



Influence of Group Size on Social Conformity among Ethnic Groups in Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

Research indicates that groups perform best, and their members learn the most when they solve problems with demonstrably correct solutions. Indeed, psychological research on social conformity finds that a unanimous group is more likely to elicit a conforming response from someone compared to when there is dissent, even when that dissent comes from a single member who is clearly wrong in his or her judgment. This may lead correct members to doubt the accuracy of their own solution, and reduce their desire to demonstrate its correctness publicly. In spite of scholarly recognition of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the importance of group size on social conformity particularly among other ethnic groups is undermined. Several examples across Nigeria raise concerns, and expectedly, the group conformity and governance of Nigeria continues to be rudely punctuated by a very disturbing ethnic and ethnic related crises that threaten its continued existence as a Nation.

1. Introduction

The Nigerian federation comprise of over 400 ethnic nationalities whose consents were not sought in its formation. This fundamental flaw is further deepened by the fact that these ethnic groups have very striking differences ranging from language, population, level of education and geographical terrain which was not factored into the crafting of the Nigerian State. Expectedly, the politics and governance of the Nigerian State continues to be rudely punctuated by a very disturbing ethnic and ethnic related issues that threaten its continued existence as a Nation. The Colonial administration fostered ethnic consciousness among the people through the creation of artificial boundaries. Ethnicism was therefore brought to the fore in the political dispensation of the country (Ukiwo 2005). As Nnoli (1980:5) cited in Babawale (2002), that ethnicity comes in hand in a situation of inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources particularly in society where inequality is accepted as natural and material wealth is greatly esteemed.

Nigeria as a heterogeneous society has continually faced the problem of ethnic consciousness as it has been entrenched in the Nigeria society to the extent that any activity or program of action initiated by the government of the day is seen as being influenced by ethnic considerations. This situation is fast becoming a value and consciously taught among each nationality in Nigeria and propagated to capture political positions has caused more harm than good to national integration and harmony (Abdul, 2006). According to Osaghae and Suberu (2005), issues relating to ethnicity, politics just like religion are highly sensitive and controversial. The intolerance and tolerance among ethnic groups and the acceptance of “settlers’ participation” in local politics of many communities in Lagos state have created a schism in achieving unity. One proclamation that triggers conflict between other ethnic groups and the Yoruba’s is that Lagos is no man’s land, which comes for the most part from other inhabitants in the city. The feeling that the announcement gives them is that Lagos is a land that no one possesses. The core owners of Lagos (Yoruba’s) consider it to be an endeavour to remove what has a place with them (Abdul, 2006).

Ethnically plural social orders have risen all through, now and again as a consequence of ethnic triumph. Today, it has become a significant issue in current

states due to ethnic understanding coming about because of expanding social versatility due to human accomplishment and from expanding geographic portability. Adebani (2004), discovered that “another category of regional identities that has gained currency is the one that developed around the six geo-political zones into which the country was divided in 1996 to share and rotate federal power and resources –Northeast, Northwest, North-central, Southwest, Southeast, and South-south.” This aligns with the fact on how regionalism has empowered social conformity, group size and ethnic tension. To an enormous degree, the zones strengthen the old local cleavages: the Southwest and Southeast are coterminous with the Yoruba center of the old West and Igbo center of the old East individually; Northwest covers the alleged 'center North'; Northeast is the center of the old 'Borno pivot's of the North; North-central incorporates the old Middle Belt and South-south covers the old group of Southern minorities.

Without dwelling much on the patterns of ethnic affiliation in Lagos in the years leading to Independence and the early years after Independence, Salawu and Hassan (2011) revealed that ethnic politics in Nigeria is entrenched in virtually every fabric of the communities, local government and states in the country as they pointed out that “about five decades after Nigeria gained independence, the Nigerian diverse social structure in terms of her heterogeneity has not changed significantly. The diverse nature of the society has made identification with the ‘nation’ a difficult task. Today, identification is easier at both family and ethnic levels, a consequence of this is that many of the citizens may never develop a proper concept of nation.” Salawu and Hassan (2011) believe that "Nigerian structure have presented an image of struggle among various social and ethnic groups for the sharing of national resources” (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Nigeria, as a heterogeneous society, 400 ethnic gatherings have been distinguished each interfacing with each other in rivalry for influence and riches and this has brought about ethnic clashes.

The conflict of identity in Lagos is to find out whether people are motivated to be ethnically loyal to their kinsmen or politically loyal to their political parties. In many cases, religious loyalty influences ethnic loyalty just as ethnic loyalty permeates

political loyalty. Whether religious or ethnic, they are both used extensively in ensuring control is maintained (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Thus, one would see people belonging to the same ethnic group but loyal to different political parties and as such conflict of identities is birthed amidst the same ethnic group and further escalates when there are more people of a particular ethnic group drumming support for another group. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) broadly defined identity as any group attribute that provides recognition or definition, reference, affinity, coherence, and meaning for individual members of the group, acting individually or collectively. However, it was identified that the task of building a cohesive nation and forging a sense of national identity among its people is one that the country Nigeria has grappled with since its independence and will likely continue to grapple with in the years ahead” (Surajudeen, 2015).

Ethnic dogmatism in indigene-settler relationship appear in sort of ethnic difference and conflicts, ethnic solidarity and ethnic social event and political solidarity. An indisputable portraying typical for the indigene completeness which furthermore implies pioneers' particularity is the creation and gathering of primordially described breaking points and edges. The criteria right now for belongingness consolidate occupation, land ownership, plunge, language and other described qualities that may be socially created on either fixed or fleeting reason to keep other out (Surajudeen, 2015). Although many writers focused on the theme of ethnic intolerance and marginalization leaving out how the Lagos society have been tolerant in Nigeria despite having the largest presence of ethnic representations (Surajudeen, 2015). This feeling of marginalization and intolerance is because often, an ethnic group is oppressed, exploited, marginalized, or discriminated against by leaders from one or more ethnic groups in a stronger political, economic, or social position” (Ema, 2001).

In a major critique of modernization theory Melson and Wolpe (1971) asserts that, inter-group conflicts are seldom a product of simple cultural diversity and in the Nigeria case, there is little that is traditional about the contemporary pattern of political divisions. On the contrary, Nigeria's political crisis is traceable directly to the widening of social horizons and to the process of modernization at work within the national

boundaries (Melson & Wolpe 1971). The negative impact of ethnic rivalry appears also in the formation of political parties. The parties are formed along ethnic lines with ethnic interest at the base. In Nigeria, there are many associations formed along ethnic lines; Arewa consultative forum, Afenifere and Ohaneze Ndi Igbo. Each is formed with an aim of gaining political advantage over the rest. The unity and progress of Nigeria as a Nation is secondary. There are two major types or sources of this category of tension in Nigeria that is associated with the character of relationship between the settlers and the host community (indigene); and that is associated with perception of how kinsmen are being treated in distant location which attract reprisal attacks on sentiment. Nigeria is undoubtedly a very tense country, in so far as ethnic relationship is concerned. A combination of interrelated crises has stretched the bends of unity. The fabric of nationhood, as well as the ingredients of citizenship identity is very thin to a potentially snappy point (Obaje 2002). Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this paper examines the influence of group size on social conformity among ethnic groups in Lagos, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is important to understand and have the conception of these operational terms used in this paper: Group size, social conformity, Ethnic group and ethnicity for the purpose of clarity.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Affiliation

Ethnicity is a phenomenon in form and conflictual in nature and content such that people from different ethnic groups sees each other as competitors in the quest for resources rather than compatriots. This can only exist within a plural political states such as Nigeria with over four (400) languages. However, an ethnic group is one which ascribes to itself the common blood or common ancestry. The group may be numerically or geographically big or small. But the common feature shared by all ethnic groups is the claim to a common ancestor whether imaginary or real. The psychological feeling that accompanies the awareness of this common origin engenders togetherness and solidarity among the members. It is the relationship between the diverse ethnic groups with the political environment that produces ethnicity. In the case of Nigeria, its conflictual nature stem from interethnic competition for power and scarce resources. It is often characterized by inter-ethnic

discrimination in jobs, housing, admission into higher institutions, scholarships, distribution of welfare services, marriage etc. This is often accompanied by nepotism and corruption. Merit is quite often sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity, thus, ethnic crisis becomes the resultant effects. (Obaje 2002).

In Nigeria, ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity. This claim is supported by the fact that both in competitive and non-competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity. Indeed, according to Lewis, Etannibi and Bratton (2002), ethnicity is demonstrably the most conspicuous group identity in Nigeria. Their survey found out that almost (48.2%) of Nigerians chose to label themselves with an ethnic identity, compared to almost one third (28.4%) who opted for class identities and 21.0% who chose a religious identity (Lewis, Etannibi and Bratton, 2002). In essence, close to two thirds of the population see themselves as members of primordial ethnic, regional and religious groups. In other words, Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of workplace. What is more “religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class identities”, as evidenced in the fact that those who identify with religious and ethnic communities are almost universally proud of their group identities, and those who see themselves as members of social class are somewhat more equivocal about their pride” (Lewis, Etannibi & Bratton, 2002). All of this is not surprisingly considering that group size, social conformity as well as ethnic formations are perhaps the most historically enduring behavioural units in the country and were further re-enforced by the colonial and post-colonial eras.

Social Conformity

Social conformity is the tendency of an individual to agree with a majority position, and it is often considered a universal group phenomenon (Hogg, Adelman & Blagg, 2010). Conformity shapes decisions with implications for social justice, public policy, and innovation and is central to explanations of various real world phenomena (Levine et al., 2014). However, rates of conformity vary with group size, culture, ambiguity of the decision-making context, and motivation (Bond, 2005). The extant psychological literature offers differing predictions

regarding how the diversity of a group will impact an individual's propensity to conform. Research on social influence suggests that individuals will conform more in racially homogeneous than diverse groups, because people tend to be influenced more by similar versus different others, by in-group versus out-group members (Levine, Cassidy, Brazier & Reicher, 2002), and by individuals with whom they more strongly identify (Turner, 1982). For example, Levine and colleagues (2002) demonstrated that when bystanders shared a common category membership (i.e., had the same affiliation), they were more likely to intervene in a violent situation.

Two forms of social influence normative and informational could explain why individuals conform more in racially homogeneous than diverse groups. Normative influence would suggest that this tendency stems from individuals' greater concern with belonging and social acceptance in homogenous group settings, while informational influence would suggest that individuals give more weight to others' opinions in homogeneous versus diverse group settings because they are more inclined to trust the judgment of similar others (Hogg, Adelman & Blagg, 2010). Accordingly, informational influence would predict that when it becomes clear to individuals in a homogeneous group that others support a potentially questionable decision, they will be more carefully consider the decision's merits than they would in a diverse group. In contrast to the theorizing above, a stream of research on attribution theory suggests that individuals may conform more in racially diverse than homogeneous groups. This predicts that because people expect to agree more with similar than different others, when consensus begins to emerge in an ethnically diverse group, it should be particularly influential (i.e., if a group like this is converging on agreement, there must be something persuasive about this particular decision. For example, Goethals (1972) found that individuals became more confident in their decision when a dissimilar (versus similar) person agreed with them. Thus, witnessing a sequence of group members from different racial backgrounds support the same decision may be a particularly compelling impetus for individuals to conform.

In addition to determining which of these competing predictions is supported, assessing the relationship between racial diversity and conformity is theoretically important because research to date has

primarily focused on how diversity affects downstream communication processes (Richeson & Sommers, 2016). Although it is clear that simply taking note of the composition of the group has the potential to influence expectations about agreement (Apfelbaum, Phillips & Richeson, 2014), whether mere membership in ethnically diverse versus homogeneous groups influence individuals' propensity to conform remains unclear.

Group Size and Social Conformity

Those who surround an individual have a profound influence on how the individual understand the world in general, and human relation in particular. Ideally, this influence happens through thoughtful exchanges of views and careful consideration, leading people to hold carefully constructed attitudes, make logical and informed decisions, and generally behave consistently with their underlying preferences (Fishkin 1991; Putnam 2000). In addition to hypothesizing about social influence, this study anticipate that several factors will affect people's susceptibility to this influence. The range of views voiced by others is one such variable. The narrower the range of expressed attitudes, the more clearly the group norm is established. This makes deviation from that norm more evident, and normative influence more powerful. The more people agree amongst themselves, the less tolerant they are of disagreement, and the more likely they are to apply pressure to deviants and ultimately ostracize them (Mutz and Mondak 2006).

According to Asch (1951), when a group is unanimous, people therefore feel increased pressure to conform. Reciprocally, when group members express a range of views, it becomes unclear whether or not a group norm exists and what that norm might be, even if the discordant group has the same ideological central tendency as the unanimous group. Dissent from the norm becomes less noticeable, more difficult to punish, and more acceptable. Hence, unanimity of others is expected to increase conformity (Asch, 1951).

The degree of difference between an individual's views and those of group members is also of interest (Asch, 1951). When an individual's views grow more distant from the group's mean view, the distinction between the group norm and the individual's view becomes more apparent. Clear deviants are the

subject of greater social pressure, whereas minor deviations from the group's attitudinal norm may go unnoticed by group members, thereby failing to elicit attempts at social influence (Schachter 1951). If individuals' attitudes are close enough to the group to seem similar to those of others, this diffuses the social influence, reducing its impact (Latane 1981). Additionally, assimilation effects may cause individuals who hold similar views to those around them to see little or no difference between their views and those of others (Mussweiler 2003), and therefore feel no pressure to change to views with which they already "agree". Ultimately, the more an individual is exposed to disagreement by close others (or perhaps even strangers) the more likely they are to change those views (Huckfeldt and Sprague 2000; Visser and Mirabile 2004). Therefore, the distance of the ego from the group is also expected to relate to conformity. Also, attitudes expressed in the group might be mere public conformity for the sake of getting along, but social motives for public agreement often influence private attitudes expressed outside of the group context, as well (Wood 2000). Additionally, expressing views to others is known to encourage persistent attitude change through both self-perception and cognitive dissonance. Either individuals take the fact that they have expressed a view to indicate that they hold that view, or they are uncomfortable with having expressed views at odds with their own, and so find ways to change their views (Cooper 2007).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Nigeria as a nation has experienced conflicts of dangerous impacts and dimensions between ethnic groups. The unresolved issues such as marginalization, domination, inequality, fairness and justice among ethnic groups cum socio-political matters have generated a lot of controversies which threatened the peace and wellbeing of Nigeria as a nation. Particularly, this paper agreed that the changing socio-political and economic realities in Nigeria and the dominant intellectual traditions of the social sciences have greatly influenced the study of ethnicity in Nigeria. The quest for imperial hegemony inspired cartographic demarcation of ethnic boundaries and anthropological observation of bio-cultural characteristics of ethnic groups. Studies on the relationship between group size and social conformity have all suggested that it will take on a single particular form, whereas the main argument of

this review is that the form of the relationships among ethnic groups will vary according to the social influence processes elicited by the task and setting. The review of the literature revealed that empirical evidence detailing the influence of group size on social conformity among ethnic groups is strong. Few studies have investigated the relationship directly, and they have yielded mixed and inconclusive findings, in part because different paradigms and tasks are likely to have elicited ethnic disharmony. There are ways in which the problem of ethnic divide can be managed:

1. In many ways, this paper raises issues for further research rather than offers definitive answers. It has sought to reopen the question of the relationship between group size and conformity by questioning the knowledge gained from previous research and theory and by presenting a meta-analysis that identifies a more complex relationship than has been assumed hitherto. The task for future research is to identify more closely how majority size relates to social influence when different motives are aroused, as well as identifying how features of the task and setting elicit different motivations.
2. Studies of ethnicity have privileged the agency of the colonial and post-colonial state as well as that of the ethnic elites while denying popular agency. This instrumentalist assumption, which pervades the literature, needs to demonstrate that there is no congruence between the interests of the ethnic leaders and those of their followers. This would require an investigation of the nature of horizontal inequalities among ethnic groups and the response of groups to such inequalities.
3. The rights of citizens should be ensured for all Nigerians wherever they settled with appropriate privileges attached.

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