Democracy, Youth and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Violent conflicts have been a characteristic feature of Nigeria's polity since the recommencement of democratic rule in May 1999. The various dimension of conflict witnessed ranges from ethno-religious, inter-communal, post-election violence, and so on. Over 187 ethno-religious conflicts were reported between May 1999 and April 2009; and since 2009 boko haram activities have been on the increase and over 115 attacks reported in the north. Nigeria is thus seen as a conflict prone society as no geopolitical zone is immune. Scholarly account points to youth as the prosecutors of over 90% of these violent conflicts and the youth constitute about 70% of Nigeria's population. But are the youth victims of these violent conflicts or the perpetrators? A critical analysis of the situation using secondary data revealed that over 60% of youth lack access to employment and development opportunities. 90% of the 1,430,000 youths that graduated from tertiary institutions between 2004 and 2014 roam the streets and become victims for manipulation by corrupt political elites and their associates to perpetrate and persecute violent conflicts on their behalf in order to strengthen or legitimize their political and economic positions. Critically, youth are more of the victims of Nigeria's democratic process that deny them opportunities and being the perpetrators of violent conflicts is but a manifestation of this denial. Therefore, value reorientation for political elites and more job creation programs for youths in both private and public sector of Nigeria's polity is strongly recommended.

Key words: Conflict, Democracy, Electoral Process, Victims, Violence, Youth,

Introduction

Nigeria as a political entity is no stranger to violent conflict for it spent three years of the first decade of political independence on a horrible civil war. The years under military dictatorships were not without incidences of violent conflicts and several occurred between 1984 and 1998: the 1984-1985 Maitatsine religious crises in parts of Kano, Maiduguri, Jimeta –Yola and Gombe; the 1986 Ilorin, Kwara Muslims and Christian clash; the March 1987 Kafanchan, clash between Muslims and Christians at the College of Education and the 1988 February Kaduna religious riots, among students of Kaduna Polytechnic; the April, 1991 Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi quarrel between a Fulani and Sayawa meat seller but escalated into full blown violence and later took the color of religious war; the October, 1991 Kano peaceful procession by the Izala sect to halt Rev. Reinhard Bonnke's crusade in Kano degenerated into a violent and bloody religious confrontation; the 1992 Zangon Kataf crisis; the 1993 political violence in Lagos the aftermath of the annulment of the June 12 election; the December 1994 and May 1995 Kano communal violence trigged of by the beheading of a Christian who allegedly desecrated the Qur'an; the May, 1995 Abule –Taylor Lagos bloody clash between the police and members of the dreaded Maitatsine sect; the Ife-Modakeke crisis of 1998 and so on (Hussaini, 2010; Aliyu, 2005; Elaigwu, 2005 and Adisa, 1995).

With the transition from military rule to democratic government in May, 1999, a constitutional government based on democratic principles such as: the rule of law, fundamental human rights that were absent under military regimes, there were expectations that unity, social cohesion and development could be facilitated among the various social groupings. This expectation is predicated on the view that in a democratic government individuals and social groups feel more secured than in non-democratic government (Mijah, 2009). Ironically,

the situation in Nigerian polity has not reflected this view of democracy. Shortly after the inauguration of the civilian administration, various ethnic groupings in the country started to ventilate their pent-up anger against the state for perceived injustice and marginalization. This resulted in the proliferation of ethnic militias championing ethnic agitation for a better deal in the political system. For instance the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) represented Yoruba land, and in Igbo land the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); in the North, Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC) as well as The Plateau Youth, The Jukun Youth Movement, The Benue/Tiv Youth Movement, The Kano-based Atjdid Movement and the Boko Haram sect; and in the South-South region, holding sway are Ijaw Youth Movement (IYM) Bakassi Boys, Supreme Egbesu Assembly(SEA), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND); The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), among others (Femi, 2013 and Joseph, 2006). .

Essentially, democratic rule brought in it heals an increase in the spate of violent conflicts that threatens human survival, development and unity. Such as ethno-religious, militancy, inter-communal, electoral and political violence, indigene and settler clashes, pastoral and farmers violent clash, boko haram activities, and so on. Literature on some of these shows that between May, 1999 and April, 2009 at least 187 ethno-religious conflicts occurred with devastating effect on lives and properties (Freedom, 2011; Mijah, 2008 and Elaigwu, 2005). The Unfortunate aspect of this development is that youths are seen as central to the perpetration of violent conflicts, and prosecutors of over 90% of conflicts (Kenneth, 2011). But is Nigeria the only polity battling with the challenges of violent conflicts? No, rather it is a manifestation of what obtains in many conflict-ridden and multi-ethnic societies and particularly in Africa since the 1990s (Christopher, 2011). However, what makes Nigeria's case a source of concern is that every geo-political zone is characterized by entrenched structure of violent conflicts and youths are seen as the principal driving infrastructure and ironically, youth constitute about 70% of Nigeria's population. Literatures on youth involvement in violent conflict suggest that they are perpetrators due to economic and other social factors. But the critical argument based on economic, political and other social factors used in this analysis, is that youth are more of the victims of political and economic structures and of violent conflicts than perpetrators.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

The most popularly used concept in social science as well as contemporary discourse on governmental system is democracy, and like other social science concepts defies a universally accepted definition. However, the word "democracy" from scholarly expressions comes from the Greek word demokratia and literally means "rule of the people" (Noah, 2006) or from the Greek demos, 'people' and kratos 'rule' (Oche, 2004). While Birch (1993) argued democratic government originated from the Greek city-states, where democratic ideals started and were transferred to other societies. Democracy in its modern form came into use during the course of the 19th century to describe a system of government in which representatives are chosen through free competitive elections and with most citizens of the society having the right to vote. This form were instituted in Britain and United States between 1860 and 1890 and later spread to other European countries as well as the developing regions of the world including Africa and Nigeria in the second half of the 20th century. The ideal form of American modern system of democracy is captured as: 'the supreme, absolute and uncontrolled power remains in the people. Our constitutions are superior to our legislature so that people are superior to our constitution...democracy is then that government in which the people retain the supreme power' (Padova, 1963:16 in Noah, 2006:192). As such, most scholars often elaborate on this ideal form. Oche (2004:10), points out three basic senses in contemporary usage: a form of government in which the right to make political decision is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule, usually known as direct democracy; a form of government in which the citizens exercise the same right not in person but through representatives; and a form of government, usually a representative democracy, in which power of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee all citizens the enjoyment of certain individual or collective rights such as freedom of speech and religion, known as liberal or constitutional democracy.

The second and third of the identified forms is what could be applied to Nigeria. For instance, Chapter 11 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with amendments in 2011 titled Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy stipulates how government organs are to operate from Section 13 to 24. And Section 13 states "It shall be the duty and responsibility of all organs of government, and of all authorities and persons, exercising legislative, executive or judicial power, to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of this chapter of the constitution". Thus constitutional provision such as Nigeria's, are base on the view as expressed by Oche (2004) is what has made democracy to become more widely praised as the best option for good governance, and all states today profess to be democracies (Dunn, 1979 in John and Paul, 2009).

But does contemporary representative democracy as practice in most social systems especially that of Africa and more specific in Nigeria's polity really rule of the people based on constitutional provisions or rule by a few political elites who disregard the constitution and manipulate the polity for the interests of a few individuals? In other words, is the conduct of democracy in Nigeria based on the constitutional provisions of democracy and social justice? A critical response to the issues raised is that democracy in Nigeria has not been conducted according to democratic principles. Elections and electoral process are indispensable ingredients of democracy as it provides citizens with opportunity to elect representatives have neither been fair nor free since independence (Dunmoye, 2011). Rather it has been marred with fraud and irregularities. For example, the rule of law is merely pronounced, elections and electoral processes are subverted and political parties and other important public institutions are manipulated in favor of the privileged few (Yagboyaju, 2011:93). Furthermore, Awowole-Brown (2011:5) notes the 2011 elections were heavily rigged in rural areas of Nigeria where the electoral observers have no access.

Going by the above observations this paper critically summit that, representative democracy in Nigeria cannot be defined as rule of the people since the process has been marred with fraud and irregularities. In other words, the process does not provide the electorates with adequate opportunity to elect representatives in a competitive free and fair election. It is on this basis that the elite theory which emphasis that democracy is rule by a few individuals becomes the relevant analytical framework.

The elite theory of democracy is credited to prominent classical theorists Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941); Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Robert Michels (1876-1936) (http:/eduresource centre.blogspot.com/p/vilfredo-classical-elites-theory.html?). As a theory devoted to the study of state, elite theory seeks to describe and explain power relationship in society. The various arguments of these theorists emphasized an inescapable division between dominant minorities variously called elites, ruling classes, political classes, oligarchies, aristocracies and so on; and the dominated majority or masses. It means that, in every organized social system there exist two groups those who rule (minority) and the ruled (majority). Mosca (1923/1939, 51, in John, 2014) made emphasis on the ways in which small or a few minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities and that political classes are political elites who command certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority over those they govern. Pareto (in John 2014) posited, in a society, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and these elites usually enjoy important advantages in form of inherited wealth and family connection in society. Elites ('oligarchies') in society operate efficiently Michels argued as they gain control of funds, information flows, promotion, and other aspects of organizational functioning, and then power becomes concentrated in their hands and retaining this power increasingly governs their actions (Michels 1915/1962 in Linz, 2006).

These arguments are indicative that representative democracy is just rule of the elites and as stressed by Femia (2001) the inevitability of elite rule makes democracy an imaginary dream and those elite can never be accountable to the people. In other words the most that is possible is an elite-manipulated democracy. In it there are elected parliaments and other elected offices, but voters do not really choose their representatives. Rather, professional politicians and other power seekers impose themselves on voters or have their friends impose them. In Nigeria the various literatures on election and electoral process shows that the electoral process were marred by fraud and irregularities (Awowole-Brown, 2011; Dunmoye, 2011; Yagboyaju, 2011; Garuba, 2007 and IDEA, 2001) are practical examples of this argument that elites manipulate the democratic process. Hence one cannot help but agree with Mosca and Michels that, democracies can never be more than competitions between elites who greatly narrow voters' choices and grossly distort voters' interests. As such, democracy in Nigeria could be defined in line with John and Paul (2009) conceptualization as a system of elected and competitive elites, a model of elitist democracy with low participation, and often met with contestation from opposing political elites and their associate in form of violent conflict.

Youth Conceptualized

The meaning of youth and the way societies regard youth(s) vary tremendously across time and space. In an attempt to conceptualize youth, several variables are often used by scholars, national governments, international organizations and other bodies interested in the study of youth as a group in society, their role and position in national development and so on. This paper draws from scholarly definitions and thus focuses on youth as age group.

In conceptualizing youth as an age group we consider as relevant view provided by international organization, and also link with national definition or categorization. The United Nations defined youth as an age group that is between 15 and 24 (Lyndsay and Erika 2009). But this definition differ with the meaning of youth in Jordan,

because the lowest age range for youth is 12, and the upper range for youth in a number of African countries – Sierra Leone, Rwanda and even Nigeria is above 24. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) used the term adolescent for those aged 10-19, and youth for those from 15-24 and young people 10-24. An essential fact from the forgoing is that, there appears to be an overlap between the definitions of youth and children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, defined child as everyone under the age of 18, which means that youth and child falls within the same age group, and the dictionary on education referred to this age group 15-24 as young adults (Lyndsay and Erika, 2009). In Nigeria, adulthood is attained as stipulated in the Constitution when an individual clocks 18 and obtains the right to vote and thus cease to be a child [Chapter 111 Section 29 subsection (4)-(a)]. Similarly, the provision of the National Policy on Education for basic and post-basic education indicate that persons between the ages of 15-30 are expected to be enrolled for educational development at the senior secondary and tertiary levels of the education sector, to prepare them for useful living. National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) Scheme, is meant for person's not older than 30 years of age. This age categorization is not ideal as even those yet to attain the age of 13 are often entangled in violent conflicts as such the conception of youth as an age group for the paper is age 12-30 since the analysis is on Nigerian youth and violent conflicts. Bearing in mind the activities of community youth groups and their categorization as street children (specifically almagiri's in northern Nigeria); security vigilante and youth gangs (Hussaini, 2010).

Conflict

Interestingly, conflict is an inevitable part of social existence for human interactions or relationships are often shaped or influenced by conflict. Conflict connotes struggle between at least two parties, occasioned by incompatible desires. The incompatible desires may be social, economic, political, intellectual and even psychological in nature (Sills, 1968:237 in Tangban, 2005:305). For Akpenpuun (2010), it is a social problem in which two or more persons, families, districts, communities, states or nations are at war with each other, or it reflects a class of interest or goal between parties, which may be: individual, or groups of individuals, or ethnic groups or even states. Aja (2007) conceptualized conflict as an attitude, behavior or an action or a process that introduces strains and stresses in the relationship between two or more parties on, say the attainment of a set of interests or goals. In other words in conflict, parties see or treat each other as a stumbling block and may result in frustrating the other from achieving or attaining a set of goals. These goals could be political power, economic position, social and so on. As such when physical force is used in order to achieve the set goals the conflict is classified as violent and from the relative deprivation argument, people are prone to violent conflict if they feel that they are not receiving what they deserve relative to other individuals or groups (Jacob, 2014). The return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999 ushered in the politicization of ethnic, regional and religious identities by political elites in their competition for political power. Those seeing no prospects of politic power become aggrieved and often take the violent route and given the current economic hardship and high level of unemployment, "armed youths for hire" are available at cheap cost. Thus the armies of unemployed youth are always willing to find new jobs as body guards, assassins, and cannon-fodders in communal violence. While the federal government 'deregulates' the economy, politicians 'deregulate' violence and control of instruments of violence, which are supposed to be the monopoly of government (Elaigwu, 2005:42-43).

Democracy, Youth and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: An Overview

Even though democracy is widely praised as the best option for good governance because of its principles- rule of law and citizens participation in decision making through elected representatives, and fosters unity in a polity, it is argued in line with the views of elite theorist that, in Nigeria this has not been the case. Rather it is rule by a few political elites who parade themselves as representative of the people and disregard democratic principles and constitutional provisions by manipulating elections and electoral process. Scholarly views show that elections and the electoral process have been marred by fraud and violence in diverse ways; and most Federal, Regional/State and local council elections have neither been free nor fair. And common electoral irregularities are: multiple and under -age registration, hoarding of voters cards, bribery to influence staff of electoral body, inflation of registration figures, falsification of results, intimidation, incitement, blatant hijacking of ballot boxes, as well as voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process and lack of equal conditions for contestants (Dunmoye, 2011; Adebayo and Omotola, 2007). Höglund and Jarstad (2010) stressed that to those who are losing election, violence can be an attractive option to influence the electoral process and outcome. Furthermore, Alihodzic and Kaiser (2010) argued that elections, while representing an essential feature of representative democracy, are also intrinsically conflict inducing processes; they can render structural issues more visible and consequently hold great potential for triggering violence. As political elites contest for political power, ethnic and religious sentiments and loyalty get easily regimented for the achievement of goals.

 It is a known fact that conflicts had occurred periodically in Nigeria's polity and the most notable being the civil war of 1967 to 1970. However, Nigeria's conflict problems became exacerbated with the recommencement of democratic rule in May 1999. Nigerian polity since this development have been experiencing various dimension of violent conflicts and crimes ranging from intra-communal, inter-community, indigene/settler conflicts, farmers/herdsmen conflicts, ethno-religious, militancy, kidnapping, area boys/ gang groups, insurgences and so on.   Over 187 ethno-religious conflict occurred between May 1999 and April 2009 (Freedom, 2011; Mijah, 2008 and Elaigwu, 2005). While militancy and terrorist related acts have also intensified. In South-East and South- South geopolitical zones having eleven states of the federation (namely: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo; Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers) kidnapping is a crime bedeviling the area. According to Hyacinth and Chinedu (2013:292) kidnapping is crime that can largely be extended to the domain of terrorism because kidnapping is about the first strategy adopted by terrorist groups before the use of bombs became prominent and is directly linked to terrorism. Stressing that kidnapping activities in Nigeria can be traced to 12th January 2006, when members of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) captured Patrick Landry (USA), Nigel Waston-Clark (Britain), Harry Ebanks (Honduras), and Pat Crawley (Bulgaria) at a Shell Platform in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Christian and Ambily (2013) argued, these expatriate were held for 19 days and within 11 days of this incident, Meinbutu militant group in Delta State (South –South geopolitical zone) kidnapped 24 Filipinos for 24 days. Ironically, Chukwuma and Ubong (2013), and Ambily (2013: 597-8) notes that between 2006 and 2009, 21 militant organizations sprang up in the Niger Delta region and were coordinated by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). These militant youth groups have since formation in various parts of the region carried out strategic militancy that are premised on implementation of resource ownership, control and management that was already enshrined in the Constitution. Etekpe (2011) notes that from these and similar forms of violence in the Niger Delta, what comes close to terrorism were strategic militancy.

 Reports on kidnapping cases in Nigeria indicate that between January 2006 and March 2010 about 48 took place, and with the South - East and South-South recording 19 and 25 incidences respectively (Hyacinth and Chinedu, 2013:294-298). And by the end of 2006 more than 79 foreigners were taken as hostages (Freedom, 2013). According to Ambily (2013: 589) the federal government amnesty program in October 2009 was borne out of the "doctrine of necessity" as the militants continued to disrupt the flow of crude oil and gas, and kidnapped 100 foreign oil companies' workers, and killed 20 of them between 2006 and 2009. In addition to these are pockets of violent clashes, and between May 1999 and March 2011 about 59 different forms occurred. 53 of these occurred in the South-South geopolitical zone and the remaining 6 incidences in South-East geopolitical zone (see Elaigwu, 2005; Joseph, 2006; Yomi and Opuene, 2006; and Dunmoye, 2011). The violence clashes are in form of inter- communal, intra-communal, area boys/gangs and so on, and the persecutors or actors are mostly youths (in form of ethnic youth militia-Egbesu (Ijaw) Youth and Itsekiri militia, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Bakassi Boys, Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and so on (Christian and Ambily, 2013:364; and Dunmoye 2011:277).

These acts of violence in the geopolitical zones left its mark such as: massive destruction of property, loss of lives and the razing down of several communities. Available literature on casualties, shows that about 3,361 lives were lost; over 20 towns sacked; over 6 buildings razed down; 200 brand new Peugeot 307 cars, and 500 brand new tricycles were burnt down; 20 Toyota Hiace Buses and 9 Hilux Jeeps were either completely destroyed or vandalized (see Christian and Ambily, 2013; Dunmoye, 2011; Ekong, 2011 and Elaigwu, 2005). In addition we submit here that so many people were displaced as a result of violent acts and specifically the surviving inhabitants of the over 20 communities noted to have been sacked are such displaced persons. In understanding the magnitude of displaced persons in these geopolitical zones, Kwanashie (2012:12) account of an operation to dislodge MEND militants based in the fishing villages of Oporoza and Okerenkoko on 13th May 2006 in which 30,000 inhabitants of these villages were displaced provides us with more insight to the situation.

A focus on South-West geopolitical zone - Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo, shows that this zone has had its share of violent conflict. Available scholarly track indicate that between May 1999 and December 2014, this zone recorded over 26 violent clashes that centres around inter or intra-communal rivalry; area boys activities and political thugs/ party supporters; OPC and religious groups and so on. Estimated number of death toll based on scholarly compilations and reports shows that over 600 lives were lost, many people were injured and property worth millions of naira were destroyed (see BBC News Africa December 2014; Dunmoye, 2011; Isaac, 2011; Joseph, 2006; Noah, 2006; Elaigwu, 2005).

 In northern Nigeria's three geopolitical zones: North-Central (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau and FCT); North- East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states); and North- West (Jigawa,

Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states) several dimensions of violence occurred. Centering on the activities of ethnic and religious militants, indigene/settler, farmers/herdsmen, Boko Haram terrorist acts and so on. Over 288 cases of violent conflict and attacks reported in these zones. North- Central recorded over 67, North- East about 146 and North–West over 70 cases of violent conflicts between May 1999 and December 2014. The estimated numbers of lives lost from the three geopolitical zones indicate that about 5,640 lives were lost to violence and over 250 women abducted in North- Central zone; more than 5,793 killed and over 600 women and young girls abducted in North-East; and over 9,457 killed in North-West. Thus bringing the total estimate of lives lost to 20,890. While properties destroyed shows that, 34 houses, 5 offices and 14 churches, 139 vehicles, 100 motorcycles and 200 cows for North-Central; and in North-East over 4000 houses, 211 schools, 41 churches, a mosque, 200 shops, 4 gasoline stations, 111 vehicles and 500 Laptops. For the North-West 128 churches, 53 mosques and 211 houses were equally affected (see BBC News Africa December 2014; Okoli and Iortyer, 2014; 2014, Humanitarian Needs Overview Nigeria; Jonathan, 2013; Isaac, 2011; Dunmoye, 2011; Ekong, 2011; Joseph, 2006 and Elaigwu, 2005).

Looking at the general situations on violent conflicts recorded in Nigeria with the return of the country to democratic rule in May 1999 from the six geopolitical zones, this paper argues based on the compilations and observations provided in the above overview that more than 24,851 lives were lost; more than 20 towns sacked; 4,245 houses affected; over 479 vehicles, 600 motorcycles/ tricycles, 200 shops, and 500 Laptops were destroyed; about 1 1 office buildings and 212 schools affected; while 183 churches and 55 mosques were either torched or destroyed.

Democracy, Youth and Violent Conflict Victims or Perpetrators: A Critical Discourse

Nigeria's democratic environment between May 1999 and December 2014 have been confronted with different dimensions of violent conflicts ranging from intraparty clashes, political assassinations, post-election violence and communal unrest, militancy terrorist acts and so on. Thus creating a polity marked with unchecked proliferation, hiring, and arming of militias in different forms to serve narrow political ends. The militias in Nigerian polity are made up of youths and according to Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart (2010) politicians and party bosses found a ready supply of unemployed men, frequently youths, willing to perpetrate violence in exchange for pay and fire power. They further argued that these young men comprised a significant percentage of lost. Scholarly focus on the Niger-Delta area points to the fact that the corruption of the Nigerian political process had not only left the oil mineral- producing communities of the region poor and underdeveloped but had un-intentionally created a large class of young men who have no hope of legitimate work that would fulfil their ambitions that are easily recruited into violence (Human Right Watch, 2003 cited in Emeka, 2013:228).

Similarly, in the north covering three geopolitical zones, scholars have stressed that ethnic, communal, political/ post-election related violence, religious and even the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist sect were perpetrated by youths who form the army of unemployed and are often manipulated by political and other class of elites to persecuted violent conflict for their political and economic ambitions. For instance, Leena (2014) aver, the aftermath of Buhari's third loss at the polls (2011) demonstrated by his supporters –mostly young northerners-degenerated into deadly clashes with security forces in Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau and Bauchi states. The homes and businesses of several members of the northern elite who had openly supported Jonathan and PDP were attacked, for what the protesters perceived as the betrayal of the North's interests and the failure of democracy to improve their lives. The violent reaction to the results of the 2011 elections from these states of the north could be linked to the view expressed by Alihodzic and Kaiser (2010) that as political elites contest for political power, ethnic and religious sentiments and loyalty get easily regimented for the achievement of goals. In other words, the contests for control of state policy produce religious and ethnic interests and since the return to democracy these have been used in different forms to lay claims to and demand particular interests, and unemployed youths are often used as tools to express dissatisfactions. Leena (2014) further stressed, in 2010, nine of the 19 northern states had the highest levels of unemployment in Nigeria-some as high as 40 percent-with young northerners being overwhelmingly more likely to be jobless. It means that the democratic environment, characterized by electoral fraud that is corruption and high levels of youth unemployment is but a breeding ground and drivers of violent conflicts and increasing insecurity.

In a critical expression, Ezeani and Ezeibe (2011:247-8) argued that defense spending in Nigeria grew about 9 percent annually on average from fiscal year 1999-2009 against education and health spending that grew about 0.3 and 0.6 percent annually within the same period, and that despite this abrupt increase in defense spending annually, the level of insecurity in Nigeria worsened because the military personnel are reluctant in spending these funds and they rather see these funds as compensation for their staying out of politics and protecting the democratic government that lacks legitimacy. The fraud and irregularities in the elections and electoral process

that has been a characteristic feature of the democratization process as has been demonstrated through several scholarly arguments in Nigeria's polity, brings into power illegitimate government and leadership (see David, et al 2014:92; and Inokoba and Kumokor, 2011). Ezeani and Ezeibe (2011) puts it thus " political leadership has failed to prioritize national needs and respect the virtues that bond society, promote stability and harmony such as social justice, equity, rule of law and respect for individual/group rights and other democratic principles". Consequently, political leadership as stressed trigger conflict drivers in the society like social division, militarization, elites' fragmentation and competition and the emergence of ethnic and sectarian militias in order to increase and rationalize military spending and repressive apparatus to forcefully hold the people within bounds of order.

 In relation to the above, Ahmed and Idowu (2013) noted, since 1999; Nigeria has continuously witnessed events that serve as sources of generating not only threat to security but particularly insurgencies. These they further stated includes electoral malpractices, dysfunctional democracy in political parties; manipulation of ethnic; sectional and other identity based primordial ties in power contestation; primitive greed and acute sleazebag at all tiers of governance; monetization of campaign and elections; corrupt judicial process and system; lack of synergy among various security outfits; open injustice in the political and security administration of the country and lack of pro-activeness in tackling ethno-religious cleavages.

From the forgoing observed situations and conduct of democracy in the country, our critical view is that, the emergence of the 21 militant camps in the Niger-Delta area between 2006 and 2009; the Boko Haram sect terrorist activities in northern part of the country since 2009 to date; the activities OPC Militants; the spate of ethno-religious, inter and intra- communal clashes; pre-elections and post-elections violence and so on are the results of unconstitutional conduct in the democratic process in Nigeria's polity. Furthermore, the unemployment situation in the country has rendered the most vulnerable population that is the youth as viable tools manipulated by political elites and their associates to perpetrate violent conflict for their benefit. For instance views on the conduct of the ruling elites and political office holders in our democratic government indicate that Rivers state government in 2003 had recruited armed militias to carryout widespread electoral fraud, and the leader of Niger-Delta Volunteer Force (One of the 21 militant camps) Asari Dokubo linked former governor of Rivers state, Peter Odili, Abiye Sekibo, former Federal Transport Minister and some of Odili's aides as sponsors and financiers of armed groups and reaffirmed the militarized nature of Nigerian politics, where the political process is subjected to force of corruption (Emeka, 2013:228). The political fallout between governor Peter Odili and Mujahid Dokubo- Asari (leader of NDPVF) has been attributed to the latter's public criticism that the April 2003, local and state election process as fraudulent, and with the former (governor Odili) withdrawing financial support from the NDPVF, and subsequently began to support financially the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led by Ateke Tom, both groups are primarily made up of Ijaws (http:/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conflict-in-the-Niger-Delta; Accessed, 04/01/2015 9:31).

Focusing on the north and the activities of the Boko Haram sect, scholarly view throw lights on how the Boko Haram Sect draw their membership, and office holders linked to the sect. Accordingly, literature reveals that, the sect draws membership mainly from dissatisfied youths, unemployed graduates and former almagiri's mostly but not limited to northern Nigeria; and sustains its operations through diverse sources of fund such as: donation from politicians, government officials and individuals, or organizations within Nigeria. And specifically on 5 January 2011, the Nigerian police made some arrest and Alhaji Bunu Wakil, a contractor and, one of those arrested was alleged to be a major financer of the sect. Furthermore, on 21 November 2011, state security operatives also arrested and subsequently arraigned a serving Senator representing Borno South Senatorial District Mohammed Ali Ndume before an Abuja High Court, for ties with, and sponsorship of Boko Haram (Freedom, 2013:411-412:). Other sources has it that a Boko Haram spokesman claimed the former Kano state governor Ibrahim Shekarau, and Bauchi state governor Isa Yuguda had paid them monthly (see the Nigerian Tribune, 21 May 2012). Former Borno state governor (Ali Modu Sherif) is another politician linked to Boko Haram and according to Ali (2014: 3) a known senior member of Boko Haram, late Boju Foi was actually appointed as commissioner by the former governor, and as such marked the official and unofficial connection between the group and influential politicians and government functionaries that facilitate the flow of patronage. In addition, Desert Herald report (for 25 November to December 1 2014: 6-7) also named the former governor as the political founder of Boko Haram, stressing further an airport closed for months over security concerns, was opened just for use of the former governor. The same report points out that it was the US that first alerted the world that 10 generals of the Nigerian Army were among 15 officers being secretly investigated for passing sensitive information to Boko Haram as well as availed the government with suspected list of Boko Haram sponsors, and intelligent report pointing to high level friends of government in the executive, legislative, senior party officials, elder statesmen and security officers including retired ones. President Goodluck Jonathan

admission on the 8th of January 2012 that Boko Haram sponsors have infiltrated his government further confirms these views.

 In South-West zone, the militant youth wing of the O'Odua People's Congress (OPC) (led by Ganiyu Adams), method of attacks centered on intimidations and killing between 2000 and 2003. The former governor of Lagos state Bola Tinubu announced on 25 June 2001 plans to turn this militant OPC youth wing into state security service in a ceremony at the commissioning of the statue of late Mrs Kudirat Abiola. And to give credit to this announcement the governor released and discharged unconditionally, about 100 OPC members arrested by the Nigerian police in connection with criminal activities ranging from arson, assassination to armed robbery (see Christian and Ambily, 2013: 365).

The forgoing literatures linking politicians/ office holders as sponsors, or supporters of various militant groups known for terrorizing Nigerian polity since the inception of the fourth republic is a clear indication that these groups are manipulated for political ambitions and economic positions. Hence having a large pool and army of unemployed youths becomes an imperative strategy, and is more beneficial to political elites and their associates than adhering to the constitutional provisions and obligations to the electorate. So also, the political elites often manipulate unemployed youths using religious, ethnic and other cleavages that best serve their political ambitions. Thus creating a democratic environment in which leaders in the words of Achebe (1983) cited in Oladayo (2014: 152) use the instrument of power to commit and maintain corruption. Oladayo further draws our attention to the argument of Atelhe and Agada (2014) that political corruption happens in a democratic setting, and rears its head when politicians and political decision makers who are the custodian of the law for the benefit of all are corrupt.

As a critical discourse on democracy, youth and violent conflicts in Nigeria: victims or perpetrators? This paper draws reader's attention to the provision of Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with amendments 2011. It is stipulated in Section 140 (1) A person elected to the office of the president shall not begin to perform the functions of the office until he has declared his assets and liabilities as prescribed in the constitution and he has taken and subscribed the oath of allegiance and the oath of office prescribed in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. This stipulation is also applicable to other elected offices. The irony is that   public officials have over the years refused to declare their assets as stipulated, and this marks the beginning of corruption/illegality in the conduct of democracy, governance and accountability to the electorate by political elites.   In addition, Chapter 11 of the 1999 Constitution, Section 13-18 dwells on democratic principles and how the state should operate for the people and on issues pertaining to fundamental obligations of government. For example, it state in Section 14.-(1) The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State base on the principles of democracy and social justice; and in (2) - (a) sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution drives all its powers and authority; (b) the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government; and furthermore in 14 (5) The state shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.

A critical look at these provisions base on the conduct of political elites and public office holders under the fourth republic governments shows that: (a) the principles of democracy has not been adhered to as the electoral process have been marred by electoral fraud and irregularities. The consequence of this development is that those losing elections often resort to violent protests to declared elections results (see David, et al 2014:95). In this regard, we argue that sovereignty does not belong to the people, rather to political elites who manipulate elections results and even use violence in the electoral process; (b) the democratic environment since the inception of the Fourth Republic (May 1999 to December 2014) has been characterized by spate of violent conflicts ranging from ethnic, religious, communal, militancy and terrorist related violence and so on. Within this period, and as demonstrated in literatures above, over 373 cases of violence acts were reported and about 24,870 lives lost. It means that the primary purpose of government which is the provision of security and welfare of the people was handled poorly. Furthermore, government has equally failed to abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power. Many political office holders are reported to have committed acts of corruption and specifically electoral fraud and failure to declare assets (constitutional provision). Similarly, the abuse of power has been documented at all levels of governance, from the executive, legislature as well as the judicial arms and so on. The observation made by the United States Government, on Friday, April 29, 2013 cited in Temple (2014:2) indicted the President Goodluck Jonathan led Federal Government of massive and widespread corruption, and examples cited to buttress this opinion include among others the conviction of former Delta State Governor James Ibori in the Southwark Crown Court in London of charges of money laundering and other financial crimes totaling N12.4bn, after he was acquitted by a Nigerian court; and the N1.067trn fuel subsidy fund lost to endemic corruption. In addition is number of cases being handled by the Economic and Financial

Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) that have remained inconclusive, including the case of alleged misappropriation of N1bn against former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole, and N40bn against his deputy Usman Nafada. So are other cases against four former governors- Gbenga Daniel, Adebayo Alao-Akala, Aliyu Akwe Doma, and Muhammed Danjuma Goje for allegedly misappropriating N58bn, N25bn, N18bn, and N12.8bn respectively.   Others are Diepreye Alamieyesigha, Uzor Kalu, Rashid Ladoja, Jolly Nyame, Lucky Igbinedion, Boni Haruna (currently serving ministers), Attahiru Bafarawa, Samimu Turaki and Adamu Abdullahi.

Oladayo (2014) provided insight into corrupt practices linked to the presidency as the highest political office in Nigeria, and that: (a) during the reign of Obasango from 1999-2007, the presidency was involved in a corruption scandal in which the vice president (Atiku Abubakar) was indicted by Senate committee set by the chamber to investigate his role in the activities of the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF). (b) The President (Obasanjo) used his influence to acquire shares at Transcorp, and also persuaded the economic elite to build a presidential library for him in Abeokuta. In addition, the 16 billion dollars that was budgeted for power generation in the 8-year reign of the president cannot be accounted for since there is still erratic power supply in Nigeria. (c) The incumbent president (Goodluck Jonathan) was embroiled in a controversy when an Italian construction firm built a Church as a gift to the president in his home community of Otuoke in Bayelsa State. Furthermore, the president has also been accused of conspiracy silence in corruption allegation leveled against the Minister of Petroleum, and have been berated for granting presidential pardons for convicted political criminals. Others accused of corruption are Sunday Afolabi, Fabian Osuji, Hussaini Zannuwa Akwanga, Alice Osomo and Stella Odua (all federal ministers). The National Assembly being the watchdog of the executive arm of government has also had its share of corruption scandal. Those involved include Chimaroke Nnamani, Iyabo Obasanjo, Patricia Etteh, Farouk Lawal, Boniface Emanalo and Herman Hembe.

 Generally, financial corruption as observed above since the inception of the fourth republic in Nigeria affects the capacity of government to provide basic necessities which the constitution took cognizance of. Under Section 17.- (3) the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that- (a) all citizens without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment; and (f) children; young persons and the aged are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect. Our argument is that democratic governance in Nigeria has not met the yearnings and aspirations of the people. Rather issues of the political elites are given priority attention over and above the electorates. Children and young persons are not protected against exploitation and are also denied access to adequate means of livelihood and employment opportunities. It's noted that public and private sectors of Nigerian economy are not adequately equipped to deal with unemployment, more so with youth unemployment problems, and with about 60% of youth lacking jobs (Danjibo, 2009). The employment rate for 2011, Benjamin (2013) notes stood at 23.9 % with youth unemployment rate at over 50%.

 In 2005, the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) for 2004 reported that, out of the 130, 0000 youths that graduate from Nigerian universities annually only about 10% are able to secure paid employment. Leaving 90% of graduates, in addition to other school leavers, both skilled and unskilled wondering the urban and semi-urban streets in search of employment opportunities that is not available. The immigration recruitment exercise of 15 March 2014, in which 700,000 applicants applied for only about 3000 available vacancies and placements, demonstrate clearly the situation of youth and unemployment problem. And if we multiply 130,000 graduates with 11 years of democracy, a total of 1,430,000 graduates join the labor market and only 14,300 gained employment, leaving 1,415,700 unemployed.

Evidently, youth unemployment is a deadly menace that has been ignored and neglected by political elites that comprises group of people in government institutions- Presidency, National Assembly and the Federal Executive Council that control government machinery. In addition are those at the state, local government and community levels. While youth that constitute about 70% of Nigeria's population, and with about 60% unemployed, and roam the streets for paid employment opportunity, the political elites who control the reign of government are busy enriching themselves and consuming large amount of the country's wealth as salaries at the expense of the electorates. In 2010, former Central Bank of Nigeria governor (Sanusi Lamido now Emir) lamented that the National Assembly Members that are less than1percent of the population consumed 25 per cent of the nation's budget (Oladayo, 2014).

 It's evident from the forgoing that achieving a level of financial independence for many youths has become a myth in Nigeria. Unemployment has risen to above 40% Mijah (2008), Yomi and Opuene (2006) observed that about 60 % of Nigerian youths reside in urban areas and about 40 % of them are unemployed and this situation poses threat to urban security, development, national security and democratic consolidation. Youths in

desperation could be vulnerable to manipulation and according to Freedom (2011), become victims and also perpetrators of violent conflicts. Youths generally constitute a vulnerable social group and in need of special protection. They become victims and at the same time perpetrators of violent conflict because they are easily influenced, and obviously war would not be possible without youths. The combatants of any conflict or war in any part of the world are made up primarily by young people (Christopher, 2011; Kathleen, 2006 and Haryey, 2003). Youths are energetic, and easy to mobilize in societies where unemployment is high, and where social justice is absent and corruption thrives as is the case in Nigeria. Hence the reflection that masses (youth inclusive) are easily cornered, brainwashed and their right of choices manipulated to a point that some of them are susceptible to bribery and can be used as political thugs to cause confusion, harassment or intimidate on opponents during elections. As such, we emphasize that youth are more of victims of our democratic process that has failed to provide them with secure and adequate employment opportunities and also protect them against any exploitation, and against moral and material neglect. Therefore, we concur to the view by Ogwuche (2013: 272) that "the causes of militancy and violence in Nigeria are: corruption by public officers and leaders; selfish interest, youth unemployment; ethnic differences; manipulation by elites; social injustice; unfair distribution of resources; and socio-economic marginalization".

Conclusion

The paper attempted a critical analysis of democracy, youth and violent conflict in Nigeria's fourth republic. Though democracy is widely praised as the best system of government, its conduct in Nigeria has not been based on strict adherence to democratic principles and constitutional provisions. Rather elections and electoral process are essential ingredients for representative democracy, the Nigerian experience has been marred by fraud and violent conflicts in diverse ways and youth are seen as perpetrators and prosecutors. Ironically, youth constitute about 70% of Nigeria's 170 million people, and 60% are unemployed. Out of the 130,000 youth that graduated from universities annually, only 10% end up gaining employment. Thus from 2004 to 2014 an estimated 1,430,000 youths joined the labor market. Generally, being unemployed and constituting the bulk of Nigeria's population, youth are at the mercy of the same elites who have progressively closed the doors to employment opportunities. As such political elites exploit children and young persons (youths) a social group that the constitution stipulated should be protected against exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect. Morally, youths in contemporary Nigeria are socialized into a democratic environment characterized by electoral fraud and violence as electoral contest are turned into war among the various fractions of the power elite; ethnic and religious intolerances; indigene/ settler identity crisis; corrupt practices and so on. In other words children and youth, who are our future leaders and hope, are misled and misguided by corrupt people and corrupt practices. And materially, youths are denied opportunities to develop their potentials to the fullest to improve their wellbeing. As expressed by Sam Omatseye a criminologist, "while we contemplate criminalizing the Boko Haram group, we must understand that we created them. The elite had food but did not give them. They had school but did not educate them…had shelter but left them loiter in the heat and sand. So they followed Yusuf who gave them a living, no matter how little" (Oyofo, 2011 cited in Christian and Ambily, 2013: 366). Furthermore, literatures shows that militant youth groups emerged in the southern part of the country in response to neglect, and kidnapping which has been established as an act of terrorism is only but a weapon of the weak to draw attention to particular area of neglect in the polity. Thus we conclude that youth in Nigeria's democratic environment are often manipulated by political elites to perpetrate violent conflict for their benefits and in this regard they are more of the victims of violent conflicts than perpetrators. The ruling elites are never at the scene where violence clashes are being played out, elites do not get killed during violent attacks (except those caught up in transit or assassinated) but youths end up losing their lives in violent clashes.

Recommendations

The recommendation is that political elites in Nigeria needs value reorientation and more job creation program for youths in both private and public sector of Nigeria's polity and finally democratic principles and constitutional provisions be adhered to in its totality.

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