

## CHALLENGES OF NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE: INTERROGATING THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND LEGITIMACY QUESTION

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### Abstract

*National security and legitimacy are essential issues of governance that no nation desirous of political, economic and democratic stability can afford to take with levity. Thus, when countries begin to struggle in these critical areas of governance, her democracy becomes threatened. Nigeria's national security, legitimacy and democratic sustenance are not exempted from a number of challenges, threatening her in the Fourth Republic. Hence, the paper is an interrogation into the challenges of national security, legitimacy and democratic sustenance. The paper adopted desk research method to gather secondary materials that were contently analyzed and the failed states theory was used as the explanatory framework of the research. The paper identified inherited colonial security orientation, Boko Haram insurgency,*

*herdsmen clashes, banditry, ethnicity, separatist agitations, underdevelopment and electoral malpractices as the core challenges of Nigeria's democratic sustainability. It recommends a review of the entire national security apparatus, citizen's welfare through good governance, and public enlightenments to strengthen supports for democratic institutions in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, development, legitimacy, national security, insecurity

### Introduction

Globally, modern government has come to be associated with democratic practices and other important indices which confer electoral power to the people, irrespective of their socio-political and economic lineages. Consequently, the prism of national security and legitimacy has become the strong fulcrum of

government policies and programs needed to enhance the sustainability of democracy. National security has endured the demand of time as the state's ability to institute the required needs of the people and stimulate policy direction for its self-survival, preservation, and protection of national values. In the analysis of Paleri (2008), this includes national-territorial autonomy in defense of the people and critical institutions of the state from internal and external subversion. The concept of legitimacy in theory and practice represents the integral part and symbol of popular representative government. In operation, it is the people's recognition of the political authority, support, and acceptance of existing leadership. Legitimacy is a bottom-up theory of governance shaped by popular and credible electoral mandate and good governance that appeal to the aspirations of the greatest number of citizens. Democratic sustainability revolves around overt and covert activities directed to strengthen democratic institutions, sustain popular participation in decisions making and preserve the gains of democratic rules.

The United States of America remains the leading bastion of democratic practices and has remained at the vanguard of democratic evangelism across the globe, with a strong commitment to programs and policies capable of strengthening national

security, defense system, and retooling her legitimacy via the popular electoral system and good governance. In effect, nearly all countries have continuously demonstrated intent and excitement to be described as democratic, irrespective of the level of accountability, people-oriented policies, and popular participation at play. This has ensured that the struggle for public acceptability remains unending. Oyekanmi and Moliki (2021) argued that governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has remained structured around popular mandate and the interplay of the democratic ethos of justice, peaceful coexistence, and fairness as the pathway from which the primary responsibility of the state can be articulated and implemented. These responsibilities are the protective, providential and regulatory functions. Hence, to retain power and sustain the political system in practice, the government must not be seen as failing in its responsibility to protect the state and the people from internal threats, external overlords, and public acceptability, in order to sustain her democracy (Oyekanmi, Ogundele & Salako, 2022)

Thus, Nigeria is not an exemption from the popularization of democratic values and practices. The trajectory of Nigerian national security is traceable to her post-independent epoch, successive military interregnum, and ethno-tribal democratic

journey. It is on record that successive Nigerian governments have continued to demonstrate fiscal and administrative commitments to strengthening national security, gaining political legitimacy, and sustaining the gains of democracy. In the word of Ebeh, (2015), these efforts include but are not limited to the establishment of Nigeria's armed forces, the Independent National Electoral Commission with the mandate to conduct periodic, regular, and people-based elections, capable of driving popular support and the survival of the projected democratic values. However, many years of Nigerian democracy have remained increasingly threatened by intermittent insecurity occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and artificial poverty across North-southern Nigeria. The multiplier effects of these leave many in doubt about the capacity of the Nigerian State to protect the lives and properties of the people and create sustainable convenience for all. Citizens' resentments for constituted authority and frustrations have created mistrust in the political leadership and a crisis of legitimacy. Amuwo (2017) posits that Nigeria's ranking in the global poverty and security index, including widespread corruption and fragility of the Nigerian states through the claws of insecurity, have prepared the ground for civil uprising and public demonstration likened to the

EndSARS Protest. Undoubtedly, these portend great danger to the survival and sustenance of Nigeria's democracy if not checked.

The paper is undertaken to identify the challenges of national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustenance in Nigeria. The research also intends to discuss the interplay between the concepts of national security and legitimacy and its implication for the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy. Lastly, it is directed to provide pragmatic solutions to ensure that the gains of Nigeria's democracy and intended oasis for its citizens are not truncated by the multifaceted challenges of insecurity, waned public legitimacy for political authority, and the threatened democracy of Nigeria's fourth republic. Thus, the paper is qualitative with its adoption of secondary data and reviewed of relevant academic journals, case reports, published textbooks, online sources, and other printed media materials. This sourced information was contently analysed by the researcher. This method was adopted because it provides available information on the trajectory and challenges of national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustenance in Nigeria. The decision to adopt secondary sources of data was informed by the researcher's awareness of the available materials in that regard.

### **Conceptual Discussions**

This part of the paper deals with the conceptualization of key concepts such as national security, legitimacy, and sustainable democracy in line with the extent of available literature.

#### ***Democratic Sustenance***

Democracy remains the most discussed system of government across the world with success stories of her displacing many autocratic regimes with platforms where citizens' preferences hold sway. In his description of how democracy appeals to people's needs for freedom and active participation in key decision-making, Abdurashed (2014) supports this argument that democracy allows the expression of popular and minority opinions through legitimized institutions. In reference to the aged existence and relevance that has made it a global political dictum, many scholars have written copiously on the concept and practice of democracy (Usman and Patrick, 2020; Okeke, 2014; Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013; Osaghae, 2007). In clear terms, democracy could be defined as the diffusion of political power in disequilibrium processes where government policies reflect the demands of the people. Iletywa (2017) argued that the philosophy of democratic institutions is the creation of people-centered policies where

popular voices are granted legitimate expression and participation. However, it is not enough to situate the concept of democracy within the victory of the majority preferences. Democracy dignifies the opinion of the minority with greater democratic values. Thus, it creates healthy competition among political actors for the good of the people (Lawal & Olukayode, 2012).

Democratic sustenance is the cumulative and collaborative efforts of the state authority and other non-state actors, to the protection of democratic institutions, public values, and popular choices. This includes policy directives, legislative outputs, and widespread social awareness to preserve the gains of democracy for the imminent generations. The interplay of these values involves credible electoral processes, freedom of the media as the fourth realm of the state, good governance, and respect for the rule of law. However, it is important to state that the clamor for democratic ethos, such as fiscal accountability, popular political participation, and respect for the aggregated needs of the people flows from the universal needs of the citizens, it also requires the continued support of the people to sustain and strengthen all institutions. In sum, democratic sustenance transcends policy measures and the establishment of

statutory institutions by the State. It requires patriotism, loyalty, commitment, and a strong support base from the people before democracy can be sustained and wither through intervening challenges. Nigeria's democratic experience has been eventful, exciting, and challenging when the predatory coups before 1999 are accounted for. Although, the country has succeeded to a greater extent in the first phase of democratic sustainability, going by the number of periodic elections and peaceful transfer of power. A reflection of this success is the survival of the Fourth Republic from the Junta Boys. In contrast, Nigeria's democracy is at the precipice of collapse in the second phase. Electoral processes are no longer credible, power transitions are riddled with violence, compromised judiciary, and weakness of democratic institutions has become more pronounced. The country is filled with super-political actors whose political whims and caprices have continued to undermine democratic institutions, while ethnic chauvinism has become the criteria of her distributive politics. These have called the viability of national security architecture and legitimacy into question.

### ***Legitimacy***

According to Billbeck and Birte (2017), legitimacy is the interplay of the hierarchical relationship between the state

and the citizens that is marked by unequal power relations. It is a popular term frequently used to describe popular support for the States, political rulers, and the compliance of the public to the established rules and institutions. Legitimacy in practice is notably rooted in the state setting, with emphasis on the accepted rights of the rulers to lead and the duty of the people to obey. The question of legitimacy remains the central concern of modern state and political philosophy. This has evoked many interpretations of the conditions that guarantee a state the legitimate right to rule and the rules that defined the continuous loyalty and obedience of the citizens to comply with the state-established rules (Adams, Antoinette, & Cord, 2020). Beatrice and Olaogun (2016) asserted that political legitimacy is not an abstract phenomenon, away from a symbiotic relationship with other issues of governance. These issues are good governance, responsive, responsible political leadership, and representative democracy where the majority of the populace's preferences prevail over the whims and caprices of the political elites. It, therefore, means that in practical governance, legitimacy should be earned by the authority, not to be claimed through the barrels of the gun. The inference here is that it is possible for properly elected individuals via a popular mandate to lose

legitimacy if it performs below expectations, the same way the citizens can support coupists to overthrow civil rule that has failed to live up to the democratic promises. While in another perspective, a military ruler can legitimize itself through good governance and public support.

Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 was welcomed with pomp and pageantry, in the excitement that the relics of military interregnum would be subdued for good governance, respect for citizens' opinions, and welfare. These were the public expectations from the dawn of democracy. Alabi (2019) notes that Nigeria's democracy in 1999 was not a tea party, nor accidental. It took the collaborative efforts of civil societies, indigenous political groups like Afenifere, sacrifices of political activists, and overwhelming public yearning for a representative government that eventually forced the military out of power. Hence, while Nigerians offered the much-needed support and clear recognition of the legitimacy of Olusegun Obasanjo's formed government, there were many expectations from the people on the fundamental duties of the government. However, the post-military political era has seen Nigeria manifest various trepidation of insecurity, state performance failure, and mutual suspicion. The ensuing crisis of trust has

exposed the weaknesses in Nigeria's democratic institutions. In effect, the credibility of electoral processes and values of the democratic institutions of the state are challenged by electoral violence, malpractices, and civil disobedience.

### ***National Security***

The need to understand the word security is imperative if a comprehensive understanding of the concept of national security is desired. Hence, Akin (2008) describes security as the situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information, and property against hostile persons, influences, and actions. It is the existence of conditions within which people in a society can go about their normal daily activities without any threats to their lives or properties. It embraces all measures designed to protect and safeguard the citizenry and the resources of individuals, groups, businesses, and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrence (Ogunleye, Adewale, Alese & Ogunde, 2011). Igbuzor, (2011) buttressing the above submission stated that to be secured is to be safe from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption.

The term is not interpretatively affixed to only the security and protection of the nation's borders from invasion or

external aggression. It extends to the extermination of all threats to the interests of an individual's right to decent life and liberty and own property. It suffices to state that, to ensure sustainable peace within a state or between and among states, the maxim of security is a popular issue to which no country can afford to pay lip service (Moliki & Oyekanmi, 2020; Agbaje, 2012). Hence, many countries of the world do not shy away from committing huge resources, technology, and assenting to many bilateral and international treaties on peace and national security. In line with the foregoing, Paleri (2008) conceived national security as the measured capacity strength of the state to protect its citizens and critical infrastructures. A further explanation of this denotes National security as the aggregate of all efforts directed at protecting the national values, preserving its overall interests, and eliminating the possibility of creating fear in the minds of the citizenry. Threats and fear in this context were identified by Romm (1993) as human and non-human actions which can influence the quality of life of the citizen. National security is a multidimensional process of how sovereign states preserve their autonomous right to rule and protect their subjects. A limited perspective on what National security rest on its conception as the deployment of the military capacity of the state to protect the

territory and citizens. The end of the cold war and the yet to break out third world war has created new parameters to measure and describe national security beyond the usage of instruments of force or violence by a nation-state to ensure their continued survival. National security now includes the ability of the states to institute the right policy measures to provide for the citizens' economic needs, which in effect ensure convenience. It includes the ability of the state to protect the emotional and socio-economic aspirations of the people. This reality was supported by Asad (2007) that national security looks so weak if narrowed down to pure military engagements of the state to protect her nationals.

In Nigeria, the establishment and maintenance of the armed forces such as the military, navy, and Secret State Services and the implementation of different developmental programs are reflections of Nigeria's government desire to strengthen its national security. In recent years, Nigeria's national security is being continuously threatened by insecurity, mass citizen protests against abject poverty, and the state's failure to perform its protective and providential functions. The country remains traumatized by internal crisis, civil war, separatist agitations, Boko- Haram insurgence, rural banditry, and kidnapping across the North-South. Nigeria is ranked

3<sup>rd</sup> most dangerous country to live in the world due to the daily destruction of lives and property with a record of 1,245 terrorism-related deaths since 2019 (Global Terrorism Index, 2020). A review of the quality of the lives of Nigerians despite decades of civil rules, reeks of hunger, hyperinflation, and underdevelopment. This has created distrust between the people, political leadership and the electoral processes. The Nigerian people are disgruntled against the government and themselves, which represents the failure of the state.

### **Theoretical Framework**

National security, legitimacy, and democratic sustainability is rooted in the context of the state and the measurement of these key political indices cannot be effective if isolated from the State. Hence, the State failure theory is found suitable to espouse the challenges of sustaining Nigeria's democracy. Although, there have been interchangeable usage of fragile states or collapsed states by other scholars; they have all ended up with same conclusions. Failed states theory was developed by the Fund for Peace Organization (FFP) as a product of many conflict assessment frameworks to explain the state's vulnerability to failure in its statutory responsibilities. The theory was further

expanded and adopted by (Kaplan, 2008; Rothberg 2003; Oyekanmi & Moliki 2020).

Generally, the state is a service provider for the comfort of the citizens. These services cover the protection of the collective values of the whole population, dignity of life and properties, provision of social welfare, and critical infrastructures. These are postulated roles of the state by the failed state theory. Rothberg (2003) in his expository parameters of failed states, argued that failed states are overwhelmed by internal violence, performance failure in governance, loss of legitimacy in the hearts of the public, and weakness of key institutions of the state. Call (2011) also stressed that when a great number of the state's political elites and society are opposed to rules regulating power accumulation and distribution of wealth, the state has already wallowed into failure. In sum, the ability of the state to secure the people and the territory, operationalization of rule of law, a higher degree of citizens' political participation, affordable quality education, and healthcare delivery determines the successes or failure of the state. Failure of the state in these areas is a precursor to violence (Woodward, 2017).

In truism to Nigeria's experience, the country has manifested all the signs of a failed state. It is unarguably the truth that the country's national security has

remained threatened by the unending war of Boko-Haram insurgency that has claimed many lives of her security men, separatist agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra and Yoruba's nation's town crier have altogether exposed the low capacity of the Nigerian state in the performance of protective functions. This has metamorphosed into a varying crisis of legitimacy, with the people losing trust in the government, of having the right to the continued leadership of the state and providing for their welfare. Consequently, ensuing civil unrest, protest and flagrant disobedience of the state laws and institutional directives have all manifested as Nigerians' response to the fragility of the Nigerian State. Osaghae (2007) describes Nigeria as a fragile state characterized by social injustice, weak institutions, threatened legitimacy, break-away agitations, and commitment to ethnic interests above national values. One of the drawbacks of the failed state theory is the failure to empirically measure the state performance index that would determine the success or failure of the state in the key responsibilities of the state stated. This is because there cannot be a uniform performance rating of a state in all the critical areas, knowing that some states may not succeed in their protective responsibility and succeed in the provision of essential public services. Do we now

categorize such a state as a failure? The theory also failed to explain the expected roles of the citizens, stakeholders, and other non-state actors to prevent the state from collapsing and to assist the state to succeed in its expected roles. The state or government is a service provider and the people are the beneficiaries of such services or otherwise. Hence, the theory failed to properly situate the expected collaborative efforts of other stakeholders in the evaluation of the stage performances.

However, the theory is profound in its analysis on the expected responsibility of the state to provide adequate security to guarantee lives and properties. The theory is rooted in pro-peoples' satisfaction as the basis of continued loyalty to the state. Such critical evaluation helps to fashion and strengthen modern government in democratic ethos. Hence every state can be evaluated on its capacity to protect lives and to live up to other expectations.

### **Problems of Nigeria's National Security, Legitimacy and Democratic Sustenance**

The foundation of Nigeria's national security problem is inherent in the dysfunctional nature of the security architecture it received from the British colonialists before its 1960 independence. The perception of national security in this era was on the capacity of the state to build

military hardware and other instruments to force people into compliance with the colonial government. Hence, this national security orientation was inherited by the post-colonial Nigerian leaders. Consequently, the Nigerian state governs with the assumption that its citizens are recalcitrant and criminally minded. Thus, the government focuses on ensuring citizens' obedience, while leaving the critical needs of the citizens neglected. According to Okunwole (2021) Nigeria's national security challenges are the product of internal contradictions caused by the failure of the government to prioritize developmental policies and good governance as they committed to the state control on the monopoly of violence.

Going forward, challenges of Nigeria's national security are herein situated into two levels of analysis: Security Challenges and Socio-economic Challenges.

Security challenges are factors or occurrences that are responsible for the unabated insecurity across Nigeria. These include Boko-Haram insurgency, bloodletting activities of Fulani herdsmen clashes, rising militia groups, religious crisis, and separatist agitations like IPOB and others. Given many lost lives and destroyed properties from the insecurity, Global Peace Index (2020) ranked Nigeria 3<sup>rd</sup> most unsecured country in the world

behind Afghanistan. Despite fiscal commitments to strengthen the capacity based on the security agencies and the lurching of South West Regional Security Network like Amotekun and Egbuegbu in the East, Nigeria's national security appears overwhelmed by this incessant crisis. A case to remember was the Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom urging the people of his State to stockpile arms in self-defence.

The socio-economic challenges of national security and legitimacy revolve around the widespread poverty, anti-people policies, and weak institutions of the state to provide essential services for the people. Adebajo and Oyekanmi (2021) emphasized that government must spread good governance, infrastructural development, and poverty reduction programs to the nooks and crannies of the state, including towns and villages. This will help the government retain the trust of the people and consolidate their right to rule. In contrast to the popular expectations, the poverty rate has continued to grow at geometric rates, with corruption at the top gear of Nigeria's socio-economic and cultural fabric. There are growing resentments against the rich and the political elites by the poor, while money laundering is on the rise. Human Development Index (2019) ranked Nigeria low at 161 from a total of 189 countries in

the world. This is a reference to the endemic poverty, corruption, and underdevelopment in the country. Undoubtedly, this has put the legitimacy of the Nigerian state in disrepute, as people continue to seek alternative sources for self-protection and economic prosperity. This has led to a disregard for established rules of the state, compromised due process, and violation of electoral processes in desperation for political power. Consequently, all known rules of democratic engagements and institutions of democracy have become the subject of group and individual attacks. Thus, Adekanye (2015) opines that if there are no urgent solutions to the subversion and manipulations of democratic institutions such as electoral laws, the Independent Electoral Commission, and the failure of the state to fulfil public aspirations, civil insurrection may bring back military rules to collapse the Fourth Republic.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The extant responsibility of the State is to guarantee the security of the lives and properties of the people. This includes policies of government to protect citizens from psychological stress, fear, and economic deprivation. These fundamental responsibilities also revolve around the effectiveness of the state to drive economic plans and provide critical services such as

infrastructure, and employment opportunities and protect national values. The wholesome of these are the undercurrent issues of national security. Going forward, the paper concludes that legitimacy is marked by the respect and loyalty of the people to the state constituted authorities and political system in operation. In effect, the performance rating of the government in her national security issues and the strength of the state legitimacy determine the capacity and survival of the political institutions. In the case of Nigeria, national security challenges such as ethnocentric politics, dastard insecurity driven by Boko- Haram, Fulani herdsmen, banditry, and separatist agitations have been identified as red-flag issues against national cohesion and peaceful life for all. Hence, many Nigerians have lost trust in the capacity of the state to fulfil their dreams and offer essential services. This has created a general zero-sum approach to personal survival and economic prosperity that has led to weakening the democratic institutions through electoral violence, corruption, and disregard for rule of law. Thus, the gains of Nigeria's democracy from military incursion and popular support for the state may not survive if the challenges noted are not addressed. In sum, no nation can claim to be democratic or preserve democratic institutions and the ethos of people-oriented

government unless it has succeeded to offer adequate protection for the people and provide for their needs through good governance. The clear conclusion herein is that democracy is not a mere political dictum, it must reflect good governance and continued support of the people.

The paper, therefore, recommends a drastic change in the approach and orientation of Nigerian states from their conception of national security as the monopoly of violence and domination of Nigerians through military hardware. The change should reflect paradigms of developmental policies and programs to eradicate poverty, create a commonwealth, and essential services for the people. This has become imperative, given the reality that threats to Nigeria's national security revolve more around internal issues than external ones. The national security apparatus, from recruitment, to the appointment of service chiefs, should be anchored on meritocracy, competence, and professional candour against the pervasive ethnocentric political appointment and tribal politicization of Nigeria's security issues in the fight against insecurity. There should be widespread public renaissance and mass literacy on the need to respect democratic ethos and institutions. This includes public education that democracy is about the people and their active

participation in such decision that affects them. By this practice, only individuals who would not deploy political authority to weaken and subvert democratic institutions for their whims and caprices should be voted for.

Electoral laws guiding democratic processes and political parties' activities should be reviewed and amended to ensure that existing political parties operate on strong democratic ideologies which include internal democracy and healthy opposition in the state. This would be a reconnaissance of good governance for the benefit of the people. Although, democracy may not be a perfect system as it is susceptible to individual manipulations. It may also be argued that many democratized countries in the third world and even in the United States have continued to suffer from the crisis of corruption and successional politics. Yet the values of democratic institutions, the promises of better lives for all, and its people-centered approach to governance make it worthy to be guided and cherished by the citizens and other non-state actors.

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