

**THE POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA: AN EXPLICATORY
VIEWPOINT ON SECURITY CHALLENGES AND
GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

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ABSTRACT: Postcolonial Nigeria experienced a series of internal political and security challenges due to the consistent and persistent behavioural patterns of the political elites; whose inordinate political ambitions revolved around appropriating state apparatuses against the primary interest of the led. To this effect, the country has suffered over the years in the hands of the recycled dominant political class that has produced and manipulated government institutions, thereby deepening economic and social inequalities between the elites and the masses. The study examined the factors responsible for the security challenges in Nigeria after decades of political independence. The study adopted an ex-post-facto qualitative descriptive method and relied on secondary sources of data collection. The “theory of postcolonial state” was employed as the main analytical construct that scientifically studies society as a whole; and considers the convergence of the unity of opposites. The paper concluded and recommended institutional revolution to end the perennial security bedevilling our dear country

Keywords: Postcolonial, Nigeria, Explicatory Viewpoint, Security, Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The unification of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 gave birth to an entity called Nigeria. It is common knowledge that this artificial contraception and imposition orchestrated by the British colonial masters provided ample opportunity for artificial interaction between the north and south during the colonial and postcolonial eras of Nigeria. The interplay between political power and elite domination did not actually manifest conspicuously during the colonial period. However, postcolonial Nigeria has witnessed a state-centric approach to issues of national concern, whether political or national security (Obikaeze et al., 2016). Thus, the struggle for power among political elites has often been principally geared towards power accumulation for domination and primitive accumulation of wealth. The postcolonial Nigerian state has, therefore, transcended into an instrument of exploitation and suppression of the masses by the rich class (petite bourgeoisie). This is antithetical to the notion that the state is an autonomous agent of regulating social relations in society.

Thus, politics in Nigeria becomes a class struggle among the political elites; to capture state power; and to use the same for personal aggrandisement (Obikaeze, 2019). This has undermined the ability of the state to deliver public goods and services, not to mention that it has deepened political corruption and the politics of perennials and patrimonialism (Lewis, 2011 cited in Obikaeze 2016). Overdependence on the consumption of wealth accumulated through foreign earnings has explained the fact that Nigeria is truly a rentier state. (Mahdavi

(1970 in Obikaeze et al., 2023) considers rentier states as those states that, regularly receive, substantial amounts of petro-dollars as external rent. The problem is that the oil revenues received by governments are not transparently accounted for by ‘compartmentalised elites’ in various segments of the state. The consistent and persistent behavioural patterns of political elites whose political ambitions are inordinate; have often revolved around appropriating state apparatuses as well as primordial forces for their aggrandisement against the greater vital primary interest of poor people. Thus, the state is alienated from the masses, thereby creating two major classes. Zogorin (2016); argues that rents empower the state and break linkages between the people and the state, making rentier states independent from society. It is apparent that Nigerian citizens live in a state of uncertainty due to the combined forces of hunger, poverty, unemployment and insecurity.

Thus, the security challenges and concomitant humanitarian crises in the country are quite alarming and have far-reaching consequences. According to the United Nations Report on Nigeria’s Common Country Analysis (CCA), the unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 14.2% in 2016 to 23.1% in 2018 and further to 33.3% at the end of 2023 (UN Reports, 2023). Furthermore, youth unemployment is particularly challenging, with 53.4% of young people unemployed and 31.4% of young people not in education, employment, or training (Okoro, 2018:13). How would security be guaranteed in this situation? There is no guarantee that the pathologically defective administrative system in Nigeria has remained pronounced in our polity after years of political independence. Thus, effective governance in various sectors, including the security sector, has yet to be realised. Consequently, this study explains how governance failure caused the emergence of security challenges in Nigeria.

Theoretical Analysis of the Post-Colonial State of Nigeria

The study is anchored on the theory of the postcolonial state, which is an offshoot of the Marxist theory of the state (Ibeanu, 2015:21). It is used in the social sciences to explain the prevailing economic and social conditions in the developing world, especially in Africa, where colonialism is seen as being responsible for shaping the nature and character of the post-colonial state. The theory emerged as a counter to the proposition of the Western liberal theory that the State is an independent force and an impartial arbiter that not only caters to the overall interest of every member of society but also equitably regulates socioeconomic processes (Ekwekwe, 1985:53).

This approach has been popularised by scholars such as Alavi (1973), Ake (1985), Ekekwe (1985), and Ibeanu (1998; 2015). The major contention of the theory is that the postcolonial state is a creation of imperialism and as such, has followed a developmental strategy dictated by the interest of imperialism and its local allies rather than that of the majority of the indigenous population. This argument is built on the premise that the relationship between Western capitalists and the local petite bourgeoisie has continued to keep African countries underdeveloped despite formal political independence. The theory contends that the postcolonial state is constituted in such a way that it has very limited autonomy both internally and externally. This lack of relative autonomy means that the state enjoys limited independence from the hegemonic social class within the state itself, as well as from its external allies (Nwadiakor, 2011).

The postcolonial state is also constituted in such a way that it reflects and mainly caters to a narrow range of interests, that is, the interest of the rapacious political elites in comprador and

subordinate relations. This, Ake (1981), is a consequence of the low level of development of the state. According to him, the level of state formation is very low in Nigeria to the extent that it can be argued that the state has not emerged. The determinants of decision-making and wealth accumulation are members of a small powerful group, who directly or indirectly corner and capture the state in the most dangerous manner for their personal aggrandisement. This postcolonial state, which is still in its process of formation, is implicated by Ibeanu (2015) as the reason for Nigeria's governance maladies, human insecurity, poverty, unemployment, corruption and population displacement. The postcolonial state in Nigeria is, therefore, implicated in the human security challenges in the country.

Explicating the State Failure in Nigeria

The term 'state' as adopted in this paper is not used as a country with a definite territorial boundary, but it is conceptualised as a machinery or agency that has a defined and consistent behavioural pattern, that manages the affairs of the people through law/policy making, implementation and adjudication (Obikaeze, 2023). Based on this, the state manages, regulates and coordinates the affairs of the people in a state or country (an entity with a defined territory with a population). It also manages material resources, coordinates the domestic economy and conducts international relations. The general character of the state as an analytical construct determines how it can effectively achieve successful public administrations, to fulfil people's expectations and aspirations.

The existential antagonism and disunity of interests between the State and the citizens is the source of perpetual conflict between the former and the latter (Gurr, 1970). This study's choice of Marxist-oriented approach is influenced by the fact that the theory scientifically studies society as a whole and takes into consideration the convergence of the 'unity of opposites;' which gives rise to exploitative and antagonistic social relations. The antagonistic class relations between the 'dominant class (political elites) and the 'dependent class (masses) have contributed to unending class struggles and conflicts. As Marx and Engels put it (Rogers, 1995), the history of all hitherto existing society, is the history of class struggle. Thus, the analytical framework of the approach best underpins the endemic pauperisation and the struggle between the exploiters (the government) and the exploited (the masses). The thinking is that the perpetual domination and subsequent suppression of the exploited would one day be negated and transformed into a better Nigeria.

State Failure and Security Challenges

The popular thinking is that intra-state conflicts particularly in the developing countries, with particular emphasis on Africa, rose astronomically after former colonies gained their independence. For instance, in Nigeria, seven years after independence, there was a civil war, which caused unprecedented loss of both lives and property. After the civil war, other pockets of internal conflicts surfaced significantly. Nwadiakor (2011) observes that security challenges assumed an alarming proportion in the aftermath of the war. Also, in the post-Cold War, the developing world was believed to have witnessed increased internal agitations and armed conflicts, particularly in different parts of Africa, Nigeria inclusive. Obikaeze and Iheke (2016) argue that in developing countries, including Nigeria, intra-state armed conflicts increased astronomically during the Cold War and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent end of the Cold War. For example, there were internal armed conflicts in Somalia leading to a civil war in 1990, which claimed many lives and led to the absence of a central

government; the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, which left millions of people dead; the Kosovo crisis which started in 1998 and ended on 11 June 1999; Sierra Leone civil war in 1991 that lasted for 11 years and left over 50,000 dead. There was also the first Sudanese civil war of 1955-1972 and the second Sudanese civil war of 1983-2005 between the central Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army. There was also the first Liberian Civil War of 1989 to 1997, which killed about 250,000 people and the second civil war of 1999 to 2003. Furthermore, from 1990 to 1994, Rwanda was engulfed in a protracted civil war as a result of a long-running dispute between the Hutus and Tutsis; that war resulted in genocide. Also, Ivory Coast, Mali, the Republic of Guinea, etc. have been engulfed in armed conflicts over the same period.

These conflicts stated above (Rogers, 1995; Olaniyan et al, 2015; Olowojubu, et al., 2015) were possible due to the state's failure to establish viable institutions of government as well as a political culture of national consciousness and integration. The partiality of the state often leads to the creation of a divide-and-rule system, thereby exacerbating religious and ethnic tensions.

Since independence, Nigeria has been confronted with one form of security challenge or another. The pervasive insecurity in different parts of the country is a pointer to the fact that there has been a long-running systemic failure of institutions in Nigeria. The level of human and national security questions has manifested in different dimensions due to the character of the Nigerian state. There are security challenges in the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. For instance, there is Boko Haram terrorism in the northeast; there is militancy in the Niger Delta Region; armed Fulani herdsmen carry out murderous attacks in every part of Nigeria; there is rampant kidnapping for ransom across the country. The deadly crises between herdsmen and crop farmers have become one of the major insecurity problems in Nigeria (Akinsowon, 2021). The existential crisis is stressed to be only second to the Boko Haram insurgency in magnitude and devastating consequences (Okoro, 2018).

The conflicts between herders and farmers have serious socio-economic implications in Nigeria. Sadly, as observed by Olakiitan (2016), the failure of the Nigerian government to decisively address herdsmen attacks has several implications for the country. Okoro (2018) further submits that herdsmen have sacked whole communities, abducted elder statesmen, burnt churches, killed priests and worshipers, killed police officers, raped, looted and perpetrated heinous crimes, while the federal government has remained mostly indifferent and helpless. Considering the crises in various parts of the country, Olukunle (2018) argues that the continuous conflicts in Nigeria have caused unstable and dangerous situations, which affect individuals, groups, communities, and the entire country.

Why these debilitating security situations in Nigeria?

Bankong-Obi (2012) and Akinsowon, (2021) provide an answer by attributing Nigeria's intractable security challenges to the government's apathy and inefficiency of the security agencies. Clear and continued injustices in various parts of the country have been a factor standing against human and national security. Years of governance failure in Nigeria as well as perceived neglect and exclusion of some segments of the country have had spill-over effects on the peace and security of the people. The agitations for separation, resource control, political restructuring, etc. emanating from parts of Nigeria are traceable to decades of state failure to ensure diversity and inclusiveness in the polity (Olaitan, 2016). The character of Nigeria state has been more or less oppressive, depressive, suppressive and alienating.

As a result, the maintenance of peace, security and national integration has remained elusive. In fact, due to structural and institutional weaknesses, the guarantee of sustainable security in Nigeria seems unattainable at the moment. The problems with security in Nigeria are not far-fetched. The systematic marginalisation of various groups and systemic impoverishment of the citizenry have made it almost impossible to entrench sustainable peace and security in Nigeria. From all indications, it appears that the government does not understand that there is a nexus between hunger and insecurity. Unemployment gives birth to hunger, and there is a long-existing relationship between hunger and anger.

The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) projects that the country's unemployment rate will hit 37 per cent in 2023, and poverty headcount will also rise to 45 per cent. It is projected that the trend of inflation is expected to remain elevated, driven by structural, cost and monetary factors (Izuaka, 2023). Many Nigerians, especially the youths feel frustrated and invariably become aggressive, which has resulted in violent expressions and an embrace of nihilism. Unfortunately, the Nigerian state has invested enormous resources (without concrete policy actions to alleviate the economic hardship of Nigerians) to protect and preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country through the adoption of physical force to coerce every aggrieved group to remain in the artificial contraption and imposition called Nigeria.

The Nigerian state has wasted hundreds of innocent lives in the name of defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity against militants and separatist groups under the guise and provocative insistence that “the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable”; even amid clear injustices, neglect, exclusionism, nepotism, and marginalisation (Nwolisa, 2017). Today, there are activities in Nigeria that continue to pose a colossal threat to human and national security. Cases such as cross-border banditry, piracy and sea robbery, cyber-attacks, armed robbery, kidnapping, assassinations, and proliferation of small and light weapons are at the centre of national security challenges.

These security challenges pose a serious threat to individuals, private firms, and public organisations, and have also affected businesses in the country. Other security challenges such as pipeline vandalism, ethno-religious conflicts, intra-communal or ethnic conflicts, security forces extortion and brutality, etc., remain insurmountable. Sadly, the proliferation of all these security threats is attributable to state failure. Security architecture and intelligence gathering in Nigeria are weak and unreliable. Sadly, the security of the people is not guaranteed because even security institutions that are meant to protect the citizens have been accused of posing high risk and security threats to lives and property. In fact, the general insecurity in the country is frightening, thus making the general public to be in a state of uncertainty or better still, in a nasty and brutish state. The general security condition of the country contributes a lot to the psychological trauma being experienced by the people, as well as loss of lives and property, and internal displacement.

However, Nigeria's security shortcomings discourage foreign investors and have been known to force some existing ones to close down. The worst part is that the Nigerian state having been captured by selfish political elites has become a precursor of internal insecurity pathogens. The neutrality of the state is thereby brutally compromised as the behavioural pattern of the state tilts towards the use of military force as the first option against dissent even when other alternatives are available. Regrettably, herdsmen who continue to pose a significant threat to farmers and rural communities through wanton killing and maiming remain untouchable. Thus,

the state fails to be an agent of distributive justice. Hence, justice has been taken to the 'black market' where it is auctioned, and the highest and most favoured bidder goes home with it.

Conclusion

The postcolonial Nigerian state has proven to be ineffective in solving the lingering socio-economic, political and security challenges that confront the citizenry in different locations and regions of the country. As a result of the lack of autonomy of the postcolonial Nigerian state, it has always served the parochial interest of the few at the expense of the majority. This lack of autonomy suggests that the Nigerian state has limited independence from the hegemonic grip of the political elites.

Further, the state is also constituted in such a way that it reflects and mainly caters for a narrow range of interests, that is, the interest of the rapacious political elite, who are engaged in pillaging and primitive wealth accumulation. The determinants of decision-making and wealth accumulation are members of a small powerful group, who directly or indirectly corner and capture the state in a most dangerous manner for their personal aggrandisement. Consequently, there is an unending conflict between the Nigerian state and the citizens because of general governance failure. Thus, different groups have emerged to challenge the legitimacy, unity and continuity of Nigeria as a sovereign and indivisible entity.

The negative socio-economic conditions of the people have also propelled them into challenging the governing authorities. Regrettably, no concrete and sustainable efforts have been made by the Nigerian government to reclaim the confidence of the people. There have been cases of agitations and threats of secession, yet the problems of socio-economic and political injustices that are propelling these internal challenges remain unresolved. Arguably, the Nigerian state has created a system of clear division between the poor and the rich; between one ethnic group and the other; between one religion and the other. Apparently, what exists is a system where the will of the people is subverted and injustice is a norm.

In view of the issues raised in this paper, we strongly argue that peace and injustice cannot be accommodated in the same space. Therefore, as long as general and perceived injustice persists in Nigeria, effective security governance will remain elusive. At this point, there is the need to engage in a strong institutional revolution of the existing political system to give rise to the negation of the current political permutations and configurations that have orchestrated a kind of politics of inclusion versus exclusion

Recommendation

This study found injustice, years of governance failure, agitations for separation, resource control, political restructuring as well as perceived neglect and exclusion of some segments of the country as some of the major factors responsible for insecurity in the country. The study, therefore, recommended justice, equity and good governance as well as institutional revolution to end the perennial security bedevilling our dear country

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