

## Poverty and Violence in Nigeria -Implication on Democracy

Dr. Bello Ibrahim

Sociology Department, Bayero University Kano, PMB 3011, Kano State, Nigeria

### Abstract

This paper discussed the relationship between poverty and violence in Nigeria and their implications on democratic consolidation. Poverty has many effects and one of its obvious manifestations is violence. This submission has been justified using social structure and anomie theory. While democracy seeks to provide equal socio-economic and political opportunities across populations and/or sub-populations of a nation, poverty is an albatross to the attainment of such egalitarian socio-economic and political arrangements. Looking at most developing countries and in Nigeria in particular, poverty is obviously an artificial social problem and it is created by corrupt politicians. These vested interests are recruiting unemployed and illiterate youths into political thuggery, such as Yankalare in Gombe State, 'Yan sara-suka' in Bauchi State, 'Yandaba' in Kano State and 'Bakassi' Boys in Abia State. The paper also found that, religious radicalism by 'Boko Haram' in the northern Nigeria and other violent activities by insurgents in the Niger Delta, such as Niger Delta Avengers are all reflections people's frustration on unemployment and poverty. The paper recommended that, to achieve democratic society, we shall overcome the scourge of violence in Nigeria through fighting poverty.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Poverty, Unemployment, Violence.

### Introduction

Poverty is a social problem that leads to other social, economic and political disturbances. Poverty is a global phenomenon but it is more common among developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Nigeria is the Africa's most populous country. As contended by Mukhtar, Mukhtar & Mukhtar (2015: 3), apart from being oil rich, "the country also has large landmark and a lot of mineral resources which if used wisely, the country will achieve rapid political and socio-economic development". But the reverse is the case in the country because large scale corruption, poor economic policies and bad governance have rendered majority of the country's population poor. Three months after assuming his office, the Nigerian Vice President, Osinbajo (in the Vanguard, August 20th 2015), expressed concern that over 110 million Nigerians lived below poverty line.

The consequences of poverty are many and notable among the effects of poverty is violence. That is why Nigeria has been experiencing many security challenges in forms of criminal activities, violence and conflicts over the years (Omotor, 2009; Adenrele, 2012; Afegbua, 2010; Onuoha, 2014; Mukhtar, Isyaku, & Sani, 2016). The formation of youth violent groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers in the south-south, Bakassi Boys, in the south-east, Yandaba in the north-west, *Yan-kalare* and *Yan-sara-suka* in north-east, as well as the most notorious terrorist group, known as *Boko Haram*, also in the north-east (Mukhtar, *et al.* 2016) are all but manifestations of high rate of unemployment among teeming youths and poverty incidences in the country.

While the major cause for the formation of the above violent groups in various parts of Nigeria is either poverty or unemployment among the youth population, these violent groups have many serious implications on the fate of the democratic governance in the country. Violence has taken a severe toll on Nigerian economy, its peoples' political, social, and even spiritual lives. Crime and violence are so palpable, so pervasive and so devastating to many Nigerians (Nwosu, 2002). It is even more disturbing to find that, the country's political leaders are using joblessness and poor living conditions of the youths to employ them as political thugs. This manner in which members of our political class in Nigeria engage the services of jobless youths as thugs for the purpose of intimidating political opponents and their supporters during elections is growing. These youths, who are mainly uneducated or semi-literate, are often encouraged to unleash violence, cause electoral violence, break the law at will, in which virtually nothing can be done to stop them once they have made up their mind to unleash these havocs on their intended targets (Usman, 2010).

Violence has become so common in the Nigerian society; at domestic, community and national levels and it has the tendency for causing national instability. For example, when there is insecurity in a nation, such as those emanating from the *Boko Haram* and the Niger-Delta Avengers, the prospect of democratization is threatened, as the leaders will shift attention from welfare services and dispensation of democratic dividend to resolving the violence emanating from the activities of these groups, even if it will affect the wellbeing of the citizens. Hence, the ban of *okada* rides, curfews, and too much check points are authority's reaction to the. In addition, election processes have been suspended in places like Gombe State and political administrations in Yobe State, Borno State, and Adamawa State, have suffered setback in the towards the end of the year 2015.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that, poverty can lead to violence and violence can hamper democratic consolidation in any given country. That is why this paper will discuss the relationship between these two

concepts: poverty and violence, and to analyse their implications on democratization process. The paper is structurally divided into six sections. Section one introduced the paper; section two deals with the conceptualization of key terms (poverty, violence and democracy); section three is about theoretical framework; section four discussed how poverty leads to violence and their implication on democracy in Nigeria; section five concluded the paper and section six suggested some recommendations.

### **Conceptualization: Poverty, Violence and Democracy**

*Poverty*, according to Mukhtar *et al.* (2016), is a multidimensional state of deprivation involving lack of basic requirements, social and political exclusion and lack of education. Poverty is a condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services. Extreme poverty can cause terrible suffering and death, and even modest levels of poverty can prevent people from realizing many of their potentials. The frustration for attaining one's potential is often expressed in form of violence. Poverty has always leads to immense social, political and economic constrains.

*Violence* is the physical, psychological or emotional attack on a person or group of persons. Violence takes place at various levels; it can be interpersonal violence, such as that emanating from home (which is also called domestic violence), and inter-group violence, such as inter-ethnic violent conflict. Thus, Violence Prevention Alliance (2016) defined violence as the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or development.

The negative consequence of violence is that, it usually ends in a quarrel, skirmishes, conflict or war. Just like war, violence can be fatal or, at least, result in the victimization of one person or group by the other. Racism, ethnicity, religious jingoism and bigotry, gender discrimination and prejudice are some of the root causes of violence. Violence can also lead to deprivation of some groups' right to live and conduct their daily routine activities freely alongside other members of a society or nation. As a result, violence negates ideal democracy.

*Democracy* is derived from the Greek word "demos," or "people". Democracy is a political system characterized by the consent of the majority. It is the system of government in which people get on to power by virtue of election, with the predetermined contract that the interest of the electorates will be represented at state or national government. No segment of the society is neglected on the basis of region, religion, tribe, ethnicity, gender and even political parties in this political system. Democracy, according to Kwasau (2013), is a subject of global concern as well as engine for socioeconomic and political developments of nations striving for international identity and developmental posture as well as liberality and good governance.

Thus, democracy can be exercised directly by the people; in large societies, through their elected agents (US Department of State, 2007). The main attribute of democracy is that, those holding political office do not have automatic security of tenure but can be challenged and even displaced in accordance with the will of the people through a wide range of institutional mechanism. Yet in Nigeria, the democratically elected leaders are abusing this principle as some unscrupulous politicians resort to dictatorship, corrupt practices and artificially create poverty and high rate of unemployment thereby inciting violence.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The social and political problems caused by poverty and income inequality are within the concerns of sociologists. This is why Sociology is rich in theoretical explanations on the influence of social structural forces on crime and other violent behaviors (Merton, 1938, as cited in Mukhtar *et al.* 2016; Walklate, 2003; Tierney, 2010; Siegel, 2010; Siegel, 2011). This paper therefore adopted *Social Structure and Anomie* theory to analyze the causal link between poverty and violence in Nigeria. This is because violence is for the most part an outcome of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and other social and structural forces that situate some members of the society at advantage and others at disadvantage or lower class category.

Social strata are created by the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and prestige and, according to Siegel (2010), it comes as no surprise that violent gangs develop in poor, deteriorated urban neighborhoods. Many kids in these areas grow up hopeless and alienated, believing that they have little chance of being part of the social structure. Youths growing up poor and living in households that lack economic resources are much more likely to get involved in serious crime and violence than their wealthier peers (Bjerk, 2007).

Lower-class areas are scenes of inadequate housing and health care, disrupted family lives, underemployment, and despair. Members of the lower class also suffer in other ways. They are more prone to depression, less likely to have achievement motivation, and they tend to constitute a threat to safety and security of the entire society, cause violence, thus they threatened the existing core-values and the democratic ideal of right to life, freedom of movement and even cause political instability (Siegel, 2010).

Youth gangs have become an ever-present fixture, even in the developed countries. Gang members are

heavily armed, dangerous, and more violent than nonmembers. They are about ten times more likely to carry handguns than nongang members, and gun-toting gang members commit about ten times more violent crimes than nonmembers; gang homicides seem to be on an upswing. Indeed, poverty is the major reason why youths in Nigeria involved in ethno-religious and political violence, such as formation of youth gangs, political thuggery, religious radicalism, and insurgent activities. In addition, these violent activities are threatening the consolidation of the nascent democracy in the country. For example, Boko Haram sect has caused serious human rights violations from 2009 to date. Also, coupled with the economic recession in the country, the Niger Delta Avengers are also causing serious economic lost to the federal government. This is not to mention the sporadic cases of electoral violence, kidnapping, assaults, and violent conducts of many youth gangs in different parts of the country.

### **Poverty and Violence- Implication on Democracy in Nigeria**

There is strong relationship between poverty and violence. Poverty results in some individuals been engaged in immoral conducts, such as drug abuse and commercial sex (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016) as well as violent activities like drug dealing political and ethnic unrest, bribery, armed robbery and cybercrimes and militancy among others (Mukhtar *et al.* 2015). Nigeria is presently battling with multiple violent confrontations in form of inter-communal or inter-ethnic conflicts, religious radicalism, insurgency and environmental struggles. The long existing conflicts between various religions in some parts of Kaduna, Taraba and Jos; the long-existing militant movements in the Niger Delta region and the Biafran secession movements which have also lasted for over five decades; as well as the current *Boko Haram* insurgency (which bases in the north-eastern Nigeria, but affected the whole of the north) are all instigated by conflicts over scarce resources, such as land, environment, power, economy, etc.

In fact, economic deprivation is a factor that has stimulated the drive towards violent extremism, recruitment and support for *Boko Haram*. Several scholars believed that poverty and longstanding economic disparities in the northeast part of the country made the youth join the sect. Similarly, Adesoji (2010, as cited in Shuaibu, Salleh, & Shehu, 2015) stressed that, in Nigeria the marginalization and imbalance distribution or implementation of the resources made some radicalized scholars to preach against the government and democratic setting, which later gave birth to the present *Boko Haram* insurgency.

To understand how *Boko Haram* is at the center of this argument, poverty theory explains that domestically the politicization of religious traditions and the radicalization of religious communities are especially likely in times economic decay, social integration or state collapse. Hopeless people below the poverty line; people who are marginalized or physical threat turn to their religious in search for an alternative political order that satisfies their need for welfares, recognition, and security.

It is important to note that, these violent movements have serious implications on the democratic consolidation of any nation. Acts of violence between or within political parties in Nigeria are usually associated with general elections and their spectacular death toll. A large share of party violence is ignored, as it is mostly internal or with a low lethality rate. Arguably, violence is a means used by the political elite, rather than the people's choice to protest against fraud. Levels of violence vary between places and parties in Nigeria (Cohen, 2015), and some studies have found that, there is strong link between poverty and the political violence. Depending on the states where they operate, some party members seem to be more likely to commit violent crimes than others. Furthermore, they often seem to do so in order to trigger ethno-religious clashes which are more deadly (Cohen, 2015). To do this, the politicians recruit and mobilize poor angry youths. As studied by Saleh (2016), the violent activities of *Yankalare* in Gombe State and *Yansara suka* in Bauchi State, for instance, are a reflection of youth's unemployment among other socio-economic factors.

### **Conclusion**

The paper discussed how poverty, violence, and democratic paralysis are related. Violence is inevitable in a society characterized by high rate of poverty, illiteracy, ineptitude, corruption, just as evident in Nigeria. This is why high rate poverty and unemployment among the youths population has attracted many violent activities through formations of youth gangs in various Nigerian cities. Issue of *Boko Haram* insurgency in the north-east has not been totally addressed and other insurgent group in the south-south, Niger Delta Avengers, is unleashing more havoc to the already collapsing economy of the nation. Any country that allows poverty to thrive it will become recruitment target of violent group, like insurgents and terrorists. Thus, it could be argued that, the root causes of the violent conflicts are often related to a long cloudy set of problems culminating into uncontrolled grievances and exploding violence.

The paper found that, culture of corruption among the political class is the main factor which creates artificial poverty in Nigeria and in many underdeveloped countries. Such problems are socio-economic and political, that is why insurgencies are more rampant in the underdeveloped countries or countries engulfed by corrupt regime, ethnicity, social prejudices and disparities in the distribution of resources or even lack of it.

Nigerian is an epitome of these gloomy pictures. Ultimately, the democratization process in the country has been stuttering. Thus, the paper concludes that, violence is common in Nigeria and it is negatively affecting the prospect of democratization in the country.

### Recommendations

To address the evil of poverty and its tendency for instigating violence, as well as establishing an ideal democratic system, the paper made the following recommendations:

- 1) To fight poverty in Nigeria, the governments shall revive previous come up with poverty eradication schemes, such as Better Life Program for Rural Women (BLPRW), National Accelerated Food Production (NAFP) Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, and Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).
- 2) There is also the need for introducing new poverty reduction programs in the country. There are many poverty reduction programmes that focused on empowering women. Others the entire families, such as that which has proven effective when introduced in Brazil. This type of poverty alleviation programme is very important because all problems emanate from home. In addition, family is the microcosm of the society, so by improving the living standard of families, the government is improving the entire society.
- 3) Also in the fight against poverty in Nigeria, revitalization of agriculture will certainly make a difference on the high rate of poverty and unemployment. Attaching importance to modern methods of farming and cultivation will provide employment opportunity on one hand and achieve food security on the other. The government and nongovernmental organizations shall give farm credit or loan to well-trained and prepared prospective farmers to promote their agribusiness.
- 4) The paper also acknowledged the present Government's fight against the evil of corruption, because its evil should be handled with iron hand. In addition, the Government shall also be severely penalizing the culprits. In other words, the corrupt practices perpetrated by the government's officials have caused severe malaise the country's; it has caused indirect losses of lives, led many youths to brigandage and mayhem. Thus, in order to serve as deterrence to future prospective embezzlers and fraudsters, severe sentences like life imprisonment should be meted out to them.
- 5) Role of the media in reporting violence is very crucial in curtailing the act of violence in Nigeria. The media shall transform crime and violence coverage to the plain of the authority. The media reporters shall engage in both mental and psychological re-conditioning. The reporter must critically re-examine the routine, conventional approach to coverage of crime and violence in favour of treating crime and violence stories as he will normally treat stories about an epidemic. In practical terms, demands that the reporter to include three classes of information in crime and violence stories (the perspectives or prevalence of the violence in Nigeria; the risk factors that expose people to victimization; and the cost of the violence in our midst). This is important since the media play roles in the structuring of perception of violence and conflict to community and authority by regular reflection on related incidences and suggesting way forward.
- 6) Nigerians at all levels and in all structures from family level to community settings, marketplace to workplace, in the places of worship, law enforce, judiciary officials are as a matter of national security participate in national security crusade by becoming productive and desist from laziness in order to live a sustainable life, fight violence of all kinds, become patriot citizens, avoid lawlessness and each citizen to become his/her brother's keeper. In order for Nigeria to develop and be salvaged from the shackle of poverty, violence and conflict, the principle of the rule of law must be obeyed by leaders and followers.

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