

MILITARISED DEMOCRACY: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

Richard Adewale Elewomawu* & Francis Ohiemi Edimeh**

&Department of History, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

On 29th May 2019, Nigeria celebrated the twentieth anniversary of her latest democratisation process. Within this period, Nigeria has successfully organised six (6) elections with three changes of government. This is quite remarkable for democracy in Nigeria. However, because of the long years of military rule (31 years), it has been difficult to obliterate the hangover of the militarised psyche of Nigerian political actors. Despite the fact that we have civil rule, Nigeria still experiences abuse of the constitution, brutalisation of the citizenry, crackdown on the press, violent electioneering, significant influence of the military on political and social issues, which are identified with military rule. This study examined how democratic Nigerian democracy is since the last twenty years. It highlighted the features of military rule in our democracy. Workable recommendations such as ensuring proper devolution of powers, implementation of fiscal federalism, elimination of executive immunity etc are suggested for Nigeria to move from a militarised democracy to the ideal democracy.

KEYWORDS: *Militarism, Militarisation, Democracy, Militarised Democracy, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

The present democratisation process is the fourth time Nigeria is attempting democracy as a way of governance. That is, the military has aborted democracy three times in Nigeria. Nigeria has experienced ten coups: six successful and four unsuccessful. Since the independence of Nigeria in 1960, Nigerians have only enjoyed twenty-nine years of civil rule while the remaining thirty-one years have been under the military. The long years of militarism has affected the psyche of Nigerians towards the democratisation of the country.

Since 1999 when the latest democratisation process began in Nigeria, Nigerians have witnessed elements of military rule in the process. There has been oppression, abuse of power, violent electioneering, and abuse of the constitution by the dramatis persona just like Nigerians witnessed them under military rule. This paper examines democracy in Nigeria since 1999. It analyses how the protracted military rule in Nigeria has influenced democracy in the last twenty years in the country. This study examines the features of militarism, democracy and presents instances of militarisation of Nigerian democracy. Some salient recommendations are also made to entrench a more exemplary democracy in Nigeria. Both secondary and primary resources were reviewed in carrying out this research.

Militarism

Militarism has been interpreted differently by various scholars. It is “an ideology that reflects the level of militarisation of a state, and which is associated with the glorification of the military, armed forces and weapons and of military power, including through symbolic displays (e.g. parades of tanks and soldiers) and actual use of force, such as through warfare. And predominance of the armed forces in the administration or policy of the state.”

Alfred Vagts asserts that militarism is the “Domination of the military man over the civilian, an undue preponderance of military demands, and an emphasis on military considerations”. Militarism has also been used in a pejorative sense to criticize the excessive influence of the military on civilian life. Militarism is a concept where military personnel and ideas are incorporated into a civilian government. It is also the belief that military power is integral to national strength. This portrays societies where the military is used to resolve issues that ordinarily should be tackled by the police such as riots, demonstrations, protests, robberies, etc.

However, a more comprehensive meaning of militarism was presented by Stavroulakis (2015). She opined that there are five multi-dimensional angles to the discussion of militarism. They are ideological, institutional, military buildup, and sociological. Ideological militarism is the over glorification of wars. Institutional militarism is the excessive influence of the military through military-industrial complex or military industrial-media-entertainment, academia and pressure groups which are globally connected. Thirdly, military buildup emphasizes the statistical volume of weapons produced and imported with military expenditure and personnel. Behavioural militarism points out the frequent use of force by the government. While sociological militarism represents the undue influence of the military on social relations. It comprises political- military relations whereby as military influence soars within a society, militarism also increases. Stavroulakis’ argument is adopted in this study because it encompasses how militarism is generated, reproduced and the resistance to it.

Militarisation

The most popular definition of militarisation is “the process of becoming ready for conflict or war” or “an act of a country, society assembling and putting into readiness for war or other emergency”. Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC) introduced the ‘Global Militarisation Index (GMI)’, which is the means and capacities available to a state’s armed forces. This is calculated based on defense spending as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The definition that best suits this study is “making a civilian organisation resemble the armed forces- with uniforms or weapons”. This is the present situation in Nigeria and most of African countries. Nigeria that claims to be a democratic country has not been able to remove the shell of militarism in society despite twenty years of civilian rule.

Democracy

Abraham Lincoln is the most sought after author in the description of democracy. He opined that democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people. Another scholar, Boyte asserts that democracy is “a way of life ... that requires far greater emphasis on citizens’ capacities, their habits, skills, confidence, as well as citizen’s power and authority”. A.B. Zack-Williams on his own claims that “democracy is the ability of a people (the electorate) to choose freely on a regular basis between competing groups of potential governors to conduct the affairs of

the state.” Echoing this claim is Nyong’o (2004) who opines that “democracy is about the governing gaining control over their governor.”

Furthermore, Schumpeter views “democracy as an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggles for the people’s vote”. David Held, however, uniquely links democracy with socio-economic buoyancy. In his concept of ‘democratic autonomy’, Held sees democracy as citizens having political freedom, but also socio-economic freedom in order to participate meaningfully in a democratic process.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that democracy is a system of government that focuses on the citizens. It is people- oriented. But due to protracted militarism in Nigeria, the people have been ostracised in the affairs of the state. The politicians run the state not to practically develop the country but for personal gains. The rulers now use state apparatus that are meant to protect the people to intimidate and coerce the people who voted them into power. Democracy is now tainted with militarism in Nigeria.

Features of Military Rule/ Militarism

Suspension of constitution: One of the common characteristics of military rule especially in Nigeria is the suspension of the constitution of the country. Some military juntas only modify some sections of the constitution to ensure their continued stay in power. With the suspension of the constitution, the military usually forms a supreme committee that is above the constitution.

Highly centralised system of government: The military religiously protect their stay in power. To ensure that, they concentrate power at the centre. They appoint representatives at the lower levels of government and retain the power to make the last command.

Fusion of the executive and legislative arms of government: The military rule usually usurps the powers of the legislature by taking over their constitutional power. The military supreme committee makes laws (decrees) and also executes these laws.

Absence of all forms of opposition: The military does not tolerate opposing views. Opposition groups or pressure groups are seen as anti-state/ unpatriotic/ dissenting groups. They usually respond with arrests and molestation of these groups.

Dictatorial/ totalitarian form of government: Military governments practically take total control of the country. They impose their ideas on the citizens irrespective of the interests and choices of the people. And they disregard the judiciary.

Restriction on the press: Military regimes are also characterised with gagging of the press. The press (paper and electronic) are usually monitored and prevented from expressing their opinions. The people are prevented from expressing their views.

The excessive use of coercion: Citizens in military- controlled countries are compelled to comply with the dictates and policies of such governments. Military officers are usually visible on the highways and streets to ensure compliance to their rules. Molestation of citizens by military officers is pervasive in such countries. The people are intimidated into “obedience” and cooperation.

Absence of periodic elections: Elections are rare occurrences in a military regime. The military does not usually permit elections, they hang on to power instead of allowing the electorate to

choose their leaders. Infact, embargoes are usually placed on all forms of political activities. The military rule does not encourage a competitive electoral climate.

Features of Democracy

Democracy has numerous features. However, Sorenson (2008) and Lindberg (2006) have come up with four compulsory features (or elements) of a democratic system. The first one is competition. This refers to equality of access to governance by individuals or groups, usually political parties. That is, there must be an opportunity for people to contest for political positions through periodic elections. An organised opposition is an integral part of democratic rule.

Secondly, there must be great participation by the people. Opportunity to participate in the running of the affairs of the country must be vested on the people. This is usually done through free and fair periodic elections. And the suffrage law must include the larger majority of the population.

Thirdly, one element that is indispensable is liberty. Freedom of expression is a foundational pillar of democracy. The people must have the liberty to air their opinion without fear. Fundamental human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Organisation Charter must be enjoyed appropriately by the people in a democratic country. That is, these rights must be respected and protected.

The last element as suggested by Lindberg (2006) is the legitimacy of the electoral process. The electoral process and electioneering must be constitutional. Winners, losers and observers must be able to accept election results. And there must be a constitutional channel of seeking redress (usually through the judiciary) by unsatisfied losers.

Further features of democracy include enshrinement of the principles of the rule of law in the constitution and its observance, majority rule yet there must be respect for the rights of the minority groups. Also, there must be equality before the law by all irrespective of positions, absence of class feeling in the country, absence of intimidation of voters during elections. A democratic society must ensure the independence of the judiciary and government actions must be open to public criticism. Finally, the principle of separation of powers must be employed and viable.

Militarised Democracy

Militarised democracy therefore is the perpetual pervasiveness of military values, symbols and influence in a civilian rule. It is a fusion of both military rule and democratic rule. Militarised democracy is an unholy and fatal ‘collaboration’ between militarism and

democracy. The obvious danger of this kind of governance is that it can lead to stagnation and even reversal of democracy, which is the ideal principle and structure of governance.

Based on the earlier discussions on the features of both military rule and democracy, it is clear that militarised democracy has always been a global challenge. Evidence of democracies that have been militarised abound all over the world. In Africa, South Africa under apartheid rule, Kenya, Cameroon, Togo under Gnassingbe Eyadema, Gambia under Yaya Jammeh, Egypt, Lybia under Gadaffi, are examples of militarised democracies. India especially in the Kashmir region also witnesses tainted democracy. Likewise Myanmar with the military officers in the parliament having 25% control of the legislatures and the military commander – in – chief almost more powerful than the president is undoubtedly a ‘hybrid regime’ and ‘electoral authoritarianism’.

The advanced countries which already have centuries of practising democracy have at one time or the other suffered militarised democracy. For instance, Dixon (2018) observed that the power of the military is gradually increasing over that of the politicians in Britain. Evidence of this is through increasing the budget of the military against more important sectors, public criticism of the politicians by the military and militarisation of education. The militarisation of British politics and society threatens the democratic and liberal values that the government is supposed to defend and protect. The desperate measure that came with the 9/11 Bomb Blast in USA such as racial profiling, illegal arrests, torture in Guantanamo detention centres, disappearance of suspects and the recent extradition of Wikileaks' Assange questions the liberality of American democracy. This study highlights and discusses the prevailing evidence of militarised democracy in Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999.

Militarised Democracy in Nigeria

Violent Electioneering. Aggression and violence have become normal occurrences in the election process of Nigeria. According to Crisis Groups (2011), politicians' use of armed militia or youth gangs as protection and to harm opponents, intimidate voters and snatch ballot boxes is an ingrained campaign pattern in parts of Nigeria.

Due to high unemployment in the country and proliferation of weapons, area boys, militant groups, cult boys and members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) are employed by politicians to acquire power by force some of these political violence usually lead to death of thugs and even innocent citizens. The use of force and violence are usually associated with militarism but the presence of these in our democracy is a terrible challenge for our democratisation process.

Intimidation and Assassination. Closely related to the above point is the pervasiveness of political assassination in Nigeria politics. As observed by Mike Omilusi, "the perceived failure of democratic elected government to deliver a better standard of living and greater human security is probably one of the greatest threats to democracy in Nigeria." Assassination under military rule was a common occurrence in Nigeria. For example, the Babangida regime was believed to have assassinated Dele Giwa and the Abacha regime was suspected to have murdered Kudirat Abiola. Unfortunately, assassination and attempted assassination of political opponents still persists under our democracy. The murder of chief Bola Ige under Obasanjo administration has remained unresolved. Likewise, the assassination of Kogi State Governor, Yahaya Bello's aide, Yusuf Adabenege in Okene and attempted political assassination under the present government of Muhammed Buhari have also been swept under the carpet. An atmosphere of force, intimidation and fear cannot make democracy thrive.

One of the basic elements of democracy is liberty. Under the military, there is usually suppression of public opinion and Press. But the crackdown on the Press in the last twenty years of democracy in Nigeria calls for concerns. For instance, in June 2014, the Nigerian military and agents of the government oppressed, harassed, impounded, detained and restrained the distribution vehicles of some media houses in the country. Media houses such as AIT, Channels TV and CNN in Lagos were raided and journalists arrested, detained and tortured. Recently, the present administration shutdown AIT and Raypower FM, which are sympathetic to the opposition party (PDP). The legislature is also attempting to gag social media press by restricting access to the internet through an obnoxious law. Taking away freedom of expression is undemocratic.

Furthermore, there is excessive use of military personnel during elections. There is a deliberate militarisation of the electoral process in Nigeria. Security agents are usually

employed by the government to 'ensure free and fair elections'. Is that not ironic?! For instance, in the 2014 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun, the government used 30,790 and 70,000 military personnel respectively. The presence of soldiers a few meters away from the ballot boxes is enough to intimidate and scare electorates away from exercising their rights and obligations of voting. This was a sequel to the declaration of state of emergency in Ekiti and Plateau under the Obasanjo government and in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa in 2013. These incidents and decisions can stagnate our democracy.

Breach of the Constitution. Military juntas are notable for the suspension of the constitution or some sections of the constitution. In the General Provisions, Part One of the 1999 constitution as Amended, it is unequivocally stated that all levels of government must be democratised. But most local governments of the country are run by sole administrators or Caretaker Committees (CTC) appointed by state governors. The Supreme Court ruled against the unconstitutionality of such administration but the concerned governments have refused to democratise the closest level of government to the people because of their personal interest.

Over concentration of power in the centre. Ihonobere (1999) observed that "the excessive concentration of power, resources, and opportunities also encouraged the rise of authoritarian and other forms of despotic rule, and the negation of democratic values." But this has been a feature of Nigerian democracy since 1999. The federal government has refused to adequately devolve power with the other two levels of government (state and local governments). Examples of this are centralisation of internal security. That is, the refusal to allow state policing, centralisation of resource allocation, and absorb the best personnel for the centre. These issues have been abused by the central government on so many occasions. The Obasanjo administration withheld the resource allocation for Lagos State because of the misunderstanding between the president and the Lagos State governor. The centre also uses security agents such as police, Department of State Security (DSS) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to intimidate state governments to command compliance. This is anti-democracy.

Also, there is an abuse of separation of power in Nigerian democracy. Militarism usually adopts a fusion of executive and legislative powers. Nigerian democracy also witnesses the interference of the executive in the affairs of the legislative and judiciary. In 2014, the Department of State Security (DSS) barricaded the entrance of the hallowed chambers

preventing entrance of opposition party lawmakers in an attempt to impeach the speaker of the House of Representatives. Something similar also happened in 2018 when the DSS barricaded the chambers in an attempt to impeach the senate president (Olusola Saraki). Earlier this year, the executive arrested the chief justice of the federation, Walter Onnoghen and forced him to resign without the consent of the National Judicial Council (NJC) as stipulated in the constitution.

Other evidence of the practice of militarised democracy in Nigeria includes contestation of all elections, harassment of the opposition, maltreatment of people in police and military custody, the presence of military personnel on the streets and highways and general brutalisation of the citizens by military personnel with impunity. All this evidence does not portray basic elements of democracy: participation, competition, liberty and legitimacy. Although Nigeria organises periodic

elections at state and national level, and is therefore under civil rule, it is pragmatically a militarised democracy.

CONCLUSION

This paper looked at the strange concepts called 'militarised democracy' in Nigeria in the last twenty years of supposed democratic rule. It properly discussed related concepts such as militarism, militarisation and democracy, which are evident in Nigeria. To buttress these concepts, the characteristics of militarism and democracy were presented. This research concludes that the democratisation process of Nigeria since 1999 is facing cancerous challenges because of the country's long years of militarism. Years of military rule has left a militarised psyche in Nigeria so much so that use of force, intimidation of electorates, abuse of power, harassment of opposition and brutalisation of the people have remained common practices in the democratic rule of Nigeria. The ideal democracy does not permit these ills. For Nigeria to move from this militarised democracy to the ideal democracy, there is an urgent need for political actors to play by the rules, tolerance and respect differences, promote freedom of public opinion, eradication of corruption and the presence of organised opposition. There should also be practical devolution of powers both vertically and horizontally. And ensure some fiscal federalism. Although Nigeria can presently be regarded as a militarised democracy, this study has suggested salient ways of speeding up the democratisation of the country.

RECOMMENDATION

Nigeria pretends to copy the presidential democratic system of the USA with its federal structure. However, fiscal federation is a mirage in Nigeria. Over concentration of power at the centre has reduced the states and local governments to make administrative units. These levels need to be empowered as they are closer to ordinary people than the federal government. Every state should enjoy at least 50% derivation allocation of resources and state police needs to be endorsed by the government. The argument of Nigerian states not matured enough to have state police should be stepped down because advanced democracies got to their present position by making mistakes, correcting and modifying their policies. Proper devolution of powers among the levels of government and democratisation of the Local Government Areas will improve participation.

The struggle for freedom from hunger, diseases and poverty are the basic problems of African democracy. Recent research has shown a constant drop in country GDP motivates reversal of democracy as seen in Mali, Mauritania, Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau. Therefore Nigerian politicians should reduce the overhead cost of political office holders and spend more on improving the education, health care, power, water and transportation network. Poverty reduction will boost participation and competition in democracy. An educated electorate will also enhance liberty and legitimacy.

To rapidly obliterate militarised democracy in Nigeria, there must be proper separation of power. The executive arm must learn to adhere to its constitutional roles. The principle of checks and balances will keep each arm on its toes. With that, the people will be able to enjoy the dividends of democracy and advance the democratisation of Nigeria.

The feeling of liberty in a democracy is uncompromisable. In the advanced democracies, the citizens are usually at liberty to make jest of their office holders without fear of harassment. For Nigeria to be seen as a proper democracy, the citizens must be able to express their opinions about public office holders (both paper and electronic) especially online. This must be defended and even encouraged.

Equality before the law is inherent in democracy. The constitution must be updated to enhance democratisation in Nigeria. The immunity clause for the president and state governors should be expunged. This clause has slowed down the process of our

democratisation. Just like in advanced democracy, every citizen irrespective of his/ her position should be made to face the law at any time.

In addition, Nigeria is a diverse country. Nigerians must cultivate tolerance and respect for each other's culture and religion. Our unity in diversity slogan should be drummed in words and actions by the leaders. The current distribution of the national positions; President from North-West, Vice President from South-West, Senate president from North-East, Deputy Senate President from South-South, House of Representative Speaker from South-West and Deputy Speaker from North-Central leaving out the South East does not promote our democracy. All regions and ethnic groups must be part of the decision making of the country. Respect for the rights of minorities in a majority rule is part of democratic process.

One area of Nigerian democracy that needs gross improvement for Nigerian democracy to continue to advance is the democratisation of party politics. The political parties must democratise. Impositions of candidates and Godfatherism must be eroded from our polity. An undemocratic party cannot democratise Nigeria.

The fight against corruption has become a unique element of African democracy. Corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private (personal) gains. Corruption, lack of freedom and inequality are primary issues in democratic instability in Africa. For Nigeria to keep advancing her democracy, the fight against corruption must be real, fair and intensified. The lip-service fight by the government should be jettisoned. Corruption reduces chances of socio-economic development. The effects of this are hunger, poverty and underdevelopment. This subsequently leads to inequality and the ostracisation of the poor majority. Corruption is a virus that stagnates and kills democracy. Nigeria must work against corruption by promoting due process, objective supervision of projects and providing the needed powers and tools to enable EFCC and ICPC clean Nigeria. A citizenry that is depressed, hungry, unhealthy and uneducated can never cultivate national unity and democratic qualities. Therefore, the Nigerian government must make provision for basic amenities such as availability and easy access to education and healthcare facilities, good and safe roads, safe water, internet and electricity to ensure the proper and rapid democratisation of Nigeria.

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