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 ASSIGNMENT

WRITE AN ESSAY ON VIOLENT CONFLICT IN YOUR GEOPOLITICAL ZONE.

 ANSWER

Firstly, my state of origin is Osun state which is located in the south western geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

 The South West region is home to two of Nigeria’s three largest cities: Lagos and Ibadan. As a national and continental economic hub, Lagos sees a high level of political demonstrating, some of which has turned violent. The city saw high rates of rioting in January 2012, when violent demonstrations broke out against the federal government’s proposed cuts to a fuel subsidy, prompting some analysts to discuss the possibility of a ‘Nigerian Spring’. As elsewhere in the country, security forces have been accused of responding with excessive force against demonstrators.

Osun, in the South West, was the only state in southern Nigeria that was not won by the current President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP having been won by the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) candidate, Nuhu Ribadu.

 Armed violence in the South West region is concentrated in Lagos, where over 55% of the recorded conflict events in the region are located. Lagos is the second most conflict-affected state in Nigeria, although levels of political violence were highest in the 1990s and early 2000s, in the early years of the transition to civilian rule. This figure does not reflect explicitly criminal armed violence, which is extremely high: Nigeria Watch data identifies Lagos as having the highest relative number of deaths due to crime in the country.

Lagos is the historical and commercial capital of Nigeria, located in the southwest of the country. It is the country’s largest urban area, and one of the largest cities on the African continent, with some analysts predicting that Lagos will become the world’s third largest city by 2015, behind Tokyo and Mumbai.

Lagos is the second most conflict-affected state in Nigeria, according to the ACLED dataset, although levels of political violence were highest in the 1990s and early 2000s, in the early years of the transition to civilian rule. Nigeria Watch data identifies Lagos as having the highest relative number of deaths due to crime in the country.

Decentralised militias are the most common violent actor in the state. These groups operate on the border of criminal-political violence and engage in opportunistic rather than strategic violence for the most part. Many of the drivers of armed violence in urban areas are amplified in a city the size of Lagos: the city is densely populated with pockets of overcrowding and extreme poverty. In 2006, Lagos had a Gini coefficient of 0.64, amongst the highest in Sub-Saharan African cities.

City residents struggle with poor living conditions – nearly two-fifths of the population lives in overcrowded housing, and a quarter have no access to adequate sanitation – and limited opportunities: 40% of males and 12% of females were unemployed according to 2006 data.

Our researcher’s mapping of responses to armed violence identified 26 organisations, including 18 civil society groups, working to reduce and address armed violence in the city. Those surveyed had the second highest financial resources at their disposal (following those based in Abuja), with median annual budgets of 10 million naira, and 4 out of 5 these organisations operate on the national, as opposed to local or state level.

The indigenous peoples of Lagos State are the Yoruba subgroups of the Aworis in Ikeja, the Eguns in the Badagry area and the ljebus in Ikorodu and Epe, while Lagos Island consists of a mixture of Benin and Eko Aworis as well as repatriated Yorubas and other immigrants.

Armed robbery, organised crime, disproportionate use of force by state authorities and domestic violence are perceived to be high in Lagos. It is also notorious for its ethnic militia and vigilante groups. According to the 2012 CLEEN victimisation survey, 23% of Lagos’s inhabitants were victims of crime in 2010.Among these, 13% have experienced robbery.

A 2005 assessment by Wale Adebanwi put the number of armed violence outbreaks recorded in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003 at over 50, with Lagos accounting for at least 15. Ginifer (2005) identifies at least 8 forms of armed violence in Nigeria, including Lagos. These include inter and intra-communal violence, ethnic militia and vigilante violence, political and electoral violence, armed criminality and ‘gang- sterism,’ state armed violence, state-sponsored violence, arms racing and ethno-religious violence.

Few cases of domestic violence have also been reported in Lagos compared with states in other zones. According to the CLEEN Foundation, a non- governmental organisation headquartered in Lagos, 33 per cent of respondents in the South-South said they had suffered or are suffering from it while the North East came in second with 26 per cent. Fewer cases were recorded in the South West region (including Lagos).

 The main actors involved in armed violence in Lagos include ethnic militias, so-called Area Boys, youths, criminal gangs and the state security apparatus itself. Ethnic militias in Lagos and across the South West region, the dominant ethnic militia-cum-vigilante group is the OPC (Oodua People’s Congress).

‘Area boys’ are the unemployed young people – mostly men – who take part in opportunistic violence in Lagos. They are easily mobilized for armed violence and although no precise data exists, there are probably several thousand across Lagos. Area Boys have traditionally had some positive connotations as community service providers. But they started to turn into a negative phenomenon in the late 1980s as a result, in part, of government economic adjustment programmes that exacerbated unemployment and resulted in cut-backs on social service provision, and of the increase in narcotic trading and consumption in Lagos.

Not all youths are Area Boys. The UN estimates that there are 25 million economically, socially and politically deprived youths in Nigeria. The inequalities and difficulties faced by these youths contribute heavily to the incidence of armed violence in Lagos. Criminal gangs are involved in various types of violence including armed robberies and gang conflicts.

Finally, the state security agencies themselves – the police, paramilitaries, special security elements, and the armed forces – are involved in armed violence. Many of these are involved in illicit activities backed up by the threat of, or actual use, of armed violence.

Victims of armed violence in Lagos are mainly ordinary citizens, including vulnerable groups such as women and children, the old and the physically challenged.

However, members of the Nigerian armed forces and the Nigerian Police have also remained both perpetrators and victims of armed violence.

In conclusion, Progress has undeniably been made in the south west geopolitical zone in recent years. As columnist Kayode Komolafe wrote in 2011: “The physical efforts to battle crimes ultimately encompass social security. For in the long run, it is social security that could enhance physical security. The product of such a strategy would be a more enduring security model