

## **Religious Fanaticism As A Contributing Factor To Continued Religious Violence Among University Of Sokoto Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fanaticism exists in different forms in Nigeria; the worst form of it is religious fanaticism. In Nigeria, it is present in most ethnic groups, clans and religions. Religion is not new in Nigeria, so also is fanaticism with the violence that goes with it. This explores the patterns and causes of religious violence in Nigeria. This article made use of documentary research method as well as the cross sectional survey design to gather data from various sources such as e-books, online articles, magazines, newspapers, and standardized questionnaire. Two hundred and ninety six (296) University of Sokoto participants were also selected through purposive sampling. Study hypothesis which states that demographical factors will significantly influence fanaticism among University of Sokoto students was retained after analysis using multiple linear regressions. Further analysis revealed a 32.1% prevalence of fanaticism among study participants. In view of the findings, the paper concludes by suggesting that Nigeria government should begin programs to reconcile differences that exist between Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions. Recommendations hinged on adopting the jigsaw approach of equal status, personal interaction, cooperative activities, and social norms that will favour intergroup contact in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Crime, Government, Minority, Religion, Students.

## INTRODUCTION

Religious fanaticism involves excessive zest to defend one's religion and thus becomes evil channel of religious disunity in human society (Onyejegbu, et al, 2021; Sulaiman, 2016; Sulaiman 2014). Two religions are predominant in Africa: Christianity and Islam (Nnam et al, 2021; Okpa et al, 2018). In Nigeria, Christianity is highly practiced in the Southern part of Nigeria and Islam dominates the Northern-Nigeria (Areh et al, 2020; Ajah et al, 2017). In Northern-Nigeria, Christians relatively the minority, while in the south, Moslems constitute the minority (Ajah, et al., 2017). For both Christians and Moslems in Nigeria, minority implies, "less patronized faith, underrepresented or marginalized group" (Ezeanya, Ajah, Ibenwa, Onuorah, & Eze, 2022; Okpa, et al., 2018). According to Ajah et al., (2017), "both have used the excuse of minority extinction and righteous hunt for memberships to maneuver for domination of Nigeria's peoples and resources. This has been peaceful at some times and violently conflicting at other times" (Ajah, et al., 2017). There are also within each religious group minorities and divisions, depending on method of worship and anticipated results of eternity (Egbeji et al, 2018). "One sees this among the Shiite and Sunni groups in Islam, and in the Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches of Christianity" (Okpa, Ajah, Nzeakor, Eshioke & Abang, 2022; Enweonwu et al, 2021). The divisions caused violent conflicts which go against the national constitutions and humanity principles. The root cause is religious fanaticism. This paper makes an excursus into the emergencies of religious fanaticism in Nigeria, and how these have caused violent crimes, and how they are changing because of changes in the root causes.

In Nigeria a known case of religious fanaticism occurred in Borno State. Mohammed Yusuf also known as Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, an influential Islamic cleric formed his own version of Islam. He was able to draw followers to his radical beliefs (Egbeji, et al., 2018). He and his adherents were named Nigerian Taliban because in beliefs and conducts their activities resembled those of the Taliban, a known terrorist group (CNN, 2018). The members said they were not Nigerian citizens and did not accept any non-Sharia Law governance system. They withdrew from gatherings in Borno State and lived in forests (Ajah, et al., 2020:17).

There is a fair consensus that, until 2009, the group conducted its operations more or less peacefully and that its radicalization followed a government clampdown in 2009, in which some 800 of its members were killed. The group's leader was also extra judicially killed after that attack while in police custody (Ezeanya & Ajah, 2021; Nnam, Ajah, Arua, Okechukwu & Okorie, 2019:33). Thereafter, their attacks intensified and they began attacking government properties, institutions, Christians, Moslems as well as women and children (Egbeji, et al., 2018). The group through suicide bombing attacked a market in Abuja in 2014 and killed more than 70 people and injured about 124 (BBC, 2016). From 2002 to 2018 more than 100,000 people had been killed and 2 million displaced (Sani, 2016). The group categorized Nigerians and humanity into infidels and faithful. Their members and others who practice Islam as they wanted are faithful, while others are

regarded as infidels including Christians, traditional worshippers, atheists and even other Moslems (Ajah et al., 2020:14). Nonmembers of their group are brutally murdered without remorse. Their operations have also affected residents of Lake Chad basin. They gave themselves the name Boko Haram.

Boko Haram members are seen as fanatics. According to Enweonwu, Ugwu, Areh, Onyejegbu and Ajah (2021), a fanatic is an extremist who holds irrational beliefs, especially in religion or politics (Enweonwu et al., 2021). Fanatics always want people to follow their own self interpreted religious doctrines and creeds. They assume that non adherents to their creeds will be damned. The errors arose from the interpretations of the fanatic and perfect religious creeds. Mohammed Yusuf, for example, admonishes his followers to shun the State or any type of knowledge that goes against Sharia Law (Enweonwu, 2021). He killed even Moslems who did not fit into his idea of Islam (Ajah, Dinne & Salami, 2020; Ajah, Ajah & Obasi, 2020; Ajah, Chinweze, Ajah, Onyejegbu, Obiwulu, Onwuama, & Okpa, 2022).

Religious fanaticism is a threat to Nigeria and its sovereign nature. It entails killing of people, damage to government properties, establishments and activities or even claim of sovereignty and independence within Nigeria. Howbeit, it breaches the Nigerian Constitution. This work studies the root causes of religious fanaticism, from the University of Sokoto students and how the causes have brought about violence and changes in violent patterns as well as changes in patterns due to changes in root causes.

## **QUANTITATIVE METHOD**

Apart from the documentary research method, this study utilized cross-sectional survey design. The researchers' aim is to gather data from standardized instruments as well as establish a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable of study. The independent variables are religion, place of residence, and income; while the dependent variable is fanaticism. This survey was carried out in University of Sokoto located in Sokoto State. Employing purposive sampling technique, three hundred and fifty (350) University of Sokoto students were recruited after briefing them about the nature and purpose of the study. In order to elicit their true responses, rapport was also created with the respondents and they were assured of confidentiality. The inclusion criteria of the study were: (1) wiliness to participate in the study (2) age range from 18 years and above. Copies of the questionnaire was administered to the participants and after the field work, out of the three hundred and fifty (350) copies distributed, twenty six (26) copies were not returned and twenty eight (28) copies were not properly filled. This made the researchers to be left with 296 copies representing 84.57% return rate. These 296 copies were then coded and analyzed for the main study via version 20 of IBM SPSS Statistics.

## **Measures**

Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The instrument was organized in sections A and B beginning with the socio-demographic variables. Section A: consists of socio-

demographic variables such as age, gender, religion, marital status, occupation, place of residence, and income. Section B comprises of the students attitudes towards fanaticism scale as developed by Alzangana (2017). The scale comprises of 20 items and 3 subscales: fanaticism and social security with eight items (Fanaticism breeds violence and causes disaster for society; I am always right, but others cannot understand my thoughts; Intolerance is a phenomenon which could lead to a disintegration of the fabric of society; Fanaticism is a kind of intellectual terrorism that must be fought; Fanaticism is the beginning of the road towards terrorism; Consulting others when making a decision is a waste of time and effort; Customs and traditions are obsolete social phenomena, therefore we should not believe in them; Fanaticism is one of the rarest phenomena in communities and therefore does not deserve a lot of attention); second subscale is religious fanaticism with 9 items (The multiplicity of religions is a cultural phenomenon which must be protected; Fanaticism is a form of intellectual stagnation which does not comply with civil society; There is only one true religion and all other religions are invalid; When somebody disagrees with your point of view it is tantamount to a direct insult to your personality; Fanaticism is a serious social disease and must be fought in every way; Religion must be imposed on people by any means, even force; I cannot respect people who constantly change their opinions; Fanaticism exists in all beliefs and does not apply only to any one particular belief; A fanatic is somebody who is suffering from a psychological disorder); and the third subscale, fanaticism and absolute views with 3 items (Fanaticism is an abnormal phenomenon in all civilized societies; Fanaticism is learned from one's social environment; Religious fanaticism is the most dangerous form of fanaticism because it is perpetrated in the name of God). The format of the questionnaire corresponded to the five-point Likert Scale: 1 strongly agree; 2 agree; 3 slightly agree; 4 strongly disagree; and 5 strongly disagree. The internal consistency for this study indicated that Cronbach alpha of .51 was obtained while the norm stood at 40.76. Based on the norm, a 32.1% prevalence of fanaticism was obtained indicating that out of the 296 participants sampled, 95 held fanatic beliefs or opinion.

## RESULTS

The data obtained from this study were analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistical methods (Ajah, Nnam, Ajah, Idemili-Aronu, Onyejegbu&Agboti, 2021:9; Ajah, Ajah, Ajah, Onwe, Ozumba, Iyoke, & Nwankwo, 2022). Descriptive statistics include frequency, standard deviation, mean and percentage. Multiple linear regressions were also employed to investigate whether the independent variables will have any influence on the outcome variable.

**Table 1** Table of frequency distribution, mean and standard deviations explaining the demographic characteristics of participants in a tabulated format (N = 296).

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Age Range (16 to 44 Years)	296	25.14	5.28

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	129	43.6
Female	167	56.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100%</b>

  

<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	262	88.5
Christianity	34	11.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100%</b>

  

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Single	235	79.4
Married	51	17.2
Divorced	4	1.4
Separated	6	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100%</b>

  

<b>Occupation</b>		
Business	41	13.9
Civil Servant	18	6.1
Apprentice	31	10.5
Student	201	67.9
No Response	5	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100%</b>

  

<b>Place of Residence</b>		
On campus	106	35.8
Outside campus	189	63.9
No Response	1	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100%</b>

  

<b>Income</b>		
Below 18k`	183	61.8
18k to 49k	113	38.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100%</b>

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From Table 1, the participants were mainly Muslims 262 (88.5%) while Christians were 34 (11.5%). This is in line with Ajah, Ajah and Obasi (2020) who observed that in Africa, two

dominating religious faiths are Christianity and Islam. In Nigeria, the two faiths are diametrically popular with Christianity highly practiced in Southern Nigeria and Islam which is highly practiced in the North. Christians in Northern Nigeria see themselves as minorities as Moslems in the South also see themselves as minorities. Neither faith has always used the notions of the minority in a positive sense, but often to imply less patronized faith, underrepresented or marginalized group. Both have used the excuse of minority, extinction, and righteous hunt for memberships to manoeuvre for domination of Nigeria's people and resources. This has been peaceful at some times and violently conflicting at other times (Ezeanya & Ajah, 2021; Ajah, Ajah & Obasi, 2020:13). Sometimes, minorities and divisions exist within each religious group along the lines of beliefs, methods of worship, and expected outcomes of eternity. This is seen in Shiite and Sunni Moslem groups of Islam and orthodox and Pentecostal branch churches of Christianity. These divisions have always led to disparities and violent conflicts that break both constitutional laws and humanitarian principles (Enweonwu, Ugwu, Onyejegbu, Areh & Ajah, 2021:1). Marital status of participants revealed that singles were 235 (79.4%), those that were married were 51 (17.2%), those divorced were 4 (1.4%), and those separated were 6 (2.0%). Occupation of participants showed that those who reported that they were into business are 41 (13.9%), civil servants were 18 (6.1%), apprentice were 31 (10.5%), students were 201 (67.9%) while those who did not respond were 5 (1.7%). Further, participants' place of residence showed that those who resided in the urban area were 106 (35.8%), and those who reside outside campus were 189 (63.9%). Income of participants indicates that those whose income is below N18, 000 were 183 (61.8%) while those whose income is between N18, 000 to N49, 000 were 113 (38.2%).

**Table 2** Summary table of multiple linear regression analysis showing relative contributions of religion, place of residence, and income on fanaticism among University of Sokoto students

<b>Fanaticism</b>						
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1β</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>βeta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>95% CI</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>34.65</b>	<b>2.34</b>		<b>14.82</b>	<b>&lt;0.05*</b>	<b>[30.05, 39.26]</b>
<b>Religion</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>1.30</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>2.06</b>	<b>&lt;0.05*</b>	<b>[0.11, 5.22]</b>
<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>.99</b>	<b>.88</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>&gt;0.05</b>	<b>[-.74, 2.72]</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>.86</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>1.26</b>	<b>&gt;0.05</b>	<b>[-.61, 2.78]</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>.157</b>					
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.025</b>					
<b>F</b>	<b>2.46</b>					
<b>R<sup>2</sup>▲</b>	<b>.015</b>					

**Sig.**

**<0.05\***

**Note:** N = 296; SE = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval; P<0.05\*

The results presented in Table 2 shows that religion, place of residence, and income yielded a coefficient of multiple correlation (R) of 0.157 and multiple correlation square ( $R^2$ ) of 0.025. The implication is that only 2.5% of the variance in fanaticism among participants was accounted for by the joint contribution of religion, place of residence, and income. Table 2 also shows that only religion was an independent contributor to fanaticism ( $\beta = .12$ ;  $t = 2.06$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This supports the observations of Iloma, Nnam. Effiong, Eteng, Okechukwu and Ajah (2022) who noted that what is notable is that Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion are highly connected to the governance system of each group or area where they exist. The head of each religious movement is usually the political and religious leader of such groups and rules as he wishes and twists mainstream ideas to suit his desires. The members usually believe the teachings not from shared beliefs but from the interpretations of the leader. Violence is usually less within each movement but intense and brutal between the members of the group and nonmembers. In each case, the first step to the formation of any extremity in religion is to reject the teachings of all other religious groups, then divide humanity into believers and infidels (Ajah, Dinne & Salami, 2020:4). The next on the table is the F-test. With  $F = 2.46$  and 294 degrees of freedom, the test is highly significant; thus, we can assume that there is an existing multi-linear relationship between religion, place of residence, and income on fanaticism. The next on the table is the regression coefficients, the significance level and the intercept in the model.

The t-test finds that both intercept and variable are highly significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) and thus we might say that they are significantly different from zero. The estimated regression model is determinant of fanaticism score =  $34.65 + 2.67^* + 0.99 + 1.09$  religion, place of residence, and income with an adjusted  $R^2$  of just 1.5%; being significant with  $P < 0.05$ . Thus, we can confidently conclude a multi-linear relationship between x and the units of y. Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that there was a significant joint contribution of religion, place of residence, and income on fanaticism among University of Sokoto Students,  $F(3, 294) = 2.46$ ;  $P < 0.05$ .

Based on this, the hypothesis which states that demographical factors will significantly influence fanaticism among University of Sokoto students was retained. Another finding that should pose concern was that 32.1% of participants reported presence of fanaticism. Why this is so is because, being a mainly Muslim dominated region, this figure calls for urgent intervention by policy makers and related government institutions. In early cultures, people lived side-by-side in small groups and each group had unique religions and leadership structures. Due to the size of the groups, each group was highly homogeneous and chances of conflict or violence were minimal. Nonetheless, stories still abound of violence between groups and between leaders in each group (Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020:13). Such violent scenarios were more political than religious but were often propagated with religious chants and rituals. In Ibo land, far down Southern Nigeria, the religious tradition covered everything.

People hardly did anything without consulting or referencing ‘Chineke’ or ‘Ndi Mmuo’/ The effect is that – once the warriors or fighters are convinced by the high priests that the opponents must be killed, the fighters go to war with much energy and almost get fanatic with killing or destroying the opposing groups. This could be described as the earliest form of religious fanaticism and was obvious in wars that were mostly political (Enweonwu et al, 2021:8).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Everyman is a religious animal by nature. This indicates that African traditional religion (ATR) has been in existence in Nigeria before the coming of foreigners. Foreigners brought Islam and Christianity to Nigeria – and both religions have influenced the lifestyles and perceptions of the Nigerian people. Early Nigerians, who practiced ATR, had little or no religiously motivated violence compared with later Nigerians after the coming of the foreign religions. This article has journeyed into the root causes of these changes and identified needs, interests, and methods at the basis of these changes. The changes also precipitated changes in patterns of violence which the paper identified and studied (Enweonwu, Ugwu, Areh, Onyejebu & Ajah, 2021:7). This paper has also found that religion, income and accommodation as major causes of fanaticism. Based on this, the study recommends more determination by corporate organizations and governments to minimize poverty and help citizens provide for their needs; while intentional efforts should be made to reconcile religious differences through a jigsaw approach which shall include equal status, personal interaction, cooperative activities, and social norms that will favour intergroup contact.

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