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**ASSIGNMENT**

Write an essay on violent conflict on the geographical zone you are from. Not less than 2 pages.

**ANSWERS**

Violent crime is a pervasive problem in Anambra State, particularly as it experiences major changes in its political, demographic and economic makeup. As in other parts of Nigeria, Anambra has experienced vast unemployment in its rural areas, contributing to a rapid urbanization. Its young, densely packed population has seen a lack of opportunities plague even its educated sectors, making education less attractive and leaving a large population of young male school drop-outs at great risk of criminal activity. With a legacy of inter-communal conflict, secessionist insurgency and other political violence, and the lingering weaponry and ideology of civil war, Anambra is ripe for all manner of armed violence. Armed violence in Anambra State dates back to the Nigeria–Biafra civil war of 1967-1970, which contributed to the massive proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the region. This brutal conflict was a humanitarian disaster in which as many as five million people – largely women and children – lost their lives. In the decades following the Biafra war, Anambra witnessed inter- and intra-communal conflicts including the major conflict between the communities of Aguleri and Umuleri in 1999-2000, which killed hundreds and displaced thousands. Not unique to Anambra, although notable for its scale and impact in terms of armed violence, is the problem of vigilante groups. The vigilantes were initially given the blessing of Anambra’s government when the Bakassi Boys gang became known as the officially recognized and state-supported “Anambra State Vigilante Services” in 2000. But in the years since, the government appeared to lose control of the vigilantes, and the arms possessed by these groups have remained unaccounted for. Eventually, the vigilantes drifted into civil matters including family, land and inter-communal disputes, and the unlawful arrest and – in some cases – extra-judicial execution of suspects. In the run-up to elections, the vigilantes are easily transformed into political press gangs; likewise, during other communal conflicts, the accessibility of armed men makes escalation likely.

Another vigilante-like group – the Anambra State Special Task Force on Street Trading (known as “Ndimpiawazu”) – has recently engaged in clashes with members of the separatist Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB).

Inter- and intra-community violence continues to be a major problem in Anambra. Hostility continues to simmer between Aguleri and Umuleri; more recent conflicts have occurred between the Akpu and Ajali communities and between Owerre and the Ezukala/ Ogboji communities, as well as intra-communal con- flict within Umunya. When such conflicts dissipate, the weapons and aggression often do not, leading to perpetrators regrouping as criminals or political gangsters. Purely criminal activity is also a major problem in Anambra. The state has the highest rate of kidnapping in the South East of Nigeria, with 273 cases reported in 2011 alone, particularly within the commercial axis of the towns of Onitsha and Nnewi. Armed robbery and murder are also present at high levels in the state.

Unemployment and rapid urbanization must be seen as primary causes of violence in Anambra, particularly in light of the state’s new status as an oil-producing economy, leading to an increasing disparity between its haves and have-nots. Simmering separatist tendencies and political anxiety, the presence of thug-like vigilante groups, often with governmental blessing, and the apparent surrender of the official police forces to criminal armed violence are all very important causes of armed violence in the state. Religion, on the other hand, is not as primary a motivation for conflict as it so often is in Nigeria’s north.

Armed violence in Anambra is committed by a wide variety of perpetrators. The vigilante situation is such that two parallel security forces exist in the state: the official police, and the state-sanctioned vigilantes and private security firms. Vigilante activities including political and criminal thuggery as well as extra-judicial arrests, detentions, torture and execution contribute greatly to the armed violence in the state. The separatist MASSOB is involved in clashes with these and other, often government-related, groups. And there are unemployed, uneducated, dropout youths committing crimes both as individuals and in gangs and “cults”. Thanks to years of conflict and state-sanctioned vigilantism, Anambra is flooded with weapons. Despite a lack of specific documentation (if security forces know the extent of arms trafficking, they aren’t forthcoming with that information), we can form a picture from recent reports of raids by the State Security Service.

In September, 2012, in just three raids, the SSS captured around 30 AK-47 assault rifles, more than 16,000 rounds of ammunition, rocket launchers, grenades and assorted pistols and other rifles. The Awka axis of Anambra is known for producing blacksmiths who are alleged to produce locally made guns. Victims of armed violence in Anambra tend to be based in urban areas including Nnewi, Onitsha, Ekwulobia, Oraifite, Obosi and Uli. Due largely to the prevalence of kidnapping, these victims are often, surprisingly, from higher socioeconomic classes –  
men in business and politics. Women and children are particularly targeted by perpetrators, and also suffer through the loss of livelihood and social status that occurs even when not targeted, through the loss of husbands/fathers. Women in Nigeria are the main civilian victims of armed violence, but are simultaneously powerless to prevent it. Finally, the 30 bodies found in 2013 to be extrajudicial killed and dumped in the Ezu river demonstrates the high lack of accountability in the protection of lives and properties in Anambra.

The state government has been deeply concerned with the recent upsurge of armed violence in Anambra and the threat it poses to both population and economy. Through Anambra Integrated Development Strategy (ANIDS) and the Anambra Youth Reorientation and Empowerment Program (ANSYREP), the state government has implemented several job-creation initiatives to address youth unemployment, but with few tangible results. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in Anambra engage in efforts to promote and implement economic empowerment pro- grams with an eye towards keeping youths from join- ing a life of crime – this includes groups such as the Centre for Development and Civic Education and Anambra Rebirth. Similarly, there is some work within the Anambra State Association of Town Unions to create community policing efforts. The CLEEN Foundation, a Lagos- and Abuja-based NGO, conducts research into violence in Anambra, working towards establishing an empirical basis for advocacy and a baseline against which progress of intervention programme can be measured.