

The Population's Perception of the Causes of Identity Conflicts in Burundi

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Abstract

Burundi experienced recurrent violent conflicts that killed many people since the acquisition of political independence in 1962. This situation depends on various phenomena. The current investigation has a target to point out them through answers to census using a questionnaire with multiple choice questions, administered to 423 citizens of Bujumbura city forming a representative sample among whom there are all 3 ethnic groups, from different religions, and various socio-professional activities represented. We used CSPro software for data collection and Advanced Excel and STATA for analysis. Findings show that 63.07% of respondents esteem discrimination as a cause of identity-based conflict while 53.67% consider social injustice, 52.88% point out exclusion, 45.22% opt for nepotism and 38.57% gave their opinion as regionalism is among the main causes of identity-based conflict.

Keywords: Burundi, discrimination, social injustice, regionalism, exclusion, nepotism

1. Introduction

Social identity theory affects all of us (psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, public policymakers, and all those interested in how social identity impacts our world), no matter whether we are currently in a state of conflict or one further along with the peace process [1]. The report of the Secretary-General precise the causes of conflicts are Social exclusion, poverty, corruption, armed groups, organized crime, conflicts over natural resources, city slums and rapid urbanization, and Maritime security [2].

The protracted social conflicts, revolving around communal identity questions, take a source in the denial of elements necessary for the development of all people

[3]. Identities, transformed in processes of social struggle, mobilize individuals and collectives and provides legitimacy and justification for their aspirations [4]. Identity-based conflicts are often caused by political misperceptions that distort public debate and undermine people's ability to form meaningful opinions [5]. In electoral systems, voters identify bends to the social group whose interests are closest to theirs, so being harmful to outgroups for voters slant their beliefs toward the group's distinctive opinion, denoting their beliefs polarization and distortion along group boundaries while economic shocks are under cleavages exacerbating conflicts in other social dimensions [6]. The economic issue is a problem especially on the international level when a state tries to avoid another to get good use of this resource [7]. Identities can be further amplified through ingroup and outgroup processes leading to involvement in violent extremism. The paper also explores how identity can mediate the stress of this extremist lifestyle and sustain engagement in violence [8].

2. Materials and Methods

The instrument used for data collection was the survey questionnaire, composed of closed and open questions addressed to the inhabitants of the Bujumbura town hall, which includes Burundians from all regions and belonging to all social and professional categories.

Our survey population is made up of individuals aged 45 and over in 2021, living in the three urban communes (Muha, Mukaza, and Ntahangwa). For the administration of the questionnaire, "hetero-assessment" was used insofar as the respondent answers directly to the questions asked in the presence of the interviewer, with the possibility of asking for clarification on certain points to reassure him/herself of the adequacy between the question and the answer he/she gives.

The method used is qualitative-quantitative. To determine the survey population, we referred to the 2008 general census, which established the population of Burundi at 8,053,574 inhabitants, including 811,866 for the country's 18 cities and 497,166 for the city of Bujumbura. Based on the component method that takes into account fertility, mortality, and net migration, the projection estimated the population of Bujumbura at 722,498 inhabitants in 2021, of which 72,912 are aged 45 and over (ISTEEBU, 2008). Our sample is random and is made up of people who were at least 17 years old in 1993, the date of the elections followed by interethnic massacres and civil war. At the time of the survey in December 2021, they are 45 years old and are assumed to have experienced at least the ethnopolitical crises of 1993 and 2015. The sample taken followed the logic of the formula to arrive at the minimum size:
$$\text{Deft} \cdot \frac{(Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)/e^2)}{\{1 + [Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)/e^2]\} / e^2} \cdot N = 384$$
. Anticipating a non-response rate of 10%, the final sample size becomes $384.16 \cdot 1.1 = 422.576$, which is rounded up to 423 individuals. The data was entered using the CSPRO tool and the results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and STATA software.

Presentation of the respondents

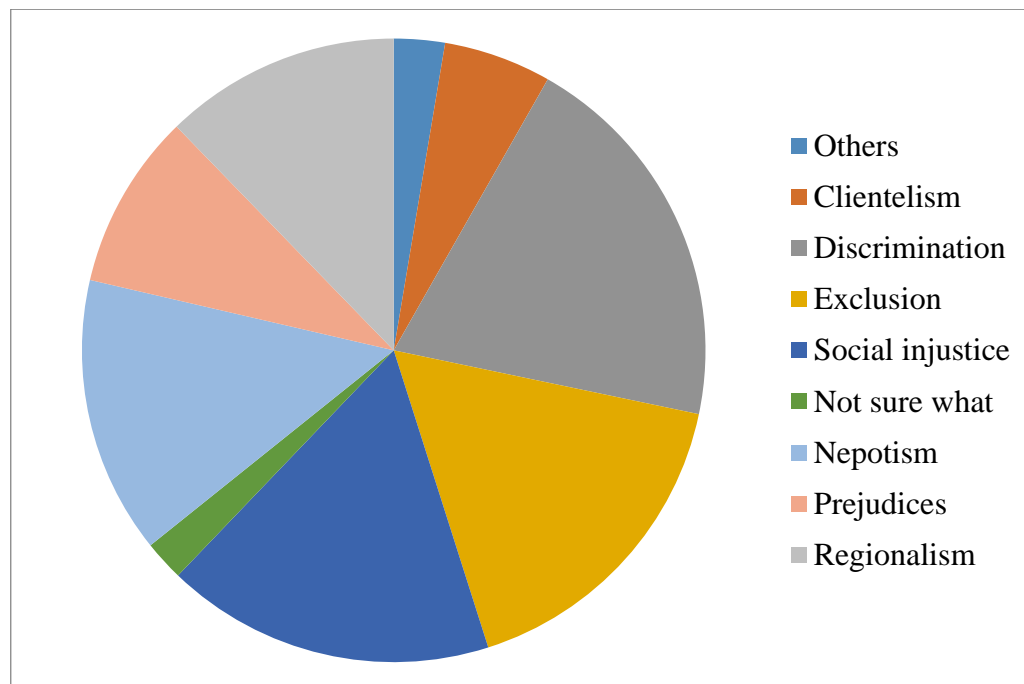
The sample is made up of people aged 45 and over. The [45-49] age group is the most represented with 33.29%. We note a decreasing representation as to the age group increases. Of the 423 people surveyed, 60.80% were male and 39.20% were female.

According to the level of education, 12.91% of the respondents have not been to school, 45.61% are at the primary level, 34.57% at the secondary level, and 6.91% at a higher level [university].

Several socio-professional categories participated in this survey. They were shopkeepers (24.75%), farmers (19.56%), civil servants (15.86%), workers (14.52%), and unemployed (12.88%). According to the religious beliefs of the respondents, Catholics are more numerous with 69.11%, followed by Protestants (22.54%) and finally Muslims (6.57%). Concerning the ethnic identities of the 423 respondents, 56.85% were Hutu, 32.74% were Tutsi, and 10.04% were Twa.

3. Results of the study

Figure 1: Causes of identity conflicts



The causes of identity conflicts are mainly discrimination (63.07%), social injustice (53.67%), exclusion (52.88%), nepotism (45.22%), and regionalism (38.57%).

Table 1: Overall Tests of Significance: Pearson Chi2(206) = 265.6334 Pr =0.003

| Causes | Hutu | Tutsi | Twa | Total | chi2/p* |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Social injustice | 53.36 | 55.81 | 65.85 | 55.47 | 0.333 |
| Discrimination | 62.78 | 61.24 | 80.49 | 64.12 | 0.067 |
| Exclusion | 57.85 | 41.86 | 73.17 | 54.20 | 0.001 |
| Prejudices | 27.35 | 34.88 | 34.15 | 30.53 | 0.291 |
| Regionalism | 38.57 | 47.29 | 24.39 | 39.95 | 0.027 |
| Clientelism | 17.49 | 20.93 | 19.51 | 18.83 | 0.724 |
| Nepotism | 50.22 | 39.53 | 63.41 | 48.09 | 0.018 |
| Others | 8.07 | 6.98 | 21.95 | 9.16 | 0.010 |
| Not sure what | 6.28 | 9.30 | 0 | 6.62 | 0.108 |

4. Discussion of the results

Burundians who participated in our survey showed their opinion about the causes of identity conflicts.

63.07% of respondents expressed the confirmation that identity conflicts are based on discrimination (Figure 1). Discrimination in Burundi was practiced even in schools where children from the Tutsi ethnic group were encouraged while oppositely Hutu ethnic group children were tormented and forced to drop out of schools before achieving[9]. This item is confirmed by UNESCO that Burundian education was marginalized and treated favorably by Tutsi children and unfairly by Hutu ones[10]. In Burundi, identity conflict based on discrimination was practically a military and political ruling system dominated by Tutsi ethnic group members drew to the coup that eliminated the first democratically elected president Melchior Ndadaye and most of the Hutu government officials[11]. By this discrimination, Hutu ethnic group members found that there were no other means than the beginning of the Hutu armed forces rebellion[12]. Identity conflict based on discrimination in Burundi affected every social category even intellectual[13]. This situation is similar to the Anglophone conflict in Cameroun which is a consequence of a perpetual political crisis, having roots in the colonial administration of the territory where Anglophone minorities live under marginalization and discrimination trying to oblige them to accept the francophone system[14]. This shows that as long as a group of people feels discriminated tries to fight for their freedom and the conflict begins.

Social injustice keeps a big part as a cause of identity-based conflict in Burundi as expressed by 53.67% of the survey respondents (Figure 1). Such a situation ruled South Africa to apartheid which by now South Africans of every race are still under its consequences but targeting to judge evictions as more fair when squatters apply procedural justice[15]. Such social injustice in Burundi, as a basis of identity conflicts, led to genocide in Rwanda [16] and caused Sierra Leoneans to be banned from their access to justice[17]. Due to that social injustice in Sierra Leone, identity conflict ended in the civil war that killed thousands of people.

52.88% of the respondents to the survey confirmed that exclusion was the cause identity based-conflict that ruined Burundi (Figure 1). The central level of governance in Burundi, throughout its post-colonial period, has been characterized by differentiation and exclusion, generalized in all services[18]. Researchers esteem that exclusion had been obvious in the period which followed the announcement of President Pierre Nkurunziza's third term presidential candidacy[19] even though others perceive it was a coup against the democratic institutions[20].

By nepotism, as expressed by 45.22% of respondents to our survey, Burundians were thrashed into identity-based conflicts (Figure 1). Nepotism in Burundi is formed around political parties whereas access to public services requires membership in the ruling party, familial relationship, or geographic origin[21]. Such Burundian nepotism where no true authority exists besides the president's one was established in Libya under Gaddafi governance who created a system of governance that relied on nepotism and let involved heavy overlap between institutions, creating a chaotic situation[22]. Nepotism has been a general practice of recruitment in the public sector in almost whole Africa[23].

Concerning regionalism, 38.57% of respondents to the survey agreed that it is a cause of identity conflict in Burundi (Figure 1), especially in governments that followed colonialism. This situation looks like what is in Nigeria where the politics of regionalization influence actors to promote their regional projects according to their identities, interests, and representations[24].

The results of the chi2 test (Table 1) show that there is a statistically significant difference between the perception of the causes of conflicts and ethnicity (p-value=0.003). This difference is mainly due to the causes: exclusion, regionalism, and nepotism. Concerning the level of education, according to the chi2 test, the causes do not differ statistically between respondents who have been to school and those who have not, and among those who have been to school, there is no statistically significant relationship between the perception of the causes and the level of education achieved.

Conclusion

This research targeted to analyze what are the main causes of identity-based conflict. The study used a questionnaire to which respondents living in Bujumbura gave their opinion. Results ensure that discrimination, social injustice, exclusion, nepotism, and regionalism had been the main identity conflict causes.

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