Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria: A reflection on the failure of democratic containment

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Abstract

Democracy is a system of government greatly supported by the vast majority of Nigerians and they are willing to sustain it. It is believed that the system guarantees security and promotes prosperity. It is considered a solution to most problems faced by the country. However, recent security challenges are reflections and continuation of political trends and the prospects of Democracy thriving in Nigeria. The focus of this article is to understand why democratic governments in Nigeria have failed in their effort to contain terrorism in the country as manifested by Boko Haram and other Islamist movements. Some elements of democracy as practised in Nigeria are observed in relations to the emergence of Boko Haram terrorism. It is submitted that, even when it does not equate to a counter-terrorism strategy, democracy still has some mechanisms that could be used to contain some factors that trigger or manifest terrorism.

Keywords: Nigeria, Democracy, Boko Haram, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism

INTRODUCTION

Politics is at the core of Nigeria's security misfortune. The inherited colonial state known today as Nigeria, has experienced numerous political crises. These have gone a long way towards showing the frustrations and dashed hopes of the population. This trend of frustration in Nigeria started with the struggle for power defined in personality, party politics, ethnicity and regionalism, which dominated the First Republic (1960--1966). In 1966, the colonial-inherited democracy was abolished

by the military. Amidst the first phase of the uninterrupted military rule (1966--1979), Nigeria experienced a 30 months civil war (Achebe 2012). Transition to democracy in 1979 raised another hope among the population. However, electoral malpractices, corruption and political violence soon dashed the hopes of Nigerians (Joseph 1991). Consequently, between 1984 and 1987 to the mid-1990s, military coup d'états became a recurrent political phenomenon in the country. The annulment of the 12 June 1993 election was another source of national agony. The iron reign of General Sanni Abacha (the military head of state between 1994 and 1998) only helped to complicate the political log jam in the country. Towards the end of the 20th century, a new era was ushered in in the country. Democracy became imperative in 1999 after the death of General Abacha. However, democracy has not been able to deliver as greatly anticipated. While military rule in Nigeria could be remembered for alienation, gross human rights abuses, intolerance, draconian laws, corruption, intimidation, miseries and underdevelopment, democracy has shown little signs of discontinuity in Nigeria. From the onset, democracy in Nigeria was trapped in a dysfunctional state with 'amoral politics' of corruption, ethnicity and garrison structures with oligarchy tendencies (Adekanye 1999; Ekpu 2009; Omotola 2009; 2011; Osaghae 1995). By implication, this trend encourages alienation, repression, underdevelopment and poverty. In return, individual citizens and civil society groups are fed with clearer anti-political and anti-state motivations and grievances against this dysfunctional system.

Again, the failure of the Nigerian state to deliver public goods coincides with the limitation of democracy to reverse this trend, and make violent capacity-building easier for radical grievous groups. While the absence or presence of democracy is not the cause of Boko Haram terrorism, this study explores those junctions, where the practice of democracy in Nigeria has failed to contain the solidification of grievances, or has avoided the whole menace as it is known, enhancing accountability and democratic institutions like law enforcement. There are many perspectives to the causes of terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria. However, the state of the country's politics vis-à-vis the limitations of democracy projects informed this focus. Failure of democracy in Nigeria is used here to reflect operational weakness and not absence of   progress and other successes of democracy outside this discussion. This article focuses on the operation of democracy in defence and security against terrorism in Nigeria.

DEMOCRACY AND TERRORISM

Terrorism is a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role (Weinberg,

Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 782). It could also be defined as the use of force or violence or the threat of force or violence to change the behaviour of society as a whole by causing fear and by targeting specific parts of society in order to affect the entire society (Garrison 2004, 278). As such, terrorism is the intentional, random murder of defenceless non-combatants, with the intention of instilling fear or mortal danger among civilians as a strategy designed to advance political ends (Meisels 2009, 348).

In contrast to terrorist strategies, democracy is a system of government characterised by the participation of the people through their freely elected representatives, by the recognition and promotion of the basic rights of citizens, including the rights of vulnerable groups such as minorities (Omotola 2008, 3). 'Democracy' means compromise, cooperation and negotiation in the establishment and institutionalisation of democratic structures congruent to the historical and political antecedents and values of the country and the relative responsiveness of these institutions to the basic wishes and aspirations of the people (Kura 2009, 272). Therefore, at the core of democratic theory is the assumption that people of all nations are interested in the way they are governed and, as such, desire to contribute to the process of making decisions which shape their welfare and existence (Zimako 2009, 5).

Democratic peace theorists contend that democracies are better positioned against terrorism. It is argued that democratic states are more legitimate and internally stable, as people can channel their aspirations through democratic means. However, there is evidence that democracies are more vulnerable to terrorism. For instance, this explanation has been recognised in America's (among other Western powers) foreign policy, which has been long hijacked by 'Fear of the Alternative' in efforts to support liberalism in autocratic regimes, most especially in the Arab World (Brumberg 2002; Diamond 2010; Zakaria 2001 & 2013).

It has been established that democracy is dangerous for fragile, failed and poor states (see Collier 2010 and 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2004 and 2002; Collier, Hoeffler and Söderbom, 2001). Rather than democracy, in the liberal sense, most of the so-called developing democracies have become 'quasi-democracies', 'electoral democracies', 'illiberal democracies', 'competitive authoritarianisms', 'semi-authoritarianisms', 'mixed regimes', 'pseudo-democracies', 'electoral authoritarian regimes' and 'garrison democracy'. (Diamond 2009; Levitsky and Way 2002; Morlino 2009). The nexus between hybrid democracy and terrorism partly fits into what Richard (2008) refers to as 'the ghost of state terror'. The argument is that the lesser democratic states encourage violence and make non-state terrorism unavoidable with their exclusive politics.

From a comparative study of politics, Schlichte (2009, 246) arrives at three reasons why terrorist groups emerged against the state. The first is the mechanism of repression: violent repression exerted by government forces which, in turn, influences political opposition to evolve into armed action. The second is the ad hoc mechanism, based on neo-patrimonial settings: individuals who feel excluded from clientelist networks of a political class who may begin to organise violent actions against state agencies. The third is often linked to situations of open political violence: this spin-off mechanism is tied to state policies, but its main characteristic is that the group's activities become free from state control. From this understanding, repressiveness, exclusiveness and unpopularity of hybrid democratic governments can ally other grievances to make terrorism an attractive tactic for stakeholders.

DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY AT WORK IN NIGERIA

Larry Diamond (2009) points out that democracy has not succeeded in most developing countries such as Nigeria, and that it is an ultimate necessity to make it succeed within the framework of the people's will. It will be an overstatement to say that democracy is associated with all societal ills, even when it is dysfunctional. However, the issue is that more is always expected of democracy, especially in transiting societies (Carothers 2002). While democracy may not be the initial cause of these ills, it makes them more dangerous. Therefore, the problem that often emerges is that of failure of democratic governments to contain these societal ills, which may even disarm democracy itself.

In Nigeria, like in many other African countries, democracy has been virtually nonexistent because of regular but not necessarily free or fair elections, disguised multiparty elites that dictate to the people rather than uphold the rule of law; the existence of the judiciary as a separate arm of government without necessarily being independent, civilian control of the military without people's control of government, ambitious legal documentation of rights and freedom that are seldom allowed in practice, and a constitution without constitutionalism. Within the framework of this understanding, Nigerians have experienced a decade of politics that threatens the foundation of the country's democratisation. In many spheres of life, citizens are contending with the persistent dashes of hope of improvement in wellbeing and promised democratic dividends.

To bring the relevance of democratisation and its dividends to bear on this discussion, issues of repression, corruption, inequality and poverty, and patterns of political competition, conflicts and violence in Nigeria have contributed in no small way to the radicalisation of many advocacy or civilian groups, including many Islamic sects. These elements have coexisted with the intention of weakening

democracy. The state accrues to itself, 'absolute power' *vis-à-vis* the citizens and civil societies, which are, at the same time, treated with suspicion and intimidation. Civil societies are often tagged as security threats on political grounds in Nigeria. The state's definition of security largely suffers from the traditional conception which centred on regime survival while human security is reduced to nothing. The armed forces form the core instrument of domestic stability. History abounds of Nigerian security officials who embarked on beating, detaining or killing peaceful protesters. Before now, Nigerians experienced more state terrorism than terrorism by non-state entities. For the Nigerian ruling elites, masses of innocent Nigerians demanding transparency in public space are threats to the continuous survival of the country. The repression noticed in most peaceful movements have, hence, radicalised their members to resort to violence. This factor is one of the many critical premises that brought the Niger Delta militant groups to life; and to some extent, the 2009 Boko Haram uprising that attracted military crackdown of their many of their members and leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and informed the transformation of the group's strategies (Nnoli 2011; Osaghae 2008).

Politics in Nigeria has assumed a zero-sum character where the winner takes all at the expense of the loser. As the chance for political corruption increased, investing in elections or coup d'état become more profitable for stakeholders. However, the global wave of democratisation limited junta's fortune and coup financiers have shifted their attention to elections (Nugent 2007, 255). However, knowing fully well that losing an election has dire financial consequences, the certainty of candidates getting 'something' in the end, through vote-buying and other corrupt activities, encourages the willingness to fund political activities, especially elections in Nigeria (Ilo 2004, 5; Smah 2008, 66). These political financials, as Anthony Butler (2010, 2) and P. J. O'Rourke (2010, 169–176) described them, "will use their money to influence candidates or party officials. Money given in return for implicit or stated favours not only has a corrupting effect on a political system, but also undermines the trust and legitimacy upon which a flourishing democracy depends." The by-products of this shadow force of democracy include the rise of neo-patrimonial regimes, politically motivated inequality and poverty.

In political systems like this, winning and losing are high stakes that come at a high price. In practice, the price is that the winner wins what he or she has won *vis-à-vis* their jungle prowess which creates a sense of popularity that they aptly maintain with patronage, propaganda and intimidation. In this scenario, actors compete to win their way into government, plunder the state treasury and silent opposition parties. This often produces what is known to Nigerians as 'do-or-die' politics. In 2007, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former head of state of Nigeria, declared that "this (2007) election is a do-or-die affair for me and the PDP. This coming

election is a matter of life and death for PDP and Nigeria (Larewaju, 2007; Sheme, 2011)". This radical determinism often manifests itself in the form of repression of oppositions by the sitting government and maintenance of armed non-state forces or groups that promote violence and assassinations among political actors (Igbafe and Offiong 2007; Schlichte 2009).

This political practice flourishes at the backdrop of the available chances for the elites to plunder the oily treasury. As a consequence, corruption has become a major problem in Nigerian polity. In this context, corruption is preferably defined as the exercise of official powers against public interest or the abuse of public office for private gains (Zimako 2009, 47). In the executive arm of government, for instance, corruption takes the form of over-invoicing, conversion of public properties for private use, inflation of contract costs, kickbacks paid to monitoring officials for contracts awarded, distribution or sharing of public resources as patronage to certain individuals to secure political support (Alabi and Fashagba 2010). These further include the awarding of contracts to family members and friends, and their appointment to public positions, even when there is no vacancy. This situation has caused increased poverty, unemployment and inequality among Nigerians. These, in the end, lead to the failure of the state to religiously adhere to the basic principles of social contract between the governors and the governed.

In Nigeria, 66.2% of the population (99.3 million people) are reported to be living below the poverty line of less than $1 a day in monetary terms (Mordi 2012). Only about 30% of the Nigerian population manage to live above $2 per day. This is happening in a country where recurrent expenditure took 70% of the budget allocation in 2012. As reported by Soyinka (2012) in *Tell* magazine (one of the leading weekly non-governmental media in Nigeria), the 2012 budget desire was to add up to the cars and jets of Aso villa (the presidential palace); and to spend N1 billion (approximately $18,2million) for the president's food. It was also reported that each of Nigeria's Senators earned N245 million ($1.6 million) per annum, compared to Senators in the United States who earned $6,000 per month (N948, 000 or N11.4 million per annum) each (Soyinka 2012). Non-accountable security vote for state governors in Nigeria ranges between N1 billion and N6 billion ($6,330 to $37,975). Thus, inequality in Nigeria is largely motivated by the operating political practices of the country. These explain the reasons for the toughness in political competition.

Apart from the intra-elites conflict, operating political practices are also accomplished with top-down dimensions and effects. As Dion (1968, 4) pointed out, the leadership is not simply a function of the leader acting by himself, but the result of an interaction with members of the group. The top-down dimension of Nigeria's political practices manifest in the form of politicisation of communal identity,

patronage and repression. The effects of these developments flow on the larger segment of the receiving side through alienation, loss of self-esteem, depression and poverty. These, expectedly metamorphosed, understandably, into mass political apathy, increases in politically motivated grievance, mass movement of the youth to other states for greener pastures, radicalism, politically motivated ethno-religious or communal violence, militancy, terrorism and loss of legitimacy for the state and government. These outcomes typify the crises that exist between personality and institutional development, and the regrettable inability of democracy to reverse this trend (see Huntington 1965 and 1968).

THE IDEA BEHIND BOKO HARAM RADICALISM

Boko Haram (meaning western education is a sin) is the popular name for a radical group of youths who call themselves *Jama'atuAhlisSunaLidda'awatiWal Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad). The core objective of the group, as popularly echoed by their leaders, is to revive pure Islamic practices and establish an Islamic state in Nigeria. As believed by the group, however, it will be difficult for an Islamist State to be established in Nigeria if western education is not eliminated. In interviews conducted before his death, Mohammed Yusuf, the late leader of Boko Haram movement, told the BBC Hausa Service that he believed the earth was flat and that rain was not caused by evaporation from the ground (cited in Oyewole 2013, 255). As a result, western education is considered to be a dangerous tool in efforts to establish an Islamic state. Da'wah Coordination Council of Nigeria (DCCN) (2009, 24–25) captured the following about western education:

> Apart from being irreligious or agnostic, some consider it too elitist, culturally insensitive and imperialistic, conformist, top-down and prescriptive, non-creative, reductionist and non-holistic, more training than enlightenment, environmentally damaging, urban-biased, oblivious to indigenous knowledge and context, amoral, relativist, rigid and age-restricted, unnatural and competitive, based on needs of the past Industrial Age and therefore out-dated...

One of the aims of this study is to interrogate the relevance of Boko Haram grievances. Eskor Toyo (2011, 44) provides two economic reasons why Muhammed Yusuf, who 'himself held a university degree' (a product of western education), could support its prohibition. One of the reasons is because of the growing graduate unemployment in Nigeria. The second reason is that western education has produced corrupt and unethical people as leaders. For instance, as from 2010, 39.28 million people were unemployed in Nigeria, and the economy kept producing 1.8 million

job seekers annually, in addition to 99.3 million people who live in absolute poverty (see Mordi 2012). As bad as the situation appears to be, the Muslim-dominated northern part of the country is the most affected. But despite this, the Federal allocations to the region still lag behind other regions.

Therefore, the conviction of members of the sect is that, if western education could breed corruption, mass poverty, class segregation, ignorance, diseases, underdevelopment, stupendous wealth for only a few, which it is said to have done mostly in the north, then society would be better off without it (Adele 2011, 63; Hassan 2010, 16). Adherents of Boko Haram ideas were compelled to withdraw from school where they received formal education and those who had acquired one certificate or the other, were also requested to tear them up, out-rightly rejecting western education (Ojo 2010, 50). The hope of Boko Haram is that a Sharia-governed Nigeria will be more human under the leads of spiritual guidance and Allah's supervision.

It should be noted that Boko Haram is not the first group to demand for Sharia or an Islamic state in Nigeria, in such radical ways. This is what many northern-based students, politicians, civil societies, religious leaders and Islamic sects have been demanding since 1978. More than 4 000 people lost their lives in the crusade for the realisation of this objective, as championed by Maitasine in 1980s. Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzakky, the leader of the then radical Islamic Brotherhood, is another fanatic who rallied massive campaigns in favour of this trend.

The trend has become more complicated with the mass mobilisation and politicisation of the demand by the Fourth Republic politicians, against true religious intent. One of the major concerns of the government of Nigeria after the 1999 democratisation, has been how to control the spread of religious radicalism and violence that accompanied the advocacy of Sharia by some state governors in the northern part of the country. This advocacy was massively supported as a 'divine' intervention to correct the ills associated with governance, while the elite considered it as a cheap weapon of galvanising political support. Against the provision of the 1999 Constitution, and with special reference to Chapter V, the federal government made no attempt to stop the adoption of Sharia law by the 12 northern state governments. However, the political and religious dominance of Sharia, corruption, repression, rising inequality and growing poverty have derailed popular support of this advocacy. As a consequence, the gap between the expected sharia states and the reality thereafter, cost such advocacy millions of its supporters. Thus, few of the radical defenders emerged to challenge the implementation of what they considered as hypocrisy in an attempt to reinvent mass support.

Apart from religious intent, some politicians in the Northeastern part of Nigeria are alleged to have sponsored this group as a bargaining power to further their parochial

interest within the federation. Based on this view, some of the violent members of the group were claimed to have been trained by politicians to win election (Adele 2011; Oyewole 2013). The expectation is to use them to intimidate opponents and their supporters and to integrate this strategy into a favourable bargaining strategy to win the Presidential ticket back to the north. In contrast to this, there are also some views that believe that the north is marginalised and Boko Haram is used as a weapon to ensure that "justice" is done in the country. Among the supporters of this view is the former national chairman of the People Democratic Party (PDP), Alhaji Bamangar Tukur and General Azazi (President Jonathan's security adviser until June 2012).

WHERE DEMOCRATIC CONTAINMENTS HAVE FAILED

Terrorism occurs when motivation and capacity meet (Jackson and Frelinger 2009). In Nigeria, democracy has not been successful in addressing mundane issues such as marginalisation, domination and violent power struggle. It has also failed to contain and deter the development of radical motivation and capacity for Boko Haram terrorism. Cottee and Hayward (2011) argue that the desire for excitement, the desire for ultimate meaning and the desire for glory are three crucial elements that make terrorism attractive. The last two elements are the prime positions of terrorist ideology. In this respect, democracy in Nigeria has not been successful enough to convince Sharia advocates, especially the violent ones, of the prospect of democracy since 1999. Walid (2008) even takes this argument further when he argued that there is a war of ideas, from which "Islamist terrorism" is a section in a wider ensuing global competition between Sharia and democracy. To reduce radicalism and terrorism, democracy must prove itself to Sharia advocates. Moïsi (2007 and 2009) and Blair (2007) harbour a similar view as battle of value.

How does democracy fare in the battle of value in this case? This can be evaluated with adopted bars of repression, patronage and institutionalism. One, Nigeria has over-relied on the armed forces for domestic and democratic stability. Throughout history the law enforcement system in Nigeria has been kept weak by different regimes for different reasons. This institution was kept weak during the 29 years of military rule in Nigeria to deter it as a rival contender for political power. In the civilian regimes, corruption is the most important factor that undermines the effectiveness of the Nigerian police. However, the rivalry between the police and the military still continues in a dangerous way, preventing the thriving of democracy (Odoma and Aderinto 2012).

Because of this weakness, the police is unable to ensure proper security in the country. As of 2004, the law enforcement system in the country has proved ill-

equipped to deter Boko Haram from instilling violence in the country. After the 2003 attacks by Boko Haram at Yanusari Local Government in Yobe State, where the sect overpowered the law enforcement systems in the state and the Federal Government was left with little choice than to call in the military to neutralise sect members (Oyewole 2013). Despite this incident among other subsequent evidence to the strength of Boko Haram against the weakness of the law enforcement system, the concern security institution remains weak. The most painful aspect about democracy in Nigeria is that it has failed to reverse the trend of weak policing, even though it has continued to submerge democracy itself.

In addition to the weakness of the Nigerian police force, it remains corrupt and repressive. In 2009, it was a contingent of the Nigerian army that arrested and handed over to the police Mohammed Yusuf, the then Boko Haram leader, and it is reported that he was assassinated while in their custody. The militaristic response of government against Boko Haram in 2009 did not take into consideration the human rights of the sect members (Adesoji 2010; Akubor 2011; Ojo 2010; Sani, 2011). This angered Boko Haram members who became more violent and even opted for terrorist tactics from 2010. With the growing terrorism, the government of Nigeria further increased the role of the military over the police. Lack of democratic means to resolve the issue of Islamists fundamentalism empowered the military more in the name of *war on terror* and abuse the basic human rights of the poor and the eventual declaration of a state of emergency by the Federal Government in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States, the three most affected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Furthermore, political competition and patronage networks in Nigeria have enhanced the escalation of Boko Haram operations and capacity building, including access to weapons and support from politicians. After more than a decade of democracy there has not been significant success in containing corruption and the zero-sum pattern of political competition in Nigeria. It is in reaction to this that Boko Haram is recorded to have been sponsored by politicians and some business interests for religious and election purposes (Oyewole 2013). On the topic of corruption and weak institutions, one can also evaluate the Nigerian Custom and Immigration Services with regard to the inflow of weapons, illegal immigration and trans-nationalisation patterns of Boko Haram operations. The recent counter-terrorism efforts by the Nigerian government have exposed issues that continue to hamper democracy in Nigeria and vice versa. Among these are issues such as human rights abuse, corruption, institutionalism, the 2015 elections, intra- and inter-political parties' crises and militarism.

What has been highlighted here is that democracy has been passive with regard to the security interests of the nation. The intention is not to portray democracy as having failed, but to establish how certain practices have limited the success of

democracy and its advantages in ensuring the security of the nation. The implication is that democracy has also in certain respects improved counter-terrorism against Boko Haram in Nigeria. For instance, President Jonathan declared states of emergency in the three states of the Federation that are considered Boko Haram strongholds, without necessarily subverting their democratic institutions. This is in sharp contrast to what was attainable in the past. Also, compared with Nigeria's counter-insurgency in the Niger Delta, the ongoing counter-terrorism has witnessed more cooperation and consultation between the three arms of government, although these do not mean a conflict-free cooperation at the political level.

However, democracy is an ideal state that no nation in the world can claim to have attained. In a practical sense, democracy is a struggle, and the best one can do is to promote it (Nnoli 2011). As a consequence, democracy is advanced when it responds to criticism and when it provides better ways to deal with societal challenges. As explained in this study, democracy is not a counter-terrorism strategy or a substitution thereof. . In this way, the central thesis of this paper is anchor in the belief that democracies make superior counterterrorism, given the benefits of their inclusive institutions that prevent them from less thought policies and overreaction (Abrahms 2007).

CONCLUSION

It was revealed in the article that the failure of democracy in Nigeria after its introduction over a decade ago, confirms the state's weak institutional building, questionable state of human security, ineptitude in the management of corruption and pattern of political competition. This resulted in the limited ability of the government to contain, deter or defeat Boko Haram terrorism. This has equally contributed directly to the emergence and escalation of this trend in the country. Against this background, the influence of democracy in the management of these menaces is strategic. Even when the current military operations become more successful for strategic ends, the management of corruption, institutional weaknesses, pattern of political competition, most especially, against the ongoing wrangling towards the 2015 elections to a large extent, will determine the value and sustainability of counter-terrorism gains. While greater democracy is not a counter-terrorism strategy, however, these elements will not be archived in its absence. It is submitted that these elements are a democratic containment. The extent that they are considered will influence the achievement of the ongoing counter-terrorism battle in the long run. In the strategic sense, this is a politics of counter-terrorism and a simplified logic of how terrorism ends and the attainment of sustainable peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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