

INSECURITY, ELECTION AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**EKONG, JOSEPH PAULINUS**

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Abstract

The paper Examined Insecurity, Election and Democracy in Nigeria. The main argument of the paper is that insecurity is a precipitate of the prevalent negative conditions which threaten the sources of survival and reinforce inequality and poverty in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary sources of data and adopted system theory as an analytical construct. One of the assumptions of system theory is that system, like the political system, has parts that are interrelated and interdependent and whatever, affects one part will invariably affect other parts of the system. One of the findings in this paper is that insecurity is a consequence of the asphyxiating living conditions which scuttle election and democracy in Nigeria. The paper recommended inter alia that the negative conditions should be curbed if not totally eliminated in order to give fillip to election and consolidate democracy in Nigeria.

Key Words: Insecurity; Election; Democracy, Poverty, Faulty Distributive mechanism; Political Elites.

Introduction

In every civilized society, it is the responsibility of every responsive and responsible state to ensure that good governance is achieved. The achievement of good governance would predispose the fact that the state is competently performing those basic functions of a state such as the protection of lives and property, promotion of the welfare of the citizens, harmonizing the ever conflicting interests of man and ensuring that the state's scarce resources are fairly and equitably distributed. In order for the state to effectively perform these basic functions which ultimately can lead to good governance, the state should embrace and uphold inclusive governance which can foster the formulation and implementation of pro-poor policies and program. Inclusive governance demands that the relevant stakeholders and indeed the people should be given a sense of belonging within the permutation of the Socio-Eco-Political Systems. Democracy is a system of government which guarantees inclusive governance as it upholds the rule of law and ensures that the people exercise their political sovereignty as they decide who their leader becomes. This decision of who becomes their leader is made through the crucibles of free, fair and credible elections. Thus election is a hallmark of democracy which enables the people to exercise their franchise and transfer legitimacy to their leaders. The choice of who becomes their leader should be freely made without any form of coercion, undue

influence or intimidation. It is against this backdrop that the paper establishes a nexus among insecurity, election and democracy in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework – System Theory

Generally, Von Bertalanffy, the German Biologist, defined a system as a set of “elements standing in interaction” (Ray, 2003:8) system theory is based on the idea that objects or elements within a group are in some way related to one another and in turn, interact with one another on the basis of certain identifiable processes. (Ray 2003). The interaction of these elements or parts in a system means that they perform specific roles that sustain the entire system. According to Alapiki (2005), societies and other groups can be seen as entities or systems functioning within environment. To corroborate the above fact, Nna (2002) noted that a system is normally not closed but open to external influences. Thus a system is prone to influences from the environment and it may in turn influence events within its environment. Consequently, at all times, a system receives inputs from the environment and responds to such in the form of output. This law brings to focus the David Easton’s Input-output analysis. David Easton noted that there is a continuous exchange going on between the political system and its environment and the system is constantly engaged in a conversion process, producing output and altering the environment (Ray 2003).

From the foregoing, it is evident that systems including the political system operate within an environment as they perform specific functions. The efficacy of the parts and indeed the entire system is a function of the environment in which they operate. Thus, the environment influences the system and the system can in turn influence the environment. The environment we are referring to in this perspective is not the biological environment of habitats and Eco-system but the environment characterized by prevalent norms and values.

A good understanding of the system theory reveals the fact that it can be likened to the Marxian Political Economy approach which is not only holistic but also studies social events or phenomena in their relatedness taking into consideration intervening variables (see Ekekwe, 2006; Ake, 1981, Ryndina, Chernikov and Khudokomov, 1980). The relevance of this system theory to this study stems from the fact that the Nigerian state provides the environment in which other systems, particularly the political system operates. Anything that happens to the Nigerian state will affect the systems including the political system. Insecurity, election and democracy are parts or elements of the political system and they interact in such a manner that they influence one another. It follows that one can understand insecurity, election and democracy deeply given the systemic interconnectivity as it finds expression in Nigerian State.

The State and Insecurity in Nigeria; the Missing Link

The state is a product of a civilized society where citizens are disciplined as they adhere strictly to the laws of the land. The state in this perspective is a political organization conferred with the authority to make laws, decisions, formulate public policies and implement same in order to facilitate a mutually beneficial, peaceful, egalitarian and conducive society (Wonah, 2019). Consequently, in tandem with the Aristotelian teleology, the state is the highest form of development of society where individual potentials can be achieved. In affirming the sacrosanct nature of state and its importance in ordering society, Hegel sees the state as “the march of God on Earth” (Guaba, 1981).

For the liberal-democratic theory, the state is treated as a product of the will of society, an instrument of “conflict-resolution and securing the common interest (Wonah, 2019). It authorizes society to constitute a government by free choice and demands that the government should be responsible to the people and should work with the continuous consent of the people (Guaba, 1981).

The Marxist theory attributes any imperfection of government to the state itself. In the views of the Marxist, so long as society is divided into dominant and dependent classes, any government is bound to serve as an instrument of the dominant class. Accordingly, Marxist theory regards the state itself as an instrument of class exploitation, and advocates transformation and ultimate withering away of the state in order to restore “authority” to a classless society.

From historical antecedents, the Nigerian state is an imposition – a product of colonial subterfuge and manipulation. The imposition of the Nigerian state on Nigerians obviously infused into the political system fissiparous tendencies which led to animosity, ethnicity, conflict and violence among the component units – particularly the three major ethnic groups – Ibo, Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. These negative vices intermittently rear up their “ugly leads” in the political system which threatens the corporate existence of Nigeria. The climax of it was the Nigerian civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970. Furthermore, the alarming spate of separatist agitation like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is an eloquent testimony. Also to be considered is the long years of military interregnum which in itself is a crystal of ethnicity and over politicization of the military. One of the effects of this long years of military interregnum is that the Nigerian state became militarized with its committant militarist value which eroded democratic values. It appears might is now right in Nigeria. This can be seen in the thoughtless granting of amnesty to groups who plunder the ultimate power of force of the state. The scenario given above inundates the Nigerian society with insecurity and no free, fair and credible election and indeed the consolidation of democracy can take place in an atmosphere of insecurity and political instability.

As insecurity – reinforcing as the above conditions are, there is a fundamental predisposing condition that engenders insecurity. Security and insecurity are two sides of a coin. The presence of one excludes the other. Security is therefore needed if we must eliminate insecurity. In the discourse of peace, conflict and security are indispensable. Whereas, there can be no peace in the midst of conflict or violence, there is therefore the need to secure peace. (Wonah, 2019). This, Securitization of peace is about providing the enabling conditions that can guarantee peace. Security generally is about the condition or feeling safe from harm or danger, the defence, protection and presentation of core values, and the absence of threats to acquire values (Francis, 2008).

Aside from the fact that security can be seen as the well thought-out and orchestrated military arrangements and intelligence, security can also be seen, and most importantly, as the protection, preservation and recreation of those conditions or resources necessary for human survival and existence. If for instance the state does not protect the environment from anthropogenic activities, the environment in what may look like a reprisal attack fights back in the form of global warming, leading to climate change, flood, desertification and other environmental perturbations. This can lead to food insecurity as farmlands are submerged by flood, and “land squeeze” which are breeding ground for conflict, violence and insecurity.

In the views of Oladiran (2014), security means safety or freedom from danger, and protection from external attack or infiltration. The point here is that beyond the protection of lives and property is the fact that security also means the protection against the ravages of the negative social conditions such as poverty, exploitation and oppression, which rob man of the much needed peace necessary for development (Wonah, 2019). This view was corroborated by Ogunbanwo as cited in Oladiran (2014: 51) when aptly noted that:

Security is more than military security or security from external attacks. For many of the four billion inhabitants in the developing countries, security is conceived as the basic level of the struggle for survival. Therefore, in order to provide an integrated African security assessment, the non-military dimensions of security should be added. Hence forth, African security as concept should be applied in its broadest sense to include economic security, social security and technological security.

In concurring with the overarching view about security, MC Namara as cited in Oladiran (2014: 51) observed that:

Any society that seeks to achieve adequate military security against the background of acute food shortage, population explosion, low level of production, and per capita income, low technological development, inadequate and efficient public utilities, and chronic problem of unemployment, has a false sense of security.

The Nigerian state, rather than investing massively on economic activities that have multiplier effect and capable of curbing or eliminating the negative social conditions of unemployment and poverty, squander, embezzle and misappropriate public fund. Instead, it prefers the not-too-efficacious military option of fighting insecurity by allocating greater chunk of public fund to defence and internal security which in most cases end up in the pockets and bank accounts of some political elites. Insecurity therefore appears to be a recurring decimal in our political system which regrettably adversely affects elections and democracy in Nigeria.

The Impact of Insecurity on Election and Democracy in Nigeria

One of the cardinal values of democracy is participation. This means the people need to participate in making and implementing decisions that affect them. The people can participate in a democratic process by deciding through election who should be their leaders. The choice of the people should not be unduly influenced or coerced as the election is expected to be free, fair, non-violent and credible. Election is the heart beat of democracy as it legitimizes governance and reinforces the political sovereignty of the people (Wonah, 2019). It follows that if anything happens to election may be through violence, insecurity, electoral fraud or irregularities, democracy becomes a sham. Election is the process through which the people elect their leaders. Election is characterized by rules and regulations in other to ensure certain degree of fairness and justice to all concerned.

Furthermore, election conveys two attributes to the people – equality and freedom. Equality in the sense that each voter has one vote no matter your status. There is also freedom to choose among alternatives without any form of inducement, coercion or undue influence. These virtues of election abhor coercion and undue influence. This means that individuals should be free to exercise his or her franchise and vote for candidate of his or her choice. According to IDEA (2000), a culture of democracy must reflect norms and values that places

emphasis on the freedom of the individual from state abuse and from infringement of rights by other individuals. It further guarantees equality before the law, as well as providing opportunities for all citizens to have equal access to the material and cultural resources and guarantee their basic livelihood.

However, in Nigeria it appears the sanctity of election has been profaned and values of democracy eroded. Apart from the fissiparous tendencies infused in the political system, the more devastating negative causative factor is the primitive accumulation mentality of the political elites. The political elites see the state and its apparati as veritable means of enriching themselves. Consequently, ascendancy to public office is seen as a do-or-die affair and politics becomes a zero-sum game. (Ake, 1996). The implication is that electoral and indeed democratic processes are marred with irregularities. Such irregularities include but not limited to falsification of electoral results, thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes and cloning of electoral materials.

Insecurity characterizes most elections in Nigeria as thugs or Hoodlums shoot sporadically thereby endangering the lives of eligible voters. This scares the eligible voters away as most of them sit back at home during election. The 2015, 2019 and other general elections were marred by insecurity. For instance, during the 2019 general election, a lecturer at Ken Sarowiwa polytechnic Bori, Rivers State was shot dead at the Polling Unit as a result of violence. So many other innocent eligible voters also died. Joab-Peterside (2016) noted that the failure of the leading political parties in the state to faithfully subscribe to rules and regulations intended to ensure internal party democracy within them have had negative and destabilizing spillover effects on the polity, resulted in violence and constricted irredeemably the democratic space. Insecurity in Nigeria, especially during elections underscores the alarming rate of poverty and unemployment. It is axiomatic that no society where there is high rate of poverty can be truly democratic. It is not enough to have democratic institutions but what is more adequate and important is the imbibing and demonstration of democratic culture. Thus, insecurity does not allow free, fair, non-violent and credible election but leads to apathy as the people are alienated from the process of exercising their franchise. The leaders that emerge from such insecured electoral process do not reflect the popular choice of the people. The effect is that such leaders may not have the interest of the people at heart and good governance may be relegated to the background or thrown into the dust bin.

The Way Forward

There is the need to curb or totally eliminate divisive tendencies by giving the component or federating units a sense of belonging. This can be done by upholding the tenets and values of democracy. Such democratic values include participation, equality, rule of law, social justice, transparency and accountability.

The political leaders in Nigeria should absolve themselves of the mentality of primitive accumulation of wealth and be civic minded. This would make them not to see ascendancy to public offices as a do-or-die affair. Apart from dousing tension in the polity, it would also sanitize the democratic and electoral processes.

Furthermore, and more importantly is that the Nigerian state through the elites should improve on the living conditions of Nigerians. This they can do by increasing and improving on the economic activities which have multiplier effect on the economy. The essence is to

empower Nigerians and drastically reduce or if possible totally eliminate poverty. Election may not be free, fair, non-violent or credible when the people are wallowing in seemingly abysmal poverty and underdevelopment. The Nigerian state should purge itself of exploitative, repressive and oppressive tendencies and review the electoral laws in order to give credence to the electoral system. Godfatherism and loyalty should be eliminated in the political system in order to reinforce internal parts democracy. There is need to introduce electronic voting which can reduce physical contact and violence.

Concluding Remarks

The consolidation of democracy demands that election should be free, fair, non-violent and credible. However, the alarming spate of insecurity during elections in Nigeria is a threat to democracy and political stability in Nigeria. Insecurity is not only about weak military architecture and the fissiparous tendencies in the Nigerian polity but more importantly is the negative social conditions that threaten the means of livelihood of Nigerians. Peace and indeed security cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of insecurity especially when the people are marginalized, exploited, poor and oppressed. election can only be free, fair, non-violent and credible when the negative social conditions are curbed drastically or totally eliminated. Free, fair, non-violent and credible election can lead to the consolidation of democracy, and this can guarantee good governance and development in Nigeria.

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