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# **NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

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## **Abstract**

*The emergence of modern nations that predicated their political and socio-economic governance on liberal democratic tripod of rule of law, individual liberty and holistic development as the most powerful and progressive has seen intense efforts among nations of the world towards*

*approximating national norms, rules and institutions to liberal democracy. The understanding is that democracy will safeguard human liberty, ensure that rule of law is entrenched and guarantee national security and development. After series of punctuated attempts, Nigeria joined the comity of democratic nations with great optimism in May, 1999. Regrettably, after over fourteen years of uninterrupted practice, democracy both as a process of governance and a way of life is yet to place Nigeria on the path to social stability and national security. This paper takes a cursory look at the Nigerian state and observes that both pre-amalgamation and post-amalgamation complexes have effectively combined to weaken Nigeria's democratic stature. Arguing that such complexes and contradictions must be resolved for any meaningful headway to be made by Nigeria, the paper proffered some realistic solutions capable of repositioning Nigeria on the path to sustainable security.*

**Key words:** democracy, security, national security and development

### **Introduction**

Until the emergence of the Nigerian state in 1914, the entity currently known as Nigeria was made up of different composite nationalities that to a reasonable degree enjoyed independent socio-economic and political status. The British annexation of Lagos in 1861 marked the beginning of political penetration into an area that eventually metamorphosed into Nigeria.

The 1914 amalgamation brought together over 250 composite nationalities sharing so much pluralities and diversities under one nation. The differences in ethnicity, culture, language, religion, norms and values, political and administrative structures were so wide that it was unimaginable

creating a stable and viable state out of this diverse lot.

Even as the colonial administration pretentiously strived to see a united Nigeria emerge at independence, the north was being prepared to dominate Nigeria's political space at independence. Ojiakor (1981) has observed that with his constitution and by his utterances, Sir Arthur Richard institutionalized ethnicity in Nigeria. He had used every opportunity he could find informing the emergent Nigerian elites that "you are not one people". However, it was the occasional emotional outbursts of significant personalities among the emergent nationalists that became more disturbing. Bolaji Akinyemi captured such outbursts in Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balawa who at various times expressed reservations and outright doubts over Nigeria's unity (Akinyemi 1979).

While colonial administration altered the socio-economic and political life of Nigerians and the Nigerian state by bringing her economy into the world capitalist economy and substituting her political values, processes and structures with the western type liberal democracy, the emergent political elites were less willing to internalize these values and understand the processes of western political economy. More important to them were how to get the Nigeria state decolonize and as heirs to the colonial administration take over the national and regional political spaces, (Ekekwe, 1986).

We can see how immediately after attainment of independence in 1960, the distribution of rewards became a major concern. Politics became a means of class competition. Thus, the values and norms in which the nationalist leaders socialized themselves in the post independent Nigeria became the socio-cultural values of primitive accumulation and, therefore, to be participants, they had to develop keen sense of violent competition within the dominant class (Lloyd 1970).

Having wrongly kick started the democratic practice in Nigeria at independence, the core values of liberal democracy was lost. This perhaps could explain why, despite four consecutive attempts at stabilizing her democracy adopting first the Westminster and later on, the Washington model constitutions, the norms, values and tempers of liberal democracy continue to fail in Nigeria. For instance, the core democratic principles of rule of law, individual and group liberty and sustainable development which when put together, guarantee optimum security for any nation refused to germinate in Nigeria because the existing institutions are too weak to drive them.

Although most of the institutions of the first republic drew their inspiration from the Westminster model, they lacked those conventions and practices which make that model what it is. As tellingly observed by Agi (1985) all we witnessed was intolerance of others view points, the gradual but systematic disabling of organized opposition, the disregard of the constitution, weak political leaders who dissipate all their energies on narrow partisan issues and interpersonal struggle for control over patronage distribution and access to the treasury; lack of national political parties; excessive personal greed and revolving venality in the ranks of the major participants; ineptitude in government; election rigging; riots; arson and fighting in the legislative houses; gross display of indiscipline by the political leaders of the time among others. All these were hallmark of Nigeria's first, second and the moribund third republics. Their impacts and dynamics are even stronger in the current forth republic. The national greed and grievance condition emanating from the conduct of the Nigerian political class have resulted in a situation whereby social degenerative symptoms such as armed robbery, poverty, terrorism militancy, kidnapping, ritual killing, official and unofficial corruption, oil theft, sea piracy, youth unemployment, advance fee fraud, among others have, compromised the Nigerian national security.

Our objective, therefore, is to provoke critical intellectual argument on how best to ensure the attainment of good governance predicated on the principles, practices and norms of liberal democracy in Nigeria as a foremost panacea to guaranteeing national security. We shall conceptualize the key concepts of the title, indentify some of the complexities arising from the 1914 political amalgamation and the substitution of a people's original political values and processes with alien ones and illustrate how the incompetence of the Nigerian state to resolve them have exposed Nigeria to large scale insecurity. Finally, the paper will expose the relationship between democracy and development and try to locate the nexus between them and national security. It will conclude by proffering solutions borne out of altruistic motives on how to sustain the practice of democracy and guarantee national development.

### **Conceptual Issues**

**Democracy:** Many of the elements of modern democracy are usually taken to have originated in ancient Greece, particularly the city of Athens. According to Enemuo (1999) the word democracy derives from the Greek words 'demos' which means 'the people' and 'kratein' which means 'rule by'. The term democracy, therefore, literally means 'rule by the people'. In addition to its Greek antecedents, modern democracy is also taken to have evolved from such medieval institutions as the British parliament and the jury and from the political theories of the 17<sup>th</sup> century such as equality of men, natural rights and sovereignty (Heater 1964). Recent historical and archeological research has shown that some of the basic principles of democracy such as accountability, consensus – building and popular participation were important features of many pre-colonial systems of government, especially in Africa.

Democracy as a concept however, has no universally accepted definition. It is commonly said in recent times that it is much easier to identify a democracy than to define it. The deficiency in Heater's definition

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is remedied in the definition provided by Diamond (1988) when he asserts that democracy entails meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) either directly or indirectly for the major positions of governmental power; in addition to popular participation in the electoral process and respect for the civil and political rights of the people. Efforts to sum up the varied definitions of liberal democracy and a listing of its major elements resulted in Held (1993) explanation that:

*Liberal democracy cluster includes elected government, free and fair elections in which every citizens' vote has an equal weight, a suffrage which embraces all citizens irrespective of distinctions or race, religion, class, sex and so on, freedom of conscience, information and expression on all public matters broadly defined, the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office and associational autonomy-the right to form independent associations including social movements, interest groups and political parties.*

However, Enemuoh (1999) has observed that in actual democracies, poverty often prevents the mass of the people from actualizing and enjoying their political and civic rights while the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few gives the economically privileged minority preponderant political influence. The recognition of these paradoxes has led to calls for the broadening of the notion of democracy to incorporate social and economic upliftment of the masses (Ake 1993).

**Security:** Security can be conceived as a state of existence that is free from danger, fear, threat, anxiety and uncertainty. The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2010) defines human security as the activities involved in protecting a person against attack, danger and anxiety. Human

security could mean that the individual or group is safe today as well as guaranteed safety against all known conditions that expose one to attack, danger, fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Security would, therefore, transcend every facet of human existence

As a concept that is crucial to an understanding of international politics as is the case with most fundamental concepts, security is ve that the subjective sense of security, therefore, is not a matter of either one has it or one does not, rather, it is a matter of degree, of feeling more or less secure, more or less insecure.

**National Security:** Until the recent past, national security was understood broadly as the absence of insecurity emanating from external threat. In other words, the capacity to deter external states from attack, or in the event that attack becomes inevitable, the ability to withstand such and protect one's state pre occupied national political leaders. National security or insecurity was periscope purely from this perspective. Later on, perspectives on national security expanded to now accommodate internal order within nations. The role of the police force and other security agencies operating within the national boundaries became the focus of security scholars.

The dynamics of modern society have since altered that configuration of national security to now include consideration for societally generated crisis such as youth unemployment, hunger and poverty, riots and demonstrations, terrorism, piracy, illegal oil bunkering, onshore and offshore kidnapping for ransom, religious intolerance, official and unofficial corruption, religious fanaticism, inter and intra ethnic strife and a host of others that threaten lives and property and indeed the peace and tranquility of the society.

Art (2001) states that national security also involves protection of the environment from irreversible degradation by combating among other



things acid rain, desertification, forest destruction, ozone pollution and global warming. Also very significant issue in national security debate is the clamour for the revival of the United Nations and the brighter prospect for collective security.

**Development:** Traditionally, development meant the capacity of a national economy whose initial economic condition has been more or less static for a long time to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product (GNP) at rates perhaps 5% to 7% or more (Todaro and Smith 2004)

One of the most authoritative definitions of development was offered by Seers (1969) when he asserts that the questions to ask about a country's development are, therefore, what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of them have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all the three have, it would be strange to call the result development even if per capita income doubled. This new focus on the meaning of development is one that makes people the target of development. Development in this sense is not all about growth but all about people. It is making sure that the benefits of growth are redistributed to enhance a better quality of life for all. Development is thus the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values (Ake 2001).

Development must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, Obi (2005). It must have the capacity to move the society away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better (Todaro and Smith 2004).

According to Todaro and Smith (2004) there are three fundamental objectives of development which have universal applicability. These are:

1. To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.
2. To raise levels of living, including in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well being but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem.
3. To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery.

### **Democracy, Development and National Security Nexus**

From what we now know, liberal democracy as currently practised in the Western world has become the most preferred form of government in the contemporary world. This is because of its efforts to address all forms of social problems. Initially restricted to principles and processes of political governance, today's liberal democracy has expanded tremendously delving into economic and social issues as well. So permeating has liberal democracy become that it is now perceived as a way of life. Beside holding on strongly to its original ideas on universal suffrage of the electoral democracy, political party system, equality of votes, political and social liberties of individuals, probity, accountability and good governance and democratic ethics of negotiation, bargaining and compromise; liberal democracy has today delved deeper into social problems and now captures socio-economic complexities such as poverty, unemployment, environmental crisis, gender issues, ignorance and diseases, among others

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The meeting point between democracy and development rests on the fact that while contemporary nation on development has become multi dimensional and in fact touches on virtually all the variables that interest today's liberal democracy, democracy provides the enabling conditions for rule of law, order, individual and group liberty. These conditions are near indispensable in powering all other variables that translate to development. For instance, a society in which the principle of rule of law, political order and liberty is in flight will battle monumental impunity, corruption, mass revolt and injustice and these will frustrate the much desired societal development.

Also, since national security is easily associated with capacities and capabilities possessed by a nation which help in eradicating or if that is not possible, drastically reducing conditions that create fears, human suffering and anxieties within its environment, it demands that a democratic environment already predicated on the path of development will engender national security. National security goes beyond stabilizing the polity by securing the political administration. Even though it emphasizes national army's protection of a state from external insurgency and the maintenance of internal law and order by the national law enforcement, it also goes beyond these. National security will also include a condition of guiding against food crisis, conditions for human capital development, concerted efforts at poverty reduction, improvement of the health care sector, checkmating of criminality, updating of the communication and information facilities, improvement of existing infrastructure and also environmental protection. When the above listed conditions are in place in any given state, a democracy induced development is taking place and the population of such state will normally experience self fulfillment since there will be a state of reduced fears, human suffering and anxiety. In this circumstance, we say that such a country enjoys national security.

### **Trends in Nigeria Democracy and National Security**

Nigeria returned back to the comity to democratic nations in 1999 when the dictatorial military regime relinquished power to the elected civilian government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Incidentally, this is not the first attempt for the three previous trials at democratization were met with colossal failures. It is widely believed that democratization experiments have continued to fail in Nigeria because the enabling conditions for it to thrive have not been successfully established.

Talking about under what condition can this system of government (democracy) thrive successfully, Heater (1964) argued that democracy is essentially a method of organizing society politically and that there are five basic elements without which no community can call itself truly democratic. These elements are; equality, sovereignty, respect for human life, rule of law and liberty of the individual.

Although, democracy cannot be regarded as the ideal form of government, it is taken as the least objectionable and for now there is no better alternative to it. However, one of the major defects of democracy is that it is the rule of ignorance because attention is paid to quantity. Meaningful participation of the people in the political process may be hamstrung of their low level of political awareness. It is the contention of the socialists that democracy is nothing but the oligarchy of the capitalists (Ikelegbe, 1995).

Nigeria has experienced a greater part of its post colonial existence spent under military dictatorship. Several years of misrule characterized by mismanagement of resources, looting, decaying infrastructures disinvestment and mounting external debt have dashed whatever hopes and aspirations the founding fathers and the world might have had of an emerging giant in Africa. It has instead been dubbed "a crippled giant". At the height of this era of waste after an inglorious annulment of a general

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election in 1993 the nation went through what has been described as the darkest era in its political history.

Having passed through a very long and unbearable period of authoritarian military despotism, the people of Nigeria have a sigh of relief when the democratic system of government was restored. It marked the beginning of a "new era". Expectations became high on the capacity of democracy to induce development and engender better standard and sustainable means of living which had long eluded the people.

Almost fourteen years of democratic practice have witnessed an upsurge in ethno-religious violence and sporadic communal conflicts across Nigeria. This has led to loss of human lives and other valuable property. According to Oronsaye (1996), in Nigeria, issues are politically salient partly because politicians and community leaders view them as such. Another very realistic scourge is the problem of godfatherism. How is it to be understood given the passion or emotion it involves? A reference to Chambers Dictionary provides some useful ideas. Here, a godfather is defined as the head of a criminal organization especially the mafia or any influential leader or powerful figure.

Erhagbe (2003) recognizes the problem of godfatherism in Nigeria when he discussed the "place of money" in electoral process in Nigeria. He starts by pointing out the relevance of elections in a genuine democracy.

Strictly, the godfather is simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes. The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is that when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined. Erhagbe's rhetorical question "if money is therefore, accepted as a sine qua non for democratic politics what could be wrong with it?" is a tacit allusion to godfatherism. According to Ukhun (2004) godfatherism and money politics could vitiate an electoral process and negate genuine democracy.

Corruption is another very ugly trend in Nigeria's democracy. Corruption in Nigeria is monumental and cuts across all strata of human endeavour. Consequently, it has an adverse effect on Nigeria's our political leadership. In Nigeria, for example, the devil is responsible for all its very human acts of indiscipline and irresponsibility. A man steals his neighbours property and is caught, he blames his action on the devil. A priest seduces the wife of one of his church members and the devil is held responsible. Name any criminal act or misdemeanor, it is the poor devil that is responsible. If leader after leader in black Africa behaves in an incompetent, irresponsible and corrupt manner, according to Okowa (1996), the logical conclusion is that the tendency for incompetent, irresponsible and corrupt leadership is a dominant one in Africa's cultural heritage. Wherever corruption thrives, it undermines the values of democracy, jeopardizes social, economic and political development. It threatens the very existence of society because it is destabilizing, inimical to security and engenders polarization

### **Nigerian Security and its Impact on National Economy**

No nation is free of security challenges. These challenges also vary from one country to the other.

Perhaps, the greatest security challenge in Nigeria today is terrorism related. The Islamic sect popularly referred to as the Boko Haram is the harbinger of terrorism in Nigeria. It has an ideology that is averse to western culture and anything it represents. Consequently, bombing of schools and destruction of lives and property as it happened recently in Yobe State have become the way of life.

Notable attacks carried out by the sect with concomitant loss of lives and property include; the Mogadishu barracks bombing in Abuja in December, 2010, the UN bombing in Abuja in August 2011 to mention a few. The sect seeks to erode the credibility and legitimacy of the government by making it appear incapable of protecting lives and property of the citizenry. No doubt the economy of Nigeria is severely affected by the reckless destruction of lives and property by these insurgents.

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President Goodluck Jonathan's strategy for dealing with the Boko Haram threat is based on a multi-dimensional approach involving all elements of national power while forces operations dominate the media headlines, government has also embarked on other activities spanning across legal reforms, de-radicalization programme and strategic public communications.

### **Prospects and Challenges of Democracy and National Security in Nigeria**

There is no doubt that civil democracy, especially its multi-party variant which Nigeria has practised since 1999 and even before has the capability to liberate the political space and provide the plural structures and platforms needed for citizens engagement in the political process. However, we also know that this does not necessarily lead to inclusive democratization or broader political participation which is so fundamental to democracy and which depends on constellation of structural and socio-economic factors outside the party systems.

The importance of political participation can perhaps be best explained by Nigeria political experiences since 1999. Soon after the country's return to multi-party democracy, it was seized by a vortex of violent conflicts. Most of the conflicts had their root deep in the country's political history and also the intense competition for national resources among her diverse regional and ethnic groupings.

A number of views have been expressed on the nature of the relationship that exists between democracy and national security. On his part, Osaghae (2000) looked at some concrete ways in which democracy enhances development. He summarized the essence of democracy in ensuring development as; enhancement of the responsiveness and accountability of the state and empowerment of the citizens to participate in and claim ownership of the development project it superintends. To that extent, democracy guarantees freedom of participation in the development process and harnesses the human and natural resources for the benefit of all.

Unfortunately, these unique political arrangements have been severely destroyed by forces of insecurity in Nigeria which range from

armed robbery, kidnapping, drug abuse, terrorism, unemployment to ethnic militias. Today, no one can walk freely and even go about his socio-economic activities. It is as if Nigeria is in a state of anarchy. To aggravate the situation, the security agents that are supposed to enforce security sometimes conspire with the criminals to use the guns against the citizens they are supposed to protect. A case in point is the recent parade of criminals including top and high ranking police officers by the army in Edo State.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria's democratic exercise has not achieved much because of the overwhelming challenges of insecurity. Even the very odious way the system of government called democracy which is still being experimented. There are two major ways through which the situation underdevelops Nigeria. The first lies in the incompatibilities between the pursuit of development on the one hand and the quest for survival on the other hand. The damaging effects of this conflict are everywhere. It leads to misuse of manpower resources, inefficiency and corruption. Invariably, appointments into positions of power which demand specialized knowledge, tend to be politicized. Particularly by regarding these appointments as part of political patronage. Each time such an appointment is made, the conflict between survival on the one hand and efficiency and development (which democracy represents) on the other is reproduced. As such, there is the retrogressive display of Nigerian youths and they manifest in the forms of armed robbery, drug trafficking, kidnapping and terrorism.

### **Recommendations/Way Forward**

In the light of the foregoing, it will be pertinent to make a few recommendations on the way out of this quagmire Nigeria's democracy finds itself;

- i. **Nation Building:** The most fundamental and all inclusive factor in Nigeria efforts to overcome most of its security challenges is for Nigeria to re-double its efforts at nation building. Nigerian governments shall take a hard look at the root causes of the current problems discussed in order to find lasting solutions.
- ii. **Data Based:** Nigeria, as it obtains in most Western countries, must



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have a computerized data base, not only of criminals but of everybody within the country, including professionals, the unemployed, working population and visiting foreigners, among others. This will enhance effective grip on the economy and engender socio-political stability.

- iii. **Infrastructure:** The standard of Nigeria's infrastructure needs to be improved significantly above what it is at present. Also, the quality of education, health care delivery, housing, roads and transportation, among others need to be upgraded to global acceptable standard.
- iv. **Public Enlightenment:** Currently, the Nigerian population cannot be described as security conscious. This has to change drastically and fast, for Nigeria to confront many of the security challenges being experienced at present Nigerians must development and imbibe the culture of social sophistication and mental alertness. Nigeria must begin to take interest in the means of livelihood of the teaming unemployed youths roaming the streets of her cities.
- v. **Reorganization of Security Agencies:** Another area where government would need to focus on is capacity building among security agencies, especially the police. Professionalism must be improved; recruitment process must be transparent. Training and retraining of our security personnel is imperative.
- iv. **Job Creation;** Job creation is the solution to youth unemployment. The government has taken many laudable steps to create jobs. Some Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was created by government to tackle the problem of job creation. To achieve this, government would provide the enabling environment and infrastructure, such as stable electricity, good roads and schools among others.

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