



Crisis of Democratic Systems as a Challenge to Resolving the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria

Abideen Muhammed Abeeb^{1*}

¹ Department of General and Remedial Studies, The Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria

* Corresponding author: abeebabideen42@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper analyses the challenges faced in addressing the persistent Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria, with a primary focus on how democratic systems have contributed to exacerbating the crisis. It explores the relationship between democracy and conflict resolution, shedding light on the limitations of democratic processes in effectively mitigating conflicts, particularly in a complex socio-political context like Nigeria. The paper underlines the critical need to reassess democratic institutions and their role in resolving conflicts while considering various internal and external factors contributing to the Boko Haram conflict. Finally, the paper provides insights into strategies for achieving peace and stability in the region and the nation as a whole, offering alternative perspectives for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners working towards conflict resolution and peace-building in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democratic Systems, Boko Haram, Insurgency, Conflict Resolution, Northeast Nigeria.

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Introduction

Rising violent conflicts in Africa, exacerbated by the adoption of democratic systems, concern both African nations and the international community. Democracy has not proven effective at resolving issues; instead, it has intensified existing problems and triggered new crises (Faluyi et al., 2019). Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has experienced a surge in various forms of violence since transitioning to multiparty democracy in 1999. These include electoral disputes, ethnic and religious tensions, herder-farmer clashes, communal disputes, and indigene/settler conflicts, all exacerbated by democracy (Ezeibe, 2021).

Nigeria grapples with a complex web of conflicts, including inequality, corruption, kidnapping, oil pipeline vandalism, ethno-religious disputes, and the notorious Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast (Babalola and Onapajo, 2019). The focus of this paper is on the Northeast and the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency, emerged in 2010, has caused a humanitarian catastrophe, with over 20,000 casualties, 2.6 million displaced, and millions in property damage (Ndinojuo et al., 2020). The insurgency has grown in size and sophistication, launching deadly attacks, displacing thousands, and causing extensive property damage. It has also spread to other parts of Nigeria and the West African sub-region, necessitating urgent intervention.

The Boko Haram conflict stems from a mix of internal and external factors, including socio-economic disparities, political-religious differences, and the death of the sect's leader (Zenn, 2020). Externally, it is part of the global Jihad, with ties to international terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and al-Shabab. Claims of international conspiracies further complicate the issue. To combat this insurgency, Nigeria must adopt comprehensive strategies encompassing poverty reduction, anti-

corruption measures, development, law enforcement, and, when necessary, military action. Distinguishing between legitimate grievances and violent ideologies is vital, as peace negotiations are unlikely to succeed with groups like Boko Haram. Addressing root causes can pave the way for lasting peace and security.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the complex challenges and obstacles faced in addressing the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria, with a particular focus on how democratic systems have contributed to the crisis. The paper sheds light on the role of democracy in exacerbating existing problems and fostering new conflicts. The overriding aim is to explore alternative strategies for resolving the insurgency, considering both internal and external factors contributing to the conflict.

Problem Statement

Rising violent conflicts in Africa, exacerbated by the adoption of democratic systems, concern both African nations and the international community. Democracy has not proven effective at resolving issues; instead, it has intensified existing problems and triggered new crises (Faluyi et al., 2019). Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has experienced a surge in various forms of violence since transitioning to multiparty democracy in 1999. These include electoral disputes, ethnic and religious tensions, herder-farmer clashes, communal disputes, and indigene/settler conflicts, all exacerbated by democracy (Ezeibe, 2021).

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Research Questions

1. Do Nigerian democratic institutions possess internal contradictions?
2. What factors contribute to the ineffectiveness of Nigerian democratic institutions in conflict resolution?
3. What strategies can be employed to bolster the capabilities of Nigerian democratic institutions in the resolution of conflicts?

Scope of the Study

The Northeast region of Nigeria is one of the country's six geopolitical zones, encompassing six states: Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe (see Figure 1). This region is home to a population of 19 million people, constituting approximately 13.57% of the nation's total population, as reported by the Nigeria National Population Commission census in 2006 (FGN, 2021). Regrettably, this area has been facing continuous attacks by Boko Haram insurgents and terrorists since 2009 up to the present day.

Methodology

Social science research extensively relies on survey methods due to their capacity for collecting extensive data from a large population, encompassing personal and social facts, beliefs, and attitudes. This study employs content analysis, focusing on textbooks, journals, periodicals, and internet materials, drawing significantly from the works of various scholars in the field (Largan and Morris, 2019).

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The theoretical framework employed in this research is the democratic peace theory, founded on principles, rules, and

institutions as mechanisms for regulating behavior and managing conflicts. According to Ezirim (2009), building upon Ake's (2001) perspective, liberal democracy serves as a conflict resolution and management strategy in Africa for two key reasons. First, it promotes compromise and offers a rational approach to containing conflicts within divided or plural societies. Second, it allows for peaceful conflict resolution through government change and institutional design procedures, such as elections, rather than resorting to forceful and violent means like military autocracy (Jega, 2010; Kew and Kwaja, 2013). However, it is essential to acknowledge the criticisms and challenges associated with this theory, as articulated by scholars like Dewey and Zask (2001), Rosato (2003), Runiciman (2017), and Schmitter (2015), among others.

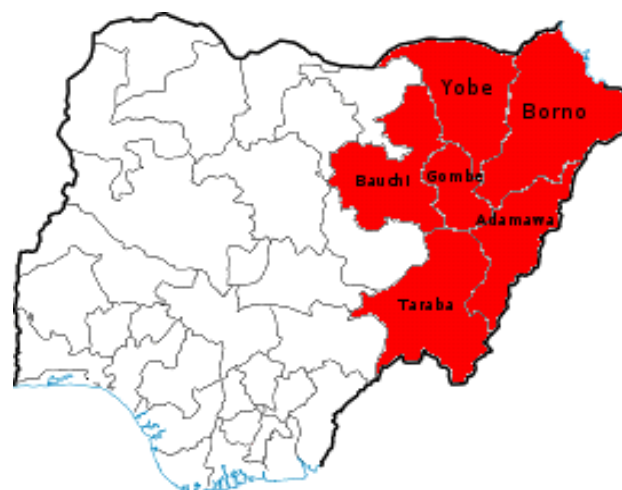


Figure 1. Map of Nigeria with Northeast Region Highlighted

Significance of the Study

This research holds significant implications for the understanding of conflict resolution strategies, barriers, and peace-building mechanisms. It sheds light on the limitations of democratic systems in effectively addressing and resolving conflicts, despite their self-regulatory claims advocated by thinkers such as Aristotle, John Stuart Mill, Rousseau, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Schumpeter. These limitations are evident in regions worldwide, including Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, among others, where conflicts persist (Rosato, 2003; Crozier et al., 1975; Runiciman, 2017). Consequently, there is an urgent call to re-evaluate and fine-tune democratic systems if they are to continue as viable political systems. Moreover, the inability of democratic systems to resolve conflicts underscores the need to explore alternative conflict resolution and peace-building strategies.

Traditional African conflict resolution methods, predating Western models, have proven highly effective (Rwebangira, 2013; Gibson, 2006). These indigenous approaches emphasize community involvement and grassroots participation, representing a bottom-up approach (Mac Ginty, 2010). This research advocates for a return to and revival of these traditional conflict resolution methods. The disconnect between imported, standardized strategies and the local culture, values, and traditions may explain their ineffectiveness, particularly in Africa (Author, Year).

Furthermore, this study is particularly relevant to the government and people of Nigeria, especially the Yobe state, in their quest to address the enduring Boko Haram crisis. It promotes an Afro-centric approach to conflict resolution as a viable alternative to coercive military measures. By emphasizing dialogue, negotiation, reconciliation, and addressing economic



development and societal structure, this research offers a pathway to peace-building. Additionally, it highlights the importance of addressing socio-economic disparities, a root cause of conflicts, by improving living conditions for marginalized communities (Author, Year).

Ultimately, this research provides direction and strategies for curbing insurgency in Northeast states, particularly the persistent Boko Haram menace that has eluded conventional approaches for decades. It encourages future research to continue exploring conflict resolution and peace-building, providing valuable data and insights (Author, Year).

Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on Northeast Nigeria

The Boko Haram insurgency has inflicted significant and multifaceted consequences on Northeast Nigeria. Scholars like Dauda, Tukur, and Abdul Kareem, among others, have studied its far-reaching effects. Dauda's research, for instance, demonstrates how the insurgency, fuelled by religious extremism, political corruption, ideological intolerance, and ethnic conflicts, has severely disrupted economic activities and trade relations in the region since 2009. This has led to a decline in socio-economic activities, significant loss of life, and property damage exceeding a billion dollars. Furthermore, the concentration of Boko Haram in a region vital for agriculture poses a grave threat to food security.

The economic repercussions are profound, with measures taken by the government to counter insurgency, such as border closures and curfews, disrupting trade and resulting in revenue losses. Farmland destruction by insurgents has impacted crops and livestock, and the fishing industry has suffered as well. Anyadike's analysis highlights the broader context, showing that Nigeria's post-democracy era since 1999 has been marred by ethno-religious conflicts, with Boko Haram's emergence in 2009 marking a turning point. The sect thrived amidst Nigeria's economic challenges and political dynamics, aided by the ambivalence of certain influential Islamic leaders. This violence may persist given Nigeria's approach to religious conflicts.

The insurgency's impact goes beyond economic consequences; it has left a trail of destruction, including the systematic destruction of religious and public facilities, infrastructure, and widespread insecurity. Families have lost breadwinners, and orphaned and vulnerable youths, especially girls, have been conscripted as suicide bombers or subjected to heinous activities. The humanitarian toll is staggering, with human casualties, human rights abuses, population displacement, refugee crises, and public insecurity prevalent. This poses a grave threat to Nigeria's national security, necessitating a strategic shift in response.

Nexus between Democracy and Conflict Resolution

Scholars have extensively explored the intricate relationship between democracy, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. The democratic peace theory posits that democratic political processes are essential in managing conflicts among groups with differing interests. In democracies, disputes are typically resolved through negotiation, compromise, and non-violence. Leaders in democratic states are socialized in an environment where coercion and violence are considered illegitimate means for resolving conflicts. In contrast, leaders in autocratic states often resort to violence, as politics is more of a zero-sum game.

Furthermore, democracy provides the essential principles, institutions, and rules needed for effective conflict resolution, particularly in deeply divided societies facing intractable conflicts. It establishes predictable processes for conflict

resolution, reduces the risk of losing battles or facing imprisonment, and offers a platform for competition while setting fundamental rules for the game. Democratic governance is seen as a means of de-escalating conflicts, promoting good governance, upholding the rule of law, engaging in effective communication with the electorate, generating employment opportunities, and ensuring a fair distribution of resources can contribute to effective conflict management strategies in Nigeria and the broader West African region.

However, the relationship between democracy and conflict resolution is multifaceted, with various factors influencing its effectiveness. These factors include the nature of competition for political power, multi-ethnic dynamics, corruption, unemployment, and poverty. Scholars continue to debate the validity of democratic peace theory, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of how democracy interacts with conflict and development within specific contexts, such as Nigeria.

Democracy and Its Crises

Democracy, as described by Boyce and O'Donnell (2007), is in a constant state of crisis, perpetually shifting the attention of its citizens from an unsatisfactory present to an uncertain future. These crises, paradoxically, underscore democracy's unique blend of hope and discontent, highlighting its capacity for hope as its defining characteristic. Dewey and ZASK (2001) stress that democracy should not be solely equated with institutional arrangements or constitutional prescriptions but should also be evaluated based on citizens' ability to withstand opposing arguments, reason critically, and learn from experience.

Scholars like Cunningham (2002) argue that democracy revolves around problem-solving, yet it has struggled to effectively address the very issues it was designed to resolve, including problems like majority tyranny and inefficiency. Runciman (2017) traces the historical trajectory of democratic crises from World War I to the present day. Schmitter (2015) acknowledges the perception that democracy is in decline but also notes that the desire for democracy as an ideal, characterized by citizens having equal rights and influence over leadership selection, has never been stronger or more widespread.

Drescher (1968) delves into the recurring historical patterns of democracy and crisis over the past century, revealing repeated behaviors such as misinterpretation, excessive reaction to routine political challenges, and a lack of perspective. Plato's critique of democracy as alluring yet fundamentally flawed, as it caters to immediate desires without ensuring they are the right ones, serves as a foundational concept in understanding these recurrent challenges faced by democracies. As Plato argued, democracies often indulge immediate desires and employ flattery, which can lead to their downfall when their weaknesses are exposed. Merkel (2014) underscores that when the truth about democracy's shortcomings becomes evident, it can ultimately lead to its demise.

Main Findings

The Nigerian government has implemented various strategies to address the Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism in the North East. Conflicts come in different forms, some of which offer opportunities for progress, while others pose threats to society. Regardless of the type of conflict, established conflict resolution strategies include understanding the situation, acknowledging the problem, avoiding coercion, focusing on the issue rather than individuals or groups, setting guidelines, maintaining open communication, taking decisive actions, and



recognizing that consensus is not always necessary for resolution.

Despite successful peacekeeping efforts in some African countries, Nigeria's internal conflict resolution mechanisms have been lacking. Many African governments tend to react to situations rather than addressing root causes. Poverty, unemployment, and unfair resource allocation have been identified as root causes of conflict in Nigeria. Efforts to promote peace in Nigeria have focused on good governance, accountability, the rule of law, and justice, along with awareness campaigns on peace-building and the inclusion of peace and conflict studies in school curricula.

The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast has been exacerbated by high levels of unemployment, leading many youths to join terrorist groups due to a lack of economic opportunities. The violent nature of the conflict has prevented the establishment of a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate its causes, and legislative bodies in Nigeria have struggled to effectively resolve conflicts due to factors such as a lack of education on conflict resolution and interference in conflicts during elections. Addressing root causes like poverty, unemployment, and governance issues remains essential to resolving the Boko Haram conflict in Nigeria.

National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST)

In response to the severe conflicts in Nigeria, including the Boko Haram insurgency, clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers, and incidents of banditry, which have resulted in significant damage, loss of life, displacement, and raised security and economic concerns, the government took steps to address the escalating insecurity. This led to the formulation of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), a coordinated approach under the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). NACTEST aimed to bolster security and assist institutions in responding to threats while upholding the rights of Nigerians and complying with international human rights standards, as outlined in legislation like the Terrorism Prevention Act 2011 and Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act 2013. Despite its comprehensive nature, the policy has encountered challenges in achieving its intended outcomes.

Furthermore, between 2003 and 2015, a grassroots response emerged to counter the Boko Haram threat in Nigeria. Civilians formed the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to support state security operations against the insurgents. Various individuals, including the Sultan of Sokoto and other religious leaders and politicians, suggested dialogue and amnesty as potential solutions to the crisis. Neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon extended military assistance through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF), which played a pivotal role in diminishing the terrorists' capabilities.

Nonetheless, the military's strategy to combat the insurgency has faced challenges related to funding, corruption, internal conflicts, and a lack of modern equipment and training. Some argue that Nigeria lacks the necessary military capacity to effectively confront the insurgent group, which recruits members from neighbouring countries. This underscores the gravity of the threat posed by Boko Haram, as they aspire not only to influence government decisions but also to overthrow the government and establish their own caliphate and sharia system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper revolves around finding solutions to the persistent and devastating Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria, which have inflicted immense suffering on the people of the Northeast states and turned the region into a battleground. The worsening economic conditions, loss of lives

due to violence, kidnapping, and cattle rustling, along with large-scale displacement of people to safer areas, highlight the dire consequences of this conflict. Despite efforts from various levels of government, citizen initiatives, and international support, achieving lasting peace remains elusive.

The evident situation underscores that democracy and its institutions in Nigeria are grappling with crises, a point raised by scholars, and they seem inadequate in effectively resolving conflicts. In some cases, democratic processes have even exacerbated conflicts, particularly during elections and governmental transitions, owing to the misuse of democratic freedoms like freedom of speech and the press. Therefore, it is imperative to reassess the democratic system itself, as it appears to be in turmoil and incapable of adequately addressing and resolving the nation's problems and conflicts.

Recommendations

Unrest in Nigeria, particularly in the North, is primarily rooted in factors like joblessness, poverty, limited education, religious extremism, poor infrastructure (such as roads and utilities), challenging climatic conditions (including desertification and low rainfall), open borders facilitating the influx of people from neighbouring impoverished nations like Niger and Chad, and individuals from war-torn countries such as Libya, Somalia, and Sierra Leone who turn to conflict.

To tackle the ongoing conflicts and crises in Nigeria, it is crucial to address their fundamental causes comprehensively. This involves taking measures to combat unemployment, reduce poverty, improve infrastructure (like roads, water supply, and electricity), enhance education, bolster border security and immigration control, and establish effective security measures equipped with modern technology for early detection and swift action against individuals or groups planning to disrupt peace.

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