



JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, POLICY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

Volume 1, Number 6 (September, 2025)

ISSN: 1595-9457 (online); 3043-4211 (print)

Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/> Email: jppssuniuyo@gmail.com

Received: July 25, 2025 Accepted: August 23, 2025 Published: September 30, 2025

Citation: Marafa, Ahmed (2025). "Ethnicity and Religion in African Politics: Instruments for Political Mobilization and Conflict." *Journal of Philosophy, Policy and Strategic Studies*, 1 (6): 142-152.

Article

Open Access

ETHNICITY AND RELIGION IN AFRICAN POLITICS: INSTRUMENTS FOR POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND CONFLICT

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Abstract

Ethnicity and religion are essential part of people's socio-cultural environment that form part of the social determinants which shape nations towards the path to democratic advancement and development. However, in Africa, religion and ethnicity are playing destructive as opposed to constructive roles in the development of the democracy as they give birth to various categories of conflicts. It is based on this that this study seeks to examine the role played by ethnicity and religion in political mobilization of people and how it culminates into various degrees of conflicts that undermine the economic and political development in the continent. To achieve this, the study utilizes the Elite Theory based on the perception of Robert Michel; and employs a content analysis method of collecting data by relying upon the existing documents containing data related to the study in question. The findings of the study indicated that African leaders are fond of using ethnicity and religion as instruments at their disposal for gaining or retaining their positions of power, which greatly hampers the development of the continent. It is based on the findings that this study recommends among others that more inclusive governance approach that could allay the fears of the various groups along best practices that guarantee equality, justice and fairness in resources/value mobilization and allocation be ensured in Africa.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Religion, Politics, Political Mobilization, Conflicts.

Introduction

Group diversity in ethnic, religious, racial or economic nature is a prominent initiator of political differences in plural societies, which results in opposing interests divided by social fractures that give birth to political competition (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020). Perceptions and attachment to social diversities like ethnicity played a critical role in fuelling World War II at the global stage. Similar sentiments mixed with religion in the 1990s divided the former state of Yugoslavia among the Balkans. Also in the African continent, the 1994 ethnic

cleansing in Rwanda (Tutsi and Hutus), and Apartheid in South Africa are adept cases in focus. Tensions associated with social diversity are common across continents (developed and developing) but some countries have managed theirs better as can be seen in the United States of America and Modern Germany (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020).

Ethnicity and religion have made a positive contribution to many post-independent African countries in that they have managed to serve both state and civil society to some degree. Even in the most repressive of African countries, state elites were forced to acknowledge ethno-regional power (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2019). Although these leaders gave scant public recognition to this rival source of political strength considering the fact that it grated against the official nationalist credo and their own elite interests, tacit concessions were however consistently made to sub-state groups. Cabinets, for instance, were often a fine balancing act as most ethnic and religious groups had their own representative within this state institution. The failure to include leading members of each ethnic and religious group within the executive would risk provoking a challenge to the regime from each absent party. Similarly, ethnic and religious quotas were also exercised in bureaucratic appointments such as in the military, civil service, police, and public agencies, as well as in the allocation of local budgets, and the allotment of state resources in general (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024). Of course, there was not automatically an equal distribution of these resources, but the state elite knew that they would have to pay a political price if any group perceived itself to have been left out of these ethnic and religious calculations.

However, ethnic and religious politics are among the various phenomena hindering the success of democracy in Africa. Africa, politically and structurally, seems to be formed and patterned on religious and ethnic differences (Kpodee & Peters, 2024). Kpodee and Peters further emphasized that ethnicity and religion are essential parts of people's social-cultural environment that form part of the social determinants which shape notable nations towards the path to democratic advancement and development. However, in Africa, religion and ethnicity are playing destructive as opposed to constructive roles in the development of democracy (Kpodee & Peters, 2024). Thomson (2004) observed that ethnicity and religion invariably portrayed as having been a barrier to Africa's economic and political development in the post-independence period. He noted that, even though ethnicity and religion when operated in the right political environment can be as progressive a force as any type of social organization, in the harsh arena of Africa's authoritarian-like one-party governments, religion and ethnicity provide a rare extent of pluralism and representation (Thomson, 2004). Eze and Karibi-Botoye (2024) believe that elections in post-independent Africa have always generated tensions, anxieties and controversies, especially among the electorates. This is connected to the fact that electioneering periods are characterized by hate speeches which in most cases have an ethnic and religious undertone. According to them, the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was a typical example as it generated more tension and controversies. Prior to the election, religion and ethnicity played a dominant role as the fielding of the same faith ticket (Muslim-Muslim) by the ruling party All Progressive Congress (APC) generated so much tension in the polity as many Christian saw that arrangement as a ploy to Islamize the country. Similarly, the nomination of Atiku Abubakar as the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) generated tension as those from southern region believed such a move was a ploy for the northern region to dominate the southern region considering the fact that a northerner in the person of Late Muhammadu Buhari was about to complete his two terms of office (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024).

Religious ethnicity gets into politics not just for cultural, spiritual, or moral reasons; often there are instrumental imperatives as well. Political, economic and social conditions affect the decision of anyone who decides to challenge the state using justifications of faith and culture (Kalu, 2016). One can certainly characterize an Islamist militant fighting in Algeria as a devout believer who is willing to lay down their life to wrestle the state from infidels. Yet, just as with the Rwandan genocide case, to leave this as the sole explanation of the Algerian conflict tends to mislead. One should acknowledge the fact that the military has always stymied political representation in Algeria, as well as the fact that the timing of Islamist popularity coincided with chronic economic problems, and the stalling of the whole (secular) nation-building project (Thomson, 2004). It is this extreme extent of religion and ethnicity in Africa as indicated by Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2020) that create an opening for the African leaders to use the situation to their advantage by arousing the people's sympathy into voting for them because of their ethnicity or religious affiliations. Wherever they realize they cannot win an election, they use these two social phenomena (religion and ethnicity) to raise tension in that area so that the election will not hold. It is based on this that the study aimed at examining the role played by ethnicity and religion in African politics as they are used as tools of mobilizing people as well as initiating conflict in Africa.

Conceptual Clarifications

Various scholars have offered a variety of definitions of the concept of ethnicity; nonetheless, most of the definitions differ only in terms of wording rather than context. According to Kpodee and Peters (2024), ethnicity is the consciousness of somebody, relative to the norms and the values of his or her culture, of which other peoples' socio-cultural background may be deemed to be inferior. They noted that ethnicity is likened to a hydra-headed monster which breeds social chaos, and has had a pervasive influence on every aspect of people's life and which calls for a multifaceted attack from all and sundry to combat it. Offiong (2001) cited in Kpodee and Peter (2024) also stated that ethnicity is a condition in which people of a given territory share a common belief, religion, culture, language, dressing, historical background, which may be different from others. He specifically indicates that if people accept the expressions of ethnic, religious and cultural preferences are a natural phenomenon and consistent with expression of individual liberty, then they have to realize that attempts to suppress such preferences are futile and cannot lead to peaceful coexistence. Eze and Karibi-Botoye (2024) view ethnicity as a person's sense of belonging to a group if it influences his political behaviour. Ethnicity is stated to be immersed both in physiological givens and in social roles, and it has common attributes of commitment to a cause, love and trust for and emotional tie to a group, and more importantly, the obligations and duties it confer on membership of a group to which one identifies with. In the view of Thomson (2004), ethnicity is found in a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language. This means that ethnicity focuses more on sentiments of descent and origin instead of the geographical consideration of a nation.

Religion as perceived by Karl Marx is the opium of the people which when lacerated creates an unbelievable level of consciousness and sentiments that see fanatics fighting without ascertaining the actual cause of their action (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020). This means that religion is a socio-political, cultural and spiritual phenomenon with overriding

influence in individual and community life of most members of the society, and has been often suspected and accused of anti-social activities. According to Geertz (2016), religion is a practice tied to conceptions of a general order of existence that is something whose existence is fundamental, all-pervading, or unconditioned. The practices that are distinctly religious for Geertz are those tied to a culture's metaphysics or worldview, their conception of the overall shape of reality. To Geertz religions are not only the forms of life based on the theistic and polytheistic (or, more broadly, animist or spiritualist) beliefs that Herbert and Tylor recognized, but also those based on belief in the involuntary, spontaneous, or natural operations of the law of karma, the Dao in Daoism, the Principle in Neo-Confucianism, and the Logos in Stoicism (Geertz, 2016). To Apuwabi (2018), religion is the set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human beings and sacred or divinity. Kpodee and Peters (2024) elaborated on the concept by stating that religion is a system of social unity commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought. This means that it is a structure within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers. Therefore, religion, based on this perception, comes to give answer to emotional tension created by puzzling and mystifying environments (Kpodee & Peters, 2024).

The concept of politics has varied interpretation and connotations, and the reason being that it is an issue, concept and phenomenon that basically invokes many variegated sentiments and opinions. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle who is widely regarded as the father of the term politics said that man is a political animal. According to him, the essence of social existence is politics and that where two or more men are interacting with each other or one another respectively, they are invariably involved in a political relationship, and this is a natural and inevitable predisposition among men. As men seek to define their positions in society, as they attempt to wring personal security from available resources and as they try to influence others to accept their points of view, they find themselves engaging in politics (cited in Ayuba & Ismaila, 2018). According to Eze and Karibi-Botoye (2024), politics is a universal phenomenon and an inescapable fact of human existence. To them, politics refers to the conscious or unconscious struggle for domination, advantage and interest actualization by man in society. Hence, this is an emphasis of the definition of the concept by Lasswell who defined the concept as who gets what, when and how. To Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2019), politics is an activity in which differing interests within a territory are conciliated. This means that politics is not only an activity to struggle for scarce resources, but also to make decisions and resolve conflicts in society. For the purpose of this study, however, politics is an organized dispute about power and its use, involving choice among disputing values, ideas, persons, interests and demands. It is the manner in which power is obtained, exercised and controlled, the purpose for which it is used, the manner in which decisions are made, the factors which influence the making of those decisions and the context in which those decisions take place.

Theoretical Framework

This study makes use of Elite theory as perceived by Robert Michel, which postulates that power in any state or organization is controlled and exercised by few individuals or groups

that are called elites. The proponents of the theory include Robert Michel, Vilfredo Pareto, Gacestano Mosca, and Harold Lasswell. In the view of Michel, the ultimate fate of all nations is to be controlled by a small group of people (minority) or plural elites (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024). The basic assumptions of the Elite theory based on Robert Michel's perceptions are:

- i. Society is closed, pyramidal, and unresponsive and composed of the few who rule and the many who are ruled.
- ii. The large mass of the people are ignoble, not cohesive and not organized and so are not competent or capable to exercise political power.
- iii. Therefore, political power is entrusted to elites who are cohesive, organized and so competent or capable to exercise political power.

Relating and applying the elite theory in understanding the influence of ethnicity and religion in African politics, it becomes imperative to state that politics in Africa is being exploited by ethno-religious chauvinists in African government and politics. Most political elites in the continent depend upon ethnicity and religion as a tool to actualize their political goal. The political elite have enormous resources at their disposal with which they can manipulate the electorates. Also because of incentives attached to public offices in Africa, politics become a means to an end; to actualize the economic goal of the political elite. It is these onerous and multifarious resources at the display of the state that the elite struggle to control and in such struggle employ the instruments of ethnic and religious sentiments for personal aggrandizement. Where these tools (ethnicity and religion) would not favour them, they use the resources at their disposal to disrupt the area so that their opponent would not benefit from the situation.

Origin and Evolution of Ethnic and Religious Politics in Africa

Politics in Africa often follows either ethno-linguistic or religious lines. South Sudan's civil unrest is regularly described in Dinka-Nuer terms. In the Central African Republic, power struggles morphed into fears of ethnic cleansing against the Muslim community. Periodic civil unrest in Nigeria takes on an ethnic label in some instances and a religious one in others. Indeed, data indicates that over three-quarters of conflicts in the continent are coded as either ethnic or religious (McCauley, 2016). Kpodee and Peters (2024) observed that the present continent called Africa is ideologically, deliberately patterned and arranged along ethnic and religious divides. And it is this political construct, as evidenced in the history of the continent's politics can be traced back to the countries' pre-independence days. These two phenomena (ethnicity and religion) have continued to be the basis upon which African politics is determined. In agreement with this assertion, Udoidem in his observation argues that since the creation of the present African State which was selfishly conceived and brought to limelight in an unholy way by the colonial imperialist, African unity only exists on ethnic and religious bigotries. He strongly affirms his position and argument that the ideology upon which Africa was contracted was based on deception and deliberate disregard for genuine unity of all parties involved (Kpodee & Peters, 2024).

According to Nwagwu (2018), although the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts have been linked to colonialism and cold war, conservative scholars argue that ethnic and religious conflicts are most rooted in bad governance, politicization of ethnic and religious identities, and the unhealthy competition for power by those whose self-centered course is rooted in parochial ideologies. Owutu (2013) identified factors that politicized ethnicity and religion in Africa to include the existence of two or more ethnic and religious groups with

numerical strengths that can significantly affect the outcome and direction of a democratic political process; the instrumentalization of ethnicity and religion as legitimizing tool of hegemony in instances when the interest of the political class is under threat; when there is an ascendant radical thinking within a politically significant ethnic or religious group capable of upstaging hegemony; and when the society is characterized by political, social or economic hardships that can cause alliances along ethnic and religious fault-lines. According to Nwagwu (2018), fragility of the state institutions in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, corruption, rising inequality, gross violation of human rights, environmental degradation, boundary disputes and other conflict related issues have also been identified as some of the underlying causes of violent-conflicts in Africa. The situation is further compounded due to the failure of the state to be responsive to its primary responsibility of providing security for lives and properties. African democracy, with its feeble institutional framework, seems to have failed to guarantee peaceful resolution or positive and effective management of ethnic and religious conflicts as the state is enmeshed in the entire mess. Where ethno-religious identities are so strong and national identity so weak, the population would pay strong allegiance to their ethnic authority or religion. Such adherents would be willing tools to engage the state authority in battle in defense of their ethnic and religious interests (Kwaja, 2009).

One of the major importance of ethnicity and religion to African leaders, put forward by Lajul (2024), is that they are utilized as instruments of mobilizing people to get access and control of economic and political resources. While economic resources are financial and material wealth of a country, political resources are power to make decisions, influence policies and make laws with which a country is governed. In this role, most political leaders in Africa want to control all public economic institutions, through their aides and diehard supporters who do exactly as and what they want. In this way, they often make use of their religious and ethnic identity to arouse the electorate's sympathy. Ayuba and Ismaila (2018) adds that these leaders while looting public resources and amassing obscene amounts of wealth for themselves often go to their ethnic and religious communities and feed them with a falsehood that it is time for their community to eat. Indeed, while individual members of the ethnic and religious community may personally benefit in this process of accessing wealth, the majority of their members remain psychologically content and proud, but with nothing to show for it. Therefore, while the leaders get wealthy by grabbing land, houses and minerals like in the case of Mobutu, most members of their ethnic groups have nothing to show (Lajul, 2024). Similarly, Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2020) asserted that ethnicity and religion is used to create a support base of their political power. In line with this, McCauley (2016) argued that politicians politicize ethnicity in an effort to build their support base from specific ethnic groups and to distribute resources they accessed through political position to those ethnic groups. He indicated that the ethnic group that forms the support base must, therefore, be large enough to constitute a winning majority. In fact, where such ethnic groups do not make a winning majority, most politicians take salvation into religion. The former president of Uganda Idi Amin Dada (who ruled from 1971-1979), came from Kakwa, a very small ethnic community, so could not rely on that ethnic group for political support, but had to resort to the support of the members of his religion, Islam. Milton Obote, who ruled Uganda twice (from 1962-1971 and 1980-1985), resorted to his religious community, the Church of Ugandan's community, instead of his smaller ethnic community, the Langi (McCauley, 2016).

Uwaifo (2016) maintained that the origin of ethnicity in Nigeria is traceable to the nation's colonial experience, particularly the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. To him, the act of amalgamation was not a federal idea. Lugard did not conceive a federal state for Nigeria. In the statement of the colonial office when Lugard submitted his proposals on 9 May, 1913, it was stated that Sir Lugard's proposals contemplate a state which is impossible to classify (Uwaifo, 2016). This is because, according to Kpodee and Peters (2024), the colonial masters felt it was grossly impossible to administer such a state that was large and mixed with diverse ethnic groups. So for the purposes of administrative convenience, in order to control such people, therefore, the British colonial master hurriedly came up with amalgamation of the different ethnic nationalities without considering the imminent and undeniable difference in culture, religion, character and socio-political traditions of these ethnic groupings. Uwaifo (2016) further identified that in the pre-colonial era and since the independence of Nigeria, ethnicity played and still playing manifest and latent roles in the body politics of Nigeria. In their research, Eghosa and Rotimi cited in Kpodee and Peters (2024) similarly submitted that like ethno-religious violence, recent inter-ethnic clashes in Nigeria have also been particularly combustible especially when they have involved relatively large groups like the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Urhobo or Ijaw.

Ethno-Religious Politics as an Instrument of Political Mobilization and Conflict in Africa

Ethnicity and religious politics in Africa has been a significant cause of political mobilization as it in most cases gives birth to the mobilization of ethnic and religious groups for political action. These political actions can manifest in various forms, including protests, violent confrontation, and demonstration. Political mobilization is driven by the desire for national unity and the need to tackle problems that affect the collective interests of the people. Nonetheless, this mobilization can at the same time give birth to conflict as it often involves competing interests and rivalries among different ethnic and religious groups (Ayuba & Ismaila, 2018). The inability of the African political elite to implement effective governance, enhance national cohesion, and stimulate economic development through well-conceived policies has culminated in substantial unemployment rates. This phenomenon has consequently precipitated the emergence of communal, ethnic, and religious challenges that define the political landscape in Africa. Given that poverty and unemployment have increasingly become entrenched factors contributing to various ethno-religious conflicts within the nation, a growing population of impoverished individuals frequently serves as a reservoir of mercenary militants. This observation may elucidate the prevalence of a significant number of combatants typically involved in ethno-religious disputes in the continent (Samuel, 2025).

According to Samuel (2025), Nigeria is indisputably one of the most strained nations regarding ethno-religious dynamics. Atiku Abubakar, the presidential aspirant representing the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 electoral contest, faced significant criticism for allegedly leveraging ethnic identity. During a gathering with the Arewa Forum, Atiku articulated that an average individual from the North does not require an individual from Yoruba or Igbo descent. A Northerner necessitates this: "I present myself before you as a pan-Nigerian originating from the North." While Atiku's advocates contended that he was misrepresented, it seems that he sincerely perceived that, with President Buhari not seeking re-election in 2023, he could secure the support of the Northern electorate as the most

prominent Hausa/Fulani candidate on the ballot, consciously appealing to ethnic politics. Additionally, in a recent television interview, Atiku was inquired whether he harbored concerns regarding Tinubu's selection of Kashim Shettima as his vice-presidential candidate, particularly in light of the fact that both he and Shettima hail from the North-East region. In his reply, Atiku invoked ethnic considerations, asserting: "If one examines the demographic composition of the North-East, one will note that Borno and Yobe are predominantly Kanuri states. There are an additional four states, which are primarily inhabited by Hausa/Fulani populations. Even if electoral decisions are influenced by such factors, I possess a comparatively advantageous standing within the North-East." Consequently, for the impending 2023 electoral contest, Atiku gravitated towards ethnic political dynamics (Samuel, 2025). Similarly, Bola Tinubu plays both ethnic and religious cards. His strategy is to replicate the South-West/North alliance that gave the All Progressives Congress (APC) victory in 2015 and 2019. For the Yoruba vote, he plays ethnic politics with the slogan "Yoruba lokan" (meaning "It's the turn of the Yoruba"). For the Northern vote, he plays religious politics with a Muslim-Muslim ticket. Recently, in Ekiti, Tinubu told the people: "Do not vote for Peter Obi or Atiku," adding: "You do not know them" – implying that they are not Yoruba (Kpodee & Peters, 2024).

Ethnicity and religious politics in Ghana have been a significant factor in political mobilization, particularly during election periods. The country's constitution prohibits political parties based on ethnicity, and religion, but the reality is that most voters align their political choices with their ethnic or religious affiliations. This has led to a complex interplay of ethnic and religious identities in Ghanaian politics that can sometimes lead to ethnic and religious clashes (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021). Ethnicity and religion in politics is rooted in Ghana's history and predates post-independence elections. During the electoral process of 1954, political factions emerged predominantly along ethnic lines. For instance, the Northern People's Party (NPP) was established with the primary objective of safeguarding the northern regions from perceived southern hegemony while also striving to promote their political, social, and economic advancement. Similarly, the Trans-Togoland Congress (TC) and the Anlo Youth Organization (AYO) were constituted in the contemporary Volta Region to advocate for the interests of their respective ethnic groups. The politicization along ethnic and religious dimensions, coupled with underlying religious sentiments in Ghanaian politics, has frequently resulted in, and may perpetuate, ethnic and religious conflicts, particularly if politicians persist in leveraging and inflaming ethnic and religious identities. Such dynamics are not only detrimental to the health of Ghana's democratic framework; they also pose a significant risk of engendering severe ethnic violence and civil strife if not managed with due diligence (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021).

According to Thomson (2004), No African state is socially homogeneous. Social cleavage produces conflicting interests everywhere. In each country, different issues act as the primary point of mobilization. Nationalism, class, and ideology are all favoured rallying cries gathering individuals together, enabling them to make their political demands to the state, and to society as a whole. So why should not ethnicity and religion be a legitimate tool enabling groups to aggregate demands and mobilize politically? Ethnicity and religion, after all, is the most obvious social divide on the continent (Thomson, 2004). Ethnicity and religion have made a positive contribution to many post-colonial African countries in that it has managed to serve both state and civil society to some degree. Even in the most repressive of African countries, state elites were forced to acknowledge ethno-religious

power. Although these leaders gave scant public recognition to this rival source of political strength (considering the fact that it grated against the official nationalist credo and their own elite interests), tacit concessions were nevertheless consistently made to sub-state groups (Apuwabi, 2018).

Nwagwu (2018) stressed on the implication of ethnicity and religion in African politics of the peaceful co-existence of people. According to the aforementioned individual, Kenya, a nation characterized by the presence of over 70 distinct ethnic groups, has experienced elections since its independence in 1963 that have been predominantly influenced by ethnic affiliations. This phenomenon has engendered a climate of exclusionism and discrimination against individuals associated with opposition factions. The Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) garnered support from the Luo, Luhya, and Kalenjin ethnic groups located in the Nyanza, Western Provinces, and Rift Valley; conversely, the Party of National Unity (PNU) received backing from the Kikuyu ethnic group situated in the Central and Eastern Provinces, as well as Nairobi, the Coast Province, and Rift Valley. In the aftermath of the presidential election in 2007, Kenya witnessed violence; President Mwai Kibaki of PNU, who is a Kikuyu, was declared the victor of a highly contested electoral process. Supporters of Raila Odinga from the ODM raised allegations of electoral irregularities, a claim that was subsequently substantiated by international observers. Kibaki was surreptitiously inaugurated at night amidst widespread protests. In response, supporters of the ODM engaged in violent acts, resulting in the fatalities of Kikuyu individuals across various regions of the nation. The police intervention and the shooting of hundreds of the protesters heightened ethnic-based killings and attacks against Kikuyus living outside their traditional settlement areas, especially in the Rift Valley Province. In an incident, over 50 unarmed Kikuyu women and children were burnt alive. The violence recorded 1,500 casualties, while 600,000 people were allegedly displaced. It was alleged the police action was government-driven against supporters of ODM (Kwaja, 2009).

In a similar vein, Rwanda experienced a catastrophic campaign of extermination against the Tutsi ethnic group in 1994, fueled by ethnic animosities. The Hutu ethnic majority perpetrated the murder of over 800,000 to 1,000,000 individuals, predominantly from the Tutsi minority. The extremist factions within the Hutu community initiated this violent insurrection in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. The genocide rapidly disseminated across the nation with alarming velocity and ferocity, as local authorities and the Hutu-dominated government incited ordinary citizens to engage in armed assaults against Tutsi individuals, their neighbors. In a comparable historical context, a Hutu revolution in 1959 compelled approximately 300,000 Tutsis to seek refuge outside of Rwanda, thereby diminishing their demographic presence. Among the victims of the genocide were Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana and her ten Belgian bodyguards. Nevertheless, prior to the ascendance of the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) through a military offensive in early July 1994, countless Rwandans had already lost their lives, and millions had become internally displaced. The victory of RPF put more than two million Hutu-participants in the genocide on their heels to Zaire, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo as refugees. In a full-blown humanitarian crisis, thousands of them died of disease epidemics common to the squalor of refugee camps (Thomson, 2004).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The effect of ethnicity and religion is not as pronounced in the western world as it is in Africa. Ethnicity and religion are the two most important social markers in sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that groups and leaders are engaged in perennial conflict. Both variables affect African political behavior independently and simultaneously because most Africans have both ethnic and religious identities which they consider critical in inter-group relationships. Political leaders employ ethnicity and religion interchangeably as social identifiers in inter-group relationships. Virtually all problems militating against politics and governance in Africa are directly and or indirectly related to ethnicization and religionization of politics. Political parties are formed along ethno-religious lines with the spoils of office distributed in that order. The ethnicization and religionization of politics in Africa leads to various civil unrest that contributed in no small measure to undermining the democratic development in the continent. It is based on this that this study makes the following recommendations:

- i. More inclusive governance approach that could allay the fears of the various groups along best practices that guarantee equality, justice and fairness in resources/value mobilization and allocation should be ensured in Africa.
- ii. For the African countries to establish a sound electoral democracy and strong united countries, the menace of ethnicity and ethnic bloc voting should be addressed. To achieve this, efforts should be intensified towards providing a set of principles for nation-building which should be included in the constitutions of the respective countries.
- iii. There should be commitment to an even distribution of socio-economic and infrastructural development. Uneven distribution of socio-economic and infrastructural development in the African countries breed a sense of exclusion, and the fear of domination and marginalization by the undeveloped segment of the countries.
- iv. There should be a formulation of policies and programmes to re-orientate those that are divided along ethnic and religious lines in order to promote good relations among the different ethnic and religious groups.

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