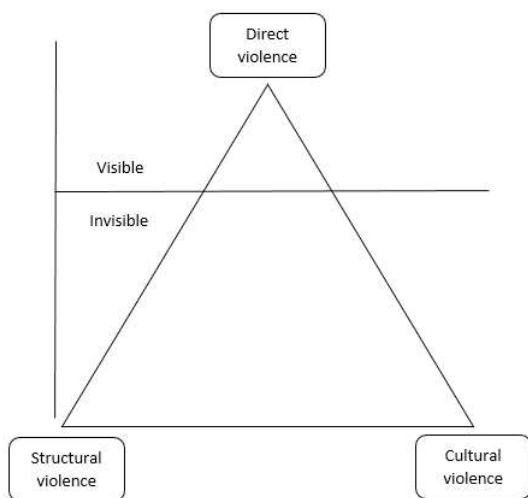

Figure 1 Galtung's Violence Triangle

The government is not exempt from the possibility of being the very source of violence itself. Given the inseparability of politics and power play from government's duties, it is no surprise that their violence could at times be ruled as a legitimate action while on other occasions it can be viewed as an outright violation of its position (Hoefnagels, 1977). Apart from being the perpetrator, the government can also be the manure pile that leads to numerous violence in the country as

a result of its ineptness to run the country.

Such conditions would contribute to the rise of violence among the population. Conditions caused by the lack of national development and poverty would come in as structural violence that later would exacerbate direct violence done by the individuals (Murphy, 2022). Should the condition remain with neither stopgap nor long term solution, not only would it perpetuate the endless cycle of violence, but it would also cause bigger problems to materialize. A good example of this would be nation-wide conflicts that would worsen the state's stability that occurred in numerous countries like Sri Lanka, Uganda and Indonesia (Achmad, 2021).

Understanding the intricate conflict and violence in Nigeria

With a population of more than 211 million people, Nigeria's religious community is composed of a Muslim majority followed by the Christian community with an estimate of 45 percent (Sasu, 2022). Nigeria has long had huge Muslim and Christian populations. In the past, back when it was still being colonized, there weren't any major conflicts involving the religious communities (Taiye, 2013). Unfortunately, the cracks begin to show following its independence.

The religious tension between the two communities would eventually spill over to political and economic matters as well. This is proven true as following Nigeria's independence; many groups seek to gain control of power and infrastructures in the country. Despite not happening on a national scale, it occurred on a regional or tribal level which allows more intricate webs of conflicts. The intricacy can be pointed to how despite in general it only appears to be waves of conflict between the Christian and Muslim communities, there lies more aspects to it, like the tribal or ethnic factors. The competition for control over the resources would attract conflict on the occasion where the local government appears to favor one of the two communities. An example of this can be seen in the case of the introduction of the Sharia law in some northern states of Nigeria. Eventually, numerous protests took

place in response to the introduction which would later amount to violent clashes with a lot of casualties (Salawu, 2010). At times, the dissatisfaction towards the local ruler pushed people to leave the region to settle somewhere else. However, this would later continue or even perpetuate the conflict cycle as the conflict of interests which at many times take the guise of religious identity by the local governments can be taken as one of the causes of conflicts. However, apart from that, there lies more things into it.

One of the roots of the religious conflict in Nigeria is the palpable poverty there. The impoverished environment many people find themselves in bound to frustrate them. Such a condition would make it easy for them to be indoctrinated by radical groups, especially the one with ethnoreligious traits (Nnabuihe & Onwuzuruigbo, 2021). Returning to the poverty issue, Nigeria's case is another example of the rich and poor people problem (Mohammed, 2021). Nigeria has abundant natural resources, one of which is its oil production that paves the way for the state's oil export.

Unfortunately, poor governance of all the relevant resources and infrastructures lead to numerous corruptions at the price of the people. This is apparent in the oil revenue distribution that is corruption-ridden (Dorward, 2012). Hence, it does not come out as a surprise that despite the presence of abundant resources, poverty remains a vital problem for Nigeria (Oloyede & Dare, 2021). It is also important to point out the government's lion share of mistakes. For that, its failure to deliver basic and adequate amounts of social welfare and jobs have certainly contributed to the many conflicts it's facing. On top of that, corruption within the government is also the leading force behind Nigeria's grueling poverty (Evans & Kelikume, 2019).

Apart from that, the presence of a political entrepreneur should also be underlined. Radical groups like Boko Haram, which are no stranger to the religious conflict in Nigeria, also have another feature that makes it even more lethal. Their identity as a non-state actor and a non-traditional threat towards Nigeria allows it a lot of opportunities to attain its interests (Badewa, 2022). Apart from their terror campaign, the fear they emanate from their mere presence affects many people of all groups, like the farmers' decreasing expectation towards their land (Adelaja & George, 2019). Despite having internal problems in the past, Boko Haram is still relevant and a force to reckon with in Nigeria. Its relevance as a threat to national security can be seen in how it was ranked 7th in Global Terrorism Index's 20 deadliest terror groups of 2022 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023).

In this case, the stark difference and eventual capacity of them can be attributed to their non-state identity, including as a threat. This feature allows them to spread their interest through channels that the government has no control of. Moreover, the government forces have also struggled to fend off their presence as they utilize the guerilla or unconventional approach. To top it all off, the presence of such groups also shifts the government's focus over the issue. While it is true that the armed radical groups pose a serious threat to both the people and the state as a whole, such a strong focus over them omits the more pressing issue. That issue is the religious divide, poverty and conflict that have been made worse by them.

As a result, it is no surprise that the government forces would at times take measures that are counterproductive. Such measures would not only exacerbate the conflict in the society, but it also supports the radical groups' standing in the bigger scheme. However, the government has also made initiatives that fit the Boko Haram bill. A good example of it is the Safe Corridor Program that aims to attract Boko Haram members to defect. While many argue that the program falls short of its intended purpose, the program still shows how the government is aware that it is more important to deradicalize and reintegrate those former members rather than having them killed (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

Through an overview of the religious conflict in Nigeria and the forces at play there, it can be grouped according to Galtung's violence triangle. The visible religious conflict

and its show of violence can be understood as the direct violence. This is to say that instead of taking them for what they are, it is important to view them as the result of the two other violence. Structural violence, as one of the invisible violence, is present in the form of Nigeria's poor governance. Its central role as the cause of the direct violence, in the form of religious conflict, is apparent in its contribution to the corruption that paves the way for Nigeria's poverty. With more than 95 million Nigerians living in poverty makes it all the more obvious for the government to take the needed measures (Human Rights Watch, 2023). As an example of structural violence, it is more difficult to handle in contrast to direct violence as it would involve wider spheres and resources to mobilize.

Being another structural violence, poverty allows other kinds of violence to thrive, one of which is the cultural one. For that, we may refer to the radical thoughts and influence from terrorist groups like Boko Haram. The influence they have has been strongly related to the structural violence as the poor governance may lead people to hold grievances to their government. Hence, with the three connected, religious conflict and violence can perpetuate itself in the country.

Raising the specter of the issue: what's at stake for Nigeria and more

In this interconnected age, it is not surprising that any issue can bring about cross border repercussions. Interconnectedness has been a trait that characterizes many dimensions of life nowadays. In this regard, the presence of conflict and instability can affect other states or communities too. This would not only spread the instability, but it could also perpetuate it in the long run.

The huge division in Nigeria as a result of the religious and ethnic conflicts could spread on a regional scale. This would certainly pose another threat for the region, especially as conflicts are nothing plentiful. For the neighboring states which are already struggling to maintain their stability, this would lead them to face yet another critical threat. For those which are relatively more stable, they would need to mobilize the relevant resources which could have been used to other beneficial ends.

Why the consideration towards the neighboring states needs to be addressed lies in the similarity between Nigeria and its neighbors. This can be taken as the inevitable feature of the region where its states are predominantly Christian or Muslim as well as the tendency of having a lot of tribes or ethnic groups.

Moreover, the presence of such an issue, especially if it's amplified, could kill any hope for a proper social cohesion in the society (Obamwonyi & Owenvbiugie, 2015) This can be said so because of how the religious violence apply the us against them mentality, which is also the mindset that makes way for the previous waves of religious conflicts to arise (Muggah & Velshi, 2019). With such a background in effect, it would be hard for the society to maintain its unity or cohesion, especially ones that are multicultural. Another thing that Nigeria would suffer should this conflict remain present is the huge difficulty to execute proper national development programs. The presence of conflict hinders the enactment of national development (Barbanti, 2007).

Not stopping there, the lack of national development effort would also lead to the exacerbation of existing conflicts (Igiebor, 2019). Hence, it would not be surprising if the state and society would be engulfed in a bigger conflict. This condition would later make it hard for the society, especially in a multicultural one, to exist and last. Given the interconnected condition of the international and regional system, for the case of Africa, it is to be expected that the problem would not only be present in Nigeria. It would then only be a matter of time for other states to find themselves facing a similar issue.

A look towards what we can view as the perpetrators is also urgent. Boko Haram, along with other radical groups, poses a serious threat along with other sets of problems Nigeria is facing (Nyadera & Bincof, 201). In the past, similar groups like ISIS in its prime have shown the international community how a non-state actor could bring about enormous terror and destruction. In the case of Boko

Haram, it can be seen in its capacity to inflict terror which in itself is a violation of human rights as well as threatening Nigeria's stability (Nalbant, 2018). Apart from the obvious threat towards national security, the conflicts and violence radical groups like Boko Haram partake in also threatens other dimensions of security, notably the individual/personal security (Nnam et al., 2020). The nature of their conduct is also difficult to handle, considering how they can dissolve and materialize should it be necessary.

Yet at the same time, they also possess the adequate instruments, armament and even territory (BBC, 2016), to enact their campaign of terror as apparent in their presence in numerous religious conflicts. It is not surprising that the US considered Boko Haram as a terrorist group in 2013, highlighting the group's capacity as a threat (Bokeriya & Omo-Ogbebor, 2016). Learning from that, it is imperative for the government and other stakeholders to make use of all necessary means to also deal with Boko Haram. Especially considering how such a political entrepreneur could establish a considerable sphere of influence against the legitimate government of Nigeria. While it is true that the current Boko Haram is not as powerful as its past form, the presence of chronic social issues within Nigeria along with the government's incapacity to properly develop the state, it is unwise to count Boko Haram out.

Another way of looking at the impact towards national security is through considering the human dimension or the human security aspect of it. Despite the two having different referent objects in their respective security scope, in the practical context like in Nigeria, they are still connected. A good example of it is how Boko Haram's campaign of terror is putting the Christian community in a state of insecurity in which their personal and religious security are at risk (Ike, 2022). This state of insecurity could also contribute to the growing religious conflict as it would develop fear within them against other religious groups, one of which is the Muslim community. In that example alone, it can be seen how Boko Haram's provocation

and campaign of terror aren't the only thing the government must take into account as the insecurity in both religious communities also has its share of implications. Those sets of implications would be something that needs its own solution.

The same implication is also present in regard to national development, which is also important for the maintenance of both national and human security. The unaccommodating relations between conflict and development would not benefit the promotion of both security and stability. It can be understood as how lack of national development programs may lead to increasing civil vulnerability to nontraditional threats like terrorism and other threats (food insecurity and ecological stress). Such conditions would then be a viable ground for the emergence of a range of national issues, like economic and environmental disruption, which then may also lead to an armed conflict which Nigeria is witnessing among its religious communities. In both scenarios, apart from national security, it is clear how the people of Nigeria would face the lion's share of the problem. Not only would they be the victim of the many religious conflicts to come but also of the existing national issues Nigeria has. Thereafter, it is imperative for the government to take the necessary measures.

Fortunately, being the representative of the people, the Nigerian government is well aware of the issue at hand as well as its disruptive potential. The intricacy of the issue has posed a significant barrier for any effective single measure or policy to work. However, given Nigeria's long experience with the issue's ups and downs along with its interest to have it ceased, it doesn't come out as a surprise that the government has taken some strides to confront the problem.

Taking the steps to face the elephant in the room

The government plays an important role in the handling of the issue. The centrality of the government does not only lie on its control or authority over the resources but also on their responsibility for the people of Nigeria. A good opportunity for them to apply their centrality is through the act of securitizing the issue.

Securitization of the issue can be done through the securitization scheme where the government can overview the issue along with its implications. In the issue of Nigeria religious conflict, an application of the securitization can be done. Through the securitization, it can be understood that the referent object is the state along with its people whereas the securitizing actor is the government itself. The threat that the government is facing is not limited to the vast religious conflict, but it goes beyond that. Moving to the execution of the act, the government will then need to frame the issue so as the people would resonate with it on the severity of the threat. The aim of the securitization, which will be done through the speech act by the government, is the creation of suitable policy to face the threat and obtaining the green light for the needed resources. The latter is important for the former as a lot of resources are needed to carry it out.

In regard to the securitization of the issue, it is important for the securitizing actor to take a holistic consideration over the religious conflict. What is meant by this is how the government must not only take into account the religious conflicts as it is but along with the contributing factors as well. As previously elaborated, the religious conflict, as a direct violence, is a result of structural and cultural violence in Nigeria. Adding to that, to only focus on the national security aspect would not be sufficient at all. The people of Nigeria are the important referent object to be protected in the midst of the religious conflict.

To fulfill such a goal, in contrast to solely focusing on the state as the referent object, there would be a lot of other matters to consider. The vast seamless webs of variables make it impossible for a single solution or approach to be used. Against this backdrop, a lot of resources must be poured, hence the securitization is enacted in the first place. Against that backdrop, it is then the government's task to securitize the religious conflict and its vast contributing factors to make way for its holistic measures.

Through resorting to it, the government not only can gain the necessary resources and permission to take the proper response, but they also can gain something for their own image.

A good example of the government's securitization can be seen in the creation of Nigeria's National Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC). The CTC was created as a response to the growing threat of terrorism, as clearly shown by Boko Haram's campaign of terror. Its creation was preceded by Nigeria's Terrorism Prevention Act that was amended back in 2013 (The National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2023). The CTC is responsible for supporting the capacity building of the state's military and police apparatus as well as creating the comprehensive guide or document that would base the country's effort to combat terrorism. Aside from their domestic role, given the mandate and resources they have, the CTC is also active in engaging with relevant parties outside Nigeria. Through doing so, Nigeria could integrate international support and cooperation to tackle the threat of terrorism (The National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2023).

As apparent in the scheme of the conflict, the religious and ethnic divisions are made worse by the many problems in the society that the government has yet to solve. Crucial matters like poverty, unemployment and the provision of basic social needs or services are exactly what the people need in their lives. With the absence of those goods, poor living conditions can be expected to thrive. In such conditions, it is not surprising that support towards the government is dwindling (Fagbadebo, 2019).

Hence, through the huge effort to securitize the issue once again, they could show to their people how they are still committed to their work. Despite the absence of any guarantee that such a measure would bring about a huge public support over the night, it is still a viable path for them to choose.

For the former to work effectively, it strongly requires some degree of systemic change to rid the government of corruption. As previously noted, many groups in the society have held grievances as a response to the government's ineptness in dealing with the issue and in carrying out its duty. It is important therefore that the eradication

of corruption be put into the priority list (Igiebor, 2019).

As previously noted, the presence of radical groups complicates the manner in which the government has been reacting. However, despite such difficulties, the government has taken some measures that better address the aforementioned issue. Such a measure was made through collaborating with religious figures from both sides of the Islam and Christian communities. Through doing so, the government established some spheres of influences among the communities.

The local figures' participation in this measure can not only be seen as a mere passive one on their part as they can also actively engage with the government to deliberate more. In this sense, apart from being a partner, they can also be the means for the government to show their commitment and how they are open for collaboration. The latter is of the utmost importance considering the intricate webs of entanglements the issue has. Thereafter, it is certainly wiser to involve other relevant actors, especially on the field, rather than concentrating them on the government alone. Not only does it allow the government to embark on more pressing matters, but their more in-depth knowledge of their respective fields would pave the way for the planned outcome.

Moreover, the Nigerian government can also utilize its vast network of foreign partners. This is an area where the government can capitalize from as in contrast with Boko Haram, they do not face any severe opposition in the international stage, especially in figuring out the way to end the conflicts. In the interconnected international system, such things have been made easier through the creation of numerous international or even regional forums. From the international channel of the United Nations all the way to the smaller ones in the form of bilateral channels (Halima & Idris, 2016), the Nigerian government can resort to them should it feel necessary and fitting.

Another means of confronting the conflict is interfaith dialogue. While it is true that conflict, in its entirety, is not all about religion, it can't be denied that it plays an important role in the scheme of conflict. For this, the government can make use of the approach, or intensify it should it has already been put in effect, to better address the religious dimension. To that end, the government has been making the necessary strides to build harmony between the religious communities and to eradicate radical groups' influence. It is also through this activity that harmony would be procured following the interreligious understanding.

Interfaith dialogue is suitable to serve as a peacebuilding tool for the issue. The dialogue can be understood as an effort to bridge and conduct productive and peaceful dialogue between the two different communities (Palita & Nasution, 2022). This grassroots peacebuilding tool can have an enormous effect on society, especially as it is flexible in its application. One of the common applications of it is the involvement of religious figures in the community to engage in constructive dialogue with their counterpart.

Through the conduct of interfaith dialogue, the two communities can engage in positive interactions and dialogue to bridge their differences (Ojo & Lateju, 2010). The dialogue is also important to accentuate the fact that many of the conflicts and violence were done not by the general Muslim population, but rather the extremist groups which pale in comparison with them. From that understanding, they can aim for the mass spread of interreligious tolerance. On top of that, through a clearer understanding of both communities, it could also deter radical groups like Boko Haram's influence and eventual growth. This approach also supports the unconventional methods that are required to deal with them.

Nigeria is no stranger to interfaith dialogue. In 1999, the government established NIREC (Nigeria Inter-Religious Council) to respond to the growing religious conflicts (Egwu, 2019). One of the ways they conduct the dialogue is by involving the religious figures across the regions. It is hoped that through doing so, the religious figures could spread positive and tolerant values within their respective communities. The council also takes on other channels to widen their

influence, like releasing relevant publications and holding public forums for the people to attend. However, despite the new focus given to interfaith dialogue, it all would be in vain if good governance remains absent (KAICIID, 2020).

Apart from the two towering issues, a stride to fight the palpable poverty in Nigeria is also important in the effort to deal with them. As previously mentioned, poverty holds an important role as a structural factor that paves the way for religious conflicts and violence to occur. Given the primacy of the issue to many walks of lives in Nigeria, the Nigerian government is well aware of the issue and the vast options to deal with it. To this end, the government has made numerous policy interventions to tackle poverty and its other rotten fruits (Osakwe et al., 2020).

The government has worked along relevant institutions like microfinance banks within the country as well as the Africa Development Bank. The government's move to involve the many banks is an important step in the country's fight against poverty. That is because through coordinating financial policies with the banks, the government could get them to provide a proper credit disbursement pattern (Chinyere, Emeka, & Samuel S., 2022). With the presence of an adequate pattern, it would provide a good environment for private sectors to grow in the country. Apart from their contributions to the economy later down the road, the new private sectors also act as another measure to address unemployment. The many benefits the government and people of Nigeria can procure through such measures make it a rational choice for the government to take. While it is true that such measures have made the government issue more loans which also contributes to its mounting debts, it can still be dealt with domestic adjustments or even inurement with relevant foreign parties (Harmon, 2023).

Despite the previous intervention, the government was aware of the issue's intricacy which makes it impossible to be solved with a single approach. Therefore, the Nigerian government also takes on itself to develop supportive national policy that would support its other approaches. One of the ways it adjusts its national outlook towards the issue is through resorting to policies that address issues relevant to poverty like unemployment. In the past, the government has repetitively dealt with poverty through austerity measures that took a lot of resources. While such approaches did solve the issue, it did so only in the short run, making it an unsustainable stopgap measure. In contrast to the previous approach, the new one offers more benefits in the long run, from supporting poverty alleviation to attaining some SDGs (Aderounmu et al., 2021). Through doing so, the government is changing its approach while still maintaining its focus on the securitized issue of poverty.

The initiative to deal with Nigeria's religious conflicts not only comes from the government, the religious community of Nigeria has also taken on themselves to face the issue. The International Centre for Interfaith, Peace and Harmony (ICIPH). Over the 6 years of its existence, the ICIPH has, in its capacity, contributed to numerous interfaith dialogue efforts in Nigeria (Amos, 2016). The initiative serves as a good example of how the government and its people can work side by side in dealing with a shared threat.

Apart from being an initiative driven by the communities, the aim of the ICIPH is also unique. Unlike other initiatives on the field, the ICIPH also seeks to document interfaith relations in Nigeria to both national and international policymakers. That is the case as ICIPH has worked along both the government and its foreign counterparts in its effort to promote peace through education and interfaith development (Ezekiel, 2022). ICIPH pushes for sustainability in its effort to promote interfaith, peace and co-existence. Measures to socialize the importance of interfaith tolerance and co-existence is apparent in its education approach. At the same time, it also goes on to deal with damages inflicted by the conflicts through establishing trauma healing centers as well as documenting the conflicts along with their closure. Moreover, the ICIPH also seeks to be an example of how interreligious peace can be obtained despite the height of religious

conflict at hand. For the community, the ICIPH also serves as a symbol of peace and hope for a better future.

Aside from initiative in a form of institution, the same is also present albeit in the form of a covenant. The Kano covenant resembles a solution to the religious conflicts that Boko Haram provoked back in 2012. Despite Boko Haram's campaign of terror that demands for all Christians to leave Northern Nigeria, the Muslim community did not fulfill it. Instead, religious figures from both Muslim and Christian communities came together on a peacebuilding effort that would see the inception of the Kano Covenant. As a product of the effort, the Kano Covenant would establish a harmonious interfaith coexistence between the 2 communities that go beyond economic and political spheres (Iweze, 2022). The people of Nigeria showed how difference of beliefs should not be seen as any hindrance for peaceful co-existence to materialize. Apart from the covenant, a noteworthy thing to realize is how the religious leaders of both communities still worked together on the rough process of peacebuilding amidst Boko Haram attacks. On top of that, the initiative was also acknowledged by the government that supported its execution in Kano. Moving beyond the scope of Kano, the event may serve as a lesson on how interfaith dialogue can remain in action despite the presence of a dangerous threat (Iweze, 2021).

Indonesia, a similar yet very different case

One of the states that Nigeria can work together with in regard to religious conflicts is Indonesia, another multicultural state in Southeast Asia. Despite possessing similar characteristics, the two states face different degrees of religious conflict in general. In the past, Indonesia has faced its share of horrible religious conflict and violence as apparent in the Poso conflict. However, looking at the present issues, while Indonesia still faces religious conflict here and there, none of them are as severe and destabilizing as those in Nigeria. Two of the prominent traits that characterize Indonesia's way to tackle religious issues from escalating lie in its institutional and ideological presence along

with the overall national stability. Apart from those two, the difference of government's capacity and action should also be underlined in understanding the way the two states handle the problem.

In the handling of any degree of religious conflicts, the Indonesian government has a litany of ups and downs that proves its capacity to confront the problem. Some notable examples of religious conflicts that Indonesia has taken care of are Take for example the Poso conflict that escalated dramatically during the final years of the 20th century. Similar to what's been going on in Nigeria, the Poso conflict involved the Christian and Muslim communities along with the social inequality myst that surrounded its source (Aya et al., 2021). Not only that, the conflict also had manifested in numerous violence clashes that brought with it destruction of properties and loss of lives. In the face of such a social catastrophe, the government did not sit idly. Instead, in-depth and tight measures were put to action to quickly face the problem. The government sent in a mediation effort led by Jusuf Kalla down into the mess of a religious conflict in Poso. In the end, the Malino Declaration emerged as the result of all the works.

The declaration resembles a holistic measure that should be implemented to deal with religious conflicts that cover the law enforcement dimension, rehabilitation of the victims and refugees, a move to return to when the conflict has not escalated to the way it was, move to eradicate social inequality that may lead to similar conflicts and other dimensions as well. The government also showed how adaptive it was by incorporating local wisdoms into their efforts to solve the religious conflict (Wijaya, 2020). Through such an incorporation, the government can avert a possible point of conflict as the spirit or value that imbued the resolution were not in any major way dominated by either values from the two religious communities but instead the local cultural wisdom itself. The local value, Sintuvu Maroso, contains the values of brotherhood and social unity, something that people of both communities can relate to with their respective beliefs.

All those dimensions bear resemblance to Galtung's conflict resolutions triangle that comprises peace-making, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Moving on, another religious conflict Indonesia has dealt with is the one taking place in Maluku. The conflict in Maluku is one of the bloodiest sectarian conflicts in Indonesia that lasted for years. Similar to the previous conflict, this one involved the Christian and Muslim community in the region. The conflict would witness 5000 people killed with more than half a million of the population forced to evacuate (Yunanto & Damayanti, 2022). The grueling casualties along with the waves of violence in the conflict is a clear example of direct violence at play. Referring to Galtung's violence triangle, the conflict has its vast share of direct violence as well as structural and cultural ones that are all interconnected in a horrible perpetual cycle. In dealing with the structural dimension in the conflict, the government put its focus on enhancing the people's prosperity through numerous policies. This has proven to be more effective than merely going with a security approach (Sukmana, 2018). An important feature in the process of peacebuilding there is how the government must be shrewd in being aware of the conflict's development and characteristics as well as in constructing the approach that would suit the landscape. Eventually, the 2nd Malino Chapter was agreed upon by the parties involved and with that the conflict was solved. While it is true that following the charter's fruition that conflicts still occurred in the region, at the very least they were few and far in between. The historical struggle and commitment to overcome religious conflicts are something that both governments, Indonesia and Nigeria, have in common.

Moving to present times, while it is true that the Poso is not entirely rid of such conflicts, at the very least they are few and far in between. Apart from dealing with a big religious conflict like the Poso Conflict back then, Indonesia has also shown its ability to deal with religious conflicts with lower caliber, albeit the implication towards the communities' harmony and stability were indeed considerable. A good example of this is how the government dealt with the FPI (Front Pembela Islam). Back then, the organization was infamous due to its involvement in numerous moves it organized. The government, through its vast means of institutions and authority, dealt with FPI by shutting it down through releasing a decree on FPI's dissolution (Huda, 2019). Therefore, de jure, FPI no longer exists as an organization and with that, removing them as a source of threat towards religious harmony.

FPI and Boko Haram have their share of similarity that make it interesting to dive into. First, the two are organized groups with their own interests that imbue their activities. This is apparent in how they would claim to be responsible for their actions, like Boko Haram with their attacks along with FPI with their demonstrations. Moreover, the two also share resemblance as a threat to national security as laid out by Barry Buzan. To be considered as a threat, issues would need to possess high intensity. What is meant by that is how the issues that are considered a threat to security should have a high intensity in terms of space, consequences, probability, etc. Boko Haram fulfills all of them as they operate in Nigeria (making it a national concern) and have been operating every year while inflicting considerable damage (Omenma, Oniyishi, & Okolie, 2023). The same also applies for FPI, albeit to a different degree. Being based within Indonesia, FPI has made numerous moves with irksome repercussions towards religious harmony in the country. Moving on, the way both groups go about their activities are also different. For instance, Boko Haram is accustomed to conducting campaigns of terror that would take up a lot of victims. In contrast to that, FPI's activities range from spearheading radical notions, organizing anarchist strikes, to even being against the state's apparatus, like the police, and many more, all those are part of its legacy (Harahap, 2022). The organization was also known to harbor fanaticism which has strong ties to the intensification or emergence of religious conflicts (Akhrani, 2018).

In the respective scheme of religious conflicts, it is also important to draw the line that separates the two threats at hand. A

difference in the threat's capacity is also present where Boko Haram is an outright radical group that is not sanctioned or approved by the Nigerian government whereas FPI was at some point a recognized group/ organization until it was later disbanded by the government. Against that backdrop, it can be inferred that the two threats are similar in terms of area of issue (both threatens religious harmony in the both countries) but they differ in the modes of action where Boko Haram would resort to outright terror and violence in contrast to that of FPI which preferred to resort to subtler means. Hence, Boko Haram is more dangerous or poses a bigger threat given its litany of terror acts in Nigeria along with the death toll it has made.

Another area worth noting in assessing the difference between the two states is in their capacity and action. The two refer to how the government's capacity, despite their high position to allocate resources and support, can fall short of what's actually needed on the field. This is palpable in the way Nigeria has been struggling to deal with its religious conflicts. As elaborated in previous parts, corruption within the government is a fatal issue that hinders any effective move from the government, either in its construction or execution stage. Such a condition is a stark contrast to that of Indonesia where it is capable of pulling off the necessary approaches that were needed. The difference here can be traced, apart from the difference of capacity to act, from the severity of corruption. While it is true that Indonesia is by no means devoid of corruption, it is by no means close to the severity of Nigeria's.

The aforementioned traits, along with Indonesia's past initiatives in handling religious conflicts abroad, should make cooperation between the two a path worth being looked into. Such a prospect is also supported by how Indonesia has already established good ties with Nigeria in the economic and general relations in Africa. Not to mention how in this interconnected age, diplomacy, either imbued by bilateralism or multilateralism, is a viable option for states to overcome their respective problems. It is also by doing so that they can attain their national interest of getting rid of the problem while at the same time enhancing their standing in the international stage through the aforementioned diplomatic approach. This is also supported with both states' capacity in conducting their foreign policies. The two states are no stranger to engaging with international partners as apparent in Indonesia's active role in the Indo-Pacific and Nigeria's initiative to work with international partners to overcome its problems (Wirth & Jenne, 2022). In this regard, the two states have incorporated their respective domestic actors to the practice of international relations and diplomacy. Hence, the leeway for both states to engage in productive dialogues is available, either through the involvement of the respective head of states, the states' institutions (ministry of religious affairs or the National Center of Counterterrorism), or even those from the religious communities (Atiba, 2022).

While it is also true that Indonesia by no means doesn't have a smooth record in solving religious conflicts, given the severe condition in Nigeria, it can rather be seen as an opportunity for the two states to learn and work together on a mutual end of understanding the better handling of religious conflict and violence.

Conclusion

The complex scheme of problem that Nigeria has on its religious conflict is indeed an appalling and pressing issue. The many causes, either arising from the government or even illegitimate political entrepreneurs, and horrifying events like mass killing and persecutions have made this issue a threat to both national and individual security in Nigeria. Through the use of Galtung's violence triangle, the nature and intricacy of Nigeria's religious conflict can be better understood. The direct violence, along with its two invisible counterparts, would pose a rather intricate matter for the government. Serious actions and effort are urgently needed given the severe impact the problem can present in the long run. Diminishing national cohesion and instability would pose a serious threat for Nigeria. Apart from

domestic repercussions, similar problems might also arise at the regional level given the strong interconnectedness of the international system. Moving on, the government has all the means to confront and bring an end to the issues, both domestic and international wise. For the former, the government can again securitize the issue to make way for many waves of effort to take care of it. Securitizing the issue would involve both elements of national and human security as both referent objects, the state and the people of Nigeria, suffer the chief burden of the conflict. As for the latter, the government can reach out to its foreign partners for assistance in dealing with the issue. This can be done to obtain both active (provision of ground forces) and passive supports (provision of funds and equipment). The government would need to focus on both problems arising from the religious conflicts (not to forget its supporting forces like poverty) and radical groups like Boko Haram. Up to this moment, the Nigerian government has made the necessary strides as apparent in its initiative to involve religious figures in its interfaith dialogues whereas for the securitization, the government has also taken note of the issue and created its own CTC. Apart from its own initiative, the government has also worked along and accommodated grassroot efforts to end religious conflicts in the country. The change must also occur within the government to rid itself off of the palpable corruption. Last but not least, Indonesia can be a go to partner for Nigeria as Indonesia is experienced in that area of issue. Its capacity to face religious conflicts can be pointed to how the government is more capable in addressing and adapting to the conflict, how it faces comparably lower corruption and the influence of Pancasila. All those measures would certainly not be easy to execute but the final end is definitely worth all the pain. However, as elaborated in previous parts, Nigeria has proven itself to be willing and capable of taking the necessary measures to deal with religious conflicts as well as its related problems (poverty and presence of radical groups).

Acknowledgement

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