THE PROLIFERATION OF ARMS AND ITS EFFECT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

1Aver, Tyawwase Theophilus, 2Nnorom, Kingsley C, 3Ilim Moses Msughter
12Department of Sociology, Kwararafa University Wukari,
PMB 1019 Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria
3Department of Sociology, Federal University, Dutse-ma,
Katsina State, Nigeria.

Abstract: The proliferation of arms and weapons is among the social problems retarding the development of democracy in Nigeria today. This particular social problem came into being as a result of the greediness of contemporary politicians. In this discourse, attempt is made to identify how proliferation of arms and weapons has affected the development of democracy in Nigeria using the conflict theoretical perspective. This is premised on the background that proliferation of arms and weapons (which most politicians acquire during elections) has brought a lot of social vices to the Nigerian society. An increase in this trend has led to military take over severally and also led to the emergence of armed conflicts and civil strifes in Nigeria. This often brings about death of innocent citizens in the country Nigeria, because victims of these armed conflicts and civil strifes are innocent people. The paper recommends that strengthening the national legislation and controls for the possession, use, transfer of arms and weapons in the country. Arms and weapons holders should not exceed requirements for legitimate defence and security forces needs. Nigeria should develop partnerships with other countries especially in Africa where conflicts have become volatile to assist and strengthen the capacity of monitoring, control, arms accumulations and flows should be advocated. Nigerians should shun politics of violence in Nigeria so that democracy can develop among the strategies recommended.

Key Words: Proliferation, Arms, Weapons, Effects, Development, and Democracy.

I. Introduction

One of the greatest threats to democracy in Nigeria today, just as in many developing countries in the world, is the proliferation of illicit arms and weapons. Although there is no reliable and accurate data on the number of arms and weapons in the country, security experts reckon that there is a large quantity of infantry weapons and civilian style rifles including pistols and revolvers in the hands of private citizens which are used during elections. To put it bluntly, Nigeria is currently awash with illegal acquired fire arms by politicians (Emeh 2012). No doubt arms and weapons have become the principal driving force of most elections in the country Nigeria. The linkages between the arms and weapons have greatly subverted the development of democracy. Hazen and Horner (2007) maintained that politicians have in the past provided arms and weapons to privately funded militias who wield these arms and weapons as tools to intimidate the politicians and supporters.

The major challenge facing Nigerian democracy is linked to proliferation of arms and weapons that lead to internal strifes like political assassinations, religious riots, communal, ethnic and sectarian conflicts among others. All these threaten the development of democracy and weaken the consciousness of the people to partake in the democratic process. It may also lead to wide spread distrust, fear and apathy, due to the popular notion of “win at all costs” the use of violence intimidation and vote rigging (Bekoe, 2007). This trend has produced a number of challenges to democracy (World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit 2013).

The irony of the arms and weapon proliferation in Nigeria is that in 2007 former president Olusegun Obasanjo famously declared that election was a “do or die affair” a comment largely seen to urge his supporters to use the acquired arms and weapons so as to obtain victory (Peace Brief 2011). Adullahi and Rauf (2012) linked arms and weapons to action of violence engaged by people and government toward delivering goals. He further explained that violence has become a prominent part of the political culture of Africa. Indeed, governance and violence have become an integrated entity. As indicated, the availability and use of more sophisticated arms and weapons have contributed to the erosion of state authority. This has become particularly evident in the escalation of crime. It is rooted in inept structural forms that create or sustain human insecurity in
its broad sense. It is clear that proliferation of arms and weapons is, in part a response to demand for personal security when normative social relations collapse or are seen to be on the brink of collapse. These arms and weapons however accelerate and aggravate dysfunctional trends. The proliferation of arms and weapons can be traced to the 1964 general elections which was the first after the departure of the British colonialists and the 1965 region into a protracted civil disturbance and heralded the military into power in 1966.

The reality on ground is that a huge chunk of arms and weapons are in the hands of politicians and the politicians use them during electioneering which is marred by widespread rigging and violent killings. This often subverted the development of democracy in Nigeria despite efforts to sustain it. It is in the light of these prevailing situations that this paper is designed to highlights the proliferation of arms and its effects on the development of democracy in Nigeria. The paper is segmented into six parts, the introduction, conceptual terrain, theoretical framework, and the effects of arms and weapons proliferation on the development of democracy, recommendations and conclusion.

II. Conceptual Terrain

The concept proliferation of arms and weapons: Proliferation of arms and weapons is defined as a method in which arms and weapons are sold to private citizens especially in the conflict zones (Kofi Annan in Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia 2013). Hazan and Horner (2007) defined proliferation as the growth or numerous multiplications of illegal arms and weapons in the country. In the context of this paper arm proliferation is defined as sudden increase in the number of arms and weapons beyond those needed for legitimate national security. This means when state supplier recipient, does not exercise restraint in the production, transfer and acquisition of such arms and weapons beyond those needed. This act is done by unidentified groups either for economic or political purposes. This arms and weapons get easily in the hands of private individuals especially politicians.

Development: The concept of development is tested both theoretically and politically, and it does not have universally accepted definition. The definition of development has been controversial and unstable over time. As Thomas (2004) argues, development is "contested … complex, and ambiguous. Gore (2004) notes that in the 1950s and 1960s a ‘vision of the liberation of people and peoples’ dominated, based the definition or understanding of the concept on structural transformation’. This perception has tended to ‘slip from view’ for many contributors to the literature development. The second perspective is the definition embraced by international development donor agencies that Thomas notes. This is a definition of development which is directly linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that is eradication of unemployment, poverty and inequality. In regards to this paper development connotes the qualitative changes in the structure and framework of society that help the society to better realize its aims and objectives. Development is a process of social change, not merely a set of policies and programs instituted for some specific results.

Democracy: Democracy also is a word that is familiar to most people but it is a concept that is still misunderstood and misused at all times. For instance when dictators, single party regimes and military coup leaders alike assert popular support by claiming the mantle of of leadership they called democracy. It is a concept that is derives from the Greek word “demos”, or “People” it is defined, simply, as government in which the supreme power is vested in the hands of people. In the memorable phrase of President Abraham Lincoln, democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. Johari (1982) viewed as a political system in which democracy or “the rule of people” prevails to make the regime legitimate” in the real sense of the term. The machinery of government is run by the chosen representatives of the people who are accountable to them for their policies and actions. Freedom of speech, discussion and expression of views, universal adult franchise and free and fair periodic elections among others all entails a continuous test of the legitimacy of this government. Sergent (1975) viewed democracy with the following options citizen’s involvement in political decision making, some degree of equality among citizens, some degree of liberty, freedom granted or retained by citizenry, as a system of representation and an electoral system of majority rule. Regarding this work democracy is defined as a set of ideas and principles about freedom, but also consists of practices and procedures that have been molded through a long, often tortuous history which is an institutionalization of freedom.

III. Theoretical Framework

There are a number of theories explaining the origin of proliferation of arms and weapons some are conflicts and functionalist theories. The conflict theory, therefore stresses that the wealthy could acquire arms and weapons to use them during electoral process as this however affects the development of democracy in Nigeria.

IV. Conflict Theory

Conflict theory emphasizes the role of coercion and power in producing social order. This perspective is derived from the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883) who saw society as fragmented into groups that compete for social and economic resources. Social order is maintained by domination, with power in the hands of those
with the greatest political, economic, and social resources. When consensus exists, it is attributable to people being united around common interests, often in opposition to other groups (Anderson and Taylor, 2009).

According to conflict theory, inequality exists because those in control of a disproportionate share of society’s resources actively defend their advantages. The masses are not bound to society by their shared values, but by coercion at the hands of those in power (Anderson and Taylor, 2009). This perspective emphasizes social control, not consensus and conformity. Groups and individuals advance their own interests, struggling over control of societal resources. Those with the most resources exercise power over others with inequality and power struggles resulting. There is great attention paid to class, race, and gender in this perspective because they are seen as the grounds of the most pertinent and enduring struggles in society.

In Mill’s view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the “unequal distribution of power and resources in the society” (Knapp, 1994). The powerful elite in society has “emerged from the fusion of the corporate elite, the Pentagon, and the executive branch of government.” Mills argued that the interests of these elite were opposed to those of the people. He theorized that the policies of the power elite would result in “increased escalation of conflict, production of arms and weapons of mass destruction, and possibly the annihilation of the human race” (Knapp, 1994).

Conflict Theorists believed that Societies are defined by inequalities that produce conflict, rather than those produce order and consensus. This conflict based on inequality can only be overcome through a fundamental transformation of the existing relations in the society, and is a product of new social relations. The disadvantaged have structural interests that run counter to the status quo, which, once they are assumed, will lead to social change. Thus, they are viewed as agents of change rather than objects one should have sympathy for (Sears, 2008). Sears (2008) further maintained that human potential (e.g., capacity for creativity) is suppressed by conditions of exploitation and oppression, which are necessary in any society with an unequal division of labour. These and other qualities do not necessarily have to be stunted due to the requirements of the so-called “civilizing process,” or "functional necessity": creativity is actually an engine for economic development. The role of theory is in realizing human potential and transforming society, rather than maintaining the power structure. The opposite aim of theory would be the objectivity and detachment associated with positivism where theory is a neutral, explanatory tool. Consensus is a euphemism for ideology. Genuine consensus is not achieved, rather the more powerful societies are able to impose their conceptions on others and have them accept their discourses. Consensus does not preserve social order, it entrenches stratification, e.g., the Nigerian dream for political powers deluded by proliferation of arms and weapons. The State serves the particular interest of the most powerful while claiming to represent the interests of all. Representation of disadvantaged groups in democratic processes may cultivate the notion of full participation, but this is an illusion/ideology. Inequality on a global level is characterized by the purposeful underdevelopment of Developing Countries like Nigeria, both during colonization and after national independence. The global system (i.e., development agencies such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund) benefits the most powerful countries and multi-national corporations, rather than the subjects of development, through economic, political, and military actions. Today, conflict theorists find social conflict between any groups in which the potential for inequality exists: racial, gender, religious, political, economic, and so on. Conflict theorists note that unequal groups usually have conflicting values and agenda, causing them to compete against one another. This constant competition between groups forms the basis for the ever-changing nature of society (Sears, 2008). Power provides the mechanism for the violent control of the rest of the population. In the course of the struggles, politicians use money to acquire arms and weapons and at the same time buy the agents of the social control such as police, prosecutors, judges and other agencies of social control in order to allow them use the arms and weapons during electoral process.

From the above theoretical perspective, one will deduce that, conflict theory is of the view that politicians are regarded as enemy of progress in the society. This is because the phenomenon of democracy in Nigeria has become multidimensional and multifaceted to the extent that the right people are not allowed to take part in the system. According to the theory, this situation makes the control of the menace arms and weapons proliferation a very difficult task by the appropriate authority. Since members of the public cannot understand the complex nature of arms and weapons proliferations, they do not give the needed vital information to the appropriate authority saddled with the responsibility of controlling the phenomenon.

It is observed further from the theoretical perspective that, politicians can muster enough resources not only to braise the appropriate law enforcement agencies but also to frustrate their investigation aimed at curbing the menace in the society. Similarly, the organized social structure in Nigeria which attaches more importance to wealth acquisition with less attention given to the approved means of acquiring such wealth by the society provide grounds for increase in electoral violence in the country Nigeria. Almost every member of the society wants to belong to the ruling class without minding how he/she climbs the ladder. This situation has rather made the control of arms, weapons and other vices in the society very difficult.
Critics of the conflict perspective point to its overly negative view of society. The theory ultimately attributes humanitarian efforts, altruism, democracy, civil rights, and other positive aspects of society to capitalistic designs to control the masses, not to inherent interests in preserving society and social order. The strength of the theory lies in its recognition that arms and weapons proliferation is a violent crime against democracy and humanity generally. It hinders the effective utilization of human capital for national development. Based on the foregoing assumptions the theory has been adopted as a theoretical guide for the study.

V. The Effects of Arms and Weapons Proliferation on the Development of Democracy in Nigeria

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Nigerian Law provide citizens with the right to change their government peacefully through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Politicians however, abridge citizens’ right to change of government in Nigeria, during national, state and local government elections, which were conducted amid widespread fraud and numerous incidents of violence (Bureau of Democracy Human Rights Practices 2009). The story of elections in contemporary Nigeria especially since Nigeria transited from military to its peculiar clone of civilian rule in 1999 has been that of one violence, and fraudulent election after another (Ohanele 2011).

It is very unfortunate that in Nigeria, most election victories are not determined by the number of vote received by the political parties and their candidates, but by the ability of the political party to acquire, use arms and weapons to intimidate opponents and rigged elections. Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2003) express concern over the situation of politics in Nigeria when they observe that during the ward congress of the People’s Democratic Party (an intra-party affair) many politicians went to the congress venue armed with assault rifles and acid containers for possible use on opponents. This act is also witnessed at the federal, state, and local elections as well as intra-party elections. The South Africa based Institute for Democracy claimed that as many as 280 persons were killed in the country Nigeria between February and March 2007 (Bureau of Democracy Human Rights Practices 2009). For example there were bloody clashes in many parts of the country in 2011 general elections. There was massive loss of lives and property across the Country Nigeria. Ten National Youth Service Corps member employed as ad-hoc staff by independent National Electoral Commission to execute the election exercise lost their lives in Bauchi State. The fact remains that it was not only the ten corps members that were brutally killed by the hoodlums, both Muslims and Christians in the state lost their lives, while others lost valuable weapons that may not be easily replaced or quantified. In Niger, Kano, Kaduna, and Borno states and other areas were cases of political crisis were reported and the inhabitants, both the indigene and genes” live was at stake (Adullahi and Rauf 2012). In Akwa-Ibo state violence, bribery, rigging the election as domestic observers and voters were attacked for refusing to receive bribe to allow unfavour candidate win (Abubakar and Ibrahim 2011). More intriguing was the alleged collaboration between the security agencies and Independent National Electoral Commission officials particularly as seen in Ido Osi. The security agent was believed to have literally provided cover for Independent National Electoral Commission officials to perpetuate fraud for instance as the People’s Democratic Party thugs set fire on INEC building in Ido Ekiti, Ekiti State the Security agents watched on in ecstasy (Kayode 2012). Support Human Rights (2007) also asserted that Nigeria’s security services played a controversial role in the underdevelopment of democracy in the country. For instance police officials were widely accused of failing to do enough to protect voters from violence and safeguard the integrity of the process. In Gombe local government area of Gombe State Independence National Electoral Commission office, three police officers watched while People’s Democratic Party agents intimidated an Independence National Electoral Commission official into changing a result sheet. A People’s Democratic Party cabinet member of the state government assaulted a candidate of the All Nigerian People’s Party while in a police station in Deba, Gombe State and the policemen/officers present simply watched. Support Human Rights (2007) further maintained that the country’s human rights record remains disastrous, fueled in large measure by the near-total impunity enjoyed by those in political offices and in the security forces. Government at all levels remains hobbled by corruption and this has kept majority of Nigeria citizens mired in poverty and deprived of basic health and education services.

The government made little effort to investigate or bring charges in any of these cases of political violence. This act of killings normally resorts to wide spread distrust, fear and apathy to the democratic process in Nigeria. Our elections are always characterized by violence, killings, destruction of properties and bribery that could have been used for some developmental projects. In contrast, arms and weapons proliferation destroy human lives and physical assets and reduces social welfare of Nigerians. Arms and weapons proliferation is like “development in regress”. There were over one million illegal arms and weapons reportedly in circulation in Nigeria as at 2011 (http://www.cdi.org/friendlyversion/printversion.cfm?documentID=2225). These arms and weapons perpetuate violent conflict and create new cycles of violence and crime and as such, creating an antidemocratic atmosphere in the country. The arms and weapons also undermine the work of humanitarian and relief organizations and mitigate against sustainable development. Aribisala (2004) also avers that “…above all,
arms and weapons not only make democratic development difficult, but also polarizes communal groups and leads to the erosion of respect for human rights and dignity. Arms and weapons proliferation leads to collapse of government in 1959, 1964, 1965, 1979 and 1983 elections that led to military overthrow of civilian governments in Nigeria several times. This trend of arms and weapons proliferation has continued to perpetrate in a variable manner in successive elections like 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011.

Furthermore, as result of the proliferation of arms and weapons, most leaders in Nigeria do not believe in gaining political power through submission of mandates by their people rather they prefer to use arms and weapons. Arms and weapons proliferation has affected democratic development in Nigeria and other African countries as many countries in the continent are still struggling with democratic government. Most of leaders believe in what is regarded as sit-tight syndrome which has become a phenomenon in Nigeria and most African countries. Sit-tight syndrome by definition is a situation in which an individual tries to hold on to power too long for personal aggrandizement or gains. In an attempt to hang on to power, Nigeria and indeed African leaders often create a regime of violence, repression and bloodshed. They organize political thugs, hooligans and scavengers to sing their praises, intimidate opponents and kill them if they become intransigent (Karl 1968). This sit-tight syndrome is witnessed in many countries in Africa like Mali, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria among others. These countries have suffered violent loss of lives and properties as a result of sit-tight syndrome. When the sit-tight syndrome power is acquired, it will surely be maintained by arms and weapons. The issue under consideration can be seen in the case of former president Laurent Gbagbo verses Allassane Quatara of Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo lost election but violently insisted to remain in power. He used his powers, controlled the armed forces to shield him since he did not get the mandate legitimately (Adullahi and Rauf 2012). Nigeria for instance had their share in attempts to consolidate democratic systems. Example includes June 12 1993 experience in her Nigeria and the attempt by General Sanni Abacha to succeed himself (Oche, 2004). However, due to the strong commitment of Nigerian to the development of democracy thousands of people were killed, maimed, detained and some others have at one time or the other, gone on exile to escape the long hands of being arrested by overzealous democratic leaders who firmly hold unto powers because of their illicit acquired arms and weapons (Salui, 2004).

Other people that contributed to underdevelopment of democracy in Africa include political megalomaniac like Mobutu in Zaire (now Democratic republic of Congo (DRC)), Samuel Doe in Liberia; Siad Barre in Somalia created themselves “Political fiefdom in their respective countries (Abdullahi and Rauf 2012). The Miscreantely speculated national wealth devalued the lives of the people and destroyed the fabric of democracy in these countries. Mobutu’s case in Democratic Republic of Congo is a good example. Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the largest and richly endowed countries in Africa, yet, it is a country that lay bare in ruins. He used this endowment to demand the democratic future of Democratic Republic of Congo through his misdemeanor. Some African countries like Zimbabwe, Dafur, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Niger, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain among others experience episodes of arms and weapons as a result of change in government and this led to the killing of innocent people. This act seriously hindered the development of democracy in these countries.

VI. How to Tackle Arms or weapons Proliferations and Promote Democracy in Nigeria

The government should strengthen the national legislation and controls the possession, use, transfer of arms and weapons in the country. It should ensure that arms and weapons holders do not exceed requirements for legitimate defence and security needs. The government should develop partnerships with other countries especially in Africa where conflicts have become volatile to assist and strengthen the capacity of monitoring, control, arms accumulations and flows should be advocated. In recognition of the extent of illicit arms and weapons smuggling, Nigeria should sign a crime-combating agreement with developed nations. The agreement should allow the security of the countries to undertake joint operations in response to common safety and security problems especially in the area of intelligent sharing. Due to the porous nature of Nigerian boundaries only people with valid documents should be allowed to come into the country. The Interpol should be properly equipped and their mandate enlarged to cover prohibition of arms and weapons smuggling across national borders. Nigeria’s international partners should be robust in pressuring the federal government to combat the patterns of corruption, violence and impunity that have undermined democratic development in the country, especially at the national, state and local elections. The government should not interfere with the court cases in considering the likelihood of legal challenges to follow these deeply flawed elections, and should respect any court verdict. The government should also prosecute politicians who acquired illegal arms and weapons in the country. Penalty should be death by hanging or firing squad in order to deter other potential politicians who may want to engage in this criminal act.

The national assembly on their part should make laws that will strictly prevent production, importation, exportation and acquisition of arms by individuals in Nigeria especially politicians. Nigerian in the Diaspora should seriously partner with the government of Nigeria; they must apply real pressure on the government to
correct the country’s broader human right issues and deep-seated problems of democracy in the country. Nigerians should report to the security operatives individual who acquired arms and weapons around them in order to make our society a better place to stay and allow democracy to develop so that we can enjoy its dividends. There is need to shun politics of violence in Nigeria so that democracy can develop. The government should also be pressed to direct the Independent National Electoral Commission to release detailed breakdowns of the results at every polling station as soon as possible to allow greater scrutiny of the process in areas where abuses were rife.

VII. Conclusion

The study has been concerned with the investigation and explanations of the arms and weapons proliferation and its effects on the development of democracy in Nigeria. Conflict theoretical perspective was adopted in investigating and explaining how arms and weapons proliferations have affected democratic development in Nigeria. The study reveals that politicians acquire arms and weapons, use them during election periods in Nigeria. This trend has led to military takeover in the country on several occasions. The effects of arms and weapons proliferation is that democracy cannot develop and development generally will be retarded when there is no democracy. Finally, the study recommends that Nigeria should strengthen the national legislation and control for the possession of firearms. The agreement should allow the security of the countries to undertake joint operations in response to common safety and security problems especially in the area of intelligent sharing, use and transfer of arms and weapons in the country, Nigeria’s international partners should be robust in pressuring the federal government to combat the patterns of corruption, violence and impunity that have undermined democratic development in the country, especially at the national, state and local elections and the government should also be pressed to direct the Independent National Electoral Commission to release detailed breakdowns of the results at every polling station as soon as possible to allow for greater scrutiny of the process in areas where abuses were rife.

VIII. References


AIJRHASS 14-196; © 2014, AIJRHASS All Rights Reserved

Page 238