



The State, Society and Political Relationships of Northern Nigerian Youths in the Fourth Republic (1999-2019)

Musa Kabir Umar^{1*} and Sulaiman Abdullahi Bambale²

¹*Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria.*

²*Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UNISZA) Terengganu, Malaysia.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the tribulations and the effects of how the political class bastardized and corruptly mishandled the democratic politics of northern Nigeria which in effect criminalized the mindset of the youth since the inception of the Fourth Republic in May 1999. The pointers of these youths' criminalities are seen in activities such as Boko Haram, kidnapping, armed robbery, armed banditry, cattle-rustling, political thuggery and gangsterism among others. These are the current challenges confronting entire northern Nigeria because of the neglect, abandonment, and misgovernance, particularly of the rural areas. The objective of the paper sought to analyze the

challenging effects of the northern youths' political misfortunes which caused the northern region to be in a serious security dilemma. Thus, the paper employed historical analysis using a secondary source of data to discuss and analysed how the Nigerian youths were relegated to mere evil political tools by the politicians over the years. It found out that the youth have been in a deplorable condition and had become ready-made instruments of the politicians to commit electoral crimes. Thus, they have become vulnerable to any anti-social conduct that can easily get them to quick and fast monetary advantages or religious extremism. The paper lastly suggests that the condition of these youth must be improved to deal with emerging social threats. This can be done by investing adequately in education, social services, infrastructural facilities and instantaneous provision of employment opportunities.

Keywords: Fourth republic; Northern Nigeria; political gangsterism; youth.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Marx Weber sees politics as striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power either among states or among groups within the state; the Nigerian youth, as a social group, need to be adequately allowed to enjoy the state's resources, opportunities, and privileges for rapid socio-economic development. The youth as one of the categories of society play substantial roles in shaping the entire life cycle of the state and society at large. For instance, although the youth historically played a key role in the fight against foreign rule; as they have done recently in entrenching multiparty democratic processes. They have immensely contributed to the socio-political transformations of the region. Indeed, the northern Nigerian youth was inspired by the necessity to change the electoral result of the region and the country at large in the conduct of the 2015 general elections. Their constructive desire in the conduct of that elections was driven by duty to participate in public affairs in Nigeria [1]. This change in political attitude is explained by increasing awareness through the help of technological development principally social media, coupled with the recent success story of the Arab Spring. Despite their huge contributions to the political development of the country generally, the Nigerian youth are alienated, marginalized and abandoned which led them to become a serious security threat especially in the northern region of the country.

The operational definition of 'youth' has not yet been well established in African societies, like Nigeria, not to talk of solving the difficulties they are experiencing [2]. It is instructive to note that youth period is a time of rapid development physically, psychologically and emotionally, which comes with a sensitive awareness of self that often focuses on individuality, personal identity and fitting into the social mainstream

[3,4]. And, through the creative talents and labour-power of the youth, a nation makes a giant stride in economic development and socio-political achievements. However, in search of independence, the youth often take the form of struggle against authority and moral discipline which result in rebellious and destructive behaviours like delinquency, deviance, political thuggery and gangsterism, cultism, hooliganism, alcoholism and other social vices [5]. These criminal tendencies among youth coupled with the kind of politics being played by the political class pose numerous threats to the overall development of the northern region and Nigeria in general. Despite these socio-economic and political problems affecting youth less attention is received in studying their difficulties [2].

Unfortunately, the number of unemployed youth in northern Nigeria have ballooned exploded and transformed into various criminal activities such as Boko Haram, cattle-rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, armed banditry among others [4 & 8]. This scenario made the Northern youth to be called with so many different names in different parts of the region especially in the Fourth Republic [6,7,4]. In this context, therefore, the paper seeks to explain the question of northern Nigeria's youth in respect of how they fare and interact with the state, society and the politicians in the democratization process of the Fourth Republic. Several studies had discussed the issues affecting youth in the country and the nature and character of how the youth interact with the state and society, economy and politics [8,7,9,10,11,2,12,4]. Yet none of these studies looked at the youth from the angle of state and societal neglect, alienation and marginalization especially in the current dangerous unsecured circumstances which the political milieu of the Fourth Republic is unfolding in northern Nigeria. In fact, the ugly and shocking nature of these crimes in the region made the United Kingdom stop its citizens from travelling around some

states in that part of the country [13]. Hence, the article would clearly illustrate how the problematic issues evolved and their effects or negative implications to the general well-being of the northern Nigerian social formation. This would shed greater light on what the future holds for the northern region's youth. Thus, the main aim of the paper is to discuss and analyse the problems bedevilling the northern Nigerian youth, especially in the Fourth Republic to propose practical and workable therapeutic solutions. It is against this background that the paper tried to make a historical analysis of the changing roles of the youth in the politics of Northern Nigeria from the First Republic through the Second, Third and the Fourth Republics. In doing this, immediately after the introduction, the paper x-rays the republics under different sub-headings and discussed the implications of the youth's misfortunes in the Fourth Republic. Findings and recommendations were proffered to address the challenges bedevilling the youth in Northern Nigeria today.

2. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

2.1 Fourth Republic

Nigeria's democratic journey has experienced four different republics. The First Republic started between 1959 and ended in 1966 by the military. After a prolong military rule the Second Republic was ushered in on 1st October 1979 which also lasted till 1984 when it was again terminated by the military. The Third Republic was started during the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha and ended in illusory without forming a democratic government. It was after the death of Abacha the succeeding Head of State then General Abdulsalami Abubakar ushered in a new democratic regime known as the Fourth Republic. It is the period of democratic transition (1999-date) that gave birth to democratic governance in the country after a prolonged military rule which began in 1984 and ended in May 1999 [14].

2.2 Northern Nigeria

This is one of the two regions (north and south) in Nigeria which consists of three geo-political zones namely, north-west; north-east and north-central. It is located between the massive dry area of the Sahara and the dense tropical rain forests along the Guinea Coast. The region is bordered by Cameroon on the east, French West

Africa on the north, French Dahomey (now the Benin Republic) on the west, and Southern Nigeria on the south [15].

2.3 Political Gangsterism

Political gangsterism refers to the culture through which most people of young age from low-income families engage in illicit political activities due to their lack of money [16].

2.4 Nigerian Youth

This means the citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who are between 18 to 35 years of age. The National Youth Policy speculated that the youth, who constituted over 70% in Nigeria, is the foundation of a society whose energy, inventiveness, character, and orientation define the pace of development and the security of a nation-state [3].

In the context of this article, these are young people who involve in political gangsterism over the years i.e. since the return of democracy in 1999. More importantly, some of these youth are graduating from one stage to another depending on how closely connected they become with the top politicians. The politically connected ones usually recruit young persons into their groups from time to time. They usually serve as God-fathers of the groups being sponsored by a top politician or political party.

3. THE YOUTH IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA AND THE FIRST REPUBLIC, 1960-1966

The contradictions bedevilling the youth of northern Nigeria cannot be detached from the colonial experience which is the foundation of the current socio-economic and political realities more particularly affecting the most useful group of our society [17].

The youth have been playing important roles in shaping society. Several historical facts show that prior to the advent of the Europeans into Nigeria the youth used to be the cornerstone of every facet of development. Indeed, they greatly supported the expansion and advancement of their various communities. For instance, in northern Nigeria, the youth have aided the Sokoto *jihad* (holy war) and the emergence of the most famous Sokoto Caliphate which was colonially transformed into what constitutes northern Nigeria today. It is pertinent to acknowledge the fact that the collapse of the

caliphate in 1903 made the political arena of the north to completely change into a new phenomenon of the independence movement which was led by the then crops of north-western educated youth. Among these youth were the late Sir Ahmadu Bello the Sardauna of Sokoto, late Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the late Alh. Makaman Bidda Aliyu, the late Malam Aminu Kano, late Sir Kashim Ibrahim among others.

At this point, it is pertinent to note that the political economy of the youth in the northern region began to take a new shape especially due to the introduction of democratic party politics. As the independence approached, some political parties like Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) were formed in the northern part of the region. One of the most important things done by some of the youth which took place in Kano on Tuesday 8th August 1950 was the gathering of a group of eight young men who came together and formed a new political party (NEPU) which was later led by the late Mallam Aminu Kano. The party became the dominant opposition political party not only in Kano but also in the entire northern region [18]. However, the attitude of the British authorities and the Native Authorities (NA) against the NEPU supporters led to the persecution of NEPU members throughout the region. This development marked the beginning of violent politics among the youth in northern Nigeria [18]. Thus, because of these persecutions of the political supporters of NEPU by the NPC supporters and the British officials, NEPU members were compelled to look for alternative sources of providing themselves and their families with security from such intimidations and persecutions of the opposition parties [4].

So, when NEPU leaders started facing harassments, molestations and arbitrary arrest from Native Authorities, they began to recruit hunters as their bodyguards to protect their leaders during political activities [7]. Unarguably, this phenomenon had implanted the seeds of political gangsterism among the youth as a means of earning rewards from the politicians from both political parties. Moreover, by the very end of the collapse of the First Republic, the economic situation was enveloped with serious pains due to misgovernance and corrupt tendencies which eventually led to the first coup-de-tat in the country. The military took over the mantle of leadership for quite a long period beginning from January 15th, 1966 until October

1st, 1979 when they handed over to the democratically elected government of the Second Republic.

4 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF NIGERIAN YOUTH IN THE SECOND REPUBLIC, 1979-1983

During the Second Republic (1979-1983), the situation did not change for the better in terms of politicking. Members of the NPC metamorphosed into the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), while NEPU members changed to People Redemption Party (PRP). The youth continued to maintain a leading position in the politics of northern Nigeria and had the sympathy of NPN. It was observed that worst fears started when both parties engaged in recruiting the youth in political gangsterism from the same group of hunters [19]. They were, therefore, made to lose their former roles, social status as well as cultural relevance in society. The *Yambanga* [political thugs] as they were popularly known in the period became more armed with sophisticated and dangerous weapons and assumed a tougher role in terms of their activities. They consume hard drugs such as Pengo, ICD, Phensic, Daga and *Arungumi Zaki* [Embrace Lion] apart from the former concoctions and intoxicants they used before [20,7,4]. However, it was claimed that they were more financially buoyant than in the First Republic as they were better paid in this period due to the national economic prosperity of the oil boom [7]. Consequently, the arming of political parties with thugs marked the beginning of political gangsterism in northern Nigerian politics.

5. THE YOUTH IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC AND THE PERIOD OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM (SAP)

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced in 1986 as an economic plan by the Babangida administration. This period witnessed inflation, the decline of wages and retrenchment of workers in both the private and public sectors of the Nigerian economy [21]. The SAP was a special economic program designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which imposed certain conditions [4]. These programs amount to detail instructions on what countries had to do to bring their countries under control of these monetary organizations. The strategy was geared towards promoting foreign markets, including privatization, deregulation, trade liberalization,

and cutting back on publicly provided services [21]. Between 1986 and 1988, when these policies were executed as intended by the IMF, the Nigerian economy did grow as had been hoped, with the export sector performing well, falling real wages in the public sector and among the urban classes, along with the drastic reduction in expenditure on public services. The policy resulted in the decline of the manufacturing sector, retrenchment of workers, inflation and shuttling of consumer goods [21]. Subsequently, SAP had greatly affected the living standards in Nigeria. Accordingly, this left a large proportion of the youth unemployed, the rising wave of poverty and corruption, an incessant increase of school dropouts not only in northern Nigeria but the country at large. The economic hardship created by SAP between 1986-1995 greatly resulted in the moral degeneration of many families. Parents were forced to abandon their basic responsibilities at home, (training and discipline of their children) to struggling to get daily bread. The youth outside the school system resorted to violence which was called with different sort of names in the region as mentioned earlier [22].

Immediately after lifting the political embargo by the Abacha military junta, these youth joined black market popularly known as *bunburutu*, extortion from passers-by and sales of drugs and other narcotics to earn a living [7,4]. The re-emergence of politics of God-fatherism in 1999 rejuvenate the menace as the politicians relied heavily on these fathers to realize their goals [23]. The God-fathers go to any length and employ violent tactics to get electoral success in any electoral process as observed by Lukman where he argued that God-fathers are merchants of fears as they are capable of unleashing violence through youths' gangs that they recruit and maintain for political assignments [24].

The emergence of these Godfathers coupled with the nature of economic hardship bedeviling the society, the role and activities of the youth in northern Nigeria assumed a new turn. According to Umar and Danjuma averred the nefarious activities of youth have attained a frightening level with the return to civil rule in 1999 [25]. Currently, the north during this period devised different strategies to earn a livelihood that was different from the previous years, such as *maula* (begging) from the politicians and other public officeholders. This has become a widespread phenomenon so much that, they follow these politicians to special events chanting and singing

flatteries to them and their associates [26,27,4]. The high rate of unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy among these youth and their families, these young people have no good education, lacked proper home training and enough food and healthy shelter. Unarguably, these circumstances they found themselves make them more susceptible to be rented as political thugs to rig elections, to kill and to engage in other criminal social evils in the society [10].

6. THE EFFECTS OF NORTHERN NIGERIAN YOUTH'S POLITICAL MISFORTUNES IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC (1999-2019)

The youth of any state or society is considered as the engine of growth. Their contribution is, therefore, the most needed for a society to advance in all angles [17]. However, because of the lingering complications since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the youth has now become a grave threat to the socio-economic and political advancement of society. They are neglected, marginalized and to some extent abandoned, hence, left to embrace illicit behaviours such as cultism, hooliganism, political gangsterism and other social vices [28,7,4]. All these criminal tendencies among the youth were attributed to the condition of poverty, unemployment, neglect and amoral politics of the northern political elites.

However, the youth in northern Nigeria are now ready-made tools to be employed by politicians to achieve their selfish political ends [4]. They are being hired to intimidate political opponents, snatch ballot boxes or cause mayhem in political gatherings. In the preceding republics they were majorly referred to as 'Yan Bangar siyaysa', but in the Fourth Republic, their names vary across the states that constituted the northern region. These political thugs are called with different names in each of the states they operate such as *Yanjagaliya*, *Yankalare*, *Yanshinko*, *Yandaba*, *Yandaukar-Amarya*, *Kauraye*, *Area Boys*, *Ecomog*, *Bakassi Boys*, *Banu-Israel* among others [21,7,29,4]. It is pertinent to note that even though historical records have rightly indicated that the Northern youth have been in the politics of gangsterism since the First Republic where for instance, in the North there was a lot of fracas between the defunct Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Northern Peoples Progressive Union (NEPU). The youth were in the forefront in the political interface that took place then, but it was quite different from what obtained in the present

political dispensation where it turned into a kind of a means of survival among the youth [6,4]. In fact, a lot of these young people in the north-eastern part of the region embraced Boko Haram after being abandoned by the political class [10].

The devastating effect of the contemporary youth of northern Nigerian society has moved to an alarming rate which made the Foreign Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom in Nigeria to advise its nationals to eschew travelling to some states of northern Nigeria [13]. The diagram shows the enumerated states in the region.

The caution was advanced because of the number of illicit activities generally carried out by the youth of the region who are involved in the terrorist organizations that disturb the peace of the Sahel region which include northern Nigeria. The groups include Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),

Al Murabitoun, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram [13]. Part of the statement released reads that:

Since January 2018, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) have continued to protest in central Abuja. While protests are usually peaceful, they have the potential to turn violent. Reports suggest that on 16 April, one person was killed and about thirty injured as police used water cannon, gunfire, and teargas to disperse protestors. A protest is also likely to continue in Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, and Zaria. You should avoid any demonstrations or large gatherings and keep up to date with local developments, including through local media.

The region has become a death zone due to the long-term neglect and the bastardization of the mindset of the youth by the state. many young nigerians are blocked from going into the mainstream political circle despite the famous bill of 'not too young to run', because of



Graph: Diagram of the enumerated states in the region which are more prone to conflict mostly perpetrated by the youth
 Source: Channels Television, June 19th June 2019

lack of financial muscles required in a political contest. This has been adduced to be one of the factors that prevented the small educated unemployed youth of northern Nigeria to participate in their own decision-making process. One of the northern youth was quoted to have bemoaned that if, indeed, democracy is about participation and inclusion everyone should be permitted to take part fully whether old or young [30].

7. CONCLUSION

In a society where poverty is becoming increasingly entrenched especially among the youth, hardly can one disentangle it from socio-economic and political vices. The most glaring phenomenon among the teeming youth in the present democratic dispensation is the scourge of violent politics and or political gangsterism. The failure of the state to effectively manage societal resources to lessen the sufferings of its citizenry had snowballed and showcases itself through the violent socio-economic and political contestations by the youth. This is especially prominent when the electoral process is hijacked by the unscrupulous political Godfathers who consider politics as a do or die affair and utilize the poor condition of the youth to perpetrate electoral frauds for a token. The case of northern Nigeria suggests that poverty among the youth had transformed itself into violent behaviours among them, especially when the state becomes incapable of devising a judicious and effective measures to address the scourge. Furthermore, the amalgam of poverty among the youth and the nature and character of politics in Nigeria has made violent politics to become an easy avenue to cushion their demands. Political gangsterism among these youth has become an encumbrance in the politics of northern Nigeria as it threatens peace, derails the socio-economic and political progress and causes insecurity in the already suffering populace. Unless poverty is significantly reduced, electoral laws obeyed, political offenders, punished irrespective of party affiliation the likelihood of political gangsterism has come to stay in northern Nigeria.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

To address these dangers in northern Nigeria some recommendations are therefore proposed. Firstly, the youth need to be involved in policymaking, and young people need to be accepted unconditionally. Secondly, the northern

states governments shall come up with judicious and transparent poverty alleviation schemes specifically for the youth, without any partiality or bias in respect to political party affiliation. This would aid in reducing poverty among the youth, hence, make them more productive in the socio-economic development of the region. This can be achieved through massive investment in intensive practical agricultural training, by way of initiating and establishment of a well-equipped northern states-owned 'Youth Agricultural Institute' with experts in modern-day agricultural technology for the training and re-training of these massive unengaged youth to specialize in fish farming, beekeeping, and poultry among others. The government should also establish small-scale industries that would employ the trainees from the institute. The program would establish farms where the youth would be employed in a mini 'agro-industrial village' in each state of the region. This would help in processing the farms' output to boost the region's economy. The institute is a proposed solution to address some of the problematic issues affecting youth through isolating them in these agro-industrial villages which should include their shelter and basic infrastructure as staff of the various sectors of the scheme. In addition, the northern governors should also increase expenditure on basic secondary and tertiary education through public sources by reducing other non-productive expenditure. Likewise, increasing wages and the provision of basic services by the northern state governments would help in cushioning the effects of poverty among the entire citizenry particularly parents to have firm control of their wards. This is because very good and adequate parental upbringing would help in reducing delinquency among the youth which cannot easily be achieved if the parents are extremely poor. It is also suggested that a massive campaign against youth political gangsterism should be in top gear throughout the region. This would help in public enlightenment of the dangers involved in such illicit behaviours capable of ruining the region.

Again, it is the recommendation of this piece that the rule of law shall be forcefully adhered to by punishing anybody found wanting irrespective of his/her position or status especially if a severe penalty is attached to anybody found wanting in committing, rewarding or financing the act of gangsterism. Simply put, there shall be justice because behind any socio-economic and political crisis in Nigeria there is an element of injustice and lack of fair play. For a state which is

conducted well 'is the best means to success: everything depends on this, and if it is preserved, everything is preserved and if this is destroyed everything is destroyed'.

Another fundamental prescription is that the general society shall come in and joined hand with the security agencies to deal with the problem of drug abuse. This would greatly assist in reducing the number of drug addiction, which is one of the major pushing factors for the perpetration of political violence among the youth. Most of these drugs were provided to the youth by the politicians or the gang leaders among each group who mostly are being financed by the politicians. In fact, it has been established that some of these youth engage in selling drugs.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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