

## **Billet Democracy and Urban Violence in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Democracy by all standards is meant to make every man's voice heard and attended to by the various state administrators. But in recent times, the opposite is the case of most scenarios in most part of the world. No doubt, there are several variants of democracies as there are various nations. Still democracy is a political platform of popular interaction among nations in which issues are resolved in an amicable manner. When democracy turns bad, the extreme form of anarchy as well as lawlessness is inevitable which are symptoms of urban violence in any developed or developing country. This paper considers questions of the level of relevance of democracy in Nigeria, to what extent is it acceptable among the citizens and the resultant effect of violence on the polity. The methodology adopted is the simple purposive random survey of perceptions across the country using afrobarometer database. The analysis of findings shows that democracy is fairly satisfying but still the most preferred among other system of governance by Nigerians. Conclusion is premised on good governance and legitimate use of force in resolving civic issues so as to sustain the democratic regime.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Military, Force, Rule of Law, Good Governance

### **Introduction**

Democracy had become popular among states as a system of governance in the world. Almost all states of the world have swayed towards democracy in the twentieth century and in this present twenty-first century. In fact, any state that is not democratically inclined will be tagged as a pariah state. Although democracy is of diverse forms and styles but there are still

some basic irreducible minimum standards which is required of any of these forms so adopted which include periodic election and fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, right to vote and be voted for, right to life among others. Janda, Berry and Goldman (1997) noted that the forms of democracy practice in Europe are different from that of the Asians and still differ from the Africans, the Middle and Far Eastern countries.

Democracy in Africa is relatively young and countries are striving to maintain the status quo of good governance and citizens' democracy. This has made several state administrators to run their countries at all cost and any means so as to be acceptable among the comity of states. Therefore, some state administrators had adopted forceful notion of compliance in their states by all means to assure the order of acceptable representative democracy. It is of note that anybody, groups or organizations that tries to justify or harness his opinion which is slightly contrary to that of the government is seen as anti-state movement and brutality will ensued (Pierre 2000; Ibrahim and Egwu 2005).

The acts of brutality by democratic regimes with the claim of protecting the nascent or bourgeoning democracy have made the regimes to be unfriendly and hostile to the people in most cases (Ikelegbe 2001; Schnabel and Born 2011). It has been characterised by the use of military in controlling and monitoring electoral activities, the use of force in acquiring obedience from the populace and the lack of accountability in the actions and missions of the elected leaders. This is evident across North Africa, central Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and part of southern Africa. Other continents such as Asia and Europe are not left out in this nebulous practice. This is nothing but the vivid presence of urban violence in Africa and other parts of the world with similar trends. This scenario is not different from what is applicable in some of Nigeria's democracy.

Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to civilian rule, the force of habit, lack of accountability in actions, duties, whims and caprices of the leaders, and above all the militarization of democratic processes have taken a high stage in the polity. This was wide spread during the conduct of gubernatorial elections and the 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential elections. However, Olu-Adeyemi (2012) and Ogundiya (2010) noted that the form of democracy in Nigeria allows the democratic irreducible minimum standards to strive which include periodic elections among others which take place every four years



(1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 respectively) and the enclosure of the fundamental human right within her military-made-but-civilian-adjusted-1999-constitution. This signifies the presence of violence against the polity and can apparently lead to a gross break down of laws and order if the elastic limit is exceeded.

The nature of militarised billet democracy is a form of urban violence in Nigeria. Billet democracy as revealed in this work involve processes that further entrench electoral violence which manifests in ballot stuffing, heavy military presence in the polling booth and the use of private security groups belonging to political parties and individuals. The economic violence involve embezzlements and misappropriation of public or group funds, social violence which include gangs, thugs activities and rape, finally urban violence also span through institutional violence which include legal chauvinism, bureaucratic egocentrism among others. It is noteworthy to remark that all these trends of urban violence had been in existence in Nigeria before the inauguration of the Fourth Republic (1999).

The methodology adopted uncovers the response of people in Nigeria to the democratic regime which is in administration. This paper proffer answers to the question of relevance of democracy in Nigeria when basic democratic tenets are misplaced. Therefore to what extent is democracy acceptable among the citizens and to what extent is the resultant effect of violence on democracy in Nigeria? The total sample size is two-thousand four hundred (2400) participants across the country. The Afrobarometer round five data are analysed in this study. The Afrobarometer data sample selection technique and collection technique is the simple proportionate purposive random sampling technique which is a primary data. Conclusions are premised on the ground that democracy across the world is not the same. It always has variants with certain peculiarities and specific challenges unique to each country or region of the world. These variants need to be spelled out in the light of the good, the bad and the ugly democracy across the globe. Billet democracy is seen as a variant and an aberration of the democratic process that seeks the greatest happiness of the greatest number of the people. This needs to be address so as to prevent the occurrence of political pandemonium which may turn to a catastrophe that might crumble the democratic system. It is recommended that force should be use as a last resort and not as a habit to ensure obedience or compliance from the populace.

### **Vivacity of Billet Democracy and Urban Violence in Nigeria**

Billet democracy lives and strives so much in new democracies and relatively in developing ones. The use of garrison and naked force is prominent in the conduct of governmental activities and the organization of violence to maintain obedience so as to ensure that the polity is put together and runs effectively. At the same time, cushioning mechanisms are put in place to suppress its aftermath on the polity such as distribution of economic largesse to constituencies, selective job creation to volatile regions among others. This is simply seen as carrot and stick method of democratic administration.

The vivacity of billet democracy can be pin-pointed in Nigeria in the following ways;

The uses of force in ensuring electoral processes are accomplished in a desired end. This is perpetuated by employing the state security agents to side track some perceived enemies; manipulate the electorates and the eventual election outcome. The heavy presence of military is mostly and recently witnessed in the conduct of election and the securing of ballot boxes and papers, electoral officials and observers. Ogundiya (2010) posited that this is hopeful in ensuring the best of security so as to guarantee the conduct of a free and fair election. But on the contrary a civilian election should only witness a mild military presence so as to ensure that the electorate are not intimidated by the military armoury (Olu-Adeyemi 2012). It also gives the government the control edge and the mechanism of election to which ever direction so far the military are present to obey orders in the controlling of the electoral processes. This phenomenon is heavily witnessed in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections. This phenomenon of garrison militarised or billet democratic – especially that is related to the conduct of general elections is well reduced in the 2015 general elections.

The use of force to ensure obedience of the populace is mostly seen in the economic activities of the people. While some prefer to evade tax payment others will simply abscond while yet others detest orderliness in the use of public facilities and utilities such as roads, market space, residential and commercial area regulations among others. The use of force in ensuring compliance simply shows the level of irrelevance of government agency in projecting the legitimacy of the government. In a polity which heavily rely on force to ensue obedience will easily run into rocks in the public acceptability and legitimacy of actions.



The use of force by the electorate on the government to execute projects which are basic for the growth and development of the country is becoming rampant in developing democracies (Omotola 2011). Ordinarily, the government is expected to provide some basic amenities for the populace but in most cases the populace need to exert some pressure on the government so as to wake-up to its lawful duties. Such amenities include roads, water, standard health facilities, good and affordable housing facilities and modern security systems among others. The billet democracy will wait until there are agitations and sometimes fierce agitations so as to see the government wake up to its task and duties.

Billet democracy simply relies on force from the populace to ensure that government officials comply with the political manifestoes that brought them into political power (Lipset, and Gabriel, 2000; Omotola, 2009; Akinwale A. (2010). As manifestoes are seen by the political parties as a mere statements to manoeuvre the electorate so as to get to the political pedestal that they contested for, the electorate uses it as a tool to call back political parties to the words of their political campaign agreements. This can be violent at times as seen in the case of the Niger Delta crises in Nigeria and some other protests across the polity (Lennox 2009; Halliru 2012; La Monica and Omotola 2014).

Urban violence in the same vein is as a result of garrison and billet democracy which is in vogue in the polity. It has the dimensions of political violence, economical violence, social violence and institutional violence. The table below composed by Moser and McIlwaine (2006) shows the category of the dimension of the violence, who are the persons, or groups that perpetuate it or the victim of the violence and the vivacity which is the manifestations in the polity.

**Table 1: Calisthenics of Violence in Urban Areas within Countries**

Category of violence	Types of violence by Perpetrators and/or Victims	Manifestations
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and non-state violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guerrilla conflict</li> <li>• Paramilitary conflict</li> <li>• Political assassinations</li> <li>• Armed conflict between political parties</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized crime</li> <li>• Business interests</li> <li>• Delinquents</li> <li>• Robbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimidation and violence as means of resolving economic disputes</li> <li>• Street theft, robbery and crime</li> <li>• Kidnapping</li> <li>• Armed robbery</li> <li>• Drug-trafficking</li> <li>• Car theft and other contraband activities</li> <li>• Small-arms dealing</li> <li>• Assaults including killing and rape in the course of economic crimes</li> <li>• Trafficking in prostitutes</li> <li>• Conflict over scarce resources</li> </ul>
Economic/social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gangs</li> <li>• Street children (boys and girls)</li> <li>• Ethnic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territorial or identity-based "turf" violence; robbery, theft</li> <li>• Petty theft</li> <li>• Communal riots</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimate partner violence inside the home</li> <li>• Sexual violence (including rape) in the public arena</li> <li>• Child abuse: boys and girls</li> <li>• Inter-generational conflict between parents and children</li> <li>• Gratuitous/routine daily violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical or psychological male-female abuse</li> <li>• Physical and sexual abuse, particularly prevalent in the case of stepfathers but also uncles</li> <li>• Physical and psychological abuse</li> <li>• Incivility in areas such as traffic, road rage, bar fights and street confrontations</li> <li>• Arguments that get out of control</li> </ul>
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence of state and other "informal" institutions</li> <li>• Including the private sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra-judicial killings by police</li> <li>• Physical or psychological abuse by health and education workers</li> <li>• State or community's vigilante-directed social cleansing of gangs and street children</li> <li>• Lynching of suspected criminals by community members</li> </ul>

Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2006) and Authors Update, 2015



### **Methodology**

The methodology adopted uncovers the response of people in Nigeria to the democratic regime which is in administration. The objective of the paper is to unravel the level of relevance of democracy in Nigeria when basic democratic tenets are misplaced. Therefore the research questions include; to what extent is democracy acceptable among the citizens and to what extent of influence is the resultant effect of violence had on democracy in Nigeria?

The Afrobarometer round five data are analysed in this study. The Afrobarometer data sample selection technique and collection technique is the simple proportionate purposive random sampling technique with the use of questionnaire which is a primary data. The total sample size is two-thousand four hundred (2400) participants across the country. The data are validated, analysed and interpreted.

Descriptive statistics is used to analyse the data. These include the use of simple percentage and bar chart graphical illustrations to analyse the result. This research is appropriate as it reflects the mind-set and realities among the Nigeria populace on the democratic regime they voted for. It also reveals the notion of the people and on the relevance of democracy to Nigerians in a time where billet or garrison acts are vivid on the polity.

### **Analysis of Findings**

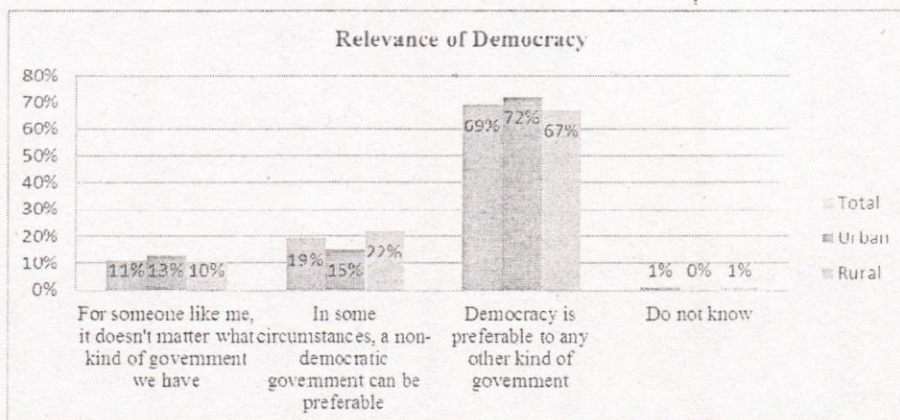
The analysis below reveals the relevance of democracy to the Nigeria populace, Level of satisfaction with democracy by Nigerians. This shows a direct response to the research questions in this paper which are; what is the level of relevance of democracy in Nigeria? To what extent is democracy acceptable among the citizens? Lastly, what is the resultant effect of violence on democracy in Nigeria?

#### **Table 2: The Relevance of Democracy to Nigeria Populace**

The general notion of people is that democracy is relevant, but this section justifies and measure how relevant, to what extent of relevance is the relevance of democracy to Nigeria as in comparison to other forms of governance.

Support for democracy by Urban or Rural Primary Sampling Unit for Country, Nigeria			
Nigeria	Total	Urban	Rural
For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have	11%	13%	10%
In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable	19%	15%	22%
Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government	69%	72%	67%
Do not know	1%	0%	1%
Total NIGERIA	2,400	1,046	1,354

Source: Nigeria 2012, Afrobarometer



**Figure I: The Relevance of Democracy to Nigeria Populace**

From the figure I above it is evident and not surprising that all of the respondents in the urban area are aware of democracy, and its relevance as zero per cent of the respondents (0%) says they do not know while just one per cent (1%) of both the rural and the total respondents says they do not know of the relevance of democracy. This is remarkable that all Nigerians are aware of the government which is running the affairs of the day.



Also remarkable is the fact from the figure I above that seventy-two per cent (72%) of the urban respondents prefer democracy to any kind of government while sixty-seven (67%) of the rural respondents also prefer democracy to any kind of government. The total and overall respondents' shows that sixty-nine per cent (69%) agree to the fact that democracy is prefer to all other kinds of administrations. This is remarkable that Nigerians still prefer democratic regimes to any other forms of governance despite some flaws and anomalies facing it.

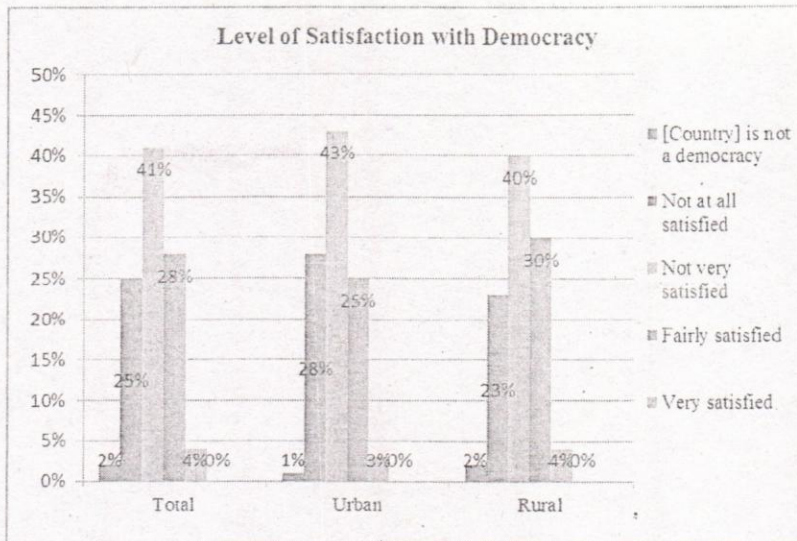
It is also important to analyse that from the irregularities and challenges which face democracy in Nigeria, fifteen percent (15%) of the urban respondents claimed that in some circumstances, a non-democratic regime may be preferable (perhaps in situation of tense security challenge where by the approval of the national assembly or parliamentarians will jeopardise the internal and or external integrity of the country). Twenty-two percent (22%) of the rural respondent prefer some other regimes apart from the democratic regime in some circumstances. While a low percentage of nineteen percent (19%) acknowledged that in some circumstance, a nondemocratic regime may be preferable to a democratic regime.

**Table 3: Level of Satisfaction with Democracy by Nigerians**

This section of the analysis digs deep to reveal the perception of Nigerians on the level of satisfaction with democratic principles and practice. If democracy is seen as preferable to any other forms of governance, then to what extent is Nigerians satisfied with it?

Satisfaction with Democracy by Urban or Rural Primary in Nigeria			
Nigeria N=2,400; Weighted results	Total	Urban	Rural
[Country] is not a democracy	2%	1%	2%
Not at all satisfied	25%	28%	23%
Not very satisfied	41%	43%	40%
Fairly satisfied	28%	25%	30%
Very satisfied	4%	3%	4%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%
Total Nigeria	2400	1046	1354

Source: Nigeria 2012, Afrobarometer



**Figure II: Level of Satisfaction with Democracy**

From figure II above, it is obvious and not shocking that all of the respondent in both the urban and rural area are not very satisfied with the level of democracy. Forty-three per cent (43%) of the respondent in urban area and forty per cent (40%) in the rural area reacted to this question which gives a total of forty-one per cent (41%) on the average that are not satisfied with the level of democracy in Nigeria. It is revealed that it is not a question to ask whether Nigeria is a democratic country or not as just one per cent (1%) in the urban area responded as not democratic, while two per cent responded in the rural area. However, it is not surprising to see that just only three per cent (3%) of the urban population are very satisfied while twenty-five per cent (25%) responded as fairly satisfied with democracy in Nigeria. The rural area respondents on the other hand are not so far away from their urban area counterpart as just four per cent (4%) of the respondents are very satisfied while thirty per cent (30%) responded as fairly satisfied with democracy in Nigeria.

Also remarkable in these findings is the fact from the figure I above that seventy-two per cent (72%) of the urban respondent prefer democracy to any kind of government, while sixty-seven per cent (67%) of the rural



respondent also prefer democracy to any kind of government. The resultant responses show that sixty-nine per cent (69%) agree to the fact that democracy is preferred to all other kinds of administrations. This is remarkable that Nigerians still prefer democratic regimes to any other forms of governance despite some flaws and anomalies facing it.

It is also important to state that from the irregularities and challenges which face democratic process in Nigeria, fifteen per cent (15%) of the urban respondents in chat I claimed that in some circumstance, a non-democratic regime may be preferable (perhaps in situation of serious security challenge where by the approval of the national assembly or parliamentarians will jeopardise the internal and or external integrity of the country). Twenty –two per cent (22%) of the rural respondent prefer some other regimes apart from the democratic regime in some circumstances. While a low percentage of nineteen per cent (19%) acknowledged that in some circumstance, a nondemocratic regime may be preferable to a democratic regime.

#### Table 4: How Safe are you in Your Neighbourhood?

The level of urban violence is revealed in this section of analysis. How unsafe are Nigerians in the street of both rural communities and the urban communities?

How often felt unsafe walking in neighbourhood by Urban or Rural Primary Sampling Unit for Country=Nigeria

#### Nigeria

N=2,400; Weighted results	Total	Urban	Rural
Never	67%	66%	68%
Just once or twice	14%	14%	13%
Several times	14%	13%	14%
Many times	4%	4%	4%
Always	2%	2%	1%
Don't know	1%	1%	0%
Total NIGERIA	2,400	1,046	1,354

Source: Afrobarometer Round 5 (2012)

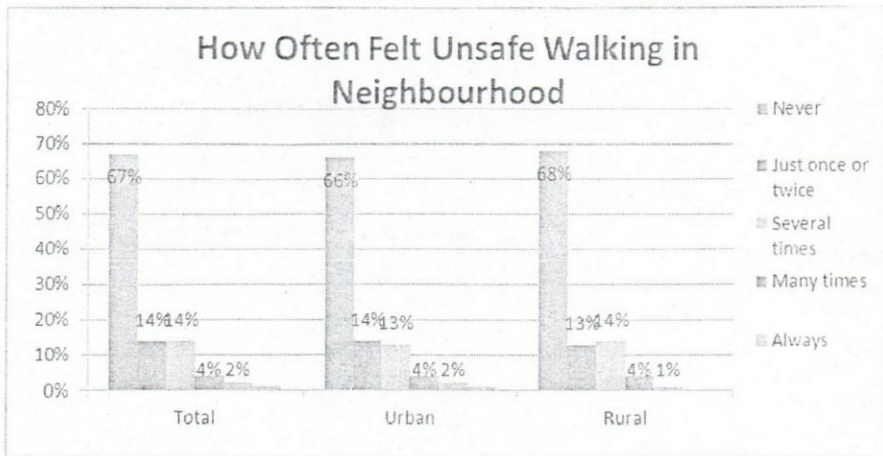


Figure III

From the graphical analysis (figure III) above, it is observed that sixty-six per cent (66%) and sixty-eight per cent (68%) of the urban and rural respondents respectively said they have never felt unsafe in their neighbourhood. Thirty-four per cent (34%) and thirty-two per cent (32%) of both rural and urban respondents said they at times feel unsafe in their neighbourhood. This means that despite urban violence, majority of Nigerians feels secured in their neighbourhood despite the unsatisfactory performance level of the government as perceived by Nigerian in figures I and II above.

This response shows the level of relevance, satisfaction and or loop holes created by the democratic regimes in the discharging of its principles and the irreducible minimum tenets. The situation envisage by most of the respondents in this study as a circumstance for not preferring democracy is perhaps in situation of security challenge where by the long process of waiting for the approval of the national assembly or parliamentarians will jeopardise the internal and or external integrity of the country but the other regimes may not require the express approval of any bureaucratic rigmarole before important actions are taken. However, despite the fact that there are variations in the level of support and the continuous relevance of democracy in Nigeria, Nigerians still felt safe walking in their neighbourhood at election period and at all other times. Therefore, the presence of billets in Nigeria's



democracy as a form of urban violence has no relationship with the daily safety of the people in their respective neighbourhoods.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Urban violence in Nigeria is not a new thing and it takes different forms and shapes. This dynamism is evident as political violence, economical violence, social violence and institutional violence are prevalent. Urban violence generally tends to adjust to the peculiarities of the environments which it ensues from. Most violence as noted is a result of a bridge in political manifestoes and promises unfulfilled by the political parties or the politicians.

Billet democracy entails force of habit as the order of the day. This is a regular feature in militarised and other non-democratic regimes across the world. A democratic regime is also entitled to the official use of force in the process of carrying out its lawful duties. However the use of force is not the principal instrument in ensuring compliance and support of the populace in a democratic system of government. In a state where billet democracy is highly acclaimed, urban violence is mostly inevitable.

It is evident from this research that Nigerians still treasure the democratic regime to any other non-democratic process regardless of its anomalies and non-compliance with basic democratic tenets which include the obedience to the rule of law and the respect for the fundamental human rights. The following stakeholders are encouraged to note the following recommendations, the democratic governments and the citizens. The government should reduce the number of military personnel that will be posted for civilian election so as not to systematically des-enfranchise the electorate due to psychological harassment that the military presence may cause. Also the government should use force as the last resort in enforcing obedience from the people. Dialogue and sensitization will solve most issues of civilians' compliance with governments' directives.

The citizens should ensure they support rule of law and use their fundamental human rights in places where it is applicable. This will reduce the sporadic frictions between the citizen and the government. Also the citizens should see the military as fellow citizens and not enemies who want to injure or kill them when exercising their civic duties irrespective of the military's number at the occasion.

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