



## IS NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY BREEDING CONFLICT?

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to address the question: Is Nigeria's democracy breeding conflict? The objective of the study is to establish if there exists a link between democracy and Nigeria's recurring conflicts as well as analyse the implications of increasing conflict for the country's development and democratic consolidation. Making use of primary (oral interviews with scholars/academics in the fields of Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies with specialisation in the areas of democracy and conflict management) and secondary (relevant books, journals, internet materials) sources of data, this paper found that democracy may not necessarily breed conflict but the "freedom" that is associated with it often gives any aggrieved group the opportunity to put forward their concerns to the government, which sometimes have resulted into violence and armed conflict when not managed properly. This is clearly seen in Nigeria's current democratic setting.*

**KEYWORDS:** Nigeria, Democracy, Breeding, Conflict, Development

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### INTRODUCTION

The greatest threat facing the survival of Nigerian democracy and unity is the general insecurity occasioned by various ethno-religious conflicts, communal clashes, violent crimes, and terrorist activities across the country in the last decade. Aside from the Nigerian Civil War (1969-1970) and some "bloody" military take-over of government, the Nigerian nation has never been confronted with such great security challenges as we presently experience in the activities of ethnic militia and Islamic fundamentalist sect. In other words, the persistent insecurity resulting from the ethnic-religious crisis, Boko Haram terrorism and other threats of violence have become more pronounced since the country's return to democracy in 1999. For example, the Niger Delta militancy was one major armed conflict that gripped Nigeria after its transition to civilian rule in 1999. As a result, the Nigerian government Amnesty Programme for Niger Delta militants came into place in 2009 and brought "relative peace" to the region until the surfacing of Niger Delta Avengers in 2016. Today, Boko Haram terrorist activities, the Fulani-herdsmen and farmers clashes and the arrival of this new group in

the Niger Delta called "Avengers" are making Nigeria's democratic environment a fragile one.

The subject of democracy, peace, and violence have attracted so much attention in academic circles due to increasing violence in democratic states, including well-established democracies. The practice of democracy everywhere rests with foundational acts of violence (Keane, 2010). In established democracies, flaws in the system have become worryingly visible and disillusion with politics is rife (The Economist, 2014). In the United Kingdom, Brexit is gradually tearing the people apart, as many UK citizens are divided on the issue. No doubt, Chan (1984) in his research found that 'relatively free' countries participated in war just as much as the 'less free.' The claim that democracy is a system for peaceful resolution of conflicts since conflicting claims by rival social groups are solved by majority votes or consensual agreements (Hegre, 2014) is being increasingly refuted. According to Hegre (2014), democratic institutions by themselves are ineffective in reducing the risk of internal conflict onset. For Boswell and Dixon, (1990); Muller and Weede, (1990); Hegre et al (2001) and Fearon and Laitin (2003), it is semi-democratic regimes that have a



higher risk of internal conflict than consistent autocracies or democracies. Where, for instance, autocrats have been driven out of office, their opponents have mostly failed to create viable democratic regimes (The Economist, 2014).

However, while democracies rarely engage in interstate wars (Moaz and Russet, 1993), the stark reality is that democratic countries have been witnessing one form of internal conflict or the other. Many democracies are undergoing a series of tests and tribulations. The Economist (2014) pointed out that democracy is going through a difficult time. The fact that “democracy lets people speak their minds” have escalated minor issues to armed conflict in many countries of the world. According to Hegre (2014) in democracies, when individuals are denied the political rights and the economic benefits they believe they are entitled to, they may react with aggression and organize violent political opposition. Given these backdrops, this paper seeks to address this major question: Is democracy breeding conflict? With particular reference to Nigeria, the paper seeks to establish if there exists a link between democracy and recurring conflict in Nigeria. It is clear that since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999, the country has known no peace. Conflict pervades the country, ranging from militancy in Niger Delta, ethnic agitations, insurgency/Boko Haram terrorism, and Fulani-herdsmen and farmer’s clashes. What is the future of Nigeria’s democracy and development in the event of increasing conflicts?

### THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy originated many years ago in ancient Greece. The word democracy comes from two Greek words: *demos* meaning people and *kratos* meaning rule. Therefore, the word means “rule by the people,” sometimes called “popular sovereignty.” and can refer to direct participatory and representative forms of rule by the people. A democratic government must meet the essential democratic credentials: it must first and foremost be based on popular will expressed through a free and fair election; accountable to people; practice the rule of law and ensure freedom of speech and choice, freedom of association and equality before the law. Scholars have defined democracy as a form of governance done in the people’s best interest that is they tend to stress the representative character of democracy. Democracy has been defined in various ways including the government of the people, by the people and for the people; government with the consent of the governed, and a form of a regime that derives from popular sovereignty in which ordinary citizens are endowed with the right and ability to govern themselves (Osablu-Kle, 2004).

However, the definition of democracy as the government with the consent of the people has often been contested especially when the elites have captured democracy and the people with vote-buying and election rigging. In that regard, it is not reasonable to argue that democracy is the will of the people when for instance, people in extreme poverty sell their votes out of necessity for survival. In democratic practice, the exclusion of certain sections of society exists in the form of rigging. Exclusion undeniably enables small groups (who may not be in power by majority vote) to dictate to the majority (who are either excluded through vote-rigging or vote-buying “against their will”). Nevertheless, the exclusion of a certain subset of the society in decision-making has not made any of the democracies to be pronounced autocracy. In the ancient Greeks, for example, a certain subset of the society was also excluded. The common people who could take part in political decision making was defined to comprise only a subset of the people as a whole, for children, prisoners, women, and slaves were excluded (Osablu-Kle, 2004). For the Greeks, the exclusion of certain sections of society from the definition of the common people was reasonable and did not render democratic practice null and void (Osabu-Kle, 2004). Thus, democracy essentially means “the rule of the common people” and as Osabu-Kle (2004) noted any attempt to define it otherwise is a matter of convenience and may have its roots in the difference between what democracy essentially is and how it is practiced.

In this way, a democratic practice may be conceived of as a mixture of some essence of democracy and some measure of dictatorship (Osabu-Kle, 2004). Undoubtedly, democratic societies have been seen as those that conduct periodic elections and allow citizens’ participation. The fact that election is conducted as at and when due qualifies a certain system as democracy, and whether it is semi or partial democracy depends on how it is practiced. Thus, since it has been called a democracy, it then means that some elements of freedom exists and claims of human rights. This, in essence, means that in times of grievances, marginalisation or neglect by the government in power, citizens in a democratic setting often have no choice than to express their concerns through protest/demonstrations. In summary, although democracy is sometimes equated with a positive meaning, it is not always so in practice. Democracy has its negative sides and can also create an environment where conflict thrives.



## DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT: THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

The subjects of war and democracy and their potential symbiosis have recently been brought to life by the fact that virtually all democracies are today caught in the sticky threads of permanent war against 'terror' (Keane, 2010). Conflict exists in all countries and in every level of society. It is endemic to all social life (Bercovitch, n.d cited in Osondu-Oti, 2017). The essence of conflict seems to be disagreement, contradiction or incompatibility. Thus, conflict refers to any situation in which they are incompatible goals. Wallenstein (2002) sees conflict as the manifestation of hostile attitude in the face of conflicting interests between individuals, groups, and states. From the perspective of conflict theory, tensions and conflicts arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups in society; as a result, conflicts become the engine for social change (Crossman, 2019).

Conflict theory originated in the work of Karl Marx, who focused on the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor). Focusing on the economic, social, and political implications of the rise of capitalism system in Europe, Marx theorized that the system premised on the existence of a powerful minority class (the bourgeoisie) and an oppressed majority class (the proletariat) created class conflict because the interests of the two were at odds, and resources were unjustly distributed among them (Crossman, 2019).

Social conflict theory basically looks at struggles for power and control in society as a major causal factor of conflict. Conflict occurs when two or more actors oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social powers in an effort to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them. The quest for dominance and power become the currency rather than consensus (Egbuta, 2018). In a democratic setting, the exclusion of certain groups from decision-making or the lack of benefits from the dividends of democracy among other factors have created conflicts in Nigeria. An example is the Niger Delta militancy. Niger Deltans felt they have been marginalised and neglected by the few elites in power and as a result frustration sets in, which eventually led to aggression. Thus, the frustration-aggression also explains some of these conflicts in Nigeria clearly. Aggression is one of several possible consequences of frustration (cited in Breuer, 2017). In other words, conflict arises due to frustration from the inability to achieve certain goals.

While frustration is the feeling of irritation and annoyance when something blocks you from achieving a goal, aggression is the malicious behaviour or attitude towards someone or something, usually triggered by frustration. The Fulani-herdsmen and farmers conflict/clashes occurred because each of the groups is frustrated from being blocked from achieving their goals of either farming or pasturing due to competition for land. Conflict theory also focuses on the competition between groups within society over limited resources (Chappelow, 2019). Conflicting interests can occur due to discrimination, struggle for resources, identity, underrepresentation, neglect among others. Since conflict is inevitable in any society and human interactions, it then follows that conflict can occur both in democratic and undemocratic settings. Moreover, democracy can create the environment for conflict in the sense that frustration that was not let out during military rule because of fear of military crackdown can be brought forward in an era of democratic dispensation. While democracy has been equated positive meanings such as peace, justice, and promotion of human rights, recent conflicts all over the world, including Nigeria revealed that democracy is not always as portrayed.

## NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT

At the inception of Nigeria's democracy on May 29, 1999, there were great expectations that the newborn democracy would deliver Nigeria from the long decades of savagery and oppression witnessed under the military rule. However, within the euphoria that came with the country's return to democratic rule, crisis ensued (Osondu-Oti, 2019). The return to the civilian rule provided some of the aggrieved groups the opportunity to voice out their grievances, as democracy is believed to offer people the environment to freely express themselves (Osondu-Oti, 2019). While democracy seemed to have provided the avenue for the Nigerian people to demand justice (as seen in the Niger Delta people clamour for environmental protection); it has failed to prevent or manage conflict. As pointed by Eck and Hultman (2007) democratic governments make use of less violence against civilians' and engage in less repression (Davenport, 2007; Colaresi & Carey, 2008), although the rebel groups tend to make more extensive use of violence against civilians when fighting democratic regimes (Eck & Hultman, 2007). Possibly because of the stronger constraints on the use of violence against insurgents, democracies tend to have longer internal wars (Gleditsch et al, 2009).

Since 1999, Nigeria has been faced with various conflicts and clashes of interests such as the



militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency in the northern region and the current Fulani-herdsmen clashes with farmers in different parts of the country. These conflicts present grave challenges to security and consolidation of the country's democracy and development. A brief examination of these conflict and the challenges they pose to the country is presented below.

### **NIGER DELTA MILITANCY**

The Niger Delta environmental and human rights issues are not new. The killing of human rights Ken Saro Wiwa and 9 Ogoni men by late General Sani Abacha in 1995 revealed that the region has been clamouring for justice prior to the dawn of democracy. Thus, when Nigeria entered into democratic rule in 1999, it was an opportunity for the people to regroup again to put forward their demands to the government of the day. Several groups also addresses such as the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) became very active in the fight for the rights of the Niger Deltans. The Niger region, which contributes over 80 percent of Nigeria's revenue through oil believed that they have been marginalised and neglected. As they struggled to get across their views to the government, the youth became violent and resorted to militancy (Osondu-Oti, 2019). Militancy caused a lot of damage to the region, the nation's economy and the external image. In a bid to solve the problem that has lingered, the Nigerian government under President Umaru Musa Yar'dua came up with an Amnesty programme for the militants with diverse initiatives to cater for the youth unemployment. The initiative was believed to have brought relative peace to the region. A few years (in 2016) after the Amnesty Programme was put in place by Umaru Yar'dua for Niger Delta militants, a new group known as "Niger Delta Avengers" emerged and they are said to be driven by environmental pollution that has not been addressed by the government.

The 2016 resumption of hostilities in the oil-rich Niger Delta region that is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy in a dwindling international oil price has been attracting international concern (Francis and John, 2018). Prior to the Amnesty programme, Niger Delta was believed to be under siege due to the activities of the militants involving kidnapping, maiming, etc. and the government military forces fighting the group. The resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta has led to a series of attacks on oil facilities and has reduced the barrel production of crude oil per day in the region (Moses and Olaniyi, 2017). According to the former Group Managing Director, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Mr. Emmanuel Ibe Kachikwu oil

production has reduced significantly due to the series of attacks on the country's oil facilities in the Niger Delta region by the Avengers. For the Niger Deltans, the country's democracy has not made any significant impact on their lives and in the development of the region. According to Akinola (2012), although there are theoretical reasons to think of democracy as the springboard of human development, the Niger Delta region that produces the lion's share of revenue for Nigeria has been reduced to a basket of waste for the majority of its citizens.

### **BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY**

Boko Haram gained widespread exposure in 2009 when the group members were alleged to be subjected to the excessive use of force by the police and they were unable to get an official investigation into the matter. As a result, the group launched attacks on police posts and other government installations killing scores of police officers (Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The inability of the police to control the group's activities made the Nigerian government bring in the army to quell the uprising. The ensuing Joint Military Task Force operation left more than 700 Boko Haram members dead and destroyed the mosque that the group used as its headquarters (Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The leader of the group who was under police custody was also killed.

Later on, Abubakar Shekau declared that he was the group's new leader and vowed to avenge the deaths of their former leader, Yusuf and other group members who were killed by security forces. Since 2009, Boko Haram has carried out assassinations and large-scale acts of violence in Nigeria. In the summer of 2010, the group began to assassinate individuals, typically police officers and also attacked larger targets. One operation that garnered widespread attention occurred in September 2010, when the group attacked a prison in the city of Bauchi, in Bauchi State and released more than 700 inmates, including some 100 Boko Haram members (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). A year later, Boko Haram's attacks increased in frequency and magnitude. For example on August 26, 2011, the group struck its first high-profile international target within Nigeria when a suicide bomber crashed a car into the United Nations building in Abuja and detonated an explosive which killed at least 23 people and injured more than 100 others. The attack at the United Nations building in Abuja drew worldwide attention. In addition, the kidnapping of over 250 Chibok schoolgirls in April 2014 at Borno state, which received international condemnation and outcry placed Nigeria among countries on U.S security alert.



The group has continued to cause great havoc to the nation and its neighbours. Although the Joint Military Task Force has often claimed that they have defeated the group, Boko Haram attacks have continued intermittently in the northern region. Boko Haram has been a major challenge to Nigerian people; a threat to democracy and Nigeria's development since 2009 to date. While autocracies often repress the formation of organizations before they can reach the stage of armed insurgencies, in democracies, opposition groups expression of discontent are allowed (Hegre, 2014), thereby making it easier for a group to sometime become either violent or to transform into a full-fledged terrorist organisation.

### FULANI-HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICT

In recent times, the north-central states of Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa and some states in the East such as Enugu have experienced conflicts that have led to thousands of deaths and displacements as a result of clashes between pastoralists (herders) and local farmers in several communities (Egbuta, 2018). Violent conflicts between herdsmen and farmers are threatening the country's security, stability, and peace. The driving force of the clashes is the competition for available resources, especially grazing land (Egbuta, 2018). The changing climatic condition generally referred to as global warming is no doubt taking a toll on the survival of herdsmen cattle. According to Egbuta (2018), desert encroachment from the Sahara towards the Sahel region and other associated climatic conditions have continued to affect the livelihood of herdsmen as they push further south in search of available space, pitching them against farmers and host communities in different parts of Nigeria.

With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. In a particular attack by Fulani herdsmen in 2016 on residents in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State about 40 persons were left dead (Abiodun, 2016). In Benue, one of the hardest-hit states, Governor Samuel Ortom reports more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016 (cited in Ajigbo et al, 2018). From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states (Ajigbo et al, 2018). In January 2018, the News Agency of Nigeria reported that over 18, 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were in 11 camps in Nasarawa state. Yet to date, response to the crisis at both the federal and state levels have been poor (International Crises Group, 2017).

In January 2018 alone, Amnesty International report indicated that 168 people were killed as a result of herdsmen-farmer clashes (cited in Egbuta, 2018). For example, concerning the clashes in Benue, farming along the Benue River accounts for over 20, 000 tons of grain annually and this same area is also fertile ground for herdsmen to feed their cattle. Gbaradi (2018) cited in Ajigbo et al (2018) showed that Fulani herdsmen killed 3,780 Nigerians in attacks across the country excluding the injured and abducted. On the other hand, farmers have killed scores of cows and Fulani herdsmen in reprisal attacks for the destruction of farms and farm produce by cows (Ajigbo et al, 2018). Thus, farmlands within the riverbank areas are the most affected by the movement of the herdsmen, resulting in a number of clashes (Egbuta, 2018). The democratic government/the present administration under President Muhammadu Buhari has failed to address the conflict properly and adequately as many states are left to their own fate. Some states such as Benue have enacted anti-grazing laws but it has been reported Fulani herdsmen have not abided fully with these laws. Thus, the conflict has not ceased.

### Nigeria's Recurring Conflict: Implications for Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation and Development

Two decades after Nigeria's transition to democratic rule in 1999, the country is still battling with various challenges, particularly conflict, that continue to threaten its democratic consolidation and development. Nigeria's democracy has known no peace. Conflict pervades the whole region and insecurity has become the order of the day. In the Southern, Eastern and Central parts of Nigeria militancy, kidnapping, insurgency and Fulani-herdsmen, and farmers clashes loom large. In the North, the Boko Haram insurgency is creating a theatre of violence, displacement, and a cycle of poverty. The same applies to Niger Delta. Nigeria's democracy is in a turbulent state as more conflict emanates every day. In an interaction with a scholar at the Department of Political Science at Afe Babalola University, he noted that it looks like democracy is breeding conflict because there seems to be a lack of political will to nib these conflict problems in the bud.

The consequences of conflict for Nigeria's development are profound. Armed conflict often leads to forced migration, long-term refugee problems and the destruction of infrastructure (Gates et al, 2015), and Nigeria is no exception. In times of conflict social, political, and economic institutions can be permanently damaged. As noted by Ray and Esteban (2017), within-country conflicts account for an enormous share of the



deaths and hardships in the world today. For example, the Fulani-herdsmen and farmers' clashes have claimed thousands of lives, destroyed properties, and means of livelihood of the people in the affected states reducing both social and economic activities. In a country that boasts Africa's largest economy, these resource-based conflicts have impeded market development and economic growth by destroying productive assets, preventing trade, deterring investment, and eroding trust between market actors (Rhynard-Geil, 2019).

It is a known fact that the development of any country in the world is dependent on many factors, which may fast-track or retards its growth, among which security is central (Adebayo, 2014). Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram remains one of the deadliest conflicts in the north despite a major military offensive to contain the African Islamist militant group and support from international partners (Campbell and Harwood, 2018). Although Boko Haram strongholds in the northern region have been limited to some villages and pockets of countryside due to the military crackdown, the group has not been totally subdued. For example, the United Nations' refugee agency estimates the conflict has displaced 2.4 million people and put more than seven million at risk of starvation (cited in Campbell and Harwood, 2018). The Boko Haram conflict has also led to the degradation of infrastructure, including the closing or destruction of more than half of the region's schools and the near-complete breakdown of an already weak public health system (Campbell and Harwood, 2018).

The Boko Haram terrorist activities in the north have also taken a big toll on the country's economic development as the nation has to redirect spending to attend to conflict-related issues including building internally displaced camps and rebuilding of communities. The money that would have been used to develop infrastructure is now used for either military expenses in the fight for terror and militancy or for reconstruction. In the words of Adebayo (2014) combating a scourge like Boko Haram necessarily involves a significant drain on the nation's material and human resources.

In the case of Niger Delta, oil wealth accounts for over 80 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, the Nigeria Natural Resource Charter (NNRC) report (2018) showed the country lost about N3.8 trillion within the years 2016 and 2017 to oil theft. The NNRC report pointed out that the estimated financial value of what Nigeria lost through crude oil theft in the Niger Delta was higher than the current combined allocations of the country to health and education in the 2018 federal budget (NNRC, 2018). It stressed that the combined allocations for health and education amount

to N189.4 billion, which translates to a mere 8.4 percent of the estimated value of losses from oil theft two years ago (NNRC, 2018). NNPC report (2016) showed that Nigeria lost 643 million litres of crude oil or N51.28 billion as a result of 3,000 incidences of pipeline vandalism in 2015 alone (Dialoke and Edeja, 2017).

Hostage takings by the militants and political instability are also injurious to the economy, as it induces capital flight or slows foreign direct investment (Dialoke and Edeja, 2017). Capital flight has a multiplier effect on an economy. For example, it impedes business investment, economic growth, and productivity, spurs inflation and unemployment and negatively affects the living standards of the people. Moreover, security of lives and property plays a major role in the development of any country, as investors in any economy want to be assured of the safety of their investments (Adebayo, 2014). Since the risk of doing business increases when there is insecurity in the polity, investors who are to facilitate industrial growth and employment generation, try as much as possible to avoid such an unfavourable business environment (Adebayo, 2014). Nigeria's human capital development remains weak due to under-investment and the country ranked 152 of 157 countries in the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index (World Bank, 2019).

Rhynard-Geil (2019) in a study for Mercy Corps organisation found that states affected by farmer-pastoralist conflicts lost an average of 47% of taxes (Internally Generated Revenue, or IGR) due to these conflicts. In addition, the study found that the average household affected by farmer-pastoralist conflict would experience at least a 64% increase in income, and potentially 210% or higher increase in income, if these conflicts were reduced to near zero (Rhynard-Geil, 2019). Destruction of means of livelihood has resulted in an increase in the number of the poor. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2018), over 62 percent of the Nigerian population live in poverty. Today, Nigeria has overtaken India as the poverty capital of the world, and there is no doubt that incessant conflicts in the country contributes to the country's increasing poverty level. Also, Nigeria's unemployment rate has been rising. According to the African Development Bank (2019) cited in Chidozie (2019) unemployment situation in Nigeria is frightening. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that Nigeria has some of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates in Africa, put respectively at 23.1 percent and 20.1 percent (cited in Chidozie, 2019).

These conflicts also pose greater challenges to the economic health of families and households, in addition to the obvious and incalculable loss of human



life (Rhynard-Geil, 2019). Conflicts have not brought any gains to the country but losses. If these conflicts are resolved, Rhynard-Geil (2019) study found that Nigeria stands to gain up to the US \$13.7 billion annually in total macroeconomic progress in a scenario of peace between farmers and pastoralists in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau alone. Conflict remains a major obstacle (among other factors) to development and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Nigeria's democracy has been chaotic and crisis-ridden, although Nigeria is not alone in that regard. Scholars believe that democracy is going through a difficult time (The Economist, 2014). Wang Jisi of Beijing University observed that "many developing countries that have introduced Western values and political systems are experiencing disorder and chaos" (cited in The Economist, 2014). Even in its heartland, democracy is clearly suffering from serious structural problems, rather than a few isolated ailments (The Economist, 2014). For Nigeria, democracy has been equated with corruption, bad governance/leadership, lack of development, increasing poverty, and of course conflict. As the country strives/works towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, one major issue (among others) that stands in the way of Nigeria is recurring conflict.

### **Nigerian Government's Strategies for Managing Conflict in a Democratic Era**

Nigeria's strategies to manage conflict in a democratic era has not been particularly different from the military era, except that the government in question is a "democracy." One of the foremost strategies of the Nigerian government in responding to insecurity and conflict is the use of police and military intervention. Aside from sending the police to maintain peace and order in conflict areas at the outset, the government has also responded through full military action, where sometimes the military has applied excessive force and rendered many civilians homeless. An example is the case of the Odi incident in Bayelsa state which was aimed at silencing the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) on November 20, 1999, and the military ended up destroying the whole community. There was also the deployment of military forces to contain incidences of insecurity and conflict as witnessed in the Eggon-Megili in Aryaragu and Eggon-Fulani Herdsmen conflicts in Nasarawa State in February 2013. The government has used the military Joint Task Force (JTF) to quell violence in conflict zones. Scholars have attributed the use of the military without adequate consideration of the main causes of the conflict to bad governance. According to Aghedo and Osumah (2015) due to poor governance, the state relies essentially on

repression and the military option in managing challenges to its legitimacy, leading to the radicalization of violent non-state actors.

The government has also responded through dialogue or the use of mediators. In the use of dialogue, the government has utilized the services of elder statesmen or men of integrity in the society to negotiate peace among warring factions. For example, Chief Edwin Clark and other prominent leaders in the Niger Delta played leading roles in the reconciliation and mediation between the government and the Niger Delta militants. Such mediating role was said to have been proposed by former President General Olusegun Obasanjo to former President Goodluck Jonathan although it was reported by the government that this was rebuffed by Boko Haram. In addition, the government also established Panels or Commissions of inquiry which act as Adhoc committee to provide the best solutions to restore peace in troubled areas. Unfortunately, after huge amounts of money and time had been spent for such panels of inquiries, their reports are never looked upon, reviewed or implemented. This is the bane of conflict management in Nigeria. Among different conflict management strategies employed, the Nigerian government has relied heavily on the deployment of military troops to diverse regions of conflict in Nigeria to restore order. The military itself has constituted a security threat in a democratic era (Osondu, 2012).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Francis Fukuyama was right when he pronounced that the world is now moving from a democratic regression to a democratic depression. Citizens of many countries are losing faith with democracy, particularly the system's inability to protect the rights of the people and put an end to armed conflict. In Nigeria today, democracy has not lived up to its expectations. The country has not experienced complete peace as envisaged but is often confronted with conflict. In established democracies, semi-democracy or transitional democracies, democracy is now equated with conflict, often intrastate wars. Since 1999 that Nigeria returned to democracy, every administration has one or more conflicts to address starting with Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram insurgency and currently Fulani-herdsmen clashes with farmers, among others such as Biafra secession. It has been established that democracy can create an environment where conflict could thrive when people have the opportunity to mobilize to show opposition. These conflicts have negative developmental implications for Nigeria. For example, Nigeria's



economic growth and development continue to regress instead of progress. There are issues of capital flight, increasing poverty and displacement that are retarding the progress on development in the country. Recurring conflict also poses a great threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Nigeria is just two decades old in running a democratic government, as a result, increasing conflict can impact on strengthening democracy in the country.

The paper then recommends that the Nigerian government should not treat these conflicts with a kid glove if the country must make any significant progress towards sustainable development by 2030. In addition, some of the root causes of these conflicts such as unemployment, deprivation of certain rights, poverty, marginalisation, and sectionalism must be adequately addressed. In the land dispute between farmers and herdsmen, for example, the government can apply equity in solving the clashes where necessary. Illegal arms proliferation and possession should come with grave punishments/sanctions to avoid reckless killings of citizens. Lastly, Nigerian laws such as anti-grazing laws enacted by some states must be enforced on offenders without fear or favour.

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