
ARMS IN NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PATHWAY: PITFALL TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

Political violence has become a constant feature since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in May 1999. This violent development has been fueled by proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). This study explored the nexus of arms, politics and electoral violence as it impedes on good governance in Nigeria. The study was a survey, relying on secondary data as sources of information. Vold's (1979) Group Conflict and Sutherland's (1939) Differential Association theories were used as theoretical justification for the study. Violent clashes during electioneering campaigns and elections have attended Nigeria's democratic experiments since independence. The consequences include floured elections, wanton destruction of lives and property, displacements of communities and serious threat to neighbourhood security. The multiplier effect of these have been observed in bad governance, communal arms struggles, youth vices and population displacement. It has also taken a toll on public infrastructure. Result of the study showed that the use of arms for electoral intimidation, vote manipulation or political violence erodes public trust in the electoral system and can lead to contested or illegitimate election outcomes. That is why Nigeria has had a disturbing share of challenged election outcomes in the past, especially since the birth of the Fourth republic. The study concluded that armed interference in elections threatens democratic governance. Successive governments have failed to address the issues of unauthorized arms in our elections, hence the many political violent clashes often recorded across the country. It is thus recommended that strengthening of the security architecture, implementation of stricter border controls to prevent illegal arms influx, political dialogue and civic education among other recommendations will help change the tide for the better.

Keywords: Arms, Floured elections, Good governance, Political violence.

1. Introduction

Africa, often tossed as the cradle of civilization, has had enormous share of electoral violence and armed struggle. The wide spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons has inflicted incurable catastrophe on the continent and its populations. The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in Nigeria has generated lots of concerns due to its linkage to various forms of social vices, to which successive governments and policy makers appear helpless as to how to mitigate the near intractable scourge.

Scholars (Hazen and Horner, 2007; Chuma-Okoro, 2011) have argued that the vast circulations of these arms in Nigeria is caused by many factors including trafficking, local production, arms theft, etc. Some of the factors that contributed to proliferation of SALWs include poverty, economic disparity, lackadaisical attitude in stocking arms by police, ethno-religious diversity, the quest for easy profits, self-defence reflex, rise in crime, cultural practices, greed, porous borders, inadequate border protection, etc. The motivations for arms possession and circulation includes but not limited to unchecked military activities, multiplicity of conflicts and personal security arrangement, insecurity, privatization of security, et cetera (John, Mohammed, Pinto & Nkanta, 2007; Hazen & Horner, 2007; Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

Elections in Nigeria play a significant role in shaping the country's development trajectory. They provide an opportunity for citizens to choose their leaders and hold them accountable for driving development initiatives. However, challenges such as electoral violence, voter intimidation, and corruption have sometimes hindered the democratic process and affected development outcomes. Yoroms (2015) argued that violence usually attends the Nigeria electoral system to the point that the foreign media was too sure it could lead the dismantling of the Nigerian Federation in 2015. This no doubt hinders development as resources that could have been allocated to infrastructure projects are often diverted to managing security during elections or rebuilding infrastructure damaged by violence, slowing down development progress. Scholars like García (2009) have also stated that electoral violence destroys the nation's image abroad, reducing investor confidence and slowing down foreign direct investment, which is crucial for economic development.

Erunke and Uchem (2003) argued that the doctrine of democracy and good governance in the Fourth Republic requires a mutually coordinated link between the leaders and the led to ensure effective governance. In a democracy, there are indices to guide the presence of popular democracy and ensure sustainable development. Among the indices are rule of law, political pluralism, and protection of rights.

Others are checks and balances, civil society, participation, transparency, accountability and peaceful transfer of power. It is said that government derives authority from the consent of the governed.

The credibility of an election is solely derived when the indicators of political violence are observably absent or reduced to the barest possible minimum. Ikyase and Egberi (2015) averred that political violence occurs either in the pre-electoral violence dimension or in the post-electoral violence dimension. The scholars affirmed that a pre-election political violence is one which is characterized by a feeling that the electoral laws and environment are deliberately skewed to favour their opponents, or where there is perceived or observed material evidence that the outcome of the election may not be in the aggressor's interest. Whereas a post-election political violence is understood to reflect a situation depicted by an impulsive and often restive outburst by parties who feel outwitted in the result of the election.

This study aligns with the views of Kruck and Schneiker (2017) that political violence is a criminal circumvention of the democratic principles and the will of the electorates prior to, during and shortly after an election by the application of inappropriate and cataclysmic assault to achieve untoward outcomes.

This study seeks to answer the questions of arms and electoral violence in our national politics. It seeks to explore the prevalence of proliferated small arms and light weapons and political violence within the Nigeria electoral landscape. It also interrogates the factors responsible for the arms proliferation and the forms in which these proliferated arms affect our electoral pathway. Finally, the study intends to answer the question of effect of proliferated arms and sustainable development in Nigeria.

The objective of this study therefore is to research the nexus between arms, politics and electoral violence as it impedes good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Operationalization of Arms, Electoral pathway and sustainable development

The concept of arms as used here refers to any object in the category of firearms, swords, axes, knives and blunt edge, that are deployed prior to, during and after election to cause harm or cause bodily injury to political opponents or electoral officials, with the intent to intimidate the victims and suppress and tele-guide the electoral process and influence its outcome. Malam (2014) describes small arms as

easily carried about fire arms that can be hidden within bodily clothing and have the capability to self-load. The SMAs, especially the small arms, are the ones that form the bulk of the weapons in use to which this study centres. Communal arms struggle in Nigeria has significant implications for electoral governance in the country (Glen, 1998). The existence of violence between ethnic groups provided the initial platforms for communal armament and militancy. This snowballed into other forms of violence. When this happens, insecurity in affected regions becomes inevitable, such that violence can spill over into the electoral process, causing disruptions, voter intimidation, and violence on Election Day. Candidates and political parties may also exploit these conflicts for their advantage, further exacerbating electoral violence. In areas affected by communal arms struggles, citizens may be afraid to participate in elections due to security concerns. This can result in voter disenfranchisement and undermine the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, especially in regions with historically low voter turnout.

2.2 Factors Responsible for Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a contiguous country which shares international borders with the Republic of Benin to the West, the Republic Cameroon and the Republic of Chad to the East and the Republic of Niger to the North. It has a Coast line on the Gulf of Guinea in the South and it borders the Lake Chad Basin to the Northeast (Babatola, 2015). Ikoh (2006) traced the historical factors for arms proliferation to many crises in Nigeria. A mention of a few include the Niger-Delta crises, the Ogbe-Ijaw, Oodua People's Congress riots, Bakassi activities in Eastern Nigeria, Oku Iboku – Iköt Öfföng skirmishes, the Ife-Modakeke uprising, the Tiv-Jukun war among others. Nnoli (2003), argued that while hired assassins wrought havoc on hapless Nigerians in the day, armed robbers are in charge in the night, all these evil doers bear arms which are mostly illegally proliferated. The cities have become potential hotpots for violent crime. Bandits are reported to be manning many Nigerian link roads in the East, in the North in the West and in the Southern parts of the country (Yishau, 2005).

Klare (1996) on his part, traced the factors responsible for arms proliferation in Nigeria to the Nigerian Civil War and ethnic conflicts which took place shortly thereafter. Conflict in neighbouring countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, have led to arms smuggling and increased availability of weapons (Rimmey, 2018). Some scholars focus on the supply side or push factors of proliferation of SMAs. They identify willing sellers, arms lucriveness and porous borders. Yet others concentrate on demand or pull factors like crime, violence, conflicts, riots and unrests (Ayissi & Sall, 2005). Corruption within security forces and customs

agencies has been observed as also facilitating the illegal importation and distribution of arms (Florquin & Berman, 2005; Okeke & Oji, 2014).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Two theories are used to analyze this study. There are Group Conflict theory and Differential Association theory.

Group Conflict Theory

The Group Conflict Theory (GCT) was developed by Vold (1979). Vold (1979 cited in Igbo, 2008) argued that group conflict theory of crime holds that crime in society was a product of individuals' and groups' interest; and that criminalization was a contention between powerful groups over powerless groups. Vold (1979 cited in Igbo, 2008) argues that humans would not seek to belong to groups unless to satisfy two distinct needs; the first is due to an inner drive to relate with other individuals as members of the community, the second is in recognition that their membership of certain interest groups guarantees their individual (personal) interests made possible by the collective strength from the group. From the understanding of the first factor for membership of any association by individuals according to the GCT, it is the psychological imperative of individuals that compels them to create groups. Arms are usually proliferated by cartels, and political violence is usually committed by group members either as representatives of a political party or their sympathizers, to demonstrate their might over other contending group (s); or as a reprisal.

Differential Association Theory (DAT)

DAT was a ground work of Edwin Sutherland published in 1939. DAT aims to associate criminality with learning that individuals acquire in association with others in society (Scott & Marshall, 2005). Adler, Mueller and Laufer (1995) assert that deviant behaviour as a learned pattern of behaviour is similar to other forms of learning. Bello (2015) observes that the several decades of political violence in Nigeria without criminal conviction of actors over time have contributed in recruiting, albeit surreptitiously, many known and suspected perpetrators into political associations. Thus, the fluid relationships people have with others in social setting are largely determined by their interpretation of group norms (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2012).

Many violent outcomes have trailed political and ethnic feuds and actors in the violence that often ensue have either been expressed as a learned behaviour of the individual(s) (DAT), or as Tarde and Giddings (1855-1931) cited in Charles (2005) put it, the influence of imitation. It is the view of this study that arms in Nigeria's

electoral pathway is therefore individual's reactions to the different associations they have in the society.

3. Methodology

The study adopted the survey method, relying on secondary sources for data collection. The qualitative approach instrument included published journal articles, books, personal experience of elections cycles and other print and electronic materials.

4. Effects of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Political Violence

Over the years, human and material losses have been recorded due to political violence. These have been occasioned by activities of opposing political gladiators and political party faithful. The expectation of the electorates in a democracy is good governance. Good governance is measured in the attraction of governments' programmes and policies that engender peaceful co-existence, growth, development and welfare for the citizens by their representatives in government. Where political violence festers highly, good governance is usually hindered in the sense that government, key players and stakeholders are usually afraid to articulate development projects in such areas, for fear of their susceptibility to targets of vandalism. Good governance can be said to be wished away when the elected got their mandates not by the ballot cast in a free and fair election but by the surreptitious manipulation by means of calculated political violence. Abiodun et al (2018) believe that arms proliferation results in political violence which precipitates weak and fragile governments and ultimately leads to ineffective government or bad governance. Ameh (2013) also argued that proliferated arms exacerbate crime in society.

4.1 Nigeria's Electoral pathway

Nigeria's electoral pathway involves a series of steps and processes for conducting elections in the country. The series of activities and preparations that belie the electoral pathway sometimes makes arms deployment inevitable. While the specific details may vary based on the types of election, (e.g., presidential, gubernatorial, legislative), all of these activities usually culminate into the inauguration of declared winners and the formation of government. However, the inauguration of government does not ultimately conclude the election roundtable, as dissatisfied candidates still have a provision to challenge the outcomes of such elections and seek judicial redress at the election tribunals/courts of law. These legal issues often arise due to voter

fraud, violence, and logistical issues during elections. It is trite to say that Nigeria's electoral pathway has not witnessed the best of times certainly, as there is still much room for improvement.

Sustainable development is a holistic approach that aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves the integration of economic, social, and environmental factors to ensure long-term well-being (UNESCO, 2016). Rostow in Okeke (2012) views development as the progressive movement from traditional society to the stage of high mass consumption of goods and services. This view of development hold strong the (Norgaard, 1994). Sustainable development seeks to strike a balance between economic growth, social progress, and environmental conservation to create a more equitable and resilient future for humanity. When this is achieved, Protecting and preserving natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystems to maintain their vitality and diversity becomes inevitable. To achieve this, the choices we make today must revolve around the needs and rights of future generations. These choices scholars have argued, must incorporate social equity, participation and collaboration, innovation and technology and resilience (Nafziger, 2010).

4.2 The Nexus between Arms, Election and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The relationship between arms, elections, and sustainable development is complex and intertwined. Arms, including weapons and armed groups, can have a significant impact on electoral processes. Nyiayaana (2023) averred that the Nigeria election situation is often times characterized by entrenched structural manipulation and violent electoral malpractices. Malam (2014) describes small arms as easily carried about fire arms that can be hidden within bodily clothing and have the capability to self-load. Dreyfus, Lessing, Nascimento and Purcena (2010) report that the Light weapons are a combination of more weighty guns and ammunitions with varying degrees of weight and design capabilities, some of which are hand-held, while others are truck-mounted. The small arms and light weapons are the ones that form the bulk of the weapons in use to which this study centres. Because political violence is not a military expedition or a full-fledged militia onslaught, the weapons mostly deployed are the hand-held small guns. This is due to their sizes and mass weight, since they can be hidden under clothing or in Sport-Utility Vehicles (SUV). Udeh (2002) and Akinwumi (2005) contended that the presence of armed groups or militias can lead to electoral violence, intimidation of voters, and disruptions in the electoral process and that politicians or political parties may exploit armed groups to secure their interests, leading to election-related violence or manipulation. This can ultimately lead to proliferation of arms, instability and in security, which in turn affect

sustainable development (Ezechukwu, Ukpaukure, Musa, Eugene & Oloyede, 1988).

Sustainable development in Nigeria's fourth republic faces several pitfalls and challenges that hinder its progress. - Armed conflicts divert resources away from development projects, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Arguing on the impact of arms to sustainable development, Stohl and Tuttle (2009) stated that African countries have experienced direct, indirect and consequential impacts of weapons proliferation on development. Similarly, Soetan (2017) saw the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as one of the major security challenge currently facing Nigeria's development challenges. The study by Soetan (2017) noted that insecurity caused by arms can deter foreign investments and hinder economic growth. There cannot be Sustainable development in a regime of armed elections, for sustainable development requires not just periodic elections but also the protection of democratic institutions, rule of law, and respect for human rights. Armed elections have been known to weaken democratic institutions which leads to the erosion of democratic norms and values. When elections are marred by violence or manipulation, they can undermine the legitimacy of elected leaders and weaken democratic governance. Alemika (2014) observed that arms beget a vicious cycle of violence. The scholar argued that crime, especially crimes of armed elections can perpetuate a cycle of violence, where political disputes are settled through force rather than through peaceful, democratic means. This cycle of violence can lead to political instability and hamper the development of democratic institutions and practices.

This study argues that the presence of arms in the context of elections ultimately hinders sustainable development, as peaceful, transparent, and inclusive electoral processes is the cornerstone to political stability and it creates an environment conducive to sustainable development. No doubt, the misuse of arms during elections does lead to violence, political instability, and setbacks in development efforts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that arms in Nigeria's electoral pathway has constituted a serious drawback to the nations march to sustainable development. Armed interference in elections threatens democratic governance. Successive governments have failed to address the issues of unauthorized arms in Nigeria's elections, hence the many political violent clashes often recorded across the country. Authorities consulted and sources of information contacted all adduced to the fact of the

prevalence of the menace. It should be noted that this study holds the conviction that to stem the tide of arms in our electoral pathway, a number of deliberate actions must be taken into consideration by state actors and stakeholders. This study makes the conclusion that electoral violence undermines the democratic process, erodes public trust in institutions, and hampers the country's progress towards sustainable development. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote peace building initiatives, and foster inclusive governance.

5.2 Recommendations

Curbing arms in Nigeria's electoral pathway is crucial for ensuring reduced incidences of political violence, sue for peaceful and fair elections, and guarantee a pathway to sustainable development. A number of recommendations are presented from this study to help check unauthorized arms deployment in our elections going forward. Actions to be taken will revolve around conflict prevention, political dialogue, and the protection of democratic institutions. This is in the realization that sustainable democracy relies on both credible elections and the broader commitment

- i. Civic Education: Stakeholders must deliberately involve civic education as a means to promote awareness about the dangers of electoral violence and the benefits of peaceful participation in the electoral processes.
- ii. Political Dialogue: Political parties must do everything to engage in peaceful dialogue and be discouraged from the penchant for resorting to the use of armed groups for political purposes.
- iii. Strengthening our security architecture: This will enhance security forces' presence in areas prone to electoral violence. This must also include implementation of stricter border controls to prevent illegal arms influx.
- iv. Implement stricter border controls to prevent illegal arms influx. Porous international borders which serve as transit routes should be appropriately manned to ensure reduced influx of illegal arms into our country.
- v. Disarmament Programs: The government is here called upon to initiate voluntary disarmament programs to encourage the surrender of illegal weapons.
- vi. International Support: The state and its security apparatuses must seek international support and cooperation in the effort to monitor arms trafficking and provide assistance in disarmament efforts.
- vii. Electoral Reforms: the clamor for electoral reforms could not have been be louder at any other time than now that the nation faces security threats in almost all its subnational divides.
- viii. Implementation of electoral reforms to ensure transparency and reduce the

incentive for violence. Strengthening the independence of electoral commissions to enhance trust in the electoral process is a much-desired milestone in our effort to achieve a holistic reform of the electoral process.

- ix. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: There is need to establish effective conflict resolution mechanisms at the community level to address grievances before they escalate.
- x. Media Responsibility: the media has a huge responsibility to advance the democratic ethos, by ensuring it sticks to unbiased reportage of events, activities devoid of sensationalization of violence.
- xi. Legal Enforcement: The legal framework requires adequate and proper formulation for effective implementation. When this is done, it should have strict penalties enforcement provisions to deal with culprits of illegal arms or involved in electoral violence.

to democratic values and principles. some of these recommendations include:

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