

## **Democracy, Violence and Insecurity: Perversion And Implications On The Youth In Northern Nigeria**

**Usman Abbo<sup>\*a</sup>, Zawiya Binti Mohd Zain<sup>b</sup>,**

<sup>a</sup>Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Science, Bayero University Kano

<sup>b</sup>School of Government College of law, Government and International Studies Universiti Utara Malaysia

\*Corresponding author e-mail: shagari59@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

Nigeria as it is constituted today depict a picture typical of a semi-democratic entity that is undergoing a demographic transition process, where the large fraction of the total population is represented by youth with high propensity for violence. Achieving political stability in the country, therefore revolve around the existence of a workable democracy which can improve government performance and thus reduce the sources of grievances capable of generating anti-government violence by the youth. However, it is the conception of this paper that, in Nigeria the political and the socio-economic principles associated with the liberal democracy are either weakly internalized or remained largely not internalized across the body polity thereby creating room for grievance hence the persistent incidence of violence, as democracy fails to deliver its promises of good governance and economic stability. Such violence therefore interacts perversely with democratic institutions, eroding their legitimacy and effectiveness thereby engendering insecurity. Living in the midst of violence and insecurity thus transforms the youth's perceptions of their physical and political environments which invariably weaken their commitment to democracy and encourage them to support forms of authority from non-state actors such as Boko Haram in the North-Eastern geo-political zone and bodies of organized crime perpetrators who specialized in cattle rustling, kidnapping and banditry in the North-West geo-political zone.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Violence, Insecurity, Youth, Nigeria

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999 was applauded both domestically and internationally due to the long and tortuous history of military dictatorship in the country. Among Nigerians there were and remain high hopes of the supposed gains of democratization. But, as events have shown, the hope and expectation is threatened by unceasing violence and war, which have consumed thousands of lives, made thousands more internally displaced and properties worth millions of dollars destroyed (Ibrahim, 2017). Boko Haram has been on the rise in the North Eastern geo-political zone in the last nine years, while the incidence of cattle rustling, banditry and kidnapping in the north-western and central regions has been rising over the last five years. The Nigerian state appears to be at war and has almost lost its violence monopoly in 2014, especially in the north-eastern part of the country (Ijere, 2015; Rotimi, 2020).

However, events after the 2015 general election that led to the invasion of the Sambisa Forest-Boko Haram's hide-out by the Nigerian military and the rescue of many women and children demonstrate how the battle for state power can form the nature of the state's governance and devotion to issues of national importance (Ijere, 2015). It is still evident that in northern Nigeria, levels of violence did not decrease, many people felt unsafe in that parts of the Nigerian society, with women and young people under the age of 30 feeling this strongly. In some of these societies, confidence in the state's ability to protect them was also not evident. (Onimisi, & Tinuola, 2019).

Given the fact that Nigeria as a country is passing through democratic transitions, couple with the fact that security sector reform has been and continue to be the emphasizing factor by external donors since the democratization processes of the 1980s got underway, it is therefore reasonable to ask why democracy had not reduced or tamed this violence? why do the Northern region shows ever increasing insecurity, often attributable to non-state armed actors?

Answers to the above questions lies on the fact that democratic states are not built through institutional evolution alone: organized citizens play a role as well. Therefore, when a body polity is unjust in its distributional patterns, it kills the possibility of a national consensus and conflicts and violence are bound to emerge and persist, and where violence persisted, it impedes citizen's action, thereby thwarting the development of democracy (Uwakwe, & Nwaneri, 2017). This is because when the rudiments of democracy are not fully internalized or are weakly internalized, it practically losses its capacity to mitigate grievances and when democracy fails to mitigate grievances it becomes enmeshed in greater conflict and violence.

Although, democracies do not appear to satisfy basic needs universally, in the sense that both opportunities and grievances are present in democratic regimes around the world. However, it is claimed that democracies offer peaceful mechanisms through which it can influence public policy, hence Østby (2008) suggests that if these do not then reduce the gap between the expected and actual outcomes for the relatively disadvantaged group, the outcome may be greater frustration and conflict.

It is therefore apparent from the above background that in a democratic entity with ineffective regulative and distributive policies capable of reducing the sources of grievances, violence tended to reproduce itself rather than diminish. This led us to the main theme of this paper which revolves around the pervasive interfaces between democracy, violence, security and its implications on youth in Northern Nigeria, which will be explored through an extensive review of relevant academic literature.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Nigeria as it is constituted today, is struggling in the midst of social grievances and political frustration by its citizens, a development that makes some researchers to start questioning whether the country is indeed a democratic state, in the sense that as confirmed by the available literature democratic states are more responsive than autocracies to group grievances (Ezeibe, 2020). However, in contrast the Nigerian democracy is characterized with sharp socioeconomic horizontal inequalities, existing side by side with a seemingly politically inclusive system. As shown by evidence

inequalities of all kinds correlate strongly with violence (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Evidence further shows that while democracies with low horizontal inequalities are the least at risk of conflict, those with high levels of such inequalities are particularly at higher risk (Nwachukwu, 2018).

It is also argued that the violence potential of socioeconomic horizontal inequalities may be stronger for democracies and semi-democracies than for autocracies (Yunusa, 2016). This is because the combination of increased expectations for democratic dividends and the attendant frustration resulting from an unequal social structures and opportunities appears to generate increased levels of violence in semi-democratic country.

The literature we have reviewed so far draws our attention to weaknesses in a semi-democracy, particularly in ethnically diverse societies like Nigeria, in guaranteeing civil peace in the sense that democracies have a potential for waves of violence, or even continuously high levels of violence, if the in-built tensions of the liberal inclusionary project reach a continuously high levels (Angerbrandt, 2018).

Against the above background, the pervasive interface among democracy, violence and insecurity in Nigeria is an upshot of weak democratic institutions and a dysfunctional federal system. The apparent lack of equity which saw the exclusion of youths in governance and the inability of the democratic state to distribute resources equitably in the country, have contributed to violent reaction against the state by the youth. Intense political competition and the arming of youths, groups and the mobilization of religious and ethnic identities by politicians as well as the use of violence for electoral gains are also contributory factors (Vickers, 2000, Yusuf, 2019).

Although the recent rebasing of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranks' the country as the largest economy in Africa, it is a truism that most Nigerians are poorer today than they were at independence in 1960, the few portion of the youths with strong economic wherewithal are in actual sense beneficiaries of the rampant entrenched corruption (Yusha'u, Halidu, & Egye, 2020). Unemployment among youths is high couple with high level of illiteracy, leading to frustration and alienation which have inevitably driven many youths to join groups (ethnic, religious, community or civic) some of which have been hijacked by unscrupulous politicians and have become hostile to the state. Governance has been characterized by inefficient yet authoritarian centralization, a culture of impunity, and a climate of unaccountability dating back to military rule (Yusuf, 2019).

The combination of aggrieved injustice and the social misery of the majority is producing disillusionment with democracy and it is creating conditions of conflict threatening the stability of Nigeria's political order. This prompt us to analyze the nexus between the nature and orientation of Nigerian democracy and the high levels of violence and insecurity occurring in the country particularly the Northern Region.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper intends to revolves around the Human Need theory especially the contribution of John Burton (1990). As advocated by Burton: "It is reasonable to assume that human

motivations include some that are required for the development of the human species, some that are culturally specific, and some that are of a transitory nature ...” (Burton 1990, 36). To differentiate between these forms of motivation, Burton labels them respectively, needs, values, and interests. Needs reflect universal motivations and are integral parts of the human being. Besides the biological needs of food and shelter, there are basic needs that relate to growth and development.

They are seen in the unsatisfied needs of individuals and groups engaged in ethnic and identity struggles; unless satisfied, these needs will spawn behavior outside the legal norms of society (Burton 1990, 36). Values are those acquired “ideas, habits, customs, and beliefs” that are characteristic of social communities. They spring from “linguistic, religious, class, ethnic, or other features” possessed by various cultures and identity groups. “In conditions of oppression, discrimination, under privilege, and isolation, the defense of values is important to the needs of personal security and identity,” and can be confused with needs. “Preservation of values is a reason for defensive and aggressive behaviors” (Burton 1990, 37).

In contrast, he says, “Interests refer to the occupational, social, political, and economic aspirations” of individuals and identity groups. “They typically relate to material goods or role occupancy,” and can change with circumstances. They are not an inherent part of the individual as are needs or values (Burton 1990, 38). Interests are negotiable and can be traded for social gain. In contrast, needs and values, such as those for identity or recognition, are inherent drives and cannot be traded. Conflict involving needs and values can easily become deep-rooted conflict. For example, individuals cannot be coerced to accept democratic rule that denies their ethnic or cultural identity (Burton 1990, 39).

This theory therefore becomes workable in explaining the intricate link between violence and democracy in Nigeria where the levels of political engagement by the youth have fallen drastically over the last decade; in which participating in the formal political system appear not to provide a platform for the expression of grievance, yearnings and aspirations by them. Youth have continued to become the victims of exclusion and policy neglect by the government on issues affecting them in the country. This invariably weaken their commitment to democracy and encourage them to support forms of authority from non-state actors such as Boko Haram in the North-Eastern geo-political zone and bodies of organized crime perpetrators who specialized in cattle rustling, kidnapping and banditry in the North-West geo-political zone.

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Why have democratization processes failed to fulfil expectations of violence reduction in Northern Nigerian? How does violence affect democracy and vice versa? When examined critically, the interfaces between Democracy, violence and security lead to two important conclusions: the diverse ethnic and religious configuration in Nigeria breeds tension while the lack of proper internalized democratic values fails to neutralized such tension which lead to conflict and violence. The violence thus interacts perversely with democratic institutions, eroding their legitimacy and effectiveness.

Even though violent conflict in Nigeria precedes the restoration of democratic transition in 1999, the intensity of violence and bloodshed in virtually all geo-political zones at one

time or the other in the present democratic dispensation calls for concern (Kalu, & Gberegbe, 2018). It suffices to argue that, failure of democracy constitutes the major cause of violent conflict in Nigeria. This is because when there is popular participation (inclusiveness), the government is responsive to citizen's yearnings and aspirations, the political office holders are accountable to the public for their action and there is transparency in governance the citizens will have less cause for violent opposition (Cederman, Hug & Krebs, 2010). Failure of democracy has therefore provided unsatisfactory conditions upon which the idea of violence was nurtured and propagated in the sense that in Nigerian, a combination of political and institutional factors; weak state institutions, elite power struggles and political exclusion, breakdown in social contract and corruption, identity politics and ethnic rivalry have contributed to violence and conflict.

Also contributed were socioeconomic factors such as ethnicity, marginalization, absence or deterioration of social cohesion, and unequal distribution of the state resources. O'Sullivan and Stewart (1999), accept that the conditions for violent conflict can be generated by state weakness. Any democracy that is unable to peacefully manage different group interests to provide adequate group security, or to satisfy increasing demands for political participation, can fracture societies. To this end, confusion and collective fears for the future in contemporary Nigeria, stemming from state weakness, clientelism and indiscriminate repression, leading to the emergence of armed reactions by marginalized young people (Nwatu, 2018).

It is important to remember that in Nigeria, ethnic origin, religion and regional calculations are the basis for the system of rules regulating state-society relations and the allocation of resources, rights and responsibilities. Expenditure on social security and meeting the population's basic needs remains very low. The enormous oil revenue by the nation rakes in annual corruption and graft gulps. Revolt and violent confrontation are not unlikely in this kind of setting. The state's failure to provide basic services, including justice and security, to everyone has diminished the credibility of the state and the confidence of citizens in democratic institutions. (Emmanuel & Onyige, 2019).

There is obviously an intricate link between democracy, violence and insecurity in Nigeria, in the sense that since independence the country has lost billions of dollars to large-scale corruption and has consistently been ranked as one of the countries exhibiting government collapse and fragile democratic institutions (Nwatu, 2018). Governance failure has denied millions of youth opportunities, resulting in unemployment and mass poverty, where some of the idle youth are easily recruited by anti-state and militia groups. It is important to note that despite relatively strong economic development, poverty has increased in Nigeria; 112.5 million-over 70% of the population is categorized as poor and totally poor where the North East, the main operational area of Boko Haram, has the worst poverty rate of the six geo-political zones (Yusuf, 2018).

The declining human development resources due to failure of governance is therefore the root causes of the violent conflict in northern Nigeria where the country's dysfunctional democratic institutions have tragically failed significant numbers of youth (Ijere, 2015) Key human development sectors education, health and the judiciary, as well as security agencies are poorly funded or underperforming. Underfunding of the judiciary with a

third of the 330,000 police employed by senior politicians and businessmen as private escorts. Nigerians lack security but not their leaders (Wonah, & Chujor, 2019). Therefore, this generates a profound sense of dissatisfaction and alienation, especially by young people who are perhaps the most acute in the northern region, thus creating the emergence of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, cattle rustlers, kidnappers and bandits who only exploited the fault lines in democratic failure.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper is not an argument that insecurity and violence in Nigeria can exhaustively be attributed to the collapse of democracy and democratic institutions. The paper's stance is that democratic failure in both structures and institutions have created the environment to nurture frustration, grievances, rivalry, and alienation which stems the tides of violent conflict. Democracy must be supported by strong institutions to set and implement the rules of the game and ensure sustainable economic governance to eradicate poverty and minimized unemployment, in order to alleviate armed conflicts and ensure lasting national peace.

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