

DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: THE MILITIA EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

After decades of military rule in most countries in Africa, the culture of violence became entrenched in the conduct of public and even private affairs. The militarization of African societies permeated politics and social life. The preponderant use of aggressive language and blatant application of force intended to intimidate, humiliate and compel compliance is illustrative. Most transitional democracies in Africa assumed a violent character soon after the military regimes that introduced them as a disparate measure to win or retain political power by the political class. Electoral violence perpetrated by youth militia is adopted by all shades of politicians as mechanism for delivering electoral victories at all cost and this has been part of the democratic process since the return of democracy in the early 1990s. Following the mismanagement of African economies by military regimes, a huge unemployment was created with an overwhelming youth population. Given the imperatives of huge monetary usage in democratic politics, retired military officers turned politicians who had corruptly enriched themselves utilized established social connections and wealth to mobilize and arm unemployed youth (other than their children), as a militia to prosecute electoral ambitions. This paper argues that changing the structure, and level of youth unemployment through entrepreneurial and education schemes in rural economies promises to drastically reduce youth availability for recruitment for violent purposes. This is within the purview of both the state and civil society.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Political Power, Militia, Electoral Violence, Civil Society