

ASSESSING WEAK INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL CONFLICTS WITHIN THE NIGERIAN STATE

Olamide S. ADELANA¹, PhD

Abstract

This paper focuses on the institutional problem and social conflicts within the Nigerian state. Nigeria's institutions have been adjudged as weak and inefficient, with attendant effects on the country's image, sustainable growth and transformation. The fact that there is a recent and continuous increase in the number of social conflicts in the country makes it a topical issue for discussion in contemporary Nigeria, especially being an entity with multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition. Besides, the negative implications of such conflicts for the socio-economic and political development of the country and its security, as well as the harmonious relationship among its diverse citizenry, make it a relevant issue for discussion. The overall objective of the paper is to ascertain the viability of strong institutions and social conflict mitigation as keys to building and developing the Nigerian state. It, therefore, addresses key questions such as: What is the nature and evolution of the Nigerian state? What roles do institutions play in the development of the Nigerian state? What are the effects of social conflicts on the Nigerian state? How can institutional frameworks be used to mitigate social conflicts within the context of the Nigerian state? The paper relies on secondary data and adopts a qualitative research approach as well as descriptive and content analysis to address the research objectives and questions. It assumes that the foundations and institutions of corporate existence in Nigeria are weak, deficient or declining in capacity and need to be strengthened. Besides, there have been increasing occurrences of social conflicts since independence, especially in the Fourth Republic, with devastating consequences on Nigerians, national security, development and nation-building. Further, the Nigerian state is seemingly failing outrageously and needs to be restructured with sustainable institutional frameworks, which are capable and formidable enough to facilitate harmony in the heterogeneous polity and bring about lasting development in accordance with global best practices.

Key Words: Development, Government, Institution, Nigeria, Social Conflict, State.

Introduction

This paper views the problem of social conflicts in Nigeria from a holistic perspective and systematically shows a nexus between the various dimensions of social conflict in line with the Nigerian state and its concerned institutions. It argues for a more careful theoretical analysis of the problem of social conflicts in the country, with special reference to the crisis of its institutions and the problem of establishing a harmonious polity where social justice, national integration, nation-building and national security take preeminence.

¹ Olamide S. ADELANA, PhD is with the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Anchor University, Lagos, oadelana@aul.edu.ng, adelanaolamide@gmail.com

No doubt, human history is characterised by various forms of conflict. This aligns with the argument and consensus among scholars in this area of study that conflict is inevitable in relations among human beings (Weeks, 1992; Burton, 1997; Okoh & Ewhariemen, 2001). The UNDP (2020) considers the multifaceted nature of the root causes of social conflict and the development challenges arising from it and thereby suggests the need for new ways of working such that the complexity and interconnected nature of risks can be recognised in order to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and adopt a multi-pronged approach paramount in defining and addressing the development challenges arising from such conflicts.

According to Ujomu (2002), social conflicts, which have beset Nigeria since its independence, have assumed life-threatening dimensions, leading to armed conflict, extensive human suffering, social instability and insecurity, as well as leading to the vitiation of the country's potential for development and on various occasions threatening to cause the total collapse of the state. This multifaceted dimension of social conflicts has further brought up concerns and arguments regarding the survival of Nigeria on the centre stage. For Oseremen, Aidelokhai and Okoduwa (2022), conflict is viewed as a natural occurrence in the lives of human beings. Still, its context in Nigeria since its independence in 1960 is such that its pattern and complexity are alarming. The factors responsible for the violent conflict are convoluted and intertwined to define a complex conflict dynamic which has left the country teetering on the verge of a precipice.

It is against the foregoing that the remaining part of this paper examines the conceptualisation of institutions, social conflicts and the Nigerian state; theoretical framework; the triggers or causes of social conflicts in Nigeria; the impact of social conflicts on the Nigerian state; weak institutions and the Nigerian state; the building strong institutions, mitigating social conflicts and making the Nigerian state work; as well as conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptualizing Institutions, Social Conflicts and Nigerian State

Institutions:

Institutions are simply referred to as formal and informal rules which influence political behaviour. Scholars have used the term in different ways, and it has resulted in most times in seeming confusion. For instance, Rhodes et al. (2006) suggest that there is no singular definition of an institution on which learners of politics can find a general agreement. Nevertheless, institutions are accordingly viewed as both architecture and rules that determine opportunities and incentives for behaviour. For instance, institutions are used by some scholars to refer to a business firm, a political party, or an organisational entity such as the US Congress, while others have referred to it as a family, the rules, norms and strategies adopted by individuals operating within or across organisations (Ostrom, 2011). In relation to this paper, institutions refer to the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating procedures that structure conflict (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). Similarly, institutions refer to building blocks of social order by which behaviour is organised into predictable and reliable patterns (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Institutions also refer

to humanly devised constraints that shape the interactions of human beings (North, 1991). The foregoing provides some understanding of both formal and informal institutions, both of which help shape patterns of human behaviour by enabling and constraining their activities.

It has also been argued that institutions should be treated as real or fixed structures (Hay & Wincott, 1998). In line with this, Scott (2014) conceives institutions as multifaceted, durable social structures which comprise symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources. Institutions have material and cultural characteristics, and they are expected to shape heterogeneity, stability and change in individuals, organisations and societies. Institutions are created to govern and shape the interactions of human beings as well as help form expectations of what people should do and what they should not do (Yifu & Nugent, 1995).

Social Conflicts:

Generally, conflict occurs as a result of disagreement or misunderstanding between individuals, groups, institutions, communities, regions and states. This means that conflict can be personal, local, institutional, regional, national or international, depending on the variables and circumstances necessitating the conflict. Conflict is inevitable among human beings, and as such, it has been viewed as a pervasive phenomenon in human relationships and has been seen as the basic unit for understanding social existence (Nnoli, 1998). According to Onwe, Nwogbaga and Nwakamma (2015), conflict is understood from the perspective of contradictions arising from differences in the interests, ideas, ideologies, orientation and precipitous tendencies of the people concerned. Accordingly, these contradictions are inherent at all levels of social and economic interactions of the human race. For Miller (1962), conflict is at the root of all politics because political activity is intended to bring about or resist change in the face of possible resistance; whatever is done without any disagreement at all, from beginning to end, is not a political act. Similarly, Jev (2014) opines that the talk about politics elicits some form of reactions and counter-reactions that sometimes lead to conflict among the contending parties simply because politics involves the sharing of resources, which often are in limited supply. This further indicates that situations of conflict exist wherever individuals and groups are unable to accomplish, and groups are unable to accomplish most of their needs; hence, the potency of the conflict depends on the needs and the nature of the society concerned.

A social conflict, according to Nnoli (1998:3-5), occurs “when two or more actors oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social power in an effort to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them”. This is in line with the views of Van Dyke (1960) that “politics is a struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues”. It is also similar to the views of Lasswell (1958:202) that politics play an important role in the life of individuals, groups and institutions, and politics is, in consequence, conceptualised as “social relations that involve, who gets what, when and how.” Competition over resources is, therefore, often the cause of conflict. This is because society is composed of different groups which compete for resources and despite the society portraying a sense of co-operation, there is often a

continual power struggle between social groups as they pursue their interests. For instance, Leftwich (1984) argues that politics involves the entire activities of cooperation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby the human species goes about organising the use, production and distribution of human, natural and other resources in the process of the production and reproduction of its biological and social life.

The point here is that individuals, groups, communities, organisations and institutions have many needs which continuously struggle for their attention, action and reaction. From the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, basic human needs include food, water, clothing, shelter, and safety (Maslow, 1987), while other needs, according to Hersey and Blanchard (1969), may be psychological, such as identity prestige, esteem, affiliation and self-actualisation, authority, power, status and influence. However, as submitted by Nwosu and Ofoegbu (1986:13), in whatever way the needs of society are classified, the fact remains that the strong, the powerful and the well-organised are least able to pursue their needs. In this case, situations of social conflict occur wherever individuals and groups find it difficult to accomplish most of their needs. Ray and Esteban (2017) refer to social conflict as within-country unrest, ranging from peaceful demonstrations, processions, and strikes to violent riots and civil war; that conflict is principally organised along economic differences rather than similarities and that conflict, most especially in developing countries, is driven by ethnic motives.

Nigerian State:

The present Nigerian state metamorphosed from the Nigerian colonial state to the Nigerian post-colonial/post-independent state, colonialism being a historical factor in the development of the Nigerian state. According to Otoghile (2012), the Nigerian state was established by the British between 1880 and 1914 through a process that involved oppression, suppression and conquest by force, indicating that two sets of forces – the pre-colonial social formations on the one hand and the colonial social formation on the other – and the interaction of these two forces gave the Nigerian state a fragile nature. Nigeria attained the status of statehood on October 1, 1960, based on the adoption of the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. It was then that Nigeria formally acquired an independent and sovereign status that enabled her to make and enforce laws within her jurisdiction. However, several years after the attainment of political independence, the Nigerian state has continued to be faced with enormous challenges in its nation-building efforts to the extent that the majority of the people still wallow in despair and hopelessness (Alozie, 2018). As argued by Adeyeye (2013), Nigeria is an ideal type of a heterogeneous and plural society divided along ethnic, tribal and religious identities lumped together in a federation. As a result, the country has been enmeshed in conflicts, violence and terror associated with its heterogeneity and diversity characteristics, all of which have threatened the country's national security and slowed down the pace of sustainable development.

The Nigerian state is divided across the federal government, 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory - Abuja, and 774 local governments. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is a multicultural

society with an estimated population of over 200 million people, and it is one of the continent's most ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse nations with more than 400 ethnic and linguistic groups. This partly explains why religious and ethnic divisions remain the basis of violent political conflict in Nigeria, and by extension, social conflict and social polarisation constitute the underlying factors when political decisions are being made (Lewis, 2006; Adesoji, 2010; Babajide & Ajayi, 2022). According to Fadakinte (2013), the Nigerian postcolonial state can be understood from four critical characteristics: unlike the developed capitalist states of Europe at that time, the Nigerian dominant social class aimed first at capturing state power prior to those of socio-economic powers; the economic and internal bases of the postcolonial state were weak and the state became very fragile; the postcolonial state was not strictly one that emerged to mediate between indigenous classes whose interests were irreconcilable; and the Nigerian social formation had not sufficiently developed well-defined class structures, indicating that at independence, there was no clear-cut alignment of all the class forces.

In view of the multi-ethnic and heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state and the attendant challenges being generated hitherto, efforts including nation-building and federal character principles had been made to inculcate the right spirit of patriotism, tolerance and compromise among Nigerians as well as achieve stability. However, the governance and political leadership in Nigeria have been driven by self-interest and other primordial considerations, which take priority over that of the public, while the Nigerian state has been failing in three major areas: security of lives and properties, promotion of the rule of law, and provision of visionary leadership (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). Being a multi-ethnic-religious society, there have been persistent occurrences of ethno-religious and political conflicts, especially since the return of democracy in May 1999, with hundreds of ethno-religious and politically motivated conflicts recorded in the country up till the year 2022. It can be argued that social conflicts have not helped the nation-building efforts of the country. For example, the history of ethno-religious and political conflicts characterising the Nigerian state has been associated with the issue of colonialism and, by extension, the Nigerian military dictatorship, followed by the contradictions and arguments compounded in Nigerian federalism.

According to Itumo, Udeuhele and Aro (2017), the present conflicts and insecurity being witnessed across the Nigerian state are not unexpected as they are intrinsically linked and rooted in British colonialism, which created the Nigeria state on a faulty foundation of mistrust and distrust among the various ethnic nationalities that make up the country. This explains the social conflicts that engulf the various parts of the country as emanating from the struggle for political control, resource control, cultural and ethno-religious differences/intolerance, contestations over resource distribution, land allocation, citizenship questions, marginalisation and indigene/settler contestations, all of which have often degenerated into violent conflicts in different parts of the country. It is partly in view of this that Alozie (2018) highlights the challenges of the Nigerian state and nation-building in the 21st century as including communal conflicts, endemic corruption, ethnicity, ethno-religious conflicts, gender inequality and persistence of human rights abuses,

persistence of sectarian uprising and ethnic militia groups, political violence, regional imbalance, political and socio-economic disparities, and youth unemployment.

Theoretical Review

Although there are various theories of peace and conflict, this paper examines some selected relevant theoretical positions that have been advanced in the literature to explain institutions, social conflicts and state structure and find lasting solutions to the attendant problems.

Institutionalism theory:

Institutionalism is viewed as complex because it covers many fields like political science, economics, sociology, history and ecology and because it is itself divided into two schools: 'old' and 'new' institutionalism (Greenwood et al., 2008). For instance, political science has often legitimately claimed that the study of power and institutions has been its core concern and contribution. In this case, institutions are viewed as important simply because modern governance largely occurs in and functions through institutions. Institutions are also relevant because they shape and constrain political behaviour and decision-making in different ways within a society. Based on institutionalism terms, issues such as party systems, the rules of electoral competition, government bureaucracies, parliaments, constitutions, the judicial system, as well as large institutional complexes that made up the government, non-state institutions, supra-national institutional complexes and the total gamut of public institutions referred to as the state has been politically analysed (Fenna, 1998; Bell, 2002).

From the foregoing, it is understandable that institutions matter in any society, but the struggle to define institutions continues. New institutionalism is viewed as the study of institutions, but both terms also remain difficult to define. New institutional theory, which is also known as neo-institutionalism, differs from the old institutionalism in that it focuses more on the cognitive aspects of institutions. According to Kallinikos (2006), institutions are the rules of behaviour that influence how they make it, and while 'institution' once described policymaking organisations such as legislatures, courts and executives, new institutionalism identifies the rules, norms, practices, and relationships that influence patterns of behaviour in politics and policymaking. The emergence of new institutionalism is characterised by certain factors, such as the recognition of the crucial role of the state in shaping political behaviour and bringing about all kinds of development, especially in the third world.

By way of comparison, old institutionalism focuses only on the organisational and formal structures of institutions and laws while new institutionalism takes into account the norms and informal practices that shape the functioning and evolutions of institutions in various ways. The old institutionalism focuses on formal institutions like the parliament, executive, and judiciary, among others, while new institutionalism, in addition, takes into account the informal institutions such as the trade unions, and pressure groups, among others. The old institutionalism is viewed more as descriptive, while new institutionalism is seen as explicitly theoretical. Above all, old

institutionalism is argued more as static, while new institutionalism is more interested in analysing the dynamic process that characterises institutional change.

Frustration - aggression theory:

The frustration-aggression theory was developed theory in 1939 with the help of scholars like John Dollard and associates while it was further expanded and modified by Yates (1962) and Berkowitz (1969). The basic argument of the theorists is that the most common explanation for violent behaviour emanates from the inability to fulfil basic needs. That is, the frustration-aggression theory explains that aggression is the product of frustration which occurs in a situation where the legitimate desires of individuals are denied either directly or indirectly by the society or social system, whereby the feeling of disappointment may lead such individuals or groups to express their anger through violent conflict that will be directed at those held responsible or accountable. In this case, frustration is defined as an emergent condition in when a goal-oriented act is delayed or thwarted (Blackwell, 2014). This further explains the main thesis of this theory in that when people perceive that they are being prevented from achieving a goal, their frustration is likely to result in aggression (Berkowitz, 1969; Friedman & Schustack, 1999). The frustration-aggression theory also contends that social movements occur when frustration leads to collective, often aggressive behaviour (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Aggression is the outcome of preventing or frustrating an individual's or group's efforts at attaining a goal. The theory is relevant to this paper because it attempts to explain why people get involved in social conflicts or violence. An attempt to resolve conflicts emanating from aggression will require an appropriate authority to examine the causal issues and address them accordingly.

Fragile state theory:

The theoretical framework that explains the Nigerian state is the fragile state theory. This theory is relatively modern and it is traced to scholars like Starr (2009). The fragile state theory assumes that prolonged instability or crisis in any state structure or institution of the society that arises from ethno-religion differences, consistent manipulation of state resources by power holders, undemocratic regime or social policy failure, if unmitigated, can predispose the state to a volatile situation that will further create opportunity for further manipulation of those weaknesses by internal and external forces thereby leaving the state more porous. According to Itumo, Udeuhele and Aro (2017), if state fragility is understood, the situations of existing weakness unabated in a state institution or essential structures of the society can be understood. In other words, the theory holds that a state should be able to demonstrate the structural capacity to adapt and manage the perceived socio-political crisis in any important area as well as demonstrate legitimacy and monopoly of the use of power and institutionalise law and order for the harmonious existence of its various parts, without which such a state will become vulnerable to escalators of social conflict in different forms. The tragedy of this development is that individuals or groups referred to as conflict entrepreneurs may take advantage of the conflict situation for political and economic gains, thereby further disrupting the socio-political order of the polity. This theory becomes

imperative for this paper because it attempts to expose both the underlying internal and external factors that necessitate the rise of social conflicts and insecurity, particularly in Nigeria.

The Triggers/Causes of Social Conflicts in Nigeria

The outbreak of conflicts is usually attributed to different factors depending on the society where they occur. For instance, Marshall and Gurr (2003) argue that the combination of poverty and weak states and institutions causes most African conflicts. Egwu (2007) and Omeje (2012) state the high level of poverty, staggering and growing level of youth unemployment, leading to hopelessness, restiveness and feelings of frustration; high population growth rate amid unsatisfactory economic performance; dysfunctional structural divide and discrimination at various levels of state and society; and promotion of violence as an economic opportunity as often precipitating violent social conflicts in Nigeria. Jev (2014) associates politics with conflict and argues that unequal allocation of resources is central to social conflict in a given political environment. Onwe, Nwogbaga and Nwakamma (2015) in their study highlight factors that trigger social conflict in a particular community or region, including remote causes such as boundary dispute, indigenes-settlers syndrome (son of the soil syndrome), politics, culture and tradition, biased historical information; and immediate causes such as interpersonal conflict, abuse of power, boundary adjustment, the state position on the matters of conflict, and self-determination by tribes or ethnic groups.

For Itumo, Udeuhele and Aro (2017), the causes of social conflict in Nigeria can be explained from the perspective of governance thesis, ethnic identity thesis, religious identity religion thesis, economic thesis, and geographical/territorial thesis. In their argument, Babajide and Ajayi (2022) attribute the emergence of social conflicts to poverty, inequality, climate variability such as in the case of clashes between farmers and herdsmen, perceived marginalisation such as in the case of Niger Delta militancy, and domestic factors such as in the case of land acquisition to politically motivated violence, religion ideological violence such as in the case of Boko Haram. In another view, Zamfir (2022) submits that the drivers of social conflict strongly include poor quality of governance, absence of rule of law and disrespect for fundamental freedoms, injustice, various state abuses and the state's incapacity to respond to the local populations' basic needs; corrupt, non-inclusive and unaccountable institutions which generate dissatisfaction among numerous groups, individuals, regions and states. Other factors as identified by Oseremen, Aidelokhai and Okoduwa (2022) as causes of social conflicts in Nigeria include poverty, indiscriminate use of hard drugs, ethno-religious factors, corruption, weak governance, weak social cohesion, and individual-survival theory.

Assessing the Impact of Social Conflicts on the Nigerian State

Politics has been conceptualised by scholars as a conflict-generating process, just as it involves how values are authoritatively allocated among competing groups in society, hence political conflicts, including social conflict in all forms, have become inevitable in human society, especially in a heterogeneous and plural state like Nigeria (Hill, 2012). The issues of social conflict

in Nigeria have continued to result in notable consequences for the Nigerian state, especially in the country's fourth republic. Salawu (2010) argue that social conflicts in Nigeria have given birth to many ethnic militias like the O'dua People Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, and the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC); the Igbo People Congress (IPC); the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC); the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); and the Ohanaeze N'digbo, all of which have become more violent and bloody with more devastating effects on the country's development. According to the World Bank (2013), years of social conflicts which resulted in weaknesses in the oil sector have increased macroeconomic risks for Nigeria. Kalejaiye and Alliyu (2013) posit that social conflicts are the most fundamental factors in the underdevelopment of the Nigerian state as social conflicts have hindered political, economic and social developments in the country, and in many instances, they have slowed down the development process, which is essential for pulling Nigeria out of poverty and placing the country more firmly on the path of stability and sustainable development.

Severe episodes of social conflicts in Nigeria have negatively influenced agricultural productivity and investment in many ways, such as disrupting the supply and distribution of inputs and outputs, creating price shocks and causing massive displacement of labour, thereby making agricultural investments difficult to maintain in the country's socio-politically volatile environments (Kimenyi et al., 2014). This means that social conflicts continue to undermine agricultural productivity and investment in the country. The unbearable economic costs of the incessant social conflicts in Nigeria on the state and its citizens as a result of violence, bombings, kidnappings and wanton destruction of lives and property in the country have been observed by Odoh, Odigbo and Okonkwo (2014). Accordingly, there is a significant relationship between social conflicts and the degree of poverty in the country such that geographic zones of the country with higher rates of poverty are where the insurgency, religious and social conflict are more manifest. Further, social conflicts have resulted in the relocation of some multinational companies and organisations to other African countries with consequent negative effects on employment generation and thereby leading to more crimes and social conflicts. Social conflicts in Nigeria are also said to be having negative effects on the tourism sub-sector and tourism development in the country. Jev (2014) opines that social conflicts have hampered the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria and diminished the socio-economic well-being of the citizenry.

Onwe, Nwogbaga and Nwakamma (2015) contend that social conflict has affected the sustainability of developmental efforts of the Nigerian state, leading to the destruction of lives and properties, especially government critical institutions, resulting in the low provision and sustainability of infrastructure facilities in the country; increased youth unemployment and high crime wave in the country; and constituted one of the major recurring problems bedevilling the socio-economic and political landscape in the country; thereby achieving sustainable development to become a difficult task for a developing nation like Nigeria, in spite of efforts by national and international development experts to bring about desired development to the country. In another view, Itumo, Udeuhele and Aro (2017) argue that violent social conflicts have continued to

paralyse the country and predispose it to a parlous state of insecurity and instability. In the views of Atere, Ayandiji and Alao (2019), the Nigerian state, since independence in 1960, has been weakened by various conflicts, and the country has lost colossal sums of funds to social conflicts that could have been ploughed into national development. This means that social conflicts have accounted largely for Nigeria's underdevelopment.

Odozi and Oyelere (2019) attempt to estimate the causal impact of conflict in Nigeria on welfare-related outcomes, thereby suggesting that recent and long-term exposure to social conflicts has increased the incidence, intensity and severity of poverty as well as decreased household income in Nigeria. Specifically and in relation to regional impact, in the report of UNDP (2020), persistent armed and violent social conflict in north-eastern Nigeria since 2009 has led to the loss of over 35,000 lives and properties, destruction of critical infrastructure, displacement of millions, and the destabilisation of economic, health and education systems, thereby having attendant effects on the productivity and development of the region and the country at large, considering scarce national resources. For Babajide and Ajayi (2022), social conflicts sometimes cause major catastrophes in Nigeria, ultimately leading to an economic downturn in the country, while Oseremen, Aidelokhai and Okoduwa (2022) posit that social conflicts have grave consequences for the Nigerian people.

Weak Institutions and the Nigerian State

As posited by Solimano (2005), a state is institutionally weak if it is unable to provide the required amounts of public goods such as law and order, infrastructure, contract enforcement, control of the territory, maximum security in the whole territory, adequate protection and respect for civil rights and property rights is limited, and physical and institutional infrastructures, Solimano (2005) also views the political regime and constitutional rules as constituting the highest echelon in the hierarchy of institutions while the judiciary, the regulatory bodies, the ministries, and the budgetary process form part of the second level in the hierarchy of institutions, all of which require are expected to function at optimum level. However, complex agent-principal problems, rent-seeking, corruption, violence, inequality of income and wealth, ethnic diversity, and social conflicts have been identified as important factors that weaken state institutions and create serious governance problems with untold hardships on the citizenry.

No nation can enjoy lasting harmonious and peaceful coexistence as well as continuous development if its citizens live in consistent social conflicts with weak institutions. Unfortunately, that is the condition of Nigeria. It is a condition of social conflict in various forms. According to Falola (2009), the Nigeria state as it is constituted, especially in her fourth republic, depicts a picture typical of a failed state in terms of its institutional framework and central regulative capacity. As corroborated by Onuoha (2011), this condition is because, despite over six decades of political independence, the country is still tinkering here and there in search of legitimacy and loyalty from its citizens in the midst of serious threats of secessionism, separatism and insurgency. All this explains the fact that social conflict has become a recurrent phenomenon in the Nigerian state, which, on many occasions, metamorphosed into violent confrontations either among the

citizens or between the citizens and the Government. Similarly, Adeyeye (2013) argues that the Nigerian state's institutional weakness and fragility are the central cause of terror in the country and the impossibility of fully realising statehood and development. In a critical examination of the Nigerian state, Adetunji and Ibrahim (2014) reiterate the importance and relevance of strong institutions as a catalyst for sustainable growth and development but reveal that the country's institutions over the years have become weak and ineffective as a result of myriads of problems confronting the polity.

Weak institutions have been described as the absence of notable attributes or qualities that define the institutional strength of a structure, some of which include independent of political manipulations and governmental controls, decisions being taken on the whims and caprices of individual bodies (Sambo, 2013; Usoro (2013). Nigeria's institutions have been adjudged as weak and inefficient with attendant effects on the country's image, sustainable growth and transformation body (Onah, 2012; Obi, 2013). Some of the factors responsible for weak institutions in Nigeria, as identified by Adetunji and Ibrahim (2014), include the lack of genuine commitment on the part of the leaders towards democratic ideas and principles; the docile nature of the country's institutions, the duplication of government agencies or organs; the undue rush for independence by the country's nationalists; and the over-lapping function of the country's institutions. Usman, Romle and Bashir (2015) have attested to institutional weakness in Nigeria, asserting that a weak institution depicted a state of decline or powerlessness of government agencies to effectively discharge some of the fundamental responsibilities of the state, including the maintenance of law and order and the protection of its territorial integrity. Accordingly and in line with the position of the Fund for Peace, institutional weakness manifests in different forms, such as losing control of territory or the sole power of using physical force therein, the crisis of legitimacy in which some part of the state seeks disintegration; inability to provide basic services to the citizens; among others, all of which the contemporary Nigerian state possesses as attributes of institutional weakness in addition to the incapacitation of the central government to maintain minimal practical control over a lot of its territory; non-procurement of basic service; pervasive incidence of corruption and criminality; displacement of citizens as a result of the crisis and the threat of secession from its regions as well as declining economic standard.

Jibrin (2017) argues that the nature of the Nigerian state and the inorganic state of its laws and institutions hinder economic development because the country lacks the capacity to affect the major changes which will catalyse growth, development and increased well-being due to the undifferentiated nature of its institutions. This is in line with the findings of Azoro, Onah and Agulefo (2021) in that a weak institution depicts a state of decline or powerlessness of government agencies to effectively discharge some of the fundamental responsibilities of the state like the maintenance of law and order and the protection of its territorial integrity, thereby losing control of territory or the sole power of using physical force therein; having the crisis of legitimacy in which some units of the state seek and struggle for disintegration; and experiencing inability to provide basic services to the citizens; among others (Usman, Romle and Bashir, 2015). This aptly

explains the condition of the contemporary Nigerian state. In a culturally plural and religiously and ethnically divided society like the Nigerian state, the basic yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the government machinery arguably lies in its capability to develop an institutional framework capable of facilitating the harmonious coexistence of the entire citizens through the effective law enforcement agency, integrative process of representative governance, and strong judicial system.

The existence of structurally weak institutions has continued to raise troubling concerns in Nigeria because the institutions have become increasingly unable to adequately and effectively perform the functions of governance due to structural logs in administration, which pose serious impediments in the discharge of their responsibilities (Owogbemi, 2012). The characteristics of weak institutions include leadership problems, pervasive corruption, ethnic and regional base loyalty and interest, and a general amoral public sphere, all of which prevent efficient governance and hamper rapid development (Odion, 2007). Abdulhakeem (2021) observes the presence of weak institutions and bad governance in Nigeria as reflected in the oil revenue decline, cultural fractionalisation, long failure of government to meet the needs of people and political dominance, all of which have brought about many economic, and social and political challenges on the Nigerian state in recent time.

From the preceding, Nigeria's institutions can be classified as not strong enough because they are not efficiently fulfilling their purpose; for example, the country's institutions are not able to properly enforce laws and regulations; they are not able to adequately offer social support as, for instance, there's no or limited access to a good level of medical care and mental health support; they are not providing absolute security for the citizenry; they are not able to protect property rights; and Nigeria's institutions are also viewed as weak because they failed to build basic and critical infrastructures stable for modern development. No doubt, the Nigerian state is presently faced with the challenges of dismantling the existing social, economic, political, and administrative institutions for new ones in accordance with the global best practices.

Building Strong Institutions, Mitigating Social Conflicts and Making the Nigerian State Work

The formidable institutions, social conflict reduction/prevention and a stable state, play a strategic role in bringing about harmonious coexistence and desired development. The task of strengthening Nigeria's weak institutions by making them strong and potent is a task for the entire stakeholders within the country. Usoro (2013) argues that where strong institutions exist, there will be the presence of a clear and unambiguous ideology which all members can identify with. According to Abdulrahman and Taar (2008) and Adetunji and Ibrahim (2014), efforts must be intensified to ensure that Nigeria's weak institutions are enhanced and strengthened for growth, successful implementation of the transformation agenda of the government and overall development of the country. It is in view of this that Adetunji and Ibrahim (2014), for instance, advocate the instrument of civic education as an appropriate mechanism, which entails the cultivation of the virtues,

knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation as well as solving problems confronting mankind, and if adequately deployed, is capable of strengthening the country's institutional framework such that the institutions can perform optimally. The making of Nigeria's weak institutional framework to perform effectively and efficiently will reduce social conflicts and make the Nigerian state work.

Attempts to have strong institutions will require the average Nigerian to be interested in making Nigeria work. Ihebuzor et al. (2020) reveal that the causes/consequences of aggravated social conflicts, injustice and weak institutions are often similar and interwoven and suggest three legs of peaceful coexistence, justice for all and strong enabling institutions as highly critical to ensuring and enhancing sustainable development at all levels within a society. For instance, any society with prevalent injustice cannot enjoy peace, which indicates that societies need strong institutions to enforce justice. From the previous, it can be argued that strong institutions in active democracies can prevent leadership impunity, allow for the rule of law to thrive as well as assist in controlling the occurrence of social conflicts. In the view of Abdulhakeem (2021), there is a consensus that institutions are very crucial for economic performance, but little is known about how countries with weak institutions can build strong institutions. For example, it is accordingly suggested that Nigeria must make significant improvements such as decentralisation so as to experience positive change. This means the kind of decentralisation that does not only transfer administrative power and resources to the sub-national government but also transfers political power to elect and remove politicians from the citizens. This means that decentralisation of political power that allows citizens to participate in government decisions and policymaking is a necessary condition for building strong, efficient and effective institutions that will ensure inclusive growth in the country.

For institutions to be strong, Küfeoğlu (2022) opines that institutions must give due importance to the rule of law, the sanctity of human rights and the effect of stability to ensure sustainable development. It is also affirmed that social conflicts can be reduced through justice and strong institutions, especially in developing countries. For example, it has been argued by Acemoglu et al. (2012) that societies that have grown and prospered in the last 300 years are those that adhere to the requirements of democracy, respect human rights and have adopted inclusive economic institutions. In further argument by Küfeoğlu (2022), in any government where it is difficult or impossible to achieve peace and social reconciliation, justice is jeopardised, and the result is social conflict and palpable fear. This exists mostly in societies where institutions are weak and justice is not strong, where violence and crime rates are high, where abuse and exploitation are common, and where corruption and bribery are common. Undoubtedly, this is a problem that exists in many places in the world, and the Nigerian state is not an exception, but this must be solved. The tragedy is that social conflict in a particular region can also affect other parts of the society. It is in view of this that the United Nations (2021) advocate a great reduction in crime and social conflict through justice and strong institutions, upholding the rule of law and strengthening the presence of developing countries in global governance institutions, all of which are considered important issues for sustainable development goals (SDG-16) and the 2030 agenda.

The point from the foregoing is that for a stronger, working and more peaceful state, it is essential to have justice and strong security institutions, and society must have a strong trust in the institutions (Brouthers et al., 2008; Küfeoğlu, 2022). For example, issues that disrupt the functioning of an institution, such as corruption and bribery that will make institutions not comply with statutory laws and regulations, should be tamed. Such negative factors must be avoided totally in order to reduce inequality gaps and promote a sense of justice in society because it is the corruption in authorities and institutions that often results in public reactions, thereby damaging the culture and fundamental principles of democracy. For instance, Babajide and Ajayi (2022) have argued that countries with more capable bureaucracies and institutions are likely to experience fewer social conflicts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has provided a significant explanatory analysis of the issues of institutions, social conflict and the Nigerian state. It has provided arguments that can help scholars and practitioners to more accurately classify the cross-national issues of institutional challenges, increasing social conflicts and unstable Nigerian polity, as well as theoretically determine their causal factors and explore the relative panaceas with which each problem can be resolved. It has been established that social conflicts are dysfunctional to political systems, but in some sets of circumstances, social conflicts can also help to give direction to social change and generate new ideas about new patterns of beneficial relationships among the various individuals, groups and regions in the society. For instance, politics breeds conflicts because it stems from areas of agreement, common interests, shared desires, shared wishes, and common expectations, but politics also involves the resolution of emerging conflict situations in society.

In this paper, conceptual issues of the institution and social conflict in relation to the Nigerian state have been examined with emphasis on theoretical reviews, triggers of social conflicts, the impact of social conflicts, weak institutions, and the need for strong institutions, social conflict mitigation and a stable state. In spite of the widespread social conflicts, visible weak institutions and increasing polity instability in Nigeria, this paper has provided some robust and practicable recommendations that will complement ongoing national efforts at providing lasting solutions. It must, however, be stated that social conflicts cannot be approached or resolved from a single source or perspective.

In the first place, appropriate steps should be taken to provide visible and practicable answers to the developmental questions of unemployment, inequality and poverty. All efforts should be geared towards how these conditions should be drastically reduced through effective institutions. If they are not declining but keep increasing at a geometrical rate, social conflicts cannot be reduced. There is also the need for a constitutional review that will make key national institutions independent, while their performance and finance should be evaluated constantly by independent auditors on an annual basis to ascertain their efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. Similarly, for Nigeria to be able to build strong and sustainable institutions, there is also the need

for a policy of political power decentralisation with appropriate sanctions through independent checks and balances. It is also important to mention that decentralisation structures such as local administrative entities and trained personnel are necessary conditions.

There should be partnering and identifying synergies with traditional institutions to curb social conflicts. Historically, traditional institutions of governance were viewed as playing very significant roles in conflict management and resolution through formidable political influences they exercised in their domains in accordance with their native laws, customs, norms, cultures, traditions and practices. In view of this, there is a need to reinvigorate and revitalise traditional institutions as mechanisms for social conflict management. The underlying interests of the diverse parties and aggrieved groups in the country should be deeply investigated and genuinely addressed through negotiation and compensation. The government must be strict against agents of corruption and conflict entrepreneurs by ensuring that they don't escape corresponding punishment to serve as deterrence for others. The country should operate either true federalism or adopt con-federalism with a genuine restructuring referendum to negotiate the existing federal arrangement. Above all, Nigeria needs patriotic and national political leadership through a credible and uncompromising electoral process that will earn the legitimacy of the people and enforce genuine good governance based on accountability, transparency, rule of law, and participation at all levels of government.

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