



EKPOMA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

VOLUME 5, NO. 2, SEPT., 2011 ISSN: 1595-904X

SPECIAL CONFERENCE EDITION

EKPOMA JOURNAL
OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

VOLUME 5, NO. 2 SEPTEMBER, 2011

ISSN 1595-904X

SPECIAL CONFERENCE EDITION

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

Ekpoma Journal of Social Sciences

The official publication of the Faculty of Social Sciences,
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State.

© Ekpoma Journal of Social Sciences
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

ISSN 1595-904X

Published September, 2011
Volume 5 No. 2

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The Ekpoma Journal of Social Sciences (ISSN 1595-904X) is published biannually (beginning in March) in one volume per year by the faculty of Social Sciences, P.M.B. 14, Ekpoma, Edo State.

E-mail: journalfass@gmail.com, fassjournal10@yahoo.com, journalsfass@gmail.com.

Subscription is available on a calendar year basis only. The 2011 rates are as follow:

Individual: domestic N2,000:00 Foreign: \$100

Institutional: Domestic N4,000:00 Foreign \$200

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**PREDICTING PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE AMNESTY INITIATIVE
IN THE NIGER DELTA: THE ROLE OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT, GEO-
POLITICAL ZONES AND RELIGIOSITY.**

Shyngle K. Balogun, PhD
Dept. of Psychology
Faculty of the Social Sciences
University of Ibadan
Shyngle61@yahoo.com

&

*Peter O. Olapegba, PhD
Dept. of Psychology
Faculty of the Social Sciences
University of Ibadan
hanpet70@yahoo.com, po.olapegba@mail.ui.edu.ng

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

Armed conflict and insurgencies in the Niger Delta over resource control and environmental degradation dated back to the 1960s with the Isaac Adaka Boro's led Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF). Successive governments had attempted military options and some palliative measures to deal with the issues without much success. These strategies were reviewed by the regime of late President Umaru Musa Yaradu'a who introduced the amnesty initiative to bring the situation under control. This initiative has given some respite in the orgy of violence hitherto experienced in the region. However, there are mixed reactions as to the general acceptability of the amnesty as well as the sincerity of government on the policy. This cross-sectional study investigated the role of religiosity, geo-political zones and public trust in government in predicting the acceptance of amnesty initiative among the general populace. Two hundred and thirty people cutting across the major strata of the society were randomly sampled to respond to a questionnaire. Findings revealed that there was no significant effect of respondents' geo-political zones on their attitude toward the amnesty initiative. Meanwhile, public trust in government and religiosity jointly and independently significantly predicted attitude toward the amnesty initiative. Against the background, it is suggested that government should embark on activities that will further enhance its credibility and foster trust in the citizen. Additionally, faith-based approach should also be adopted in tackling the violence in the Niger Delta.

Introduction

Amnesty is derived from a Greek word 'amnesia which has the same root word with 'amnesia' which literally means forgotten. It is a legislative or executive act by which a state restores those who may have been guilty of an offence against it to the position of innocence. Amnesty is more than pardon in the sense that it obliterates all legal remembrance of the offence. In the United Kingdom, amnesty can be granted by the crown alone, or by an act of parliament.

The first recorded case of amnesty in history is the one given to Thrasybulus in 403 B.C.E at Athens (Tieman, 2002). Other popular amnesties in the early history of mankind include; amnesty received by Napoleon Bonaparte's when he became France's console in France in 1802. In England, it was referred to as the 'Acts of Grace' a prerogative of the Crown alone and it was used after the Jacobites rising of 1715 and 1745. America Civil War amnesty (1861-1865) was granted by President Andrew Johnson while President Jimmy Carter of the USA pardoned Vietnam draft evaders after the Vietnam War. (Amnesty and Pardon, 2010)

Amnesty for an individual, or individuals, has often been an important aspect of conflict resolution. Khmer Rouge guerrillas, responsible for an estimated 1.7 million deaths in the 'killing fields' of Cambodia, were offered amnesty in 1994 and members of the Argentine Junta and the soldiers who followed their orders, leading to an estimated 30,000 missing and presumed dead, received amnesty under 1996 and 1987 laws (CBS news, 2000). The South African Truth and Reconciliatory Committee (TRC) also offered amnesty to offenders of the apartheid regime in South Africa (Bristow, 2009). Recently, the Nigeria Government has employed the use of Amnesty in the resolution of the insurgency in the Niger Delta region of the country.

From a social psychological perspective amnesty by its nature is an attitude object. Attitude is a much discussed and central concept in social psychology. Simply, attitude could be referred to as 'positive or negative views of an attitude object.' a person, behavior, events or things or propositions. In academic parlance, however, a more acceptable conceptualization of attitude is given as 'a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike of an 'item'. The items could include places, concept, things and events etc. which are appropriately termed as 'attitude object'.

Allport (1935) defined attitude as a mental state of readiness organized through experiences exerting a direct or dynamic influence upon an individual's response to all subject or situations to which it is related. Collins (1970) defines an attitude as 'a feeling that an object is good or bad, fair or unfair. Wagner (1969), states that 'an attitude is composed of affective, cognitive, behavioral components that corresponds to ones evaluation of, knowledge of, and predisposition to act towards the object of the attitude'.

The kind of belief members of the public holds about the amnesty initiative given to the militants in the Niger Delta will likely determine their attitude towards the amnesty initiative. If an individual believes that the amnesty is a futile exercise, he may not offer support to the programme. Further, such persons may actually engage in acts that might sabotage the amnesty process. An individual who believes that a sustained military action is a better option compared to the amnesty will also most likely engage in public condemnation of the government, and incite members of the public against the government with the hope of pressurizing the government to consider a military option. Moreover, such persons may engage in blaming the government for not taking a decisive military decision and blame the dwindling revenue accruable to the government to its lack of proper handling of militancy in the Niger Delta.

The affective component which refers to feeling and emotions also influence attitude towards the amnesty initiative. For instance, people who fear that sustained military action in the Niger Delta region may culminate into full blown civil war/guerrilla warfare may garner support for the programme, they may form NGOs and other support groups to support the amnesty and appease the people of the Niger Delta region to accept the amnesty option, and execute plans that will aid the amnesty process. Also, fear of a full blown war increases the likelihood that militants and their sponsors will take the amnesty option rather than the painful path of warfare.

The conative component of attitude which refers to an individual's policy orientation towards an object, or proposition is the behavioral aspect of the attitude. It could also be referred to as 'the behavioral intention which is a verbal indication or typical behavioral tendency of an individual'. If an individual has a positive attitude for an object, it is likely to translate into a particular type of behavior, such as buying or procuring the object; in the case of a purchasable item. In the case of the amnesty initiative, the behavior could be proclaiming public support for the amnesty and encouraging others to, giving the government and security agencies information on persons sabotaging the process, and persuading other members of the public to fully support the programme. Further, if a member of the military has a positive attitude towards amnesty and negative attitude towards sustained military action, such person may become a 'conscientious objector' to any military intervention that may be ordered in the region.

Asides from the tri-component nature of attitude, there are also three important characteristics that make it germane to amnesty in the Niger Delta, these are:

- i. attitudes tend to persist unless something is done to change them
- ii. They can fall along a continuum from very favorable to very unfavorable

iii. Attitude is directed towards some object about which a person has a feeling (sometimes called 'affect') and beliefs.

Governance in Nigeria has been found to be characterized by high level of mistrust; successive governments at various times have reneged on legally and validly binding agreements with impunity. This situation has eroded trust and confidence of the citizenry in government and government policies. As a result, it is important to know how this phenomenon will affect people's attitude towards the amnesty initiative. Trust is a complex interpersonal and organizational construct (Duck 1997; Kramer and Tyler 1995). "Trust occurs when parties holding certain favorable perceptions of each other allow this relationship to reach the expected outcomes" (Wheless and Grotz 1977). Further, trust is "reliance upon information received from another person about uncertain environmental states and their accompanying outcomes in a risky situation" (Schlenker/Helm/Tedeschi 1973). Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995 defined trust as a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others.

According to McKnight & Chervany (2001), trust is an essential component in a relationship especially whenever risk and uncertainty exist. When an individual trusts a person, he or she expects the other person will behave in a responsible manner and will not take advantage of a dependence upon him or her (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003).

Three levels of trust as a social psychological construct are delineated: trust in a specific person (relational trust), trust in people in general (generalized trust) and trust in abstract systems (Analyze & Kritik, 2004). Specific trust is 'the expectation that the other will cooperate' including the perception of the other's attitudes and personality traits (Pruitt/Kimmel 1977) which are assumed to facilitate cooperation. Specific trust may be misused. Therefore, people are especially sensitive to cues which indicate that others misuse trust and as a consequence are not trustworthy. (Analyze & Kritik 2004), while 'generalized trust', which is defined "as an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon" (Rotter 1967).

One major feature of the lives of Nigerians is religion. Religion in Nigeria is found at individual, institutional and governmental levels. It is practically impossible to separate religion from public life in the country, policy are formulated with special attention to religious issues, government consult with religious leaders over important national issues as experiences over the years have shown that governmental policies can spark off serious religious crisis. In this vein, it is also important to know how religion will mediate the attitude of Nigerians across religion divides towards the amnesty initiative.

Background to the Niger Delta Crisis

Armed conflict and insurgencies in the Niger Delta over resource control and environmental degradation dated back to the 1960s with the Isaac Adaka Boro's led Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF). Successive governments had attempted military options and some palliative measures to deal with the issues without much success. These strategies were reviewed by the regime of late President Umaru Musa Yaradu'a who introduced the amnesty initiative to bring the situation under control. It is however noteworthy to know that the problem is not a recent development.

The Niger Delta is one of the 10 most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world and is home to about 31 million people. The Niger Delta is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by multinational oil companies. Oil has generated an estimated \$600 billion since the 1960s. Despite this, the majority of the Niger Delta's population lives in poverty (Amnesty International, 2009). The region is described as suffering from "administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict". The majority of the people of the Niger Delta do not have adequate access to clean water or health-care. Their poverty, and its contrast with the wealth generated by oil, has become one of the world's starkest and most disturbing examples of the "resource curse". (UNDP Report, 2006)

The oil industry in the Niger Delta started commercial production in 1958 following the discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri by Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell), in 1956. Today, the oil industry is highly visible in the Niger Delta and has control over a large amount of land. SPDC alone operates over 31,000 square kilometers. The area is crisscrossed by thousands of kilometers of pipeline, punctuated by wells and flow stations. Much of the oil infrastructure is located close to the homes, farms and water sources of communities. The oil and gas sector represents 97 per cent of Nigeria's foreign exchange revenues and contributes 79.5 per cent of government revenues (Amnesty International, 2009).

Despite the huge revenue generated from the Niger-Delta region, indigenes of the delta perceive themselves as inadequately compensated. It is against this backdrop that the struggle for resource control began in the region. At the forefront of the struggle to liberate the Niger delta indigenes from the perceived injustice meted on them by the Federal Government of Nigeria was Adaka Boro who established the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) in the 1960s. The first incidence of armed insurrection against the Nigeria state happened on February 23, 1956 when three divisions of Boro's 150 men troop moved out from their Touton Ban camp to attack police stations and blew up pipelines in Yenegoa, Bayelsa state, declaring the Niger Delta region an independent

state. Adaka Boro was arrested and charged on a 9-count of treason. He was convicted and sentenced to death. Although he was eventually pardoned by General Gowon, the Nigeria Head of State at the time (Siollun, 2008).

The build up to the present situation started in the 1980s as an intellectual engagement and subtle protests of environmental degradation and chronic neglect of the region. The insensitive nature of government led to a twist in the agitation, it became violent with the formation of militant groups demanding for control of the resources in the Niger Delta by Niger Deltans.

Against this backdrop, it is important to investigate the role of trust in government, Geo-political zones and religiosity on the attitude of Nigerians towards the Federal Government amnesty initiative to restoring peace to the Niger Delta.

Method

Research Design

This is a cross-sectional survey that adopted ex-post facto design. None of the variables under interest was manipulated. The Independent Variables (IVs) are religiosity, geo-political zones and trust in government while the Dependent Variable (DV) is attitude towards amnesty.

Research Setting

The study was carried out in Ibadan, Oyo State. Participants were drawn from the general population as well as military and paramilitary organizations.

Participants

Two hundred and one participants drawn from the population of students; civil servants; and military/paramilitary participated in this survey. There were 147 (73.1%) males, 54 females (26.9%). One hundred and fifteen (57.2%) had B.Sc/HND qualification, 27 (13.4%) had Masters Degree; 23 (11.4%) NCE/OND level; 28 (13.9%) SCCE/GCE level; 8 (4.0%) did not indicate their academic qualification. In all 5 (2.5%) of the sample population were missing. On type of employment, 138 (68.7%) were employed in public service, 41 (20.4%) were employed in the private sector, while Twenty two (10.9%) did not indicate their employment type. One hundred and twenty one (121) of the sample populations are military/paramilitary personnel representing 62.1%; 74 (36.8%) were civilians while 6 (3.0%) did not indicate their status. On Geo-political zone 114 (56.7%) were from the South West; 20 (10%) from South South; 18 (9.0%) from South East; 12 (6.0%) from North Central; 11(5.5%) from North West; and 10 (5.0%) from North East. 16 (8.0 %) did not indicate Geo-political zone.

Instrument

Questionnaire was used as a tool for collection of data in this study. The questionnaire comprises of the following sections:

SECTION A: This section consists of a the demographic characteristic of the respondents which include sex, age, marital status, religion, educational qualification, type of employment, position held or rank, and work experience.

SECTION B: This is a 14 item scale measuring attitude towards amnesty, developed by Ewuola (2010). It is a 5-points Likert response scale with options from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). This suggests that higher score indicates positive attitude towards amnesty while lower score indicates negative attitude towards the amnesty. The reliability coefficient of the scale is .90

SECTION C: This section consists of a 10 point Trust in Government Scale (TGS), it is also a newly designed scale designed to measure how much trust the public has in the government. The scale adopted a 5-point Likert response format from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Higher scores indicate that respondent have a high trust in government while lower score shows that individuals have low trust in the government. The reliability coefficient of the scale was .91

SECTION D: This is a 7-item short form version of Francis Attitude towards religion scale (Francis, 1993). The seven items are scored on a 5-point scale labeled from Strongly Agree (1) through Strongly Disagree (5). Possible summed score ranged from 7 to 35, with higher score indicating a more positive attitude towards religion.

PROCEDURE

The researcher took the effort to personally administer the questionnaires to the participants in their various faculties, departments and place of work. Participants were briefed before administering the questionnaire and the objective of the exercise were made known to them. The participants were urged to give sincere responses to test items. The questionnaires were collected back immediately over a period of four weeks. Out of 250 questionnaires distributed 220 were returned, and 201 were found fit to be used in data analysis.

Result

Table 1: Summary of One-Way ANOVA Showing The Effect Of Respondents' Geo-Political Zone on Attitudes Towards the Amnesty Initiative

| | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | P |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Between Groups | 181.801 | 5 | 36.360 | .950 | >.05 |
| Within Groups | 5243.444 | 137 | 38.273 | | |
| Total | 5425.245 | 142 | | | |

The result indicated that there was no significant effect of respondents Geo-political zones on attitude towards amnesty. $F(5, 137) = .950, P > .05$.

TABLE 2: Summary of T-Test Of Independence Mean Comparing Military/Paramilitary And Civilians Attitude Towards Amnesty Initiative

| SERVICE | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | DF | T | P |
|-----------------------------|----|-------|----------------|-----|------|------|
| AMMNE MILITARY/P STY ARA | 94 | 46.77 | 6.32188 | 151 | 2.61 | >.05 |
| CIVILIAN | 59 | 44.10 | 6.17957 | | | |

Table 2 revealed that there was no significant difference between military/paramilitary respondents (Mean= 46.77) and civilian respondents (Mean= 44.10) on attitude towards the Amnesty initiative. ($t=2.61, df, 151, p>0.05$).

Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Independent Significant and Joint Influence of Religiosity and Trust in Government on Attitude towards the Amnesty Initiative

| Model | Beta | T | P | R | R ² | F | P |
|-------------|------|------|------|-----|----------------|-------|------|
| (Constant) | | 3.59 | | | | | |
| TRUST_G | .31 | 4.04 | <.05 | .44 | .19 | 16.60 | <.05 |
| OVT | | | | | | | |
| RELIGIOSITY | .27 | 3.48 | <.05 | | | | |

Table 3 revealed that there is a significant individual influence of Trust in Government on Attitude towards the amnesty initiative (Beta=.31). Also, there is a significant individual influence of religiosity on Attitude towards Amnesty (Beta=.27). Trust in Government

and religiosity also have joint influence on Attitude towards Amnesty, the two variables jointly contributed 19% F (16.60); $R=.44$; $R^2=.19$; $P < .05$.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study investigated the influence of religiosity and trust in government on attitudes towards amnesty initiative in the Niger Delta. The finding shows that Geopolitical zone of respondents does not affect respondents' attitudes toward the amnesty initiative given to militants in the Niger Delta region. The finding is in contrast with findings of Lal, Vasan, Sarma, & Thankappan (2000) who performed a community based, cross-sectional survey of 625 randomly selected undergraduate college students to assess the knowledge and attitude of the students towards HIV/AIDS. They revealed in their results that students from urban areas demonstrated more favorable attitude towards HIV/AIDS.

The contrast between the findings of this research and that of Lal, Vasan, Sarma, & Thankappan (2000) may be due to the fact that both research were conducted in different cultural settings (Nigeria and India respectively). This may as a result of differences in culture and socio-economic factors prevalent in the two settings. Also, pervasiveness and intensity of the Niger Delta crisis which has affected all zones in the country in terms of the attendant consequences of the activities of the militants on the socio-economic life to similar degree may account for the absence of difference in the attitude of people regardless of the where they are from.

The findings also showed that there was no difference in the attitude of military personnel and their civilian counterparts on the amnesty granted to militants in the Niger Delta. This result contrasts the findings of Gronke and Peter (2007) whose investigation was designed explicitly to compare attitudes across the mass and elite public and across various subcategories of military experience. Their results revealed that there was a significant difference between attitudes of military personnel and their civilian counterparts on issues ranging from National security issues to government policies. They refer to these discrepancies as 'military and civilian gap': Gronke & Peter (2007).

Lastly, the finding indicated significant independent and joint influence of trust in government and religiosity on peoples' attitude towards the amnesty initiative. The finding is in consonance with a previous research on the influence of religiosity and trust on attitude. For example, Wald & Martinez (2001), in a study on how religious doctrines, institutions, practices, and beliefs shape political institutions and behavior both within and across state boundaries, reported that religiosity was positively associated with political attitude among American and Israeli Jews.

The result was however in contrast with Convoy and Emerson (2004) who surveyed students at two Southern United State Universities to explore the correlation between

ethical attitudes and religiosity; and whether ethical attitudes are affected by courses in theology, ethics or religion. Their finding revealed that religiosity did not have a significant impact on ethical attitude of respondents. However, completion of ethical or religion classes was however a significant predictor of ethical attitudes in two of the twenty-five vignettes. The researcher concluded that factors outside the educational system may be more influential in shaping response to ethical vignette than are ethics and religion courses.

Also, the influence of trust was in agreement with the findings of Wen Tang who hypothesized that *a consumer's trust toward using online store positively affects his /her attitude toward using the online store*. He reported that consumer trust has a stronger effect on attitude than Perceived Usefulness (PU) does. This also corresponds to the result of Gefen and Straub (2003).

The joint influence of religiosity and trust in government is in consonance with the findings of Barro and McCleary (2003) who examined the link between subjects' religiosity and trust in five key institutions (the government, the police, the armed forces, the judiciary and banks), and trust towards others (interpersonal trust). Their result revealed that there is a positive correlation between trust in the government, in the police, in the judiciary, and religious practice in general.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of the study have implications for the government and policy makers at all level in understanding factors that may be more influential in shaping public response or attitude towards the amnesty initiative of the Federal Government and other government policies/programmes. The need to get the public into having positive attitude on the amnesty as it may be a precursor to positive behavior concerning the amnesty cannot be overemphasized.

First, the Federal Government should make visible attempts to ensure that the act of governance is generally perceived as transparent by the public. Second, the government should further avoid actions that may portray them to the public as not worthy of public trust. This is because trust in Government influences attitude towards government policies as revealed in the study. Furthermore, the government should encourage religiosity by ensuring that religious studies, which could sometimes predict religiosity, are included in the school curriculums across board.

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