DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: 1999-2017

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ABSTRACT
Democracy and challenges of national security is a paper which uncovers the problem of security in Nigerian democratic experience which since 1999 has turned peace loving Nigerian communities who have co-existed over ten decades into violent contestation and circle of bloodletting. This paper analyses the various modes of insecurities bedevilling the citizens in virtually every nooks and crannies of the country. It examines the genesis and implication of the ugly situation on the survival of democracy in Nigeria. The researchers have found out that the problem of insecurity in Nigeria is linked to the action and inaction of the state managers. The leadership is indifferent to the plights of the citizens with little materials benefits, unemployment, lack of basic needs, forcing people to rely on religion and ethnic group. As a way of safeguarding their lives and property, people resort to taking laws into their hands which has become a threat to national security. The paper recommends that unless the leadership appreciate the values and ideal of democracy and empower the people to participate in governance, peace and stability will remain an illusion

Keywords: democracy, national security, insecurity, violence

Introduction
Democracy is arguably the most popular form of government in the world today. Within the last two decades, it has emerged as the most cherished political system in the world, even though it is indisputable that democracy cannot solve all our problems (Babawale, 2007) the word democracy itself is a derivative of two Greek words, “demos” which means the “people” and “Kratia” which means rule of or rule by. This means that democracy connotes rule “by the people”.

Since the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999, so many citizens have become scared as to whether the current democratic experiment is capable of sustaining national security. This fact is justifiable going by the Nigeria’s experiences of democratic governance in the first, second and aborted third republics (Baban Umma, 2011). Some of the major security challenges confronting the nation have been identified to include: political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic
agitations, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organized crimes.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy
Democracy can be seen as a form of government in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. Democracy allows people to participate equally, directly or through elected representatives.

Democracy was conceived in the Athenian City State in the manner of antiquity as involving the direct participation of every citizen in legislation and administration.

However, modernization and expansion in size and scope of society from state to nation-state have necessitated the modification of the Athenian processes and mechanisms into a differentiated structures and functions, but the ideal remains unchanged. The ideal of democracy has always been expressed as for the good of man and the equal right of all to hold public office and determine public policy. This calls for elaborate structures consisting of both representatives and specialized institutions (Fagge, 2000) cited in Abubakar 2015.

National Security
In order to possess national security, a nation needs to possess economic security, energy security, environmental security, etc. (www.wikipedia.com-2010).

Nnoli (2006) opine that security or national security is a cherished value associated with physical safety of individuals, groups or nation states together with a similar safety of their most cherished values. He further said that it denotes freedom from threats, anxiety or danger.

Methodology
The research is based on secondary data. The secondary data is derived from the content analysis of journals, conference papers, magazines, newspapers and textbooks.

Analysis of Insecurity in Nigerian Fourth Republic
Since the return of Nigeria to democratic governance in 1999, there have been cases of insecurity and violence of all sorts, including kidnapping, inter-communal conflicts, political violence, Herdsman/farmers conflict, etc. The lack of political will and determination on the part of Nigerian leaders has made physical safety of the prominent concern of every Nigerian as they lack the capacity to protect lives and property of the citizens (Baban Umma, 2011). Nigerian media have been feeding Nigerians with horrible news of deaths and massacre across the country.

Other estimates of casualties are much higher as more than 6000 people have been killed. Statistics has shown that from 1999 to date, over 100 eruptions of conflicts are recorded across the country representing a much higher frequency than any period in Nigeria’s history. Some of the crises recorded are the year 2000 Sharia crisis in Kaduna between Muslims and Christians, Jos 2001 crisis between Muslims and Christians where over 1000 people were killed, the OPC
crisis in Lagos, the Odi and Zaki Biam massacre by the Nigerian Military, killing of innocent Nigerians by Boko Haram sect which has become a source of concern not only to the government and people of Nigeria, but the International Community as well. (Aminu, 2011)

Another serious threat to peace in Nigeria is the herdsman/farmers conflict. The conflicts between these two group of people have existed since the beginning of agriculture and have increased in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental and other factors (Dare, 2007). Resource scarcity and competition have been identified as the primary cause the conflict between herdsmen and farmers. In the opinion of Homer Dixon (1999) and Blench (1984) cited in Dare (2007), resource scarcity is induced by climatic and environmental factors such as climate change, acute drought, environmental degradation, fresh water depletion, desertification, erosion, extreme heat, loss of wetland, etc. They further said that scarcity of land, water and foliage which stems from unfavorable weather and climatic condition reduces the sufficiency of these resources which seriously affect the pattern of grazing by the herdsmen. The spillover effect of it all is that it results to conflict between farmers and herdsmen, thereby leading to loss of life property. The Institute of Economy and Peace (2015) in Dare (2017) described the Fulani militancy as the fourth most deadly terrorist group in the world. Record shows that from 2012-2013 conflict arising from farmers herdsman clashes occur in different parts of Nigeria.

However, it appears the government of Nigeria is yet to realize that the best guarantee of state security is the security of their citizens in form of social contract.
The situation points to undeclared civil war, which unlike the Biafran civil war was restricted to the Eastern part. None of the culprits in connections to these crises has been punished, but Nigerian government is busy claiming all is well and that the country is peaceful for foreign investment.

**Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria**

Bomb blasts, assassinations, and other terror acts have become the order of the day in our once peaceful country. In Nigeria today, unemployment has become every youth’s nightmare. According to Aminu (2011) unemployment coupled with the ever-widening social gap was what triggered the Niger Delta youths to pick up arms in protest. The emergence of Boko Haram brought about a new culture of suicide bombing and martyrdom to Nigeria. Our leaders quickly dismissed the group as that of religious extremists who were misguided and brainwashed by their leaders, without taking time to look at the injustice, unemployment, deprivation, hopelessness and the total lack of commitment on their parts to the plight of the struggling Nigerian youths.

According to Ehusani (2002) what we have witnessing in Nigeria is the failure of the state and the collapse of leadership. The average Nigerian seems to have no confidence and trust in the ability of leaders to protect lives and properties. Poverty and the widening gap between the rich and the poor also contribute to rising wave of insecurity.

According to Buhari (1998), poverty in Nigeria has for the past decades been increasing and is now pervasive and equality resulting from severe distortions has made people to lost confidence in government, thereby looking for every means to survive.
Other factors contributing to national insecurity are political exclusion; economic marginalization and social discrimination threatening the security of citizens to a level that they regard the state as the primary threat to their survival. Citizens now resort to self-defense as a means of safeguarding their fundamental values from the threat of unacceptable government policies and programmes.

Despite intolerant and ruthless contest among political leaders and their followers have often resulted in violence, security breaches, killing and destructions which threatens the very democracy that they seek to partake in. It can be recalled that desperate politicking among PDP members was the cause of the 2011 post-election violence that claimed the lives of so many Nigerians when President Good luck Ebele Jonathan jettisoned the zoning arrangement of his party and contested which northerners view as unacceptable.

Electoral fraud also possesses a major challenge to democracy in Nigeria and by implication poses threat to the security of the nation. It undermines the sanctity of democracy and weakens its capacity as an instrument for the mobilization of the development of the people and the state.

Implication on Survival of Nigerian Democracy

The fact that Nigeria is a nation imbued with ideals of greatness is quite incontrovertible. That the country is highly endowed with inexhaustible human and material potentials is equally undeniable. Nigeria has the prospect of maintaining a viable socio-economic legacy that can stand the test of time. Unfortunately, series of senseless, ethnic, political, religious killings and assassinations seem to be dragging the country back. In spite of the deluge of condemnations that have greeted the increasing orgy of ethno-religious and political violence and insecurity in Nigeria, the social vice has remained almost intractable like a monstrous specter. Even outside the frontiers of the nation, many world leaders have condemned in unmistakable term this ugly scenario as a big threat not only to democracy but also to the corporate existence of the nation (Agu, 2010).

Democracy encourages group participation in governance, and decision making process. There is no doubt that a country where the citizens have no regard for sanctity of human lives cannot have a place in the annals of history. According to Baban Umma (2010) insecurity and violence turns people’s attention from creative production to creative destruction as in the case of Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau State respectively. It must be noted that democracy has never survived in an unsecured environment. So, one of the reasons why the Nigerian government has not been able to address the myriads of socio-economic challenges confronting the country could be linked to the high level of security challenges in the country. For our democracy to survive and flourish, serious security threats have to be addressed.

Conclusion

From the analysis thus far, it is conspicuous that the problem of insecurity in Nigeria has to do with the undemocratic nature of the state. To address the impasse, what is required is participatory democracy where citizens can have a say in the running of the state. According to Baban Umma (2011) had Nigeria knew that democracy as practiced today would consume blood more than civil war, they could have taught of other option. It is when people are
happy that the country can really be secured, can really be ready for nation building and democracy can flourish.

Recommendations
1. Government should strive to empower the populace through increasing the capacity of the masses to directly and concretely influence politics in their own interest.
2. Ethnic and religious strife should be alleviated through respect for the people’s identities and peculiarities.
3. The Nigerian Police Force should be empowered to have the capacity to deal with security challenges in the country. This can be done through reforming the police service.
4. Traditional rulers should be involved in the efforts to achieve peace in the country. This hinges on the fact that traditional rulers as custodians of culture and tradition, are better placed to talk to the people.
5. The orientation of Nigerian democracy should change where leaders would have respect for people, listen to them, have faith in their ability to understand the political process, relate with them on the basic of justice and mutual respect.

REFERENCES


