

THE PERSISTENCE OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PRINCIPAL CAUSES

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Abstract

The current paper sought to identify the causes of the persistence of violent conflicts in the African continent and how all of this affects democracy. The research question grappled with in the current paper is: What are the causes of the perpetuation of violent conflict in Africa and how does this impact democracy? Beyond the use of an Afrocentric lens due to the limitations of the literature in discussing this subject from an Africa-centred lens, the paper has used secondary data materials to inform the objective of the paper. The paper has revealed multiple causes including perpetual imperial influences, foreign socio-political doctrines and indoctrination, global arms and suppliers and arms trafficking, and lack of effective leadership as the central pillars of violence in the African continent. It then became important for the African continent to devise a common code of effective leadership, and effective measures of arms control, including counter-foreign and defense policies in a matter that check the excess flow of international indoctrination and imperial influences on Africa.

Keywords: Africa, violent conflict, arms trafficking, imperialist influence, weak state, leadership crisis.

Introduction

Africa has been prone to violent conflicts ever since it was co-opted into the global community through the Berlin Conference of 1884. The main violent conflict was the resistance against the imperial and colonial forces which lasted close to 80 years. By the 1960s, liberation wars were understood in patches to territories throughout the entire continent, with Southern Africa the remaining stronghold of settler colonial powers and apartheid. Violent conflict can be explained as a phenomenon that occurs when two or more parties use physical force to resolve their competing interests or claims (Büscher, 2020). As a result, most of the African states were independent states, as by the United Nations (UN) towards the end of the decade. Liberation wars were conformed to the internal crises within certain African countries which were seen as the teething issues of nationhood, as encountered in African countries like Nigeria, Congo Kinshasa. The concentrated violence in these conflicts was a direct attestation that African countries were found wrong on structural foundations, without the needed national leadership

skills, still under imperial influences and often made complex by manipulations by the global socio-political indoctrination for the benefit of military and defense industrial complexes. This actuality played out in the sequence of coups and counter-coups across the entire continent.

The 1985 annual summit of the Heads of State and Governments of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) showcased the dominance of military men. These military coups have led to a leadership crisis in Africa which resulted in violent resistance to leadership and loss of lives. Often, the post-1985 period was characterized by resistance to political parties that were autocratic and military rule throughout Africa, with violent consequences in most of the African countries, and the birth of multi-party elections in Africa. The events occurred simultaneously with the end of the Cold War, and the dawn of the independence millennium. It although anticipated that the dynamics of the Cold War which promoted deep political divisions across ideological lines and proxy civil wars, and the resurgence of governments that are democratically

elected in Africa would consequently reduce violent conflicts in the continent. But the reverse was encountered, just like in the Rwanda genocide, the Darfur crisis, the Liberian Civil War, the Central African Republic conflict, the Sierra Leone Conflict, the Somali conflict, Niger Delta insurgencies and Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Ethiopian Civil war, Libyan conflict, and Malian conflicts amongst others, which have shown the persistence of violent conflicts in Africa in the contemporary period.

This is against the backdrop of multiple efforts at doing away with violent conflicts in Africa through the use of several regional and continental instruments such as the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), Peace and Security Council (PSC). The complete failure of the African Union, United Nations, Europe, and alternative actors in dealing with the persistence of violent conflicts in the continent necessitated the undertaking of the current paper, which sought to interpret and analyse the variables which promote the substance of violent conflicts in the continent; answering the question of why violent conflicts persist in the continent? The paper is sub-divided into various themes including theoretical and methodological interpretations. The discussion of the drivers of violent conflicts in Africa includes leadership crisis, the global supply of arms and weaponry into Africa, foreign socio-political doctrines and indoctrination, neocolonialism, and the nature and structure of African states. Studies on the persistence of conflicts in Africa have all found different factors causing the conflicts. Although the results have been mixed, research on the common code adopted by African states to tackle factors causing conflicts is scarce. This paper bridges this gap by providing adequate information on codes that can be utilized by Africa to curb factors causing persistent conflicts affecting its democracy

Significance of this paper

The paper provides a surgical analysis of the violent conflicts within the African continent from an analysis of principal causes discourse. Violent conflicts in the African continents continue to increase displacement, poverty, children without

parents, and deteriorating economic and social development in Africa. Thus, this needs to be interrogated on the root causes therefore to also understand the solutions to be implemented. This then provides the topic at hand a significant role in uncovering the leadership style, voter rigging, failure of leaders to deal with issues in the region, and military coup as some of the factors that are contributing to the violent nature of multiple regimes in the continent. Beyond this, the paper further questions, if these consistently arise in conflicts in the continent, do or do not affect democratic dispensation within the continent, and provides a thorough view of how this democracy is affected. Hence, it attempts to contribute to the body of scientific knowledge by highlighting the above-mentioned factors as some of the factors that ought to be blamed as the causes of the violent conflict issues in the continent. Similarly, this paper also provides an Afrocentric theoretical stance in an attempt to show the importance of the topic in addressing violent regimes that may or may not impact democracy in the African continent. The paper identifies and analyses the leadership crisis, global supply of arms and weaponry into Africa, foreign socio-political doctrines, and the nature and structure of African States as the principal drivers of violence in the continent.

Theoretical and Methodological Interpretations

The Afrocentric perspective is a theoretical lens of intellectual efforts at ensuring that Africans are the centre of the production of their knowledge, with their knowledge systems. This theory presents a set of ideals that unites Africans and dispenses an alternative theoretical tool that is at the heart of uniting Africans towards the common goal of contributing to the knowledge fraternity (Asante 2003). This is a relevant theoretical lens because the study was conducted and produced by scholars and/or academics who are situated geographically in the global South, particularly in Africa to have the ability to provide a broader analysis of the subject under paper (Asante 1990). The theory is also deployed to do away with the knowledge gap curbed to provide a comprehensive theoretical injection into the subject of the effectiveness of arms control measures. From that view, the theory will

be employed to critically understand African issues from African perspectives and be able to provide issues that will be relevant based on the leadership style, geographic location, or some of the identified factors within the scope of the paper.

Under normal circumstances, the theory is adopted using the three important theoretical tenets which include the cultural centeredness that outlines the importance of the incorporation of the cultural knowledge which stems out of the African continent. This means the comprehension of the cultures of people who help with knowledge is significant to understanding and relating fully with their actions and their worldview. This then situates the scholarly method of inquiry into the attributes of the culture of the groups that are under inquiry at the point and time (Schreiber 2000).

The second tenet is paradigmatic pluralism which speaks to addressing the significance of plural views which can lead to true trans-cultural analysis. Implying that the theory not only stimulates the centering of Africans on the production of knowledge but also groups of different cultures and their voices should be harbored fairly and/or evenly and all centric positions are interrelated and interdependent. Furthermore, this means that all different African cultural groups should affirm and view themselves and the analysis of the surroundings from their perspectives and/or views (Asante 2003). The third and final tenant is liberation and cultural agency which speaks to the issue of liberating Africans in social, methodological, historical, and epistemological terms of reference. The ignorance of the real account of African history has reduced and done away with the real experiences of Africans, perpetuating Western hegemony through the creation of a false reality that views Africans as unable to relate (Rapanyane 2021). The theoretical lens then came in helpful in affirming that the African culture, social cohesion, and the promotion of the reconstruction of African values, institutions, history, and promotion of self-worth are very important in helping the marginalized to break off from the chains of marginalization, though fostering cultural agency (Schreiber 2000). Just as much as other cultures and viewpoints, Africans are entitled to give their perspective on the African experiences.

This paper has adopted a qualitative methodological approach in the form of a document review design method. The foregoing has involved deep research and review of the extensive literature on the subject from various sources of information, including libraries, the internet, and archives. Implying that the paper has depended on secondary data. This method often saves costs, time, and energy that are often absent. The data that was used was deemed reliable, valid, and satisfactory in the interpretation and analysis of the research paper (Rapanyane 2020). The collected data was presented qualitatively, in that the relevant texts were infused into thematic analysis and interpretation using a content technique of smooth, chronological discussion of findings and general conclusions.

The persistence of violent conflicts in the African continent: principal causes.

Leadership Crisis

Even though colonialism broke the peaceful African political institutions where great Africans led their different empires and kingdoms with tact and pride; it is without doubt that the current and/or contemporary Africa is led by semi-literate with extremely little exposure and knowledge of the statecraft (Okon, 2022). These leaders came out of the colonial masters' -imposed assimilation policies and indirect rule to inherit the African continent with no visions for their differing countries. The African leaders have remained loyal to the ex-colonial overlords even after indirect rule and assimilation policies were abandoned and their countries gained independence (McGowan & Johnson, 1984). Most of the leaders of the independent African countries are self-seeking and corrupt. Africans have inherited Western systems of government which they do not understand or are well equipped to operate them. As a result, that has opened a vacuum for external infiltration by our former colonisers/Western forces.

Many of our African leaders belong to the club of kleptocracy where leaders have worked together with the compradors to further exacerbate the impoverishment of African countries; and expropriate their own countries' resources to the global world's metropolises (Okon, 2022). When the state resources are stolen by political leaders of a

country, aggression and frustration set in and the citizens who are deprived take up arms to rebel against their leaders. Practical examples would be referred to the 1990s outbreak of conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Siberfein & Conteh 2006).

In the same context, the under-development of the Niger Delta region was the principal cause of the Niger Delta insurgency against the vast looting of the enormous resources meant to develop the region (Lebovich, 2019). The effects of successive administrations have also led to under-development causing tensions within the relevant case points e.g., Boko Haram, the Northern Mali crisis, and the Tuareg Rebellion. This implies that corruption and self-seeking African leaders have often unconsciously promoted under-development that angered multiple people who took up arms and/or engaged in violent protests (Arief, 2019). Despite corruption and ineptitude, modern leaders of independent African states are engaged in sit-tight syndrome. The syndrome is engulfed by leaders who force themselves into leadership positions through the engineering of electoral laws and procedures in the manner of ensuring longevity in positions of power. Several relevant examples of these include Omar Bashir, Faure Eyadema, Paul Biya, Yoweri Museveni and Paul Kagame, Robert Mugabe are all in the club of the former leader of Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko who have manipulated the constitutions of their countries to retain political offices using flawed elections. Lest we do not forget Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia who stayed in power until he was forced out by ECOWAS (Shimeles & Nabassga, 2017).

An alternative contributing aspect of the leadership crisis in Africa is the promotion of nepotism and tribalism over meritocracy in the hiring of comrades into public services. Implying that most leaders in the continent have portrayed signs of favoring kinsmen in wealth transfer and/or contracts award. Patterns of ethnic hegemon arose from the promotion of one minority ethnic population in a country favored by the leader at the point and time (Akadiri & Akadiri 2018). Practical examples would include the Tutsi hegemony in Rwanda and Burundi which led to the civil wars and genocide in the 1990s as illustrative.

In the contemporary period, we have the Nigerian Fulani hegemony, which is a perilous development that should be dealt with in time to avoid the events of the Rwandan scenario (Okon 2022). The perpetual appetite of the Western forces for the minerals and other raw materials found in the continent also plays a role in fueling the persisting conflicts in the continent. They frequently involve themselves in the internal affairs of most African states and create some conflicts. Libya under Muammar Gaddafi is a typical example.

Global Supply of Illicit Arms and Weaponry into Africa

The lack of technological development in Africa has had a considerable impact on the continent's ability to produce sophisticated weaponry and arms needed in modern warfare. Apart from certain African countries with considerable economic and strong political institutions, like South Africa, Nigeria, etc., alternative African countries and actors have shown patterns of dependence on outsiders for the supply of weapons and arms used in various battles in the African continent (Dulley & Sampaio, 2020). The most explanation that makes sense to answer how non-weapon producers can access weapons would have to include the possibilities of utilizing the African continent as a dumping site for outdated weapons, and/or even the testing site for some new weaponry products (Dulley & Sampaio, 2020). To some extent, all of this may be taking place through the illicit trade of weapons for mineral and/or natural resources in the continent. The reality is that it is very difficult for non-state actors to possess distinctively sophisticated weaponry that has been discovered in various conflicts including in the Angolan Civil War and the Niger Delta (Newsom, 2011).

Without a doubt, one can argue that the extensive flow of illicit weapons and arms into the continent is a deliberate act of conspiracy by global powers of arms supply to instigate and sustain conflicts in the continent in the way of forcing state actors to continuously increase their military and defense budgets on the acquisition of arms. Then by trading weapons for resources to both non-state actors and states in Africa, a balance of terror and destruction

is preserved. This has been the motivating factor for non-state actors like terrorist groups to take up arms against the states in a cyclical manner (Abiodun, Asaolu, and Ndubuisi, 2020). The following example is an archetype: the militias in the Niger Delta where multinational corporations (MNCs) have played a key role in suppressing the protestors in the Niger Delta multiple times which led to multiple arms struggles fighting against Sudan in the early 2000s. In Nigeria, the state has since expanded its spending on the acquisition of more unconventional platforms and weapons including a defense budget for the containment of the insurgency groupings and threats in the country. In the Northern region of the country, Boko Haram is predominant and even overran various territories and has enjoyed dominion over the State of Nigeria (UNODC 2022). Similar case points have played out in Africa's conflict zones elsewhere because without the availability and supply of weapons and arms, aggressiveness will find no space in the societies to promote conflicts since the non-state actors would not have access to weapons; and most importantly, without weapons; then there is no conflict (UNODC 2022).

An additional important point of discussion is the uncontrolled supply of small arms and light weapons in Africa, and their illicit nature of trading across the national borders (Baregu 2011). An example of this would be the Mano River region which has severe political instability because of the uncontrolled availability of small arms and light weapons in the entire region. Similar cases were observed in the civil war of Burundi and the Genocide in Rwanda which attracted illicit weapons to the Great Lake region in Central Africa (Silberfein & Conteh, 2006). Once more, the armed conflicts in the region of Sahel are historically traced to the overthrow and killing of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and the extensive mineral and natural resource looting in Libya by "Multinational criminal entrepreneurs". The overthrow of Gaddafi can also be attributed to the illicit weapons that were deployed by Jihadists and Tuaregs both in 2012 and 2013 in the armed conflicts of the region (Dione & Togola, 2018). There is a very strong established interconnection between African conflicts and the illicit flow of Small and light weapons. This is due

to the escalated rate of violent conflicts amidst the huge presence of the weapons that strengthen belligerents, like the fight between the Rapid Support Group (paramilitary group) and the Sudanese Army which is perpetuated by the availability of unconventional weapons in the hands of the military group (Dione & Togola, 2018).

Foreign socio-political doctrines and indoctrination

The battle for the soul and mind of men is an internationally contested phenomenon. It is made up of different values and norms as the profound basis for spiritual satisfaction and societal organization. Such perspectives and/or views have been advanced beyond economic and socio-political borders with alienating tendencies (Adamo, 2011). Western norms and values and alternative foreign religions are mostly predominant doctrines that seek to generate perpetual conflicts in the continent (Adamo, 2011). At the dawn of independence in Africa, most of the States were interspersed with various institutions that transferred Africans from their original simple traditional lives. Such would include religion, where Christianity came to be imposed on African traditional religion (Kanu, 2014).

The imposition of Christianity by European colonial masters who managed to describe African religions as barbaric and primitive and replaced them with their religion which they believe is universal was recorded. Their religion which sought to control the souls and minds of men for external salvation perpetuated clashes with the African traditional religions (Wan Niekerk, 1986). The severe damage has been supplemented by the advancement of Islam in the Continent, which eventually spread throughout East, Central, and West Africa by travelers and traders. Islam, like Christianity, also sought dominance in religion for the world to worship Allah, as the only true God (Zenhle 2020). The advancement of Timbuktu in Mali, as the centre of learning, prescriptions of mosques as places of worship five times daily prayers on Fridays including visitations of pilgrimage to Medina and/or Mecca as compulsory all combined discredited the African traditional religious practices and/or

activities (Zenhle 2020). The argument here is that Africans have been indoctrinated into Islamic and Judeo-Christian religions by Arabs and Europeans who destroyed the continent's harmonious religions of reaching to God through ancestors (Thurston 2020).

The importation of this narrative would eventually lead to various conflicts in the continent fuelled by foreign indoctrination and attempts at dominating Africa religiously. Various examples would include Boko Haram's territorial acquisition in Northern Nigeria where Sharia law is the normal practice, Northern Mali's Jihadist violent movement in 2013, Jihadist violent movement in Mozambique, Al-Shabab's continuous rumbling in Somalia, perpetuated by the international indoctrination of Islam religion and the desire to create the Islamic States across the African continent (Teiner, 2021). Whilst this is the case, several African countries have attempted to reject these jihadists' fever to welcome the West's indoctrination of liberal values which are mostly premised upon Christianity (Thurston, 2020). Consequently, the absence of African traditional religions has exacerbated religious indoctrination throughout the continent and turned Africa into a battleground for different religious doctrines with violent conflict (Dione & Togola 2018).

Another important pattern of indoctrination takes place in the political arena, where the majority rule is conglomerated under the democratic classification. The African continent had peaceful and/or harmonious traditional democracy systems where independent contribution towards societal decisions and discourse was premised on the superior personal qualities of men, women, and youth in the societies (Okon & Esin 2018). The prior African system promoted communal good over self-enrichment, and eventually took care of the weak in the society as the consolidated accountability of the system. All people in the society were encouraged to work for the development and good of all (Ikime, 1999). All the harmonious practices that existed for millenniums were replaced by Western democratic ethos across Africa. The indoctrination and promotion of individualism over collectivism as the dominating paradigm has instigated selfishness in governance and kleptocracy

where individuals have manipulated the weak state institutions to content self-enrichment and ambitions (International IDEA, 2021). The ultimate failure of weak institutions of checks and balances in liberal democratic states led to a zero-sum nature of politics in the continent, where winners took all; and elections are rigged in all ramifications (Arieff, 2015). The continuous electoral violence in Africa as experienced in Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Burundi, etc. are illustrative and supportive (Igwe, 2011).

The nature and structure of African State

The Westphalian State system was made up of independent states as the basic units and members of the global system. These independent states had to correspond with nationhood; become a source of pride to people and an object of adoration praiseworthy of pride patriotic acts in its deference and ideals. In the same vain, the Westphalian states are anticipated to work towards the benefit of collectives and individuals within their domain, in a fashion of providing the basic needs of the citizens including the provision of socio-economic and political environments that augment the realization of the armpit of the law and dreams of individuals (Gaub 2007). Most of the African States are below these significant ideals. Most of the African States were delineated in line with the 19th-century global economic and political patterns and/or dictates. These reasons have accounted for the contradictory territorial borders across Africa, eventually, independent pre-colonial States were merged altogether to establish States without internal consent. Relevant examples would include the formation of Southern and Northern Nigeria, the Sudanese State formation at independence, the mobilization of the French West African empire, and the question of Ogaden between Somalia and Ethiopia are explanations of despotic boundaries. Hence, most African States have always seen their states' systems as portraying alien structures as a result of superimposition with punitive goals (Akadiri & Akadiri 2018). Most aligned to the discussion is the nature of the states during the colonial period, which were extremely oppressive to the indigenous people, forced Africans into labour, doubled taxes, and expropriated the land to

white people (Akadiri & Akadiri 2018). This master-servant model imposed by European colonial powers in Africa made Africans lose trust in their institutions of government and can also be attributed to the paucity of patriotism in Africa (Hope 2017). The struggle by the political elite who lead these loose institutions of government to control natural resources rent, and poor redistribution of wealth including irresponsible and uncaring African states to their citizens have often encouraged armed struggle between non-state actors and states as seen both in the Niger Delta, and Sudan respectively (Hope 2017).

In most of these African States, political elites have organized themselves into a class with various privileges backed by their country's laws; and constitutional immunities and have had unlimited access to the national resources and purse to buy their way out of accounting to their masses; thus creating the development of political class that is influential and wealthy at the expense of the masses; strengthened by weak law enforcement institutions and/or security forces who are instrumental to the oppression of citizens for the political class (Richard, 1984). As the rich, get richer and the poor get poorer; this has led to the creation of hopelessness pillared by the unjust structures and explains the aggression and frustration nexus of African violent conflicts (Shimelles & Nabassaga 2017).

This was visible through the recent coup belt that was seen from the North Western African states as they were seeking to topple their governments and ensure that they released their states from the greed of such leaders. The term "Coup Belt" was coined in the 2020s to describe the region of West Africa, Central Africa, and the Sahel, which are known for frequent coups (Mills, 2022). This has had a major impact on democratic states, raising questions about whether another regime might work better than democracy. This is on the base that many leaders appear to be using the system to benefit themselves and some elites in society, depriving the majority

of the population of state resources. This has led to violent conflicts, such as the military rule currently in place in Niger, which undermines the democratic process and changes in government. As a result, the continent as a whole has been affected, and the belt has had an impact on democracy across the continent, either positively or negatively, depending on the state.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to make a scholarly contribution to the explanation of the causes and/or drivers of violent conflicts in the African continent. The paper identified and analysed thoroughly the following as the principal drivers of violent conflicts in Africa; leadership crisis, the global supply of arms and weaponry into Africa, foreign socio-political doctrines, and the nature and structure of African States. All of the mentioned causes of violent conflicts have been debated and discussed in multiple platforms including in government and academic platforms to come out with permanent solutions for all. However, such discussions have proven fruitless as violent conflicts continue to be the order of the day in Africa. Moreso, the continent has been experiencing difficulties in developing various Africa-centred solutions and political doctrines that are anchored on the African cultures to counter the various challenges experienced that perpetuate violent conflicts in Africa. Beyond all of this, Africa can still reduce the threat of violent conflicts by instilling socio-economic and political inclusion and promoting visionary leadership that is committed to establishing institutions that are rotted in merit, transparency, and accountability. This implies that Africa would need to choose leaders who are effective and base their beliefs on shared democratic norms and values; to come up with and support effective international arms control. Equally, African states would need to invest more in establishing research that will guide them in defending their policies and curbing foreign indoctrinations and imperial agendas in the continent.

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