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# Ineffectiveness of Social Institutions and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study explores the complex relationship between ineffectiveness of social institutions and violent conflicts in Nigeria by applying the theoretical lenses of anomie and functionalism. Nigerias diverse socio-economic and political landscape is marred by numerous challenges, including corruption, poverty, insecurity, and weak governance, which have led to various forms of violent conflicts over the course of its history. Indeed, the ineffectiveness of social institutions has created an environment where individuals and groups resort to violence as a means to achieve their goals. This study draws on Robert Mertons anomie theory, which posits that a disconnect between societal goals and means can lead to deviant behavior. It also applies Émile Durkheims functionalism theory, which emphasizes the importance of social institutions in maintaining social order. The study also reveals that ineffective social institutions, including economic deprivation, weak governance, corruption, inadequate education, lack of security, and the failure of the healthcare system have contributed to the emergence and persistence of violent conflicts in Nigerian society. This study concludes that the revitalization of the country's economy will strengthen other institutions and allow them to perform their roles and unburden their responsibilities as prerequisite to the security and development of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** conflict, economy, poverty, unemployment, youth, institutions

## Introduction

Nigeria, a country with a rich cultural heritage and vast natural resources, has been plagued by various forms of violent conflicts, which have had devastating impacts on its socio-economic and political development (Adegbamigbo & Adeoye, [2021](#)). These conflicts, ranging from the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East to the Fulani herdsmen attacks in the

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Middle Belt and the Niger Delta militancy in the South-South region, have resulted in significant human suffering, displacement, and loss of life. The persistence of violent conflicts in Nigeria has been attributed to various factors, including weak governance, economic deprivation, poverty, corruption, inequality, and the ineffectiveness of social institutions, such as the family, education system, police, judiciary, security, and government, that play a crucial role in shaping societal norms, values, and behaviors (Osaghae & Suberu, [2005](#)). However, when these institutions fail to function effectively, it can create an environment conducive to conflict.

This study explores the nexus between the ineffectiveness of social institutions and violent conflicts in Nigeria. By examining the complex interplay between these two phenomena, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of violent conflicts in Nigeria and identify potential solutions to address them.

Nigeria's history of violent conflicts dates back to its colonial era, with various forms of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts. Since independence in 1960, the country has experienced several military coups, civil wars, and other forms of violent conflicts (Falola, [2009](#)). The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in the 1950s has also been a significant factor in the country's conflict dynamics (Omeje, [2004](#)). Moreover, the ineffectiveness of social institutions in Nigeria has been a major concern, with many institutions failing to provide basic services and promote social cohesion. This has created an environment conducive to conflict, with various groups resorting to violence as a means to achieve their goals. However, the current study aims to explore potential solutions to address the nexus between ineffective social institutions and violent conflicts in Nigeria society. And furthermore, to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding violent conflicts in Nigeria and inform policy interventions to promote peace and stability in the country.

### Conceptual Clarification

*Family:* The family remains the bedrock of every society, serving as a vital source of nourishment and a primary agent of socialization. It provides a framework for child rearing and transmitting cultural values (Damon & Lerner, [2008](#)). The African proverb says, "Charity begins at home." This underscores the importance of the family. A personal family background

significantly influences their development and the family system that determines the future of the society as a whole (Reiss, [1995](#)). Moreover, family is an indispensable tool in transforming society.

*Education:* Education system plays a crucial role in shaping individual and societal development. It is a complex and dynamic system that provides a framework for learning, growth, and socialization (Rusho et al., [2024](#)).

*Religious:* Religion is a complex and multifaceted institution that plays a significant role in shaping individual and collective beliefs, values, and practices (Alshehri, [2024](#)). It is a system of symbols, rituals, and doctrines that provides meaning, purpose, and direction to people's lives.

*Government:* Government is a vital institution that plays a critical role in shaping the lives of citizens and determines the overall direction of society. Its functions, types, and importance highlight its significance in maintaining stability, providing essential services, promoting economic growth, and protecting citizens' rights (Kirlin, [1996](#)).

*Police:* The police are a critical social institution responsible for maintaining law and order, ensuring public safety, and upholding the rule of law (Lindholt et al., [2003](#)). As a key component of the criminal justice system, the police play a vital role in enforcing laws and regulations to prevent and detect crime, maintain public order and stability, and build trust and collaboration with communities to address safety concerns. The effectiveness of the police as an institution is crucial in promoting social cohesion, trust, and security. However, police can also create challenges, such as corruption, brutality, and ineffectiveness, which can undermine public trust and exacerbate social conflicts.

*Judiciary:* The judiciary is a critical institution responsible for interpreting laws and ensuring that their application is fair and just. Moreover, it resolves disputes between individuals, organizations, and government entities and upholds justice, ensuring that justice is served and the rule of law is maintained (Falola, [2009](#)).

*Economy:* The economy plays a vital role in shaping societal norms, values, and behaviors. It is a complex system of interrelated all economic institutions and activities that govern the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within the society. The economy serves as the foundation upon which other societal structures rely on for their survival and function. It is a key driver of development, promoting security

and a peaceful environment (Solo, [2000](#)). As a major consideration in public policy making, the economy significantly influences individual and societal outcomes. Moreover, a society's economic background shapes the character and attitudes of its members.

*Youth:* The term 'youth' refers to the stage of life between childhood and adulthood, typically spanning the ages of 15 to 24, according to the United Nations. In the Nigerian context, the classification of youth is the people falling within the age range of 30 years, since they are allowed to participate in the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC) programme. However, this phase of life is marked by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. Globally, the youth remain the stakeholders in the development process and the most considerable phenomenon in formulating policies for socio-economic development.

*Social Vices:* Social vices refer to behaviors or actions that are considered morally reprehensible, harmful, or unacceptable by society (Hassan & Abdulkareem, [2023](#)). These vices can have negative impacts on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Examples of social vices are substance abuse, crime and violence, corruption, and cybercrime, among others. While, the causes of most social vices are poverty and economic inequality, social and cultural factors, and family and upbringing. The consequences of these vices include harm to individuals, social problems, economic costs, community breakdown, and others.

## Theoretical Framework

Theories of 'anomie' and 'functionalism' serve as the theoretical framework applied in order to understand the nexus between ineffective social institutions and violent conflicts in Nigeria (Abdullahi, [2021](#)). Anomie theory, developed by Robert Merton, posits that a disconnect between societal goals and means can lead to deviant behavior. In Nigeria, the ineffectiveness of social institutions has created an environment where individuals and groups resort to violence as a means to achieve their goals. While Strain theory, as proposed by Merton, suggests that individuals experience strain when they are unable to achieve their goals through legitimate means. In Nigeria, the lack of economic opportunities, corruption, and poor governance have created strain, leading some individuals to turn to violence. Anomie refers to a state of normlessness or the lack of clear social norms. In Nigeria, the ineffectiveness of social

institutions has contributed to a state of anomie, creating an environment where violent behavior is more likely to occur.

Functionalism theory, developed by Émile Durkheim, emphasizes the importance of social institutions in maintaining social order. In Nigeria, the dysfunctionality of social institutions has disrupted social cohesion, contributing to the emergence and persistence of violent conflicts. Functionalism theory suggests that social integration is critical to maintain social order. In Nigeria, the ineffectiveness of social institutions has led to social disintegration, creating an environment where violent conflicts can thrive.

Institutional dysfunction refers to the failure of social institutions to perform their expected functions. In Nigeria, the dysfunctionality of social institutions, such as the government, education system, family, police, security, and judiciary has contributed to the emergence and persistence of violent conflicts.

The ineffectiveness of social institutions in Nigeria has created an environment where individuals and groups resort to violence as a means to achieve their goals. While, the dysfunctionality of social institutions has led to social disintegration, creating an environment where violent conflicts thrive. The ‘strain’ and ‘anomie’ theories argue that the lack of economic opportunities, corruption, and poor governance have created strain and anomie, leading some individuals to turn to violence.

The Anomie and Functionalism theories provide a useful framework for understanding the nexus between ineffective social institutions and violent conflicts in Nigeria.

Indeed, the adoption of untimely economic policy and other factors have resulted to the current Nigerian economic crisis that responsible for the high rate of unemployment and poverty. According to Akanbi (2025), there is a direct correlation between unemployment, poverty, and crime. The study emphasized that economic hardship increases the likelihood of anti-social behavior, particularly among the youth, while lack of employment opportunities gives rise to various social problems, including the emergence of street children that accelerate youth involvement in crime.

## **Economy and Unemployment**

The primary goal of any administration is to achieve development,

which is closely tied to a strong economy. A robust economy serves as the foundation that sustains society and enables the government to carry out its functions and responsibilities effectively. Indeed, it acts as a pillar that sustains other institutions, that enabling them to function effectively. The economic strength of a nation is a critical factor in policy making and determines its development status. Indeed, the bad state of Nigeria's economy is the root cause of high rate of youth unemployment and poverty which have had a ripple effect on other institutions, including family, religion, education, government, police, judiciary, security, and others.

Unemployment is a universal problem that affects most of the countries, of the world both developed and underdeveloped. Although many countries are taking necessary steps to abate the problem, it seems that the Nigerian government is not doing enough to address the issue. However, following the bad state of Nigeria economy with significant effect on the high rate of unemployment and poverty in the society, the effect of unemployment remains deeply rooted and can have far reaching consequences on the society, include:

*Economic Instability:* High unemployment rates can lead to reduced consumer spending, economic stagnation, and increased poverty.

*Social Unrest:* Unemployment can contribute to social unrest, as individuals and communities become frustrated with lack of opportunities and resources.

*Mental Health:* Unemployment can have negative impacts on mental health, including increased stress, anxiety, and depression.

*Crime and violence:* In some cases, unemployment can contribute to increased crime and violence, as individuals seek alternative means of supporting themselves and their families.

Addressing unemployment requires a comprehensive approach that includes job creation, skills development, and social protection programs. By investing in employment opportunities and support services, the government can mitigate the negative effects of unemployment and promote economic stability and social cohesion in the country.

### **The Interplay between Youth Unemployment and Development**

In every society, youth remain an important resource for development, serving as an asset for innovation and creativity, as well as a major

stakeholder in socio-economic activities. The youth population of any nation represents the driving force in its development. This is because the youth is characterized and filled with excessive energy that needs to be extracted and channeled positively. This can be achieved by engaging them productively, while the failure to engage them positively can have an adverse effect on the society, as currently experiencing in Nigeria's society. Indeed, the majority of Nigerian youth roams about the street without work, which has made them vulnerable to be recruited by criminals or extremists.

Unemployment, according to Simon and Peter ([2007](#)), is the number of the economically active population currently without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (Obumneke ([2012](#)) asserted that bad government policies and other factors are responsible for the risen in unemployment rate and poverty, including the adoption of untimely economic policy measures, wrong impression about technical and vocational studies, the neglecting of the agriculture sector, and poor enabling environment. In view of Obumneke ([2012](#)), unemployment accounts for most of the crimes perpetrated by the youth in Nigeria society today. The accelerating level of prostitution, armed robbery, rape, and all other facets of violence can be largely attributed to the high level of unemployment and poverty. An examination of most of the apprehended criminals shows that a large number of youths that engage in criminal activities are those without gainful employment. Some of these criminals are people who have the potential for gainful employment but have been denied such opportunity. Unemployment, then, can be seen as one of the core causes of the rising level of social disorder and insecurity that permeating Nigerian society.

The weakness of Nigeria's economy sector as an institution has far reached implications and effects on other institutions, such as government, police, judiciary, education, religion, family, and others and hindered them to perform their respective roles effectively. In this regard, the following factors should be considered:

*Limited Job Opportunities:* Insufficient job opportunities for youth can lead to poverty and economic instability.

*Poverty Trap:* Poverty can limit access to education and skills development, making it difficult for the youth to secure better paying jobs.



*Vulnerability:* Unemployed or underemployed youth are more vulnerable to exploitation and recruitment by violent groups.

*Social Exclusion:* Unemployment and poverty can lead to social exclusion, further marginalizing young people.

*Corruption:* Corruption in every facet of institutions has consequences and negative effects on their role and responsibility in every sector of the society.

### **Violent Conflict and Ineffectiveness of Social Institutions in Nigeria**

The name of Nigeria has become a reference point in most of literature and media which is synonymous with the persistence of violent conflicts and social vices, including frauds, religious crisis, political crisis, armed robbery, Boko Haram, kidnappers, Fulani-herdsmen, prostitution, and other vices, usually perpetrated by its youth. However, all these social vices and criminal activities have led to palpable fear among the populace to the extents the security of lives and properties can no longer be guaranteed. This has led the country to be tagged as one of the unsafe nations on the continent. Indeed, the weakness of institutions has been significantly indicted for the rise of all these social vices in Nigerian society.

Social institutions remain the wheels that sustain the society and also the act as the nutrients from which the society draws its strength. Their effectiveness reflects on the whole structure of the society. However, following the current state of Nigeria's economic crisis as a major cause of high rate of unemployment and poverty in the Nigerian society, has been indicted for high rate of social vices. Akanbi (2025) contended that there is correlation between unemployment, poverty, and crime. Youth unemployment and poverty lead to anti-social behaviors, such as emergence of street children, as well as the involvement of youth in crimes and in armed conflict. For instance, militancy in the Niger Delta, and currently the Boko Haram crisis both have been fueled by youth unemployment and poverty as a result of the ineffectiveness and weakness of the institutions that supposed to take responsibility.

According to Adebayo (2006), poverty and relative deprivation can drive individuals to crime as a means of survival. In Nigeria, the social environment faced by the poor and jobless often contributes to a high rate of social vices and crimes among the youth. The desperation and sense of want can lead to increased crime rates, poverty, and unemployment.

Moreover, it can drive individuals to engage in criminal activities and other social vices. The lack of opportunities and resources can contribute to various social problems.

The relationship between violent conflict and the ineffectiveness of social institutions in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted. It is affected by the following factors:

*Institutional Weaknesses:* Weak social institutions contribute to an environment conducive to violent conflict by failing to address grievances, inability to provide security, and failure to promote social cohesion.

*Conflict Escalation:* Ineffective institutions can escalate conflicts through the failure to respond to early warning signs, neglecting community needs, and perpetuating injustices.

*Lack of Trust:* When institutions fail to deliver on their mandates, citizens lose trust, leading to increased tensions and a higher likelihood of violent conflict.

*Cycle of Violence:* Violent conflicts further weaken social institutions, creating a cycle of violence and institutional ineffectiveness that is challenging to break.

Hence, addressing and strengthening social institutions, promoting accountability, and fostering a culture of trust and cooperation between citizens and institutions is imperative.

### **Government Initiatives to Strengthen Institutions**

The Nigerian government has implemented various programs of development aimed at promoting economic growth and strengthening institutions. Some notable initiatives include the following.

#### **Institutional Reforms**

The Nigerian government established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as an institution to combat economic and financial crimes, including corruption and mismanagement. The EFCC's mandate includes investigating and prosecuting financial crimes. It investigates and prosecutes individuals and organizations involved in financial crimes, such as corruption, money laundering, and advance fee fraud.

## Economic Development

For the government to strengthen the institutions and be effective, Nigeria's government has established some programs of development aimed at promoting economic growth, such as National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), responsible for investment promotion, trade facilitation, and business regulation.

## SERVICOM

This initiative was purposely established to improve the effectiveness of governance institutions. It focuses on the effectiveness of all government sectors including those responsible for policy formulation, implementation, and oversight.

Despite all these initiatives, violent conflicts remain unabated and continue due to the ineffectiveness of the institutions in charge.

## Conclusion

The nexus between violent conflict and the ineffectiveness of social institutions in Nigeria is a highly complex and multifaceted issue. The current study emphasizes the crucial role of social institutions, including the economy, family, education, security, and government, in maintaining social order and fostering stability. The findings suggest that the ineffectiveness of these institutions contributes to social disintegration, strain, and anomie, ultimately leading to violent conflict. A strong economy is essential for the effectiveness of other institutions. Hence, policymakers should prioritize economic development to promote stability and reduce the risk of violent conflict. By addressing the root causes of ineffective social institutions and promoting stability, the country can reduce the risk of violent conflict and build a more peaceful and prosperous future for its citizens.

## Recommendations

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves the strengthening of social institutions, promoting peace and security, fostering economic opportunities, and encouraging community engagement along the following lines:

*Strengthen Institutional Capacity:* Enhance the capacity of social institutions to deliver essential services, promote social cohesion, and address grievances.

*Promote Transparency and Accountability:* Foster a culture of transparency and accountability in governance and institutions, reducing opportunities for corruption and abuse of power.

*Encourage Community Engagement:* Foster community engagement and participation in decision-making processes, thus promoting social cohesion and reducing tensions.

*Support Economic Development:* Implement policies that promote economic development, reduce poverty and inequality, and provide opportunities for economic growth and social mobility.

*Security Sector Reform:* Reform the security sector to ensure effective and accountable security services that protect citizens and promote stability.

*Promote Dialogue and Understanding:* Encourage dialogue and understanding between different groups, promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts and reducing tensions.

*Address Root Causes:* Address the root causes of violent conflicts, including poverty, inequality, and lack of access to resources and opportunities.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can reduce the incidence of violent conflicts and promote stability, security, and sustainable development.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Data associated with this study will be provided by corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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