

MILITARIZATION OF DEMOCRATIC RULE IN NIGERIA, 1999-2019

Ezedinachi, Edith Ifeoma Ph.D MHSN

Department of History, International Studies and Diplomacy
Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike, Enugu- Nigeria
ifeomaezedinachi@yahoo.com 08037420431

Prof. Uchenna Anyanwu

Department of History and International Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
agucas2000@yahoo.com 08063465111

Abstract

The quest for democracy and thus development in Nigeria has been hindered by the disruptive influences of military rule. Each time there was a coup, the country's constitution is usually suspended as the military administers the country with decrees which has been a stumbling block to the development of democracy. In addition, the imposed military decrees have consistently worked to undermine the majority rule. The Military ruled for twenty-nine years out of fifty-nine years of independence and the implication of these extensive years of military rule on democratic practices, is of course the display of military tendencies in a democratic arena. Although, the major reasons for the military intervention has always been to instill discipline, curb corruption and political ineptitude, in effect, the result has been the enthronement of anarchy. The study adopted qualitative research design using historical method of analysis, and largely, secondary sources of data were employed. This paper examines the effects of the lengthy military rule on Nigeria's democracy and to set the conditions necessary for change. Therefore, the paper recommends that, if democracy is to be developed in Nigeria, constitutional as well as policy measures should be adopted to tackle this issue of democracy administered in a military fashion.

Key Words: Democracy, Military, Development, Government, Politics, Citizenry

Introduction

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, the praxis of democracy has stirred considerable concern, one of which is the obvious demonstration of military political culture in the democratic space. Democracy is entrenched in a system of government in which the exercise of power is bestowed in the people through their elected representatives. Military governance engenders usually the suspension of constitution and enactment of decrees¹ which are normally tailored to suit the whims and caprices of the military. Such decrees do not pass through the rigor of popular and majority vote synonymous with democratic rule. Thus the people represented by the legislatures, are not given the opportunity to function and contribute in the formulation of laws.² The military had ruled for 28 years out of 50 years of the nation's independence, thus vitiating every move to develop democracy.

The result is the practice of democracy in the military fashion, the outcome of which is entrenched military culture and psyche in the citizenry. Credence to this point arises with the dominance of ex-military men as politicians in a democratic dispensation who are yet to be civilianized. Therefore, the procedure became that of order, combat rather than dialogue, disregard of court orders and violation of human rights became the principle of military civic culture in a democratic government.³ Consequently the nation has continued to fumble continuously several years after independence. In this regard, the paper appraises historically the military rule and development of democracy in Nigeria

Conceptual Clarifications

Military Rule

The military is one of the institution of the state assigned with the responsibility of defending the territorial integrity of the state and ward off aggression from other independent state.⁴ Military rule therefore, is a political regime in which the military as an organization holds a preponderance of power.⁵ In a military dictatorship, political power is held by a military junta, militia or other form of armed authority which again, is not subject to restraints or effectively accountable to the citizenry in any way. A military dictatorship could be and often are totalitarian regime, in

which the state strives to control every aspect of life of civil society, or authoritarian regime which offer citizens very limited freedom.

The main features of military rule include; the concentration of power in the hands of the military ruler, a significant limitation or complete absence of democratic rights and freedoms, willful violation of constitutional proclamation of rights and freedoms in the pretext of restoring and maintaining order in the country.⁶ The military government can resort to weapons for resolving any conflict. In fact, political power is held by a military regime, militia, or other form of armed authority which again, is not subject to restraints or effectively accountable to the citizenry. Thus the people lose any right to express their opinion and have to suffer under the pressure of military junta.

Democracy

Democracy has become a much abused concept even as it has gained a lot of attention across the globe. Democracy has been devalued in order to make it convenient and less threatening to those in power or demanding on anyone. What exactly is democracy and what is its link with the concept of good governance? Democratic theory has been mired in an unresolved conflict between two meanings. The first conceives democracy as some kind of popular power, a kind of politics in which citizens are engaged in self-government and self-regulation. This perspective holds the view that democracy has a basic intent and objectives. These intents such as individual liberty, equality of citizens, Mass media and citizens right to express themselves; the protection of the rights of the citizens under the rule of law, tolerance of opposition, independent judiciary, popular consultation and fundamental rights can be realized within a variety of processes. Democratic government must be dedicated to the well-being of the people who should be able to hold leaders accountable and make them express their wishes and respond to their needs. The second views democracy as an aid to decision-making, that is, a means of conferring authority on those periodically voted into office. Democracy through voting aggregates interest and expresses policy preference.⁷ The emphasis here is process, those institutions and processes designed to ensure the happiness of society as a whole not trampling on individual liberty.⁸

Democracy will differ also according to the economic structure of the state. Aristotle considers this the best kind of democracy: the people have considerable power and hold the governing class in check by the possibility that they may use it, but so long as the rulers proceed moderately the people leave them free to do much as.¹⁰ Thus democracy always believed in the spirit of general communication.¹¹ Hence, the ethics of they think best democracy regarded mutual concession and compromise not as defections from principle but as ways of reaching agreements which on the whole were more satisfactory than any that could be reached by the dominance of one interest or one party over all the others. The purpose of a democratic philosophy was to extend rather than to limit the scope of negotiation. It is supposed to be based on a sound and generally admitted observation, which indeed required no high degree of psychological penetration. It depended on the fact that coercion is at best a crude method of controlling mechanisms as delicately constructed as human personalities and the social ties between personalities; a method that is likely to fail of its purposes, and when it does not fail, is likely to leave in its train accumulations of resentment, frustration, and aggressiveness that lay the foundation for future failure.¹²

Development

There is a pervasive disembodied conception of development which sees development in an exclusive economic sense. Within this restricted economistic consignment of development, development theorists and practitioners forget that development is a many sided process. In this regards the overall framing of development challenge is restricted to economic process which do not include concerns for 'the political'. With development conceived in this way, the challenges of development are scarcely defined and analyzed beyond how to generate efficiency in management and increased productivity. In this way, little or no effort is made to address broad social and political questions that are central to conflicts. The failure to appreciate that development is more encompassing, and that it involves the totality of human and societal affairs and hence cannot (and should not) be restricted to the economic sphere is a major conceptual and theoretical deficiency.¹³

The evidence is accumulating that economic growth alone cannot bring about that steady social transformation of a people without which further advances cannot occur. In fact, we have to admit that economic growth... will not of itself be enough to accomplish our development objectives.¹⁴ Development therefore involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, politics and culture that permits a re-direction of science and technology, the self-generating and self-perpetuating use and development of the people's potentialities and improvement in the machinery of administration and productive institutions, to meet the rising demands of society. It will also involve widespread education and literacy, a relative freedom from external bondage and elimination of exploitation, a fair and equitable distribution of social wealth and the presence of a ruling elite that is strong enough to eliminate the corrupt elements in its own ranks, relatively competent and seriously devoted to public welfare and the reform of existing inequalities.¹⁵

Brief Exposition of Coups and Reasons for Military Intervention in Politics in Nigeria

The first military coup in Nigeria took place on 15 January, 1966, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, but the then most senior military officer, Major General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi later took over position of the head of state. Since then Nigeria has witnessed six successful military coups.¹⁶ Many factors were responsible for the January 15 coup which include regionalization of political parties, intra party rivalry, corrupt politicians and politicization of the army. The coup plotters saw themselves as the instruments of liberation, dedicated to establish a unified and prosperous nation free from corruption and internal strife.¹⁷

Following the January 15 military coups, was the counter coup organized by Northern military junta on July 29, 1966 which ushered Lt. Col (later General) Gowon as head of state.¹⁸ This second coup d'etat brought division into the army and more confusion into the entire country which later led to the outbreak of civil war in July 6, 1967. On 29 July 1975, Brigadier (later General) Murtala Muhammed in a bloodless coup took over power from General Gowon. General Muhammed was killed in an abortive coup led by Lieutenant Colonel B.S Dimka on 13 February 1976 leaving the Chief of Staff, Supreme headquarters, General Obasanjo to

continue his programme.¹⁹ The reasons for the coup of 1975 include, the inability of Gowon to keep to his promise to hand over power to civilians on a stipulated date. In addition, Gowon's regime was alleged to be marred with corruption and inflation which created instability in the economy. Nevertheless, on October, 1979, the Federal Military Government headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo handed over leadership of Nigeria to a democratic government.

Civilian rule which began in October 1979 lasted for only four years and three months, before it was terminated by another coup on 31 December 1983. Following the coup, Major General Muhammed Buhari became head of state. Various reasons accounted for the coup which include, wide spread corruption in government, the astronomical rise in the cost of food and other essential goods and the introduction of the alleged squandered grandiose projects which had little relevance to the needs of the people. Though Buhari regime left far reaching landmark events designed to make the society more disciplined and efficient such as War Against Indiscipline (WAI), War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), yet, the regime was tyrannical and became insensitive to public opinion.²⁰ However, the bloodless coup that took place on 27 August 1985 brought Major General (later General) Ibrahim Babangida as head of state (later President) and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces. Babangida accused Buhari of failing to revamp the economy. Human rights abuses are seen to be a phenomenon in various military regimes. This was replicated during Babangida administration which botched the transition to Civilian rule in 1993. The Presidential election was held and was later annulled by regime for no substantive reason.²¹

Following the annulment of the 12 June 1993, Presidential election, and subsequent political upheavals, Babangida was forced to 'step aside' for Chief Shonekan as head of Interim National Government. General Sani Abacha came to power on 17 November 1993, having forced Chief Shonekan to resign as the head of the interim National Government. However, the Abacha administration committed large-scale human rights abuses. Some of the abuses included the arrest and imprisonment of Chief M.K.O Abiola on June 23, 1994 on a charge of treason, having declared himself president following the annulled election. In addition to that, an

Environmentalist and Playwright, Ken SaroWiwa, the then leader of Movement for the Survival and the Sovereignty of Ogoni People (MOSSOP) was in 1995 sentenced to death by hanging alongside eight other leaders for criticizing the Nigerian government for the environmental damages inflicted on Ogoni land as a result of oil spillages that arose from the oil drilling activities of Shell.²² However, following the death of General Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar became the head of state and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. General Abubakar returned the country to civilian rule on May 29, 1999.²³

An Overview of Military Rule and Development of Democracy in Nigeria

The practice of democracy in Nigeria in the last ten years has raised considerable concerns, one of which is the obvious display of democracy administered in a military fashion. The supposed states-men have demonstrated in a democratic setting the political behavior of active-combative attitude rather than dialogue, arbitration, negotiation and reconciliation as demanded by democratic principles particularly since 1999. The democratic system of government in Nigeria has been faced with substantial problems, reminiscences of military rule. We had witnessed incidences of late Umaru Shehu Musa YarAdua who with military dispatch closed down 'This Day Newspaper' and Channels Television for allegedly informing the public that he was likely to resign on account of poor health. The President whose ideology had become the rule of law could not practice it. This is the vestiges of long years of military rule. Besides, it was reported by Sahara Reporters, New York on September 17, 2008, thus, "Umaru Yar'adua's regime displayed its Abacha-like tendency when it withdrew the operating license for Channels TV."²⁴

Also from 1999-2002 the government had consistently indulged in extra budgetary expenses contrary to section 80(2), (3) and (4) of the 1999 constitution (as Amended), which is a clear violation of the Constitution which requires going through the due process. Examples include, the expenditure on the national stadium which was in excess of appropriated sum, excess expenditure on the National Identity Card from N5.9 billion to N9.5 billion above the sum approved in the 2001 and 2002 Appropriation

Acts respectively. The authorization of the purchase of 63 houses and their furnishing for Ministers in the year 2002 to the tune of N3,019,153,178.06 without any budgetary provisions in the 2002 Appropriation Act. This was when the National Assembly was not on recess. The principles of extra budgetary expenditure, a dominant phase of the democratic settings but a legacy of profligacy bequeathed to the civilian regime by former military government. In a democratic dispensation, such must give way to budgets that seriously addresses the crisis of grinding poverty in the midst of plenty. Sometimes between April and July 2002, the then President Obasanjo amended the capital provisions of the 2002 Appropriation Act by reducing the capital budget to 44% without forwarding the said amendments to the National Assembly for passage in violation of section 80(4) of the 1999 constitution and be that as it may, such act amounts to gross misconduct.²⁵

On November 20, 1999, he authorized the deployment of military troops to 'Odi', Bayelsa State to massacre innocent citizens without recourse to the National Assembly contrary to section 217 (2) C of the 1999 constitution which requires first for some conditions to be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly for the use of the military in that regard.²⁶ The event in Odi cannot be isolated from the larger crisis in the Niger Delta which have their root in the historical political alienation, economic deprivation, physical brutalization and psychological traumatization of the people by an oppressive Nigerian state and exploitative multinational corporations. Thus President Obasanjo's handling of the crisis, as exemplified by his unconstitutional and reckless deployment of troops to Odi, has been consistent with the oppressive philosophy of governance of erstwhile military dictators which conceives of force as the basic strategy for resolving social and political problems. This is contrary to democracy dictates which would emphasize dialogue and popular participation in the quest for a just and lasting solution.²⁷

In the year 2001, President Obasanjo without lawful authority authorized the deployment of military troops to 'Zaki Biam' (Benue State) which occasioned the murder of innocent citizens and the destruction of properties, contrary to section 217(2) C of the 1999 constitution as

amended which requires firstly for some conditions to be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly for the use of military in this regard'.²⁸ The soldiers shot dead more than 100 people in Zaki Biam in central Nigeria on October 12. In addition to that, Troops were also reported to have destroyed numerous buildings. According to Amnesty International Press Release, "There was no imminent danger to the life of soldiers who took part in this military operation. It can only be described as a killing spree".²⁹

Another illustration of democracy administered in a military fashion was ably demonstrated under the Obasanjo's administration during the cases of impeachments. The Federal government raised the allegations, substantiated and adjudicated it. It consisted in the main of: raise the allegations, pretend not to know what the Constitution prescribed in such matters, invite the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to substantiate the allegation no matter how vague, pick up some officials of the state legislature to sign impeachment notices, or throw them into jail, create a semblance of insecurity in the place, set the place ready for emergency rule, sponsor protests against the governor, hold-up state fiscal allocation, sponsor some indigene of the state often those with political ambition to speak against the governor, take away some members of the legislature indoctrinate them and bring them to the assembly under arm escort to effect the impeachment. This was the scenario used against DSP Alamesieyea in 2005, and Joshua Dariye in 2006, former Governors of Bayelsa and Plateau states respectively. The explanation for the above situation is derived from the low level of political culture which Nigeria belong.³⁰

Furthermore, Nigeria's use of brute force to stem the agitation of Pro-Biafra protesters and killing of helpless and armless IPOB members on September 10, 2017 under Muhammadu Buhari administration are violations and infringements of civic rights associated with the military rule. One of the tenets of democracy is the recognition of the right to agitate and to demonstrate in order to be heard. As the 'Operation Python Dance' unfolded, it became a tale of terror, bloodshed and tears. Armless youths who fell into the net of the Nigerian Army in Isiala Ngwa Local Government Area of Abia State were subjected to unimaginable cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The gory video clips that went viral on

the internet portraying young men compelled to swim in a muddy pond vividly revealed the abysmal contempt of human dignity exhibited by the Nigerian Army. To ensure that their atrocities were not reported in the media, the military invaded the secretariat of the Nigeria Union of Journalist, Abia State Chapter on 12th September 2017, without the slightest provocation and traumatized the journalists carrying out their legitimate duty.³¹

In addition, President Muhammadu Buhari, whose deputy, Professor Yemi Osibanjo is a law professor, has shown a spectacular disdain for the courts. On January 25, 2019, the President suspended the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Walter Onnoghen in an unconstitutional move and replaced him on the same day. Onnoghen was charged with operating secret accounts with millions of U.S dollars undeclared. In addition, he communicated to lawyers, including the now-suspended judge, that the "rule of law must be subject to the supremacy of the nation's security and national interest."³² Another illustration of militarized act in a democratic space was the military invasion of Azaghene community in Bayelsa state on July 23, 2019. The armed troops looted properties, raped women and burnt down houses in the community after chasing away residents including the traditional ruler, Awame Festus Oru. While the brutal killing of the two soldiers and the kidnap of another soldier is condemnable, the barbaric military invasion and the unleash of mindless attack on unarmed people in the name of security erodes democratic principles.³³

Likewise, on June 7, 2019, the National Broadcasting Commission suspended the license of Daar Communication Plc, owner of the African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power FM, a key opposition figure, mainly for the use of divisive and inciting contents from the social media. The suspension was not only an affront on the freedom of press but also on speech as enshrined in the constitution in a democratic setting. It is a throwback to the years of military dictatorship.³⁴ Thus, the political behavior of the supposed statesmen in a democratic setting has, however, come at very grave costs to the nation's democracy, as the militaristic handling of crises has resulted in excessive use of force; and egregious human rights violations. Their commitment, inclusion and absorption into

politics after their retirement from the armed forces and their desire to continue in the part of democratic career attests to this claim.

Conclusion / Recommendations

The democratic principles and tenets infused by the military rule are generally defective and deficient for a viable democratic governance to flourish. The quest for democratic development in Nigeria has been hindered by disruptive influences of military rule. Therefore, it is instructive to note that democracy can only develop when democratic key values or norms such as freedom, equality, inclusion, equity, equity, welfare, negotiation and compromise are embedded in Nigeria political culture.

The development of democracy in Nigeria must involve a shift in political culture, a transition from instrumental to principled commitment to the democratic tenets, a growth in trust and cooperation among the political competitors and a socialization of the civic society. This can be achieved through both deliberative efforts and the practice of the democracy in politics and civil society. Democratic consolidations must involve a shared normative and behavioral commitment to the specific rule and practice of the country's constitutional system, the major catalyst that will concretize the democracy in Nigeria and instill an enduring transparent and viable people-oriented governance. The press as the backbone of any democracy should be independent, professional and responsible in their duty to inform the citizenry, criticize and stimulate debate and expose the politicians to the society for reactions. Democracy should be based on its values; the actors should learn these from the Democratic principles, to replace the military ethos, which they display with recklessness in the democratic environment. In fact, a center for democratic studies should be established for potential politician to undergo scholarly training on democratic values, norms and principles.

End notes

1. Ibiyemi Oyeneye, Micheal Onyenwenu, E. Bodun Olosunde, *Round-up Government* (Ikeja: Longman Nigeria Plc. 1998) 6
2. Carl Levant's *Homage, Development, Security, African Politics* Carlleven's.com>Nigeria-military-decrees. Accessed 26/09/2019
3. Emmanuel Ibiam Amah "The Search for Autochthonous Constitution" *Home Journals Social Sciences and Humanities BLR* Vo 1,8 No. 1 March 2017 <http://www.scirp.org>journal>paperinfomation>. Accessed 27/09/2017
4. Etim Okon Frank and Wilfred I. Ukpere "The Impact of Military Rule on Democracy in Nigeria" <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261672856>. December, 2012. Accessed 05/08/2019.
5. Osabiya Babatunde, "Democratization and the Military in Nigeria: A Case for an Enduring Civil-Military Relations in the Fourth Republic and Beyond" *Review Pub Administration Manag* 2015, 3:1 <https://www.legit.ng/1207669-advantages-democracy-military-rule-nigeria.html> Accessed 3/7/2019
6. Military rule/political regime/Britannica.Com <https://www.britannica.com>topic>military rule>. Accessed 01/08/2019
7. Babatunde, "Democratization and the Military in Nigeria..."
8. H. Samuel *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations*. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, Cambridge, 1957
9. A. Remi, *The Military, Democratisation and Governance in Nigeria*. In: Olurode, Anifowose (eds) *Democratization and the Military in Nigeria*. Frankad Publishers, Lagos, 2004.
10. George H. Sabine, Thomas L. Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*. (New York: Dryden Press, 1973) 114
11. Sabine & Thorson, *A History*....844
12. Sabine & Thorson, *A History*....844
13. Victor A.O Adetula "Development, Conflict and Peace Building in Africa" in Shedrack Gaya Best (ed.) *Introduction to Peace and*

- Conflict Studies in West Africa*. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006) 387-388
14. E. J Nwosu, *Achieving Even Development in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1985) 60
15. Nwosu, *Achieving Even Development*....60
16. Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent Since Independence* (Britain: Free Press, 2005) pp 193-194 See also Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture 1966-1976* (New York: Algora Publishing 2009) 59
17. Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1980) 5
18. Fredrick Forsyth, *The making of an African Legend: The Biafran story* (New York: Penguin Book, 1969) 35 See also Alfred Obiora Uzokwe, *Surviving in Biafra: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War* (USA: Lincoln Shagari, 2003) 35
19. Ngozi Ojiakor, *Social and Political History of Nigeria 1970-2006* (Enugu: Evans Press, 2007) 34
20. Ojiakor, *Social and Political History*....84
21. Meredith, *The State of Africa*.... 382
22. Ojiakor, *Social and Political History*....133. See also Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent Since Independence* (Britain: Free Press, 2005) 145-146, 397
23. Meredith, *The State of Africa*.... 574, 579-580
24. Sahara Reporters "The Drama Behind Closure of Channels Television" New York, September 17, 2008. Saharareporters.com>2008/09/17>drama-behind-closure-channels-televis...
25. Impeachment charges by Nigerian parliament against president... www.waado.org>NigerDelta>Obasanjo>Impeachment Charges Accessed 05/08/2019.
See also "Public expenditure management reforms in Nigeria and critical..." <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>...01-May-2013>. Accessed 01/07/2019
26. Frank and Ukpere "The Impact of Military Rule...". Accessed 05/08/2019.
27. Frank and Ukpere "The Impact of Military Rule...". Accessed 05/08/2019.

28. Frank and Ukpere "The Impact of Military Rule...", Accessed 05/08/2019.
29. "Nigeria: Odi Massacre Statements"-12/23/99-The African Centre. <https://www.Africa.Upenn.edu>> Accessed 20/08/2019
30. Frank and Ukpere "The Impact of Military Rule...", Accessed 05/08/2019. See also Obasanjo declares state of emergency in Plateau State. [www.thenewhumanitarian.org>news>2004/05/18>obasanjo-declares-sta...](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2004/05/18/obasanjo-declares-sta...)
31. Francis Nwaiwu. "Python Dance-The Oppressor and the Oppressed People of Biafra...Human Right in Ala Igbo: An Overview" January 9, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com>> Accessed 3/6/2019
32. "Nigerian Court Orders Arrest of Top Judge Enmeshed in asset... [www.xinhuanet.com>english](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english) 13 Feb-2019 Accessed 15/07/2019
33. "Withdraw Troops from Azaghene Community in Bayelsa, Falana Warns Nigeria Army Chief" Saharan Reporters, New York. Saharareporters.com>2019/07/29>Accessed 29/07/2019
34. "Nigeria Shuts Down Private TV, Radio stations tied to Opposition... [http://www.adjazeera.com>news](http://www.adjazeera.com/news)> 07 June 2019, Accessed 30/07/2019