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COURSE TITLE: PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

Assignment: Write an essay on violent conflict on the geopolitical zone you’re from.

Introduction

A violent conflict involves at least two parties using physical force to resolve competing claims or interests. While a violent conflict may involve only non-state actors, often, the term is used as a synonym for war which involves at least one government. Another way of classifying violent conflicts is depending of which type of actors is involved in the conflict and where it takes place. These categories are however rather blurry as the distinction between national and international conflicts is difficult to establish due to the degree of international involvement in internal conflicts. An example of this is the south-south violent conflict in Edo State which shall be elaborated on below.

Demographics and geography: The population of the South South region is estimated at 24.6 million people.The region’s population is predominantly Christian, and ethnically is very diverse, with concentrations of Ijaw, Igbo and Ibibio ethnic groups (who make up approximately 10%, 18% and 3.5% of the national population), alongside several smaller ethnic groups such as the Urhobos and the Edo. This diversity has been a prominent issue along which violent competition and disputes over resources, land, economic and political power have occurred. An additional potential source of tension is the high proportion of young people in the population: the share of the population

Civil Society in the South South plays an important role in victim-assistance. More than in any other zone, NGOs, faith-based organisations and community-based organisations engage in projects supporting victims. 84% (33) of the projects surveyed engage with victims. The majority of them focus on psycho-social assistance and data collection. Edo is an inland state in central southern Nigeria, created in 1991.288 Nicknamed “the heartbeat of the Nation,” Edo is one of the two states created out of the defunct Bendel State by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. Benin City is the capital of Edo state. Edo’s people speak a variety of languages, with Edo, Ebira, Esan and Okpamheri chief amongst them. The major ethnic groups in Edo are Bini, Esan, Afemai, Ora, Akoko-Edo, Igbanke, Emai and Ijaw.

Edo state is bounded in the north and east by Kogi State the south by Delta State and in the west by Ondo. The 2005 census estimated the state’s popula- tion to be about 3.5 million. The economic mainstays of Edo State include crude oil and gas; mineral re- sources; agriculture and tourism. Like Nigeria as a whole, Edo is divided between Muslim and Christian communities with a smaller number of believers in traditional religions. In spite of this, the state has not witnessed the level of religious tension and violence seen around inter-faith relations in northern Nigeria and elsewhere in the country. The State has many higher education institutions including: the University of Benin, Benin City; the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; the Igbinedion University, Okada; the Benson Idahosa University, Benin City; and the Federal Polytechnic Auchi.

Overview of armed violence in the state: According to the Fund for Peace, Edo had the third-highest per capita level of violence in the Niger Delta between the beginning of 2012 and June 2013. The high proportion of the population who are youths and the level of unemployment and underemployment are partially responsible for this state of affairs. Political figures give weapons to youths to engage in political violence, and those weapons are not collected when election season ends, leading to their use in other forms of violence as well. Generally, unemployment and misplaced priorities amongst youths, power struggles, poverty, competition for resources, the poor state and mismanagement of the national economy, desire to attain wealth and power rapidly by any means necessary and ethnic and cultural differences are major causes of crime in the Niger Delta. Official statistics show a variety of types of crimes occurring in Edo, including kidnapping, murder and armed robbery, the killing of police officers and political assassinations.

The gubernatorial election has been a particular flashpoint of political violence. With a number of people killed in the build up, many in Edo were fearful of a possible outbreak of violence during and after the July 14th election. As a result, the Nigerian Federal Government deployed thousands of military personnel in Edo to assist local police forces in containing the possible damage of electoral violence. Various types of political violence occur frequently in Edo state. One of the most common is armed robbery, though kidnapping and organized crime are also regular occurrences.

There are many other types of violence occurring in Edo. Cultism and inter-cult rivalry clashes are a regular occurrence in the state. Such cults have become a threat to the peace within the tertiary institutions in the country and Edo State in particular. Political parties have used unemployed youth to intimidate their rivals and have used violent rhetoric to galvanize their supporters, resulting in violent clashes around election season. In the Niger Delta, there have been clashes over control of the crude oil resources between youths, militant groups and the Joint Military Task Force (JTF).

Perpetrators of armed violence: The perpetrators of armed violence are largely youth groups who represent a disproportionate share of Edo’s population, and are responsible for a disproportionate share of its violence. But they are not the only ones responsible for violence. Members of the Militant groups and cults groups have also engaged in violence rivalry for their own purposes. Politicians, businessmen, oil company workers, community leaders and groups, and union leaders have all contributed to armed violence by employing unemployed youths to engage in violence on their behalf. Some corrupt security agents who aid and rent their weapons to criminals for use in crimes (indeed, some of them are members of these criminal groups), and some ex-servicemen keep or do not surrender their weapons when they are discharged so as to use them for their own violent purposes later.

Weapons used: Weapons used in armed violence include: AK-47 assault rifles and AK-47 variants; FN FAL and other semi-automatic rifles; Uzis and other sub-machine guns; single, double-barrel and pump action shotguns; locally made pistols and rifles; axes; cutlasses; knives; and hand grenades.291

Victims of armed violence: Members of the oil producing communities, the general public, women, children, physically challenged persons, the aged, members of the various cult groups, members of unions and, in general, male youth have all been victimised.

Institutional responses: The Nigeria Police Force is the primary lawfully constituted force for maintaining order in Edo. However, they are supported by other state agencies. Primary amongst these is the State Security Service (S.S.S.), which works with informants from most of the communities and members of the general public to arrest prospective perpetrators of armed violence. The military – particularly those with the JTF – is also involved in managing armed violence. The Nigeria Civil Defence Corps provides community policing and alternative security services.The government has undertaken various strategies to control armed violence. It formed the JTF to combat militancy in the Niger Delta. In parallel, it set up an amnesty program that was intended by the Federal Government to rehabilitate and reintegrate Niger Delta youths and to recover their weapons and ammunition. On a more local level, neighbourhood watch and community groups have been set up, along with skills-training centres for formerly militant youth. Outside the government, civil society organisations have been doing a large degree of work with government on issues around law and for the care of victims of armed violence. Both community-based and faith-based organisations do work in this regard.

Successes and challenges: There are significant challenges to understanding and reducing armed violence in Edo. Many incidents of armed violence are not recorded or reported, making it difficult to form an accurate impression of the level of armed violence in the state. The government uses repressive tactics to manage armed violence, and has not been particularly willing to respond to enquiries about its approach or strategy. This, along with a dearth of information in publicly accessible sources, means that our understanding of the perpetrators and dynamics of violence in Edo is severely limited.

Conclusion

The lack of both information and willingness of those in the government to engage with NGOs and the press on armed violence in Edo, coupled with its heavy-handed tactics, makes the suppression of armed violence more difficult. The government and its security agents in the state have been doing their best to curtail armed violence in the state, but much still needs to be done both in terms of armed violence reduction and awareness creation to help stimulate economic conditions conducive to peace.