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worldbank.org political violence, conflicts and inequalities are closely related, but not necessarily in the way people think. Countries where there is great inequality between rich and poor do not experience more violent conflicts than countries with fewer economic inequalities. On the contrary, inequalities between groups defined by religion, ethnicity or regional identities are linked to a significantly higher risk of armed conflict. The good news is that while income inequality among individuals is on the rise, inequality based on identity groups seems to be decreasing. This could lead to fewer conflicts in the future. There has never been more inequality When we talk about inequality, we generally focus on the differences between individuals. This is also the kind of inequality that has been the starting point for most existing research on this topic. The well-known Gini index is exactly such a measure of inequality between individuals. We have collected the best data available from a number of countries in order to measure levels of income inequality between individuals. This gives us valid data that are comparable in all countries and date back to the 1960s. Unsurprisingly, during the period for which we have the data, the world has never experienced greater economic inequality than it does today (there is Figure 1). Figure 1: Global economic inequality Rising economic inequalities are worrisome for a number of reasons, but it is not a major cause of armed conflict. This is because armed conflict is not an individual activity. Violent political conflicts are fought between groups, both between an organized group and the state, and between organized identity groups. Economic inequality in itself is not a unifying factor strong enough to bring together groups large enough to rebel against the state. Inequality between individuals and identity group inequality This does not mean that inequality is irrelevant to armed conflicts. Over the past 10 to 15 years, conflict research has focused on group inequality, i.e. systemic inequality between identity groups, rather than inequality between individuals. From the point of view of conflict research, the most interesting groups to examine are often those defined by religion, ethnicity or language. In many countries these groups are very unequal in terms of political power, wealth and social status. Not all inequalities between groups are problematic. In many countries, all under-age groups are excluded from participating in elections. This form of group inequality is widely accepted. Inequalities of this generation-based issues rarely lead to serious armed conflicts, but from time to time it helps mobilise support for political change. In Norway, for example, young people are demanding that 16-year-olds a year old should have the right to vote. Group inequality generates The situation is more serious when ethnic or religious affiliation determines access to social, economic or political goods. In the United States, there was a clear case of political group inequality when African Americans were systematically excluded from political participation until the mid-1960s. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's Alawite regime has excluded other groups of the Syrian population from political influence. In Nigeria, a country with one of the highest rates of inequality in the world, ethnic groups in the north have consistently higher rates of infant mortality and lower educational outcomes than ethnic groups in the south of the country. While 50% of Christian women in Nigeria born after 1980 have completed lower secondary school, the corresponding figure for Muslim women is only 20%. Research has shown that this identity group inequality is an important cause of armed conflict. This is particularly true when the relative position of identity groups is changed, for example if a group that has had access to political power is suddenly excluded from political participation. There is a significantly higher risk of conflict in states that exclude ethnic groups from political power when these groups have already had the opportunity to participate in political processes. Group inequality is declining We have collected data on identity group inequality over time, including data on inequalities in infant mortality between different groups over time. Infant mortality rates are a useful universal measure of socio-economic development. As such, they are of particular interest to researchers interested in inequality. Infant mortality rates (IRS) have fallen sharply in recent decades. Last but not least, this is the result of efforts by the United Nations, the World Bank and humanitarian organisations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in relation to infant mortality. More surprisingly, we find that these efforts have led to a significant drop in infant mortality rates among different ethnic and religious identity groups in developing countries, as shown in Figure 2. This is in stark contrast to the myth that identity group inequality is so persistent that it is almost impossible to change. Figure 2: Rates of change in infant mortality and horizontal inequality in IMR, from larger versus second, 1970-2015 Disparities in infant mortality rates between different groups increased until the early 1990s. Since then, these disparities have decreased at the same rate as infant mortality has decreased overall. The world has not experienced overall infant mortality rates as low as today, and as far as we have the data we can say that the world has never seen such low levels of inequality in infant mortality between different identity groups. Identity identity group is a significant cause of conflict. A reduction in this inequality will help, if the trend continues, to reduce the risk of conflict in the future. This is encouraging news. But these changes didn't happen on their own. Greater attention to the new Sustainable Development Goals and the recognition that it is important to reduce identity group inequality will be decisive in preventing conflicts and supporting peace. The authors of the basic study on which this blog is based are Karim Bahgat, Gray Barrett, Kendra Dupuy, Scott Gates, Solveig Hillesund, Siri Aas Rustad, Hovard Strand, Henrik Urdal, and Gudrun Sstby, all researchers at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Fragility Conflict and Violence x This site uses cookies to optimize features and give you the best possible experience. If you continue to browse this website beyond this page, cookies will be placed on your browser. For more information about cookies, click here. The rise of ethnic and religious nationalism in Nigeria over the past decade has led to such high levels of tension that people have been asking whether it will survive as a country. Or if Nigeria is on the brink of another civil war. What is behind the growing tensions is the unequal distribution of the country's wealth. Inequality has caused mistrust among ethnic groups. This, in turn, has led to conflict and violence. Nigeria has been at war with itself for some time, a war that has intensified over the last two decades. A number of events illustrate this. For example, militancy in the oil-rich Niger Delta region began after the 2003 general election, in which some people bought weapons and ammunition from some politicians and handed over to young people in an attempt to influence the elections. But after the elections, many young Nigerians, angry at the high unemployment rates, turned their weapons against their sponsors and the Nigerian state. Another example is the role played by the Congress of Peoples of Oodua, a group that supported an autonomous region for Yoruba that speaks in southwestern Nigeria. The congress began its agitation in 1994, a year after the cancellation of the 1993 presidential election won by M.K.O Abiola, a member of the Yoruba ethnic group. Their dominant message was the alleged marginalization of the Yoruba ethnic group. And in 2009 the Boko Haram insurgency erupted after the brutal assassination of Mohammed Yusuf, an Islamic cleric based in Maiduguri who had started a movement seven years earlier to push for an end to corruption and action against inequality. He has also supported Islamic practices in northeast Nigeria. Yusuf was arrested by the police and died in in 2009. Many members of his sect immediately staged a peaceful protest. The protests became more violent as they began targeting police offices and police posts across the North. Now there is a resurgence of in Biafra. It echoes in 1967 when the then military governor of the eastern region of Nigeria, Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared the Igbo to speak eastern independently of Nigeria. This followed Igbos in the North being targeted after the first military coup that ended Nigeria's first republic. The 1966 coup, mostly led by Igbo military officers speaking east of Nigeria, was perceived by many in the North to have specifically targeted and killed many Hausa/Fulani politicians in the northern region. Economic inequalities cannot be separated from the root of all these developments. Nigerians are frustrated because they can see economic inequality growing at a faster rate than ever before and no one seems to be doing anything about it. Will these unrest lead to a real war in the course of the civil war of the 1960s? There is no categorical answer to this. But I doubt that there will be another civil war of the magnitude of 1967-1970, even if there may be large-scale violence. A history of violence Violence has always been part of the history of economic and political marginalization in Nigeria. Examples can be drawn from the mass violence that led to the 1967-70 civil war, as well as the eto-religious violence of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Between 1980 and 1985 there was the Kataf conflict, the Maitatsine uprisings in the North, the Farmers' Revolt of Agbekoya in the West 1968-70, the first iteration of the rebirth of Biafra by the Ralph Uwazuruike-led Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra in 2000, and the national protests against the annulment of the presidential elections of June 12, 1993 won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. A 2003 photo of current Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari with Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu leading biafran's failed civil war in the 1960s. But they have been aggravated by the strong response of the Nigerian Government. The protests have paralysed state activities. But no one has threatened the survival of the Nigerian state more than the oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta. Since the state assassination of Niger Delta rights activist Ken Saro Wiwa in November 1995 and crystallizing in the insurgency against oil companies and the state, protest action in the Niger Delta has influenced the production and sale of oil that is the mainstay of nigeria's economy. How Nigeria got here The resurgence of eto-religious protests in Nigeria may be due to the fact that wealth circulates among a small group of elites. Although they come from all ethnic and religious groups, they resort to fanning etino-religious feelings when they feel that there is threat to their wealth. Cries of marginalization become the dominant cry when they are out of power. The election of the President Buhari in 2015, triggered new tensions. That's because he's considered a member of the Northern elite. Soon after his election protests began to support self-determination or secession by various groups in the South. These included the indigenous people of Biafra in the southeast and groups such as the Avengers of the Niger Delta in the south-south. Control of Nigerian oil resources in the Niger Delta always comes into the mix. The recent clashes involving the Biafra Group in Port Harcourt – the state capital of oil-rich rivers – must be understood in this context. Unsurprisingly, once again the Niger Delta is at the center of the current outcry over secession just as it was between 1966 and 1970, when oil extraction began to take root in Nigeria. But there are important differences between today's protests and those previously organized in Nigeria's history. The main ones include the fact that people are mobilized differently and the way information is disseminated and consumed. News travels faster than before, and unfounded rumors spread like wildfire. Fuelling the tensions is the fact that hate speech is widespread. The state is as guilty as the agitators. Voices of reason and objective analysis are lost in noise especially now that everyone with a smartphone has become a 'journalist'. In the confusion, the road to anarchy hangs over Nigeria. What needs to be done An inclusive economic and political system is the only solution. The current public discourse focuses on ethnically political restructuring. Calls for a political agreement in which large ethnic groups will have control over their geographical areas and resources in that country could help. The danger is that instead of unifying Nigeria, it would further divide the country along ethnic and religious lines. What is missing from the conversation is the fact that the environment for the violence and oppression of most Nigerians came because of the way the country's economy is structured. The elitist economy crosses all ethnic groups. The deprivation of the right to vote, marginalisation and exploitation challenge ethnic colouring. In order for restructuring to be significant, Nigeria must create an inclusive economic and political system in which ethnic and religious affiliation will no longer be a determining factor in economic and political participation. What Nigerians need, and they are cla cla calling for, is a country that will host them regardless of ethnic or religious belief. Political, religious and ethnic tolerance is the key to economic and political success, so economic and political inclusion must take into account greater tolerance in order for it to be effective.

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