

## HOSTILITY PERCEPTION: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Intergroup relations in Nigeria have not only become synonymous with hostility perceptions but also assumed debilitating proportions to the detriment of national integration. Notable threats to intergroup relations include ethnic politics, struggle for power and resources, the Action Group crisis of 1962, National Population Census figures, Nigeria–Biafra War, various presidential elections, annulment of June 12 1993 election, and issuance of quit notice to the Igbo residing in the North among others. This paper offers a theoretical explanation of intergroup relations where hostility perceptions manifest including political, social and economic contexts. With secondary sources, the case study analysis espouses hostility perception theory and identifies the salient factors that have sustained such debilitating hostility perceptions over the years and suggests ways of enhancing positive perceptions for national integration. Greed, grievance, deprivation and nepotism are some ingredients of hostility perceptions which heighten the insecurity of lives and property in most parts of Nigeria. The paper stresses that hostility perception downplays civil harmony in rural and urban areas which further aggravates feelings of the other in the country even after over 100 years of intergroup relations. Eradicating hostility perceptions from the grassroots to the top, especially when groups rethink hostility, would enhance national integration and promote good governance devoid of nepotism.*

**Keywords:** Hostility perception, Intergroup relations, Politics, Ethnic rivalry

“Let’s face it, we and they are already in one bed together, cohabitating the one side of our shared Earth. And big or small unresolved conflicts in bed will create walls and pain, not a new life worth living for....” **Libby and Len Traubman’s *Peace is Intercourse***, January 2014

“Let me assure you and all Nigerians that I do not engage in negative political actions and will never, as President, oppress the people of a state or deprive them of much needed public services as a result of political disagreement” – **President Goodluck Jonathan’s** response to Obasanjo’s letter, 20 December 2013, *Vanguard* 23 December, 2013, p. 52.

### **Introduction**

Living together in a nation that is made up of different ethnic groups demands a lot of efforts in the areas of peace education, confidence building and peacemaking to create the much desired atmosphere of peace and stability. Nigeria is made up of three major ethnic groups: Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba; and other minority

groups. Ethnic identity issues and hostility perception have scarred Nigeria for decades since her independence in 1960. This ugly development has not only hampered national integration but also negatively influenced the quality of leadership. There are notable clichés in the political landscape, including ‘majority rule, rotational presidency’, tenure elongation, single tenure, third-term agenda, zoning of leadership, party agreement for power rotation, and minority rights. There is no doubt that Nigeria, as currently constituted, is characterised by contestations and struggle for power at the Federal level, which remains at the centre of most internecine (social) conflicts across the country (Okolie-Osemene, 2013).

Intergroup relations in Nigeria has become synonymous with hostility perception and assumed debilitating proportions. Notable threats to intergroup relations include ethnic politics, struggle for power and resources, the Action Group crisis of 1962, National Population Census figures, Nigeria– Biafra War, various presidential elections, and annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election.

This paper addresses the phenomenon of hostility perception which has scathed intergroup relations efforts in Nigeria. To a great extent, “hostility perception” is one of the most malignant attributes of intergroup relations in Nigeria’s history especially in all sectors. This manifested in various facets of national life from the pre-independence period till Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. Commenting on the “fragile state of unity” among many ethnic nationalities, Adebayo (2002) asserts that successive governments have been preoccupied with the promotion of national / intergroup unity with little success.

Nigeria’s hostility perception discourse is timely and could not have come at a better time than in 2014 when the nation marked and celebrated 100 years of the amalgamation, and nation building between the North and South, involving various ethnic groups. The issue of intergroup relations in the country has become synonymous with hostility perception, a worrisome attitude that exacerbates feelings of “the other” with attendant broken relationships among supposedly social, economic and political neighbours.

The study adopted a case study research design, using primary and secondary sources, including non-partisan observation in the polity. The cases presented are hostility perceptions in the electoral process, governance at state level; and hospital setting.

### **Hostility Perception in Intergroup Relations**

This paper offers a theoretical explanation of intergroup relations where hostility perception manifests in political, social and economic contexts. The case study analysis espouses hostility perception theory and identifies the salient factors that have sustained such debilitating phenomenon over the years and suggests ways of enhancing positive perceptions for national integration.

There is one major attribute among various groups in Nigeria – “hostility perception”. This according to Catildi (2011:29), means that perception of other individuals or groups is hostile toward a particular group or one’s own group, identity, or culture to the extent that such perception tends to exacerbate conflict and conflict behaviour. This gives groups the inspiration to struggle for domination and control of “others” in the polity to the extent that they assume their actions are appropriate or justify their responses to other groups’ actions. Hostility perception theory is closely linked with the realistic group theory formulated by Sherif (1996) and Sherif et al, (1998) which contends that hostility between two groups results from real or perceived conflicting goals, which generates inter-group competition. When groups are engaged in reciprocally competitive and frustrating activities of zero-sum nature, each group will develop negative stereotypes about, and enmity towards the other group (the out-group) (Onu, 2002). Owalabi (2003) posits that “the problem of the ‘other’ is simply the problem of how to manage individual or social relations, which is also a form of power relations leading to anxiety on domination and being dominated syndrome.” Hostility perception has created what Akamadu (2014) describes as the scars on the nation’s history since 1914. Hostility perception is also driven by intergroup emotions. Intergroup emotions theory explores how intergroup emotions direct and regulate specific intergroup behaviours (Mackiel, Smith, and Ray, 2008). It reveals that emotions are instrumental to the actions that characterise intergroup relations. The manifestations of intergroup emotions portray how various groups engage in conflicts, primordial politics and peacemaking.

In Nigeria’s context, Ogbogbo *et al* (2012:1) noted that “since independence, intergroup relations (characterised by social consciousness, indifference towards others, protection of socio-cultural values in a competitive society etc.) have remained within the matrix of suspicions and hostility.” And such hostility manifests in various areas

across the country, such as power struggle, communal clashes over land disputes, and resource conflicts. Williams (1994) asserts that the most intense conflicts are to be expected when the stakes are collective goods, including categorical claims to prestige and political authority. In many scenarios, claims to prestige, political offices/authority have generated hostility perception between parties in Nigeria. Placing emphasis on ethnic factors in society, as stated by Smith (2004) that is closely linked with the economic and political consideration in intergroup affairs (Gurr, 1995, cited in Okolie-Osemene and Agahlino, 2013), further aggravates hostility perception among groups.

An example of hostility perception is found in the electoral process where “primordial class whose electoral promises do not reflect their actions often settle their strong opponents or eliminate them completely to sustain their political influence” (Oghenovo, 2011:23). There is also prevalence of revolutionary pressures, the National Question and the clamour for a Sovereign National Conference (Orji, 2011). On the outcome of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, Adebayo (2002:95) has this to say: “recent events in the polity show that the slogan ‘to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done’ is still fresh in our minds today.” Actually, the events that preceded the Nigeria-Biafra war and others during the war aptly offer more insight into the nature of hostility perception in the country. For instance, the Federal Government of Nigeria fined-twenty nine Roman Catholic missionaries 100 Nigerian pounds (over \$280 then) each after being detained in Port Harcourt, for illegally entering the country and for working in the Biafran region; they were given the option of spending up to four months in jail. They all paid the fine to avoid going to jail (Reuters, Monday February 16, 1970, cited in Aneke, 2007:719). Nigeria requested the United States to suppress two charitable pro-Biafran groups that were collecting funds for rehabilitation, including the Biafra International Foundation and the Nigeria War Victims Relief Foundation based in New York (Aneke, 737). Also, a decree issued in Lagos on 15 January 1970 targeted those government workers who supported the Biafran movement or engaged hostile acts against the federal or state governments between Jan 15, 1966 and Jan 15, 1970. Gen. Gowon signed the decree which authorised disciplinary action against officers whose records revealed that they showed “undue enthusiasm beyond the scope of their calling as civil servants in furthering the rebellion” (Aneke, 2007:736).

Government’s clamp down on various media organisations and media practitioners in the history of the nation, especially between 1980s and 1990s, shows how hostility perception in governance downplays human rights. According to John (2012), some newspapers were banned from circulating for political reasons and for their involvement/neutrality to political reasons. Salawu (2010) argues that the conflict in Nigeria was at its apex from the mild 1990s when Ken Saro-Wiwa was killed by hanging to about 2009 when amnesty was granted to repentant militants. However, Salawu agrees that the conflict is regionalised and led to the formation of ethnic militias in late 1990s.

Hostility perception inspired the establishment of various ethnic militia movements such as O’dua People’s Congress (OPC), Egbesu boys, Arewa People’s Congress (APC), and the Bakassi Boys which greeted Nigeria’s Fourth Republic in Southeast; while Bakassi Boys operates in Abia and Anambra States, OPC has its stronghold in the Southwest. Hostility perception led to the emergence of various phenomena including national resistance, minority struggles, politics of exclusion, debilitating agitations, lopsided clamour for presidency, self determination by minorities, ethno-religious conflicts, and prohibition of ethnic militias. Nwabueze (2013:51) discusses the “divide” between the North and the South and traces the divide to the days before 1960, which was exacerbated by the advent of partisan politics. According to Adetolu (2013), “the contemporary regrettable state of the political entity called Nigeria is as a result of tension between conflicting religion, economic and socio-political praxis and ideas” (cited in Okolie-Osemene, 2013).

The execution of Ogoni nine, including Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 by the military government of late Gen. Sani Abacha, the Umuechem massacre of 1990 (*African Concord*, 1990; Suberu, 1996), the Ogoni genocide (*The News* May, 1993; Suberu, 1996, *Note* 3), the Odi Massacre of 1999 (Aghalino, 2009; Oluduro and Oluduro, 2012:50), the instability in Niger Delta, criminalisation of freedom fighting and all forms of youth/community agitations created hostility perceptions not only in the region but also across the country.

Ethnic hostilities in Niger Delta especially the instability in Warri, Delta State between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri between 1999 and 2008 over location of local government resulting in the destruction of lives and property (Ozekhome, 2007:232), and militarisation of Warri and environs. Today, hostility perception is the source of ‘wanton insecurity in the country which threatens national integration/unity (*Nigeria Tribune*, October 2, 2013:45). Only hostility perception explains the killings and human rights violations recorded in Odi, Zaki Biam and Baga in Bayelsa, Benue and Borno States respectively.

The period from 2011 to 2014 marked a strange dimension to hostility perception in the country. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) recorded the highest defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) while it adopted litigation as an option to checking defection. Even Nigeria's former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar left PDP for APC, citing unresolved issues and impossibility of creative transformation as reasons for his departure.

Nigeria witnessed the politicisation of budget as APC's directive to lawmakers in the National Assembly to frustrate the passage of the 2014 appropriation bill (due to Presidency's indifference over Rivers crisis), generated controversies in various quarters. The resolution by APC made the Nasarawa State Deputy Governor, Mr. Demeshi Luka to condemn his party's action, noting that the budget is a developmental matter that goes beyond politics, and that the implication is that such directive would ground development process in the country. Similarly, the senator representing the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Senator Philip Aduda, stated that APC ought to realise that the budget is beyond politics as it concerns all Nigerians most of whom are not among the political elite. He further argued that attempting to use passage of the budget to attain "political mileage" is not in the best interest of national development, as delay could stall development, capital projects and payment of salaries (*Scan News*, 26 January, 2014).

PDP and APC senators on several occasions clashed over the 2014 appropriation bill with disagreements along party lines. While the PDP Senators argued in favour of the bill on the basis of transformation agenda and economic growth, the All Progressives Congress senators maintained that the bill should be returned to the executive for a "rejjig", citing its inability to address empowerment and security needs in the country; the APC senators called on the Minister for Finance and the Supervising Minister for the Economy, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, to resign (Aborisade, 2014). The position of the APC senators made the Federal Government to raise the alarm over what it described as the party's intent in destroying "the nation's democracy."

### **The Race for Elections as Source of Hostility Perception**

Apart from pre-election and post-election scenarios where aspirants and their political parties capitalise on perceived weaknesses of their opponents, hostility perception has characterised election dispute resolution in Nigeria's democratic history. To a great extent, it aggravated the various controversies that greeted electoral results. This is worsened by ethnicity-inspired lopsided clamour for presidency. Rather than presentation of party manifestoes, campaign of calumny becomes the order of the day.

Some people argue that Nigeria's problem is more rooted in ethno-religious issues than politics. In the history of transition in Nigeria, especially in 1964, 1983, 1993 and 2011, lives were lost and property destroyed in spontaneous response to electoral irregularities and quest for power (*Nigerian Tribune*, 29 January 2014:3). The lopsided clamour for presidency in Nigeria seems to be intensified by the problem of the "other" which Owolabi (2003) describes as the anxiety that an individual develops when he is confronted with another person. According to Ajayi (2013:138), "the manipulation of ethno-religious factors for political ascendancy had noticeably become serious centrifugal forces which threatened the corporate existence of the nation." A notable aspect of hostility perception is election dispute resolution. In Nigeria, this began to take competitive dimension in the Fourth Republic which started from 1999. But before then, the first major highly contested election petition was the *Awolowo v Shagari* case, in which Chief Obafemi Awolowo filed a petition against Alhaji Shehu Shagari on 11th August, 1979. The petition was concluded without delay before the swearing-in of Shagari. The judiciary as one of the organs of government, acknowledges the constitution in interpreting the 2010 (amended) Electoral Act (Okolie-Osemene, 2011).

The results of the 2007 elections in most states were highly contested between the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and opposition parties. At the state level, Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) (Ekiti State), Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) (Abia State), ACN (Osun State) and Labour Party (Ondo State) succeeded in defeating the PDP at the tribunals and Courts of Appeal. The 2011 general elections left behind a trail of grievances in certain quarters, especially in the northern part of the country; the same was applicable to the outcome of 2015 general elections, which was not accepted by some opposition parties in various states. The political parties and politicians who felt shortchanged over the conduct and outcome of the elections filed their petitions at the tribunals. Public debates are being generated around the handling of major petitions by the tribunals. After elections in Nigeria, candidates and political parties that file petitions at the tribunals have different goals: some want the elections to be nullified, while others want the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to declare them winners of lawful votes cast in their respective states. Some political parties

risk losing the states and even constituencies they already control as a result of the rulings that would come from the tribunals. Elections are either upheld, cancelled, or results declared (Okolie-Osemene, 2011).

*Anioma Crime Watch* released “two passports of a Nigerian”, with emphasis on the statements that portray hostility perception: (a) There will be bloodshed if Jonathan loses 2015 elections (Asari Dokubo, 2014); (b): There will be bloodshed if Jonathan rigs 2015 elections (El- Rufai, 2014). After his release by the SSS on 28 January, 2014, El – Rufai stated thus:

It is all about politics, it is all about 2015, this is just an attempt to intimidate and silence opposition for crying out that elections are likely to be rigged; I will continue to speak and they will continue to arrest me until we get free and fair election in Nigeria (2014).

Nigeria’s Minister of Information, Labaran Maku, had this to say about the hostility perception ahead of the 2015 elections:

People who call themselves politicians, will go to radio stations, go to television stations and make dangerous statements, which will set people against each other, which all incite violence. This is what we have been witnessing in the North since 2011. Beginning with 2011 elections, we have continued to witness this unfortunate tendency from leaders, not all leaders, some leaders among us who are always inciting people (Elebeke, 2014).

Apart from the provocative utterances, campaign of calumny and blackmail ahead of 2015, Nigeria has witnessed defections from one party to another in recent times. For example, 20 Kwara Assembly members defected from PDP to APC in January 2014. On 3 February 2014, Nigeria’s former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar formally sent his letter of resignation from the PDP to the Chairman of Jada Local Government Area in Adamawa State, Adamawa PDP Chairman and PDP National Chairman, Alhaji Adamu Mu’azu. In the letter, he identified marginalisation, humiliation, lack of internal democracy, lack of inclusiveness, as the reasons for such defection to APC.

In 2006, as a result of my firm stand in defence of our democracy, my supporters and I were pushed out of our party, the Peoples Democratic Party, a party we worked tirelessly with other compatriots to build as a vehicle to restore democracy to our country. We later returned to that party in 2009 when a new leadership of the party and the country promised a new direction, a direction of inclusiveness, of internal democracy, of an end to impunity, adherence to the rule of law and respect for the dignity of members and Nigerians. Sadly, however, these promises have not been kept. In addition, the PDP continues to be beset with many crises, mostly leadership-induced crises (Umoru, 2014).

It is argued that political parties and their supporters do not adhere to Electoral Act. Circumstances surrounding the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) and the establishment of anti-corruption agencies point to the magnitude of hostility perception in the country. The letter written by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to the presidency titled ‘Before it is Too Late’ generated a lot of controversy to the extent that Pastor Tunde Bakare accused him of being guilty of his allegations against President Jonathan. Similarly, northern elders cautioned the political elite against making inflammatory statements or encouraging gatherings that motivate people to adopt an aggressive approach in response to the actions of other groups.

### **Rivers Crisis: Another Aspect of Hostility Perception**

The various scenarios which the media dubbed, “Rivers Crisis” is nothing but the display of hostility perception. Rivers State is made up of various groups including Ikwerre, Ogoni, Andoni, Gokana, Okirika, Tai, Etche, Ogubolo, and Degeme. Parties to the Rivers Crisis consistently strategise on ways of winning these groups to their sides along party lines. The circumstances that occasioned the suspension of Rivers Governor from the PDP and his subsequent dumping of the party for APC was not just the peak of hostility perception but also paved the way for the disjuncture between the state government and the presidency; the extent State Police commissioner, Mr. Joseph Mbu, was not redeployed even after the Governor’s petition to the National Human Rights

Commission. After disrupting various political rallies planned by the state government, the police banned political rallies in the state on 3 February 2014. Against this backdrop, Nigeria's human rights activist Mr. Femi Falana stated that police have no legal rights to issue permits for rallies. Prior to this directive, the January 2014 Save Rivers Movement rally at an Anglican Church where members of the group were attacked by thugs made some critics to assert that "Ogoni people have dared to be free, having challenged repression, to gain liberty (Kennedy, 2014). Some members of Anioma Voice argued that it is not good to bite a finger that "fed you." People asked: Whose finger fed who in Rivers State? They argued if a finger feeding a child becomes leprous, the best thing to do is to seek treatment or even amputate the finger. The main argument in was that the PDP government had become leprous, 15 years into democracy in the country (Aduba, Michael Ifechukwu, 26/1/2014). The situation in Rivers State or escalated struggle for "Rivers soul" was hostility between PDP and APC. The impasse made the APC to caution that "this is no longer intra-party dispute and because of its potential to set the country on fire, we call on everybody to rise up and defend the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution over arbitration" (APC on Rivers/NGF Crisis, 2013).

### **Hostility Perception in the Hospital Settings**

The discourse on hostility perception cannot be complete without mentioning the lopsided clamour for administrative hegemony in the hospital settings and the Ministry of Health by medical doctors which is implicated by the heightened tension in the sector over the appointment of Chief Medical Officer. The impasse between medical doctors and medical laboratory scientists portrays Nigeria's health sector as enmeshed in the politics of power relations. According to Ayodele Aaron (2014, at Critics Corner), one of the events that started the destruction of harmony in the health sector was when Ransome Kuti wanted his wife to be a medical laboratory scientist, and to be absorbed into the profession without following the rules of writing the prescribed examinations. The medical laboratory science council of Nigeria (MLSCN) insisted that she must meet the requirements to qualify. Olikoye allegedly got angry about that and the first destructive mission he carried out was to bring down the call duty allowance of all Nigeria medical laboratory scientists (MLSs) when history has it that MLSs were the ones that first started calls in the hospital laboratories because of the peculiarity and sensitivity of their work. It is believed that is the kind of administrative and management acumen Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) wants people to believe they possess from medical school which other medical associations do not have.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined how the phenomenon of hostility perception has remained an attribute of intergroup relations in Nigeria. From the electoral processes to the revenue allocation matters and also inter-ethnic relations, the fear of the other is a problem. Since the independence of the country, one of the most threatening aspects of hostility perception is the quit notice given to the Igbo residing in the northern part of the country by some youths in the North. Greed, grievance, deprivation and nepotism are some ingredients of hostility perception in different sectors and contexts which heighten the insecurity of lives and property in most parts of Nigeria. The main protagonists in the 2015 general elections capitalised on the Jonathan presidency to demonstrate their hostility perception with threats of violence which was never carried out due to the victory of APC at the presidential election polls. This was due to the fact that the then president Jonathan had already conceded defeat even before the winner was declared by INEC.

This paper stresses that hostility perception downplays civil harmony in rural and urban areas which further aggravates feelings of the other in the country even after over 100 years of intergroup relations. Eradicating hostility perceptions from the grassroots to the top, especially when groups rethink hostility, would enhance national integration and promote good governance devoid of nepotism. The future of intergroup relations in Nigeria greatly depends on the intensity of hostility perception in the polity. This could either be low or high given the fact that no group can operate alone. It is possible to enhance intergroup relations through robust tolerance and more interest in intergroup harmony. The enhancement of positive perceptions for national integration has peace, security and development value.

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