



## Article

# Youth Violence and Human Security in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The failures of governance and statehood in Nigeria breed an anarchical or disruptive system in the state and provide a platform for youth violence and justification for disruptive behaviour against the state systems and structures. Contributing to the available research, this study shifts its focus to understand and address the linkage of disruptive behaviour by studying and discussing Human Security through the lens of youth violence in Nigeria. In doing so, this study adopts a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative data with Ted Robert Gurr's theory of relative deprivation to investigate, analyse and discuss the issues herein. From the findings, cultism and ethnic factors were identified as major causes of youth violence among others. Thus, effective institutions, quality education, economic and security regional or geopolitical zones programs is noted as a means to address youth violence in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** human security; security; youth violence; violence; Nigeria



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## 1. Introduction

In recent times, the study of security has undergone a paradigm shift and emphasis previously focused on issues of national security and state sovereignty is currently centred on the issues of human security. However, scholars have theorised that security of individuals within a state is a better way of guaranteeing the security of a state. Francis (2006, p. 23) opines that security has expanded from its traditional military origin to include 'non-military dimension such as environment, migration, ethno-religious and nationalist identities, poverty and human security and disease'. Human security, therefore, entails a holistic measure that ensures the safety of individuals, including the environment inhabited by the people. However, what constitutes the 'safety of individuals' remains quite ambiguous, but human security is a foremost goal of the United Nations.

The ambiguity of human security lies in the non-availability of a conventionally acceptable parameter used to determine the level of safety of individuals. More so, some clauses constituting human security such as 'freedom from want' and 'absence of fear' (United Nations 1994), which are abstractions and intellections which make it difficult to concretise and measure human security. Nevertheless, human security could be defined as the general well-being of individuals which could be narrowed to an acceptable high standard of living. The multiplicity of actors ranging from governments, international organisations, researchers and NGOs in using human security concept for different purposes, makes the term 'security' too broad to grapple with and criticised (Fukuda-Parr and Messina 2012).

Despite numerous resources, human security in Nigeria has remained a salient issue and problem for the Nigerian government and has also decreased the nation's economy through major deterioration of channels such as tourism and investment in the country. Apart from government's lackadaisical attitude towards human security, many other factors combine to limit its achievement. Due to inefficient human security in the country, societies have adopted different measures to secure themselves (Uduabo 2019); such is the idea of community security.

Violence among the youth in Nigeria is stirred by grievances based on political rights, cultural rights, religious rights and minority rights, among others. For example, the high rate of kidnapping in South South and South East Nigeria, as well as bombings in some South South states such as Bayelsa in Nigeria, is attributed to venting of grievances for their livelihood needs and adequate representation of their interest in the federal government character, since major natural resources that fuel the economy of the nation come from their regions (Ukeje 2005). The combination of the process of violence created by social groups, economic systems and political structures threatens human security at every step. The prevalent socioeconomic and political structures deprive youth of viable opportunities to attain their potentials and expose them to violent tendencies. Bouchat (2010) points out the importance of Africa and its security concerns; hence, Nigeria as a unit of analysis point for this study is also important because Nigeria is seen as an important state due to its natural and human resources in the African continent.

There is research on human security that has focused on crisis warning system and human security in Nigeria. While some focused on human security and social development. Thus, most of the research on violence and security in Nigeria has pointed out high incidences of violence and crime in general without relying on data, but focuses on qualitative discussions and analysis, not because they do not have the means and capacity to engage with quantitative analysis as well, but because statistics and data are not reliable. In a bid to ameliorate these disparities between the method of enquiry in analysing and discussing human security and violence in Nigeria, this study adopts a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research, to discuss the effect of violence on human security and vice versa. According to Gurr (1971, p. 87), relative deprivation (RD) is the disparity between what people want, that is, their value expectations, and what they actually gain, which is their value collecting capabilities. Hence, people are more likely to revolt when they lose hope of attaining their societal values, and that the intensity of discontent/frustration 'varies with the severity of depression and inflation.' This is theorized on the disposition to revolt and rebellion enshrined in RD. This study explores the issues associated with violence and rebellious attitudes/behaviors among youths in the context of Nigeria.

The aim of this study is to further develop the relative deprivation model in the context of Nigeria, and to understand if variables such as unemployment and under-employment are causally connected to violence and insecurity destabilising the Nigerian state. All of these are indices that affect development just as was explained by (Adah and Abasilim 2015), and (Joseph 2014). The general objective of this article is to detail the summary of the evidence and category of youth violence pervasive in Nigeria as it influences human security, or the other way around, so that policymakers and the individuals who execute projects to forestall youth violence might be made aware of the basic requirement for mediations that depend on the proof for adequacy, and planned in a way that considers the causes. The article starts with the Introduction and moves to the Methods and Materials employed for the study, Conceptual Clarification, Culture of youth violence, Relative Deprivation theory, Security in Nigeria, Youth violence in Nigeria, Discussion, Theoretical linkage and Conclusion.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Research Design

This study adopted an explanatory research design approach. The choice of this design is best suited for this study in explaining the insights from Relative Deprivation theory/model adopted for youths, violence and human security in the Nigerian context. In operationalising the design for the study, a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approach was employed. Additionally, the choice of method is to cover sufficient variance to discuss the issue which the study sets out to investigate. Depending solely on either qualitative or quantitative will create huge validity gap in understanding the true nature of the issues concerning human security and culture of youth violence in Nigeria.

## 2.2. Data Collection

### 2.2.1. Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data collected for this study were mainly extracted from the Nigeria Watch Program Dataset from 2015–2018, with the total of 4989 violent crime/cases analysed. It also gathered online survey through (google form) and 191 respondents out of a targeted 200 online survey respondents were identified for youth perception regarding youth violence across the Nigerian geopolitical zones (the zones are North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, South West, and these zones make up the 36 states in Nigeria). The respondents were engaged through online social media forums such as National Youth Congress, Nigerian Youth for Leadership, Nigerian Youth for Democratic Sustenance, Nigerian Association of Youth in Politics and submission of the online google survey through popular and verified twitter handles, with a section in the survey accounting for their region/locality as population representative. The ethnic online forum comprises of respondents of different religions as well. The selection of the population is to eliminate dominance of a particular population (category) in the study.

### 2.2.2. Qualitative Data Collection

Apart from the Online survey, a total of 17 interviews with the inclusion of both uneducated youth and 7 security professionals were conducted to ascertain and compare with the responses provided by the online survey (google form). The uneducated youths and those who do not know how to fill the online survey (google form) were interviewed randomly based on geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The interview was limited to 10 random uneducated youths (because their responses were similar and there was no need to keep increasing the number of respondents). Among these 10 random 'uneducated youths', (the term uneducated implies no formal education), two sets of uneducated youth categories were interviewed. The first group (5 interviewees) were the ones who have personal businesses, such as tailoring and trading. The second group (5 interviewees) were the ones associated mostly with the transportation business such as transport, conductors. 7 interviews were conducted among security professionals, scholars and journalist. Local interpreter was employed for interviews in regions where locals were engaged with their local languages and secondary data were sourced from relevant and grey literature as well as reports and government documents.

### 2.2.3. Study Population

The study population were mostly youths comprising of the educated and non-educated youth in Nigeria, as well as state security officials in the government security sectors, security professionals and academics

## 2.3. Measures

The survey instrument such as the structured online questionnaire and interviews were developed to investigate issues concerning human security and youth violence. A pilot study was undertaken to check the reliability of questions investigated and retrieved for analysis. This was done by the help of political and sociological experts and authorities in the fields in framing questions needed for investigations. The main questions in the survey were to find the youth perception and participation, causes, types and recommendation for youth violence. For the dataset, the activities of youth participation in violence between the periods of 2016–2018 was retrieved and analysed.

### Sampling Technique

On sampling size and technique, the purposive type of non-probability sampling technique (where the odds of any member being selected for a sample cannot be calculated) was adopted. Though the focus is on youth, the purposeful non-probability technique ensures that respondents targeted were selected on convenience and ease to access to information.

The theme of each interview was the respondent's knowledge of and exposure to security and youth violence in their community, society and Nigeria as a whole. The questions during the interview did not follow a hierarchical order of questioning but more of a discussion or prose style in order to eliminate the give and take response between the researcher and the respondents. Nonetheless, the questions the researcher needed to ask were covered during the discussions with respondents.

#### *2.4. Data Analysis*

At the data analysis stage, the quantitative data were analysed with Statistical Package of the Social Science (SPSS 20.0) and relevant information regarding participation and types of crime that youths mostly participate in were presented on charts and tables. The only survey information regarding respondent perception was also presented on a chart, while the interview was content analysed.

#### *2.5. Ethical Considerations*

During the course of this research, the following ethical procedures were considered; the studies guide for information gathering was based on: respect of persons, beneficence and legality. Individuals were treated as autonomous agents. It was ensured that the subject has received a full disclosure of the nature of the study, the risk, benefits and alternatives, with an extended opportunity to ask questions. Persons with diminished autonomy such as government stakeholders and key informants were entitled to anonymousness. Respondents' permission was sought for before taking notes and audio-recorded messages for research purpose. There was fairness in distribution and equitable selection of participants/respondents. The next section discusses the result of the study.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1. Quantitative Analysis*

As part of the robustness in engaging with youth, graduates and non-graduates were engaged in this study. A total of 83.8% of the respondents were graduates and 16.2% were non-graduates, which included students in tertiary institutions and high schools. The uneducated youths and those who did not know how to fill the google form were interviewed.

Reacting to issues regarding to protest, 83.2% of the respondents indicated that people in their community would join in a protest if there was any financial benefit to derive from it, while 16.8% thought otherwise. Therefore, the above result shows that money serves as a motivational factor for youths to engage in a protest. One can deduce that while peaceful means may be available to address issues within the society, money can be used by different actors to induce protest, which may ultimately result in violent confrontations, ranging from politics, ethnic and personal interest depending on how an individual feels.

Though as informative as the responses of the respondents were, when asked if they have been part of any violent protest, it appears that 42.1% of the respondents indicated that they have while 57.9% indicated they have not. This differs from the earlier responses on willingness to join a protest. Regarding youth participation in violent crimes, cultism (cultism in tertiary institutions and secondary schools in Nigeria is likened to gangs in America), political factors, religious factors, ethnic factors and protest were extracted from the Nigeria Watch Project Dataset on General Crime in Nigeria between 2016–2018 dataset. Thus, the most relevant and significant data among the crime category accounted for are cultism and ethnic-related crime. Cultism accounted for 67.7% participation of youth participation in crime and ethnic factors accounted for 69%, while youth participation in other crimes such as protest are significantly less, and political and religious crimes are statistically insignificant. Therefore, cultism and ethnic factors are significant for youth participation in violence.

As observed and explained by [Gboyega \(2005\)](#), youth violence, which plays out on the campuses of tertiary institutions through cultism, is a problem because the tertiary

institutions are subsets of different macrosocieties, and the violent activities of the cultists are reflections of society's increasing use of violent methods to resolve conflict frustrations and conflict situations. He noted that Nigerian tertiary institutions have witnessed unprecedented violent behaviours occasioned by students' involvement in campus cultism. To corroborate [Gboyega \(2005\)](#), it is pertinent to note that this cultism has now extended its tentacles beyond tertiary institutions to secondary schools in Nigeria. For example, in Port Harcourt, cultism is deeply rooted among the secondary school students who uses violence against their fellow students, teachers and also the society. Causes attributed to youth engagement in cultism are multicausal. They include class-oriented strain, time pressure, quality of school environment and psychological problems ([Steffgen and Ewen 2007](#)). They also include personal interest and loss of societal and family values that discourage violent association or membership. Ethnicity as a source of violence manifests through inter-ethnic, inter-community, as noted by [Obiakor \(2016\)](#), while the causes can manifest through resources-based conflict among many others. Political factors as causes of violence were also enumerated and acquired through the qualitative analysis. This also justifies the reason a mixed method was adopted for this research, in order to cover and account for all the variables and explanations needed to discuss the context of the research.

### 3.2. Qualitative Analysis

Five (5) people, who were mainly security scholars and practitioners in the Nigerian government sectors from Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence College, Abuja, were interviewed. Two (2) journalists were also interviewed. One is an editor on security issues for This Day Newspapers, while the other is a defense, conflict and security correspondence with 12 years of experience, (1) attorney on security issues and (1) former Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP). To make up for the unaccounted response of uneducated youth who could not participate in the online survey questionnaire, 10 uneducated youths were interviewed as well. In total, 19 people were interviewed.

Regarding the issues presented in this study, all the professional and expert interviewees engaged in the study knew and understood the concept of human security. However, the interviewees gave different understanding of human security. During one of the interview sessions, one of the interviewees from Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence Abuja College, made a remarkable statement by saying that 'human security in itself is hard to measure, and based on that, there are different measurements employed depending on what needs to be measured or analysed'. Therefore, as applied to the Nigerian situation, which was one of the questions asked, he stated that 'considering indicators such as security and welfare in Nigeria, human security has a low performance' (Personal communication, 7 February 2019). One of the journalists avowed that:

'Nigerian security system and architecture is still dominated by primacy on state security with human security as a consequence or afterthought. There are no pragmatic and practical efforts to place emphasis on human security. In fact, most of the policy makers and drivers of our security policy have not prioritised the centrality of human security as the prerequisite for effective and efficient state security. Even at that, Nigeria's emphasis on state security is still at its crude stage where the state security is viewed as the security of the ruling elite sometimes at the detriment of national security' (Personal communication, 28 January 2019).

On the question regarding the causes of youth violence, one of the interviewees from the Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence Abuja, avowed that there are four causes to youth violence, which are: (a) political manipulation, (b) marginalization/exclusion of youth in political leadership (this, concedes with deprivation as expressed in RD theory), (c) unemployment and (d) parenting problems, an effect of harsh/hard economic situation that pressures both the father and mother to engage in paid jobs with little or no time to take care of the children and give them proper training in ways they ought to grow up as good citizens of the country. He explained that the consequences of improper upbringing/training of a child have an effect on societies when



these children eventually become acculturated and influenced by decadent people in the society at adulthood. Invariably, issues such as violence become a way of living for some of the children with improper home training. The assertion on family and erosion of moral standards for an individual to function properly in the society attunes with Durkheim and Merton sociological anomie (Dicristina 2016). The interviewee averred that unemployment is a global trend. Nevertheless, it does not operate in isolation. Rather, it works in combination with other factors mentioned above to influence youth violence (Personal communication, 7 February 2019).

Therefore, when unemployment and poverty are merged together, they expose youths to vulnerable situations in finding whatever means necessary to fend for themselves. Furthermore, one of the interviewees informed that:

the factors that cause youth violence have at their core the lack of emphasis on human security, which leaves them with a sense of vulnerability. Moreover, the exclusion of the youths in sociopolitical and economic empowerment, as well as indoctrination that emphasises identity politics and amplifies the inherent ethno-religious fault line, gives rise to youth violence (Personal communication, 28 January 2019), just as it was expressed in the work of Nolte (2004) on identity and violence of youth in Ijebu-Remo.

When asked about the youths' capacity and capability to influence security, all the interviewees engaged in this research noted that the youths are instrumental to achieving peace and security. As stated by one of the interviewees, 'youths are clear measurable indicators for peace and security' (Personal communication, 7 February 2019). In a follow-up question on whether the government is doing anything to curb youth violence in the country, an interviewee stated explosively that firstly, 'any government that does not invest in the youth is not taking youth seriously.' (Personal communication, 12 December 2018). He buttressed his point further by providing an example of the current academic institutional strike action in the country that had lasted over three months, which means that the youths who are mainly students are at home doing nothing. He noted this as a clear indicator that the government is not interested in the youth when compared to the European Union. Secondly, the government does not promote competitive sport programs that engage the youth and only very few states within the country initiate sport programs for the youth, expressing that government has also allowed public institutions to promote laziness without work, citing the Big Brother Africa (BBA) television show as an example. In other words, the public institutions publicise mediocrity over meritocracy.

Thirdly, he expressed that youth empowerment programmes are initiated only when election period is close; even with that, the empowerment programmes are not properly institutionalised, which leads to the failure and erosion of the empowerment initiatives. It was also observed that the youth agency powers rest on the decisions and rations of youth involvement in the state affairs. At best, the youth agencies were used for sporting activities in the education sector, with little funds in engaging with capacity building for the youths. Just as was explained by Ukeje and Iwilade (2012, p. 1), 'youth violence is in many ways an expression of youth agency in the context of a social and economic system that provides little opportunity.'

Lastly, with regards to employment, he noted that the years of experience requested by the private sectors in the country is not regulated and controlled, citing that due to the incessant strike actions, students might end up graduating later than expected, thereby jeopardising their eligibility for specific job openings because of age requirement as the delay in the completion of their programmes might cause some to graduate at a much older age. Again, this explains the rationale for adopting the African Union Charter's definition of youth as it enunciates the peculiarities of the African/Nigerian society in terms of productivity and efficiency.

Furthermore, one of the journalists' positions on government's efforts to curb youth violence went thus:

'Government is not doing enough to curb youth violence because it is yet to effectively address those socio-political and economic factors that enforce exclusion of the youths in

governance, decisions making and improved well-being. Although the recent bill on not too young to run is a right step to even start with, but most youths are still unemployed and excluded' (Personal communication, 28 January 2019).

From scientific scholars'/experts' opinion on how the issue of youth violence can be addressed, the interviewees expressed that the federal system has to be restructured, stating that, though it is not going to solve the problem of youth unemployment in a short term, it can, at least, be managed, and the soaring rate of unemployment will be reduced. They also expressed those effective policies geared towards youth inclusion in governance should be implemented; issues of infrastructures, energy, education and delimiting of entrepreneurs who aid and contribute to provision of jobs should be addressed.

One of the interviewees assiduously said that 'education should be prioritised and the bar of political involvement in politics should be raised using education as a yardstick (at least a graduate from the university), explaining that most of the politicians who govern the country do not understand the underpinnings of the importance of youth development and human security in the country. More so, they send their children to the best universities abroad to acquire good education, while with their insufficient and archaic knowledge, they govern the Nigerian people in a way that puts them at harm's way causing insecurity'. Furthermore, the interviewed journalists informed that:

'We need a total reform, update or overhaul of our national security policy and architecture to reflect the needs of the 21st century security. Also, good governance, inclusion as well the restructuring and decentralisation of our security system to encourage people's buy-in and ownership will help improve human security in Nigeria. In addition, inherent in a sustainable solution to the asymmetric warfare and ongoing counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations is Human Security' (Personal communication, 28 January 2019).

On 'uneducated youths' (the term uneducated implies no formal education), two sets of uneducated youth categories were interviewed. The first group (5 interviewees) contained those who have personal businesses that they run, such as tailoring and trading. The second group (5 interviewees) contained those associated mostly with the transportation business, such as conductors. The uneducated youth who were interviewed did not understand the concept of human security, as this concept is mostly discussed in tertiary institutions, but they understood security from a layman's term. The uneducated youths who had private businesses indicated that they will not put themselves in harm's way for the course of any political issues in the society but can involve themselves or indulge in violence when there is an attack on their ethnic group and religious beliefs.

The second group of the uneducated youths associated with transportation businesses who were interviewed avowed that if any form of financial benefits is attached to campaigning for or supporting any politician, they will not hesitate to actively participate in such exercise. These persons invariably implied that the intended support for whoever provides financial benefits is to mobilise other youths for the campaign, which at sometimes might involve violence when other youth factions are also doing the same thing. Additionally, concerning other religions and ethnicity, they avowed that they are ready to use violence against whoever attacks their beliefs.

One of the researchers from the Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence Abuja interviewed for this study opposed the religious and ethnic division causes as the main problem causing insecurity in Nigeria, but instead commented on the huge division of the elite and the masses. He said that there are countries with different religions and ethnicities with no security problems, but for Nigeria, the problems surrounding religion and ethnicity are fomented by individuals with dangerous ideologies seeking to move cross over to the elite class, and for this to happen religious and ethnic tensions are instigated with youth being instrumental to its course (Personal communication, 5 February 2019).

While factors fuelling youth violence have been noted, from the government side, effort has been made to address some of these challenges by different regimes. For example, the agitation, rebellion and violence perpetrated by Niger Delta militant was managed by

the Amnesty program of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua established in August 2015, which also has its success and challenges (Okonofua 2016). Regarding government effort to curbing youth violence, the Nigerian government has an existing Ministry of youth and sport development with the aim in developing and investing in youth so as to avoid or manage future conflict or violence. However, the Ministry of youth and sport development is highly inefficient as it is accountable for only minor impact on the lives of youth, and also skewed as the chances of aids and assistance to youth are directed to those that are already enrolled in educational sector, while those without education are barely accounted for. The only active institution addressing youth violence and not the cause of youth violence are the security agencies. They are deployed to quell violence and protest perpetrated by the youth through force, which leaves the issues unaddressed, and it resurfaces again. In validating and giving credence to the qualitative analysis discussion, the study moves to the next section to explore the issues presented herein theoretically with insights from relative deprivation theory.

#### 4. Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation (RD) is the disparity between what people want, that is, their value expectations, and what they actually gain, which are their value collecting capabilities. Gurr (1971, p. 87) states that 'the intensity of relative deprivation varies strongly in terms of the average degree of perceived discrepancy between value expectation and value capabilities.' Furthermore, he argues that people are more likely to revolt when they lose hope of attaining their societal values, and that the intensity of discontent/frustration 'varies with the severity of depression and inflation.' Gurr alludes to RD as 'the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction, and this disposes men to violence' (Gurr 1971, p. 23). In relation to political violence, relative deprivation theory holds that instead of an absolute standard of deprivation, a gap between expected and achieved welfare leads men to political violence (Richardson 2011, p. 1). Though, there are critics of relative deprivation based on weak and inconsistent results that abound in research works such as Thompson (1989), who noted after his analytical research that there is no support for relative deprivation on high unemployment to increased violence.

The application and relevance of relative deprivation 'impacts on different types of social and political action from the wide range of activities available to citizens in contemporary democracies as well as into how this relationship might vary based on the wider economic context' (Grasso et al. 2017, p. 1). In other words, RD has divergent effects such as activities and associations such as parties or organizations, voting, contacting, demonstrating, and striking contrary to the traditional argument on marginalisation.

Inequality is also another factor that has been compared with the RD theory. However, the sociological approach concerning the commitment to a relativistic conception of inequality in RD leads to serious theoretical and practical complications. (Pedersen 2004). For this study, RD is used to examine the social inequality (deprivation) among the youth who justifies and adopt violence as a means to vent their anger against society and the government. In other words, the relative comparison of the deprivation in this study is between the youth who are the main component of the working class and the government whose main component are the elite. Thus, the deprivation manifests in social factors and political factors situations in the country.

For the case presented herein, the RD theory presents the grievances variable which can manifest in different stages that lead to violence. Moreover, the rebellion occurs when grievance is strong enough. For example, the manifestation of grievances on unemployment or the recent #Endsars protest staged nationwide, and also on social media platforms e.g., (twitter), in October 2020 as a result of police brutality, generated enough mobilisation which led to some rebellious confrontations among the people and the state security in some parts of the country (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000; Ukeje 2005). By implication, this directly affects human security in the country, because a violent or unstable society, does



not create the necessary conditions for human security to flourish. Having highlighted the features of RD as it engages with this study, the study will now conceptualise the main concepts of this study in the next section.

## 5. Conceptual Clarifications

### 5.1. Youth

According to the United Nations, youth is defined as ‘a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence.’ As a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Apart from using age as a categorisation, similar patterns of behaviour driven by emotion, peculiar reasoning and attitude define youth, and their response to issues is quite different from other categories. Nevertheless, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment, and specific character exhibition. For statistical purposes,

‘youth’ is defined as that category of persons without prejudice to other definitions by member states ([United Nations 1981](#)). Nonetheless what constitute and define ‘youth’ has evolved over time.

To conceptually define youth, one of the crucial things noted by the Secretary Kurt Waldheim is that the term ‘youth’ varies in different societies around the world. The UNICEF pegs adolescents as those whose age falls between 10–19 years; for the World Health Organisation, young people are those between the ages of 10–24 years; for UNFPA, youth are between 15–24 years of age ([United Nations Population Fund 2019](#)). For the [United Nations Habitat \(2012\)](#), ‘youth’ is statically defined as the group of people who fall between the age ranges of 15–32. Likewise, the African Youth Charter categorises youth as those whose age are between 15 and 35 years ([African Youth Charter 2006](#), p. 2). In European countries, ‘youth’ is defined as, ‘the path from a dependent childhood to independent adulthood’ when young people are in transition between a world of rather secure development and a world of choice and risk’ ([European Commission 2009](#), p. 17).

Having highlighted important definitions concerning ‘youth’, this study adopts the African Youth Charter’s definition. This choice is based on the following. Firstly, because of variance in chronologies and peculiarities used in defining youth varies according to society ([Furlong 2013](#)) and the closest and most suitable to situations in Nigeria is the African Youth Charter. Secondly, the study is focused on the Nigerian (African) youth; thirdly, over the years, there is a growing and teeming population with scarce economic resources for individuals to be self-dependent, which, as against the backdrop of other definitions of youth on dependency on parent, makes the classification of youth to be difficult and challenging in the African context. Simply put, using age as categorisation of the Western categorisation of youth definition may not be suitable in the Nigerian situation, as children and young people in contemporary Africa depend on their parents for so many years due to scarce economic resources, which elongates their period of dependence irrespective of age.

### 5.2. Security in Nigeria

This section discusses how security is implemented and orchestrated for the polity. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution explicitly states in Section 14 (2) of (b) that ‘the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government’ ([Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigerian 1999](#)) and somewhere else under the purview of the Constitution with the National security agencies act for establishment of advisory councils, it states in Section 2 of (a) that ‘the national security council shall be charged with responsibility for matters relating to public security’ ([National Security Agencies Act 1986](#), p. 19).

It is on the concept of ‘public security’, as mentioned above, that this study considers the definition and implementation of security in Nigeria. The scope and adoption of security in Nigeria have mainly been focused on the military with little effort in addressing human security holistically. The military approach to security as explained by

Baldwin (1997) and Buzan and Jones (1981) has led to lots of security anomalies in the state, such as the upsurge of the Boko Haram terrorist group and the Niger-Delta militants, to mention a few. Moreover, security crises and conflicts between North and South in Nigeria have been noted to be politically motivated according to Crawford (2012). The assertion that political parties are the architects of security problems in Nigeria is rightfully put. This is because the nation's political leaders continue to fractionalise and pit one against other in utter disregard of constitutional norms while neglecting developmental concerns of the polity leading to insecurity. As a result, 'alienation by the government has only served to heighten the people's sense of insecurity, as threats to their sources of livelihoods intensify by the day' (Owolabi and Okwechime 2007)

Contrarily to the military approach adopted by the Nigerian state in the implementation of security for the populace, community policing emerged to meet the needs of security; this shows the lacunae in the military approach of security. Community policing addresses problems that are criminal, affect quality of life and increase fear among citizens. It is carried out by identifying, analysing and addressing community problems from the roots (Okeshola and Mudaire 2013). It also creates a peaceful, secure and enabling environment for investors as well as societal and personal development. However, it also comes with its challenges as provision of security through partnership with the police and the polity is unrealistic due to poor public perception of the police (Kpae and Adishi 2017), corruption and inadequate logistics (Okeshola and Mudaire 2013).

### 5.3. Youth Violence in Nigeria

Youth restiveness is not a recent phenomenon; it has been a prominent issue in recent times with an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, such as hostage-taking, oil bunkering, insurgency and cultism, notably in the Niger Delta region (Anasi 2010). In the Northern part of Nigeria, there is a substantial body of research literature that links the *Almajiri* phenomenon and violence in northern Nigeria (Abbo et al. 2017) and cases of youth violence abound in Nigeria. Nonetheless, insecurity associated with youth violence was clarified by Caldeira, who noted that insecurity is not limited to indicators of economic crisis, unemployment rates, urbanisation or even state expenditures on public security at which we must look in order to understand contemporary violence. Rather, we have to consider the everyday functioning of the institutions of order, the continuous pattern of abuses by the police forces, their disrespect for rights and routine practices of injustice and discrimination (Caldeira 2000, p. 209).

Concisely, Ajaegbu's study (2012) stated that 'unemployment appears to be the root cause of violence in Nigeria'. However, the issue of unemployment as expressed by Ajaegbu and Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) is highly dependent on the viability of the economy.

Another dimension of violence as explained by Aderinto and Tunde (1994), has its roots in the loss of traditional structures that kept people together. Oruwari and Opuenebo (2006), traced the increase in violence and emergence of cult groups to the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War that lasted from 1967 to 1970. In other words, the experience of the war exposed a lot of youths directly and indirectly to violence for survival means. This survival method (violence) that was learnt from the war has festered in the society like a wound on the flesh that is unable to heal. The reason for urban violence in post-Civil War Nigeria was due to abundance of guns in private hands, coupled with hard economy, deterioration in the standard of education and lack of specific training in areas relevant for sustaining both the agricultural and industrial sectors.

In southwestern Nigeria, Obgbeide (2013) examined the youth violence and electoral process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and revealed that youth violence has a significant effect on the electoral process in Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. Ogbeide noted that 'youth energy is either used positively or negatively, depending on the individual or in some cases the society.' The energy of the youths is negatively harnessed since they are idle and have nothing to engage them positively and productively. Ogbeide's study concluded that most

youths who are perpetrators of electoral malpractices are uneducated, unemployed, and idle. Therefore, these three factors put together affect the state's security at the micro and macro scale when explored further. Succinctly, Ukeje (Ukeje and Iwilade 2012) asserts that 'Youth violence is in many ways, is an expression of youth anger in the context of a social and economic system that provides little opportunity . . . and the narratives of violence should not be associated as the mainstream on youth without considering underlying social meanings of violence, such as legitimate claim against an authoritarian and incapable state'.

The exclusion of youth concerns in the state, directly or indirectly, builds up stress and pressures against national security. In the northern part of Nigeria, most of the youth violence occurs as an ideological focus. Using the Marxian theory on political economy that presents revolutionary movement as inevitable for social change, Tenuche (2009) explains the cause of violence in Ebira land. Tenuche argued that the type of violence in Ebira land is not ideological and not political, but the absence of a well-articulated society by the state. With the explanation and justifications of the concepts adopted in this study as discussed above, the study moves on to the next section to engage the issues of youth and security presented in this study logically.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Sociopolitical and Economic Causes of Youth Violence in Nigeria

On socialisation and identity formation, Nigeria has different sociopolitical setting that is situated in different ethnic and cultural lines. These differences breed varied ideology in the way people understand and work in a multicultural society and a heterogeneous nation such as Nigeria. Just as the in-group and out-group recognition and social category as noted by Giles (2013). On the one hand, the social category and recognition drive and motivate the youths to exhibit some violent behaviours such as violent cultist activities in the society; and on the other hand, political and religious actors and factors also engineer the violent dispositions and activities exhibited by youths in the society.

The dataset showing youth participation in violent crimes reveals that cultism, a social factor, has a high potential of inciting youth violence. Invariably, the perception of the youths and actual evidence of youth participation have a meeting point. Though the dataset did not signify that political factors are significant to the causes of youth violence, the qualitative discussion of the data provides information concerning political factors as a source of youth Violence. Nevertheless, the qualitative discussion is reliably valid because some of the persons interviewed have been either been involved in act of political violence or know other youths that are famous for fomenting political violence.

The sociopolitical variance in Nigeria plays out in all spheres of the societal structure. These variances reflect in all sectors and institutions of the Nigerian society. Youth exclusion is also one of the factors that prompts violent conflict, and in trying to be part of the state concerns, they get involved through sociopolitical violent activities for their opinions and demands to be heard. A typical example of this is reflected in the Niger Delta militants' conflict with the state. Though some of the opinions and demands of the militants have taken another dimension based on greed, generally, the struggles of the Niger Delta militant/emancipation started off as grievance or relative deprivations and grievances are the initial motives for the violent conflict in the Niger Delta. Moreover, Kahl (1998, p. 87) explains that if individuals or social groups come together to resent and blame others for their predicament and woes, it becomes a grievance and may be directed towards the state or other social groups.

### 6.2. Theoretical Linkages with Violence

Some authors such as Cramer (2011, p. 2) stated that 'there are no grounds empirically for the commonly made claims that there is a strong automatic causal connection between unemployment, underemployment, or low productivity employment and violence and war.' Therefore, relative deprivation theory is inconsistent, and unemployment leading to violence is not significant according to the relative deprivation tenets. While this assertion

may be true for such authors, it should also be noted that the application of the theories varies based on regions and the state that is being analysed. Moreover, the variables adopted for the discussion in this study are interdependent.

In Nigeria, unemployment (a factor associated with deprivation in RD theory) has been pinned as one of the most explainable variables of youth's participation in violent conflicts in order to make financial gains or as a means in venting their grievances and anger on the society and state structures and institutions. The findings of this study, through the respondents interviewed, have shown that unemployment associated with economic factors gives violence a chance to thrive with youth being instrumental to it when it occurs. Additionally, the quantitative result showed cultism and ethnicity as other major causes, but in general, the political factors also contribute, and all the causes are overlapping. As noted by [Ajaegbu \(2012\)](#), rising unemployment leads to increase in violent crimes. In Anambra State, the statistical analysis of [Onwuka et al. \(2015\)](#) revealed that there is a significant relationship between youth unemployment and violent crimes in Nigeria. Moreover, [Cincotta et al. \(2003\)](#), and [Henrik \(2014\)](#) noted that there are views on youth unemployment as a key cause of insurgency or civil war. Additionally, [Akpan \(2015\)](#) study, identifies unemployment, illiteracy and faulty institution and corruption as some of the factors responsible for national insecurity in Nigeria, which is characterised by violence, kidnapping, assassinations, armed robbery, food insecurity, environmental insecurity and other vices in the nation. So, the issue of varying results on unemployment as a causal factor of youth violence could be adduced on relativeness of different cases based on state administration and resources available by geographical locations among many others.

From the above, while RD theory helps in pointing out explainable variables of youth participation in violent confrontations, in the same vein, RD theory provides an offshoot explanation on the effect of violence on human security, as stated in the early part of this work; a violent or unstable society does not create the necessary conditions for human security to flourish. The adjusted RD diagram below provides a pictorial explanation as to how RD theory resonates with human security and youth violence.

#### Adjusted RD Model

The adjusted model of RD in Figure 1 shows the connecting variables associated with rebellion, grievance, mobilisation, and youth violence and human security. In the model above, what triggers rebellion is negative democratic dividends, which leads to rebellion. Rebellion causes repression, and repression leads to grievances. Repression is influenced by political manipulation, which then leads to the variables impacting on grievance know as unemployment, geopolitical zones marginalisation, youth exclusion/marginalisation and economic situations. These are accounted for as the direct influence on grievances. Moreover, grievances, when strong enough, lead to rebellion, but when they are not strong enough, they fuel mobilisation, as shown with the dotted lines. For mobilisation, identity, group size and democratisation are accounted. The minus (−) sign indicates that the variable does not lead directly to another variable while the positive sign (+) indicates that it leads to another variable.

#### 6.3. Security Implications of Youth Violence

The findings of this study indicated a high involvement of youth in violence, which could potentially escalate if structures are not put in place to address its growing rate. Having noted different factors causing Youth violence/restiveness, [Igbo and Ipka \(2013\)](#) noted that youth restiveness can be curbed through skill acquisition, enlightenment and counselling programmes. The skill acquisition programmes mentioned by Igbo and Ipka bring to mind the empowerment programmes for the youths, such as Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE- P) and the youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) under the past administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. Currently, the current administration of President Mohammadu Buhari recognised the high rate of violence due to youth unemployment and initiated the Social Investment

Programmes (SIP) such as N-power, Conditional cash Transfer (CCT), and Government Economic Empowerment Programme (GEEP).

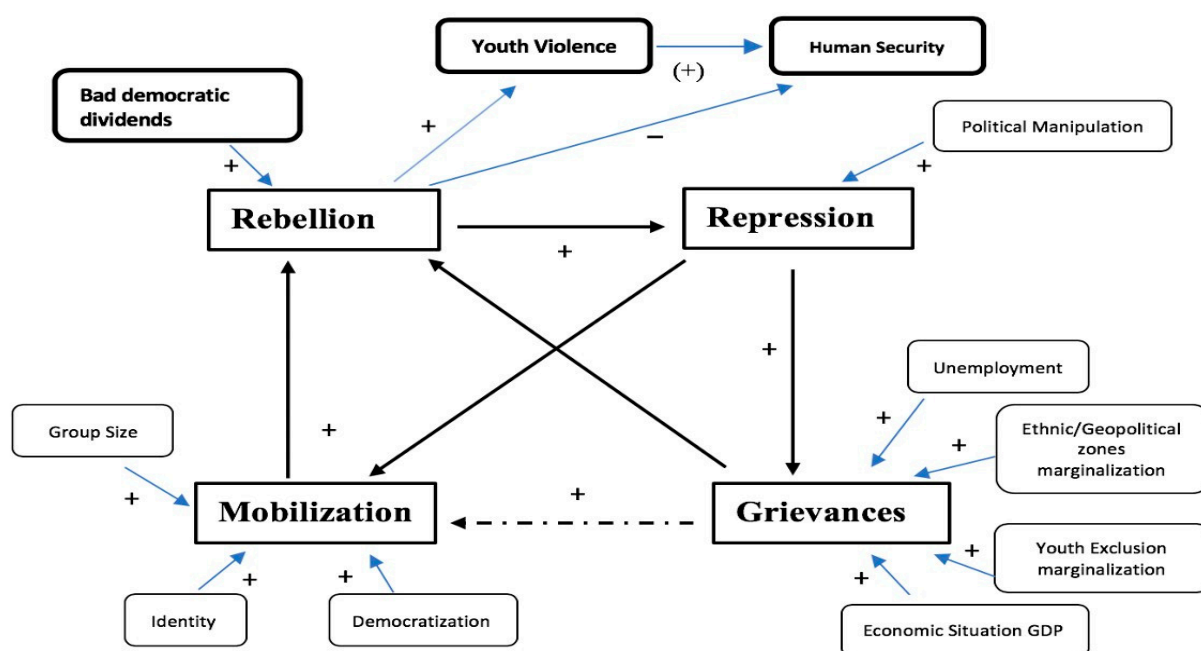


Figure 1. Specified model of youth violence grievances and rebellion in Nigeria.

All these are designed by the Nigerian government in addressing the overbearing pressure and problems of unemployment affecting the country. As good as these initiatives and innovations were, it is saddening that it is like a candle fire trying to boil a big pot of water. For example, the decision of the Nigerian government to terminate the payment of thirty thousand naira (N 30,000.00) monthly to about 500,000 unemployed youths is causing alarm. The general question being asked by everyone is if the government is terminating the stipend without any other alternative of income so that the youths can fall back to crime and violence?

These initiatives are very few and oftentimes met with different political policies that put a cog in the wheel of their activities in addressing youth unemployment. In other words, these programmes have been politicised and sometimes, merits or the result of youth within the system are met with doubts and skepticism. The study of [Okonta \(2012\)](#) revealed that the youth, who constitute over 50% of the voting population in Nigeria, was deliberately excluded from the political process. Thus, the attack on governors, politicians and traditional rulers is as a result of the disenchanted northern youths in 2011.

The nature of the political violence as explained by Okonta was anchored on youth militias, ethnic hegemony, and democratisation in northern Nigeria. Apart from the mainstream of ethnic and religious factors/causes fuelling youth violence in Nigeria, Anasi see ([Elegbeleye 2005](#)) pointed out three major factors of youth restiveness which are, peer motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas and perceived victimisation arising from economic exploitation.

#### 6.4. Policy Recommendation: Curbing Violence and Improving Human Security

Following the theoretical framework established in this study, which expresses marginalisation and deprivation by relative deprivation theory, Nigerian government can do better in revamping existing or creating workable institutions that help in provision of youth needs to function properly in the society, which will reduce youth behaviors towards violence on the society and the state. There are various ways in which the government can go about youth behavioral change on violence and enhance human security but among all the measures the government can take, effective institutions are very important.



Effective institutions in a state are very important, for example ‘in most societies, political, economic and military powers are created through institutions that structure human organisations and relationships. These institutions simultaneously give individuals controls over resources and social functions and by doing so, limit the use of violence by shaping the incentives faced by individuals and groups who have access to violence’ (North et al. 2009, p. xvii). The importance of institutions is based on the fact that institutions generate behaviours; part of the institutional elements are rules, norms, beliefs and organisation (Greif 2006). One of the problems of Nigerian institutions, as stated in the findings of this study, includes parenting problems, where parents have little or no time for their children while focusing all attention on their job in order to meet financial obligation of the family, also needs to be revisited. This has to do with wages of workers in the country. Whenever the Federal Government increases the minimum wage in the state, prices of all services and goods increase simultaneously which defeat the aim of the wage increment for the citizens and this issue needs to be addressed.

Another entry point in curbing of youth violence and radicalisation is through quality education. For example, in regard to radicalisation and cultism stated earlier, some of the youths who participate in violent activities are being coerced or pressured to join such groups with little or no information on the consequences of their actions. Therefore, unlearning the widespread benefit of violence by being a member of a violent group will also assist in reducing and reshaping youth behaviour towards violence. Additionally, economic and security regional or geopolitical zone programmes for positive engagement of the youths towards individual development and state building should be made available, which also helps to reduce youth involvement in violence. Moreover, a favourable taxing system that will be channelled to social welfare of the Nigerian citizens just as witnessed in most European countries should be adopted. Affordable soft loans to foster and strengthen private individual for business should be provided. By implication, the businesses will generate employment and also reduce less strain and stress on the government to cater for the needs of the increase population dependent on the government for the provision of jobs.

Moreover, there is a need for institutional and structural revolution in Nigeria. Nigeria has good institutions but virtually all are dysfunctional in that individuals are stronger than institutions, thereby undermining institutional functionality. The institutional and structural revolution does not call for violence and forceful change but rapid and progressive change that will impact positively on the lives of the citizens. The central thesis of the revolution will be strict adherence of the rule of law where individuals regardless of their political, social and economic standing are obliged to submit to the dictates of the law. In this case, there implementation of the law will cease to be determined based on personality as is the presently obtainable.

## 7. Conclusions

This study has considered human security and youth violence in great details by contextualising, presenting its findings and discussing the issues through relative deprivation theory. In the context of this study, analysing the variables associated with human security and youth violence with the RD theory shows that they are interdependent. Among the variable explored for violence causality, it was found that there is a connection of unemployment (economical factors) as deprivation to the causes of youth violence. Nonetheless, for radicalisation and youth behavioural change in conforming to the societal and state norms, there is the need for a wider trajectory to be employed, and of course these trajectories will be a process of impacting knowledge, which all anchors on education. For human security findings, a solid footing in Nigeria, there will be need for real decentralisation of powers/responsibilities which involves state governors in different geographical locations working together on a regional basis to alleviate the violence, security and economic problems and challenges facing their regions. Likewise, good parenting and guidance of the child to fit well into the society is equally germane to curbing youth violence. Un-



til there is a turnaround in approaches adopted for human security and youth violence, different waves of violence relating to conflict such as creation of insurgent groups will keep unfolding with youths being instrumental to its unfortunate success. By and large, to achieve all the efforts in curbing youth violence in Nigeria, there is need for institutional and structural revolution.

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