

# SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THE SEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

The paper focuses on the impacts of security challenges and the pursuit of democratic development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The primary responsibility of the government is to ensure the security of the lives and properties of its citizens to enhance their development. It is the government's responsibility to be actively involved in addressing security issues in every part of the country. This revolves around the relevance of security and peace to development in Nigeria. The study employed secondary data sourced from books, journal articles, magazines, published reports, newspaper reports, and relevant materials from the Internet. The paper discovered that the security challenges in Nigeria are a major impediment to democratic growth and human development. The paper concludes that the government should provide a conducive environment that propagates, strengthens and supports human development and good governance. The paper recommends that government should exhibit and demonstrate the necessary political will to enhance security in Nigeria by massively investing in human capital development, tackling poverty, good educational system prosecuting corrupt public officials, the practice of good governance at all levels, intelligence and information gathering about insurgents' hideouts and their financiers and the practice of good governance at all levels among others

**Keywords:** Security, Democratic, Sustainable Development, Challenges and Nigeria

## **Introduction**

With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, coupled with the assertiveness of non-state actors, as well as the postulations of the Copenhagen scholars in their securitisation of security thesis, which expanded the concept of security and its application beyond the military and statist views (National Security and Defence) to now mean any potential threat to human existence and the pursuit of a good life and general well-being of the society (Buzan & Weaver, 2003; Brooks et al., 2020). The post-Cold War era has been marked by dynamic changes in security issues, which brought to the limelight the traditionalist and

the wider perspectives of security, as noted by Buzan, Weaver and De'Wilde, (1998) and Brooks et al., (2020). According to the Copenhagen scholars, there was a need to widen the concept of security to include economic, political, social, environmental and human security as against the traditional conception of security from a military and statist view. Consequently, the dynamism of the concept of security is not limited to political, economic, social, environmental and human security; the concept has been applied to varieties of cognate academic disciplines.

Over the years, it has been observed that insecurity undermines the prospects for

peace, stability, democratic development, socioeconomic advancement and sustainable development. Amid the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria, the country is confronted and battling with a deficit of democratic governance and socioeconomic hardship (Fagbadebo, 2020). Nigerians suffer from ceaseless terrorist attacks, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and other heinous criminal activities (Abang, 2014; Aborisade, 2018; Aleyomi, 2020).

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been embarking upon a complex task of nation-building aimed at socio-political stability. This has not been possible due to combined factors of corruption, maladministration of public affairs, unaccountable democratic leadership (Fagbadebo 2019; Fagbadebo 2020), poor socioeconomic conditions of citizens, hardship, political violence, ritual killings, thuggery, cultism, as well as insecurity. Nigeria's Fourth Republic, since 1999, has been characterised by the democratic process through institutional frameworks, civil society organisations and critical mass media. These institutional platforms and structures can make democracy thrive in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the political terrain has been encumbered by a series of challenges disrupting the genuine realisation of the system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Generally, observing the Nigerian state in recent times, it is crucial to understand that one of the main challenges to the credibility of democratic rule, governance and development has been incessant and intractable insecurity perpetrated by non-state actors within the Nigerian state. The activities of these non-state actors have become a contemporary issue in newspaper headlines; it has also become a subject of debate as to why they continue to perpetrate violent activities that are inimical to the lives and properties of citizens. Terrorism has been viewed as the weapon of the weak against the strong. The

weak are the many impoverished Nigerian masses while the powerful remain the political elite that control the affairs of the country. Since the masses have no power to hold political leaders accountable, terrorism was deployed by a very small fraction of the Nigerian state to gain the attention of the government and challenge the prospect and credibility of democratic development. It is however argued that without good governance, socio-political insecurity will continue to escalate to all areas of the Nigerian state.

### **Perspectives on Security**

The primacy of security in state systems is traceable to the works of ancient philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and Aristotle. Thomas Hobbes observed that only the state can guarantee security and save society from anarchy (Mrozek & Gawliczek 2023; Gaskin, 1996). To Aristotle, the formation of the state made the human community self-dependent (Řádek 2020). The human community feel safe because the state protects them from internal and external threats. Therefore, the state is necessary for human survival (Mijuskovic, 2017). Cicero believed the state should create and maintain communities that promote the common good while avoiding internal tyranny and external conquest (Marquez 2011; Simendić 2022; Mebane 2022).

Section 14 sub-section (2b) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, states “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.” This implies that it is the government's duty to ensure the safety and security of its citizens and their properties. Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) assert that security is vital for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development. According to the US Department of Defense, security is “a condition that results from the establishment and maintenance of protective measures that

ensure a state of inviolability from hostile acts or influence” (cf. Szpyra 2014). Scholars have defined security as the ability of a state to safeguard lives and properties and to maintain its territorial integrity against both real and perceived threats through its security apparatuses (Lai 2021; Cameron 2021).

Insecurity threatens the lives and properties of citizens, discourages local businesses, deters foreign investments, and affects the country's image (Shafiyev 2023). There is a connection between security and development. Some scholars have observed that the security breakdown in Nigeria is due to compromised standards among the government and armed security officials (Cull, 2023), while others believe that the security architecture is overstretched (Oyewole, 2013, 2020) alongside other administrative weaknesses (Abang, 2014). The consensus on Nigeria's security threat suggests the state's inability to mobilise the security architecture effectively to prevent insecurity or manage escalating conflicts. Analysts often overlook the role of government and citizens, whose engagement may be essential for pursuing human security through resolution and collaborative actions. Despite peace and stability being core objectives for many nations, security challenges remain a significant obstacle to achieving democratic development and socioeconomic advancement in many African countries, particularly Nigeria.

The central focus of security has traditionally been people. However, some scholars, particularly in international politics, argue that the state should be the primary consideration when discussing security. Conversely, other analysts contend that the discourse on security is incomplete without prioritising human beings. The security sectors mentioned such as human security and governments remain inseparable parts of the complex whole and as such reduce the complexity for analysis. Notwithstanding the controversial debate on security, this paper

focuses on the implications of insecurity on socio-political development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Therefore, socio-political development deals with the organisational stability of the state, the governing systems, the legitimate and authoritative ideological inclinations, and the sustainability of traditional patterns of language, culture, religion, national identity and customs (Brooks et al., 2020; Saleh, 2010; Buzan & Weaver 2003).

### **Democratic Development**

Despite differing perspectives among writers and practitioners, democracy integrated with social, economic, and political development promotes good governance and fosters peaceful coexistence. Consequently, democracy, because it incorporates the will of the people, is widely regarded as the most suitable form of government for any country, as it provides a framework for achieving a harmonious society and national development, particularly in heterogeneous societies. Therefore, democracy has been acknowledged as the only ethical and legitimate means of administering a society (Lazar, 2024). The concept of democratic development as used in this paper is equated to good governance. Many scholars of democracy believe that the consolidation of democracy ultimately leads to good governance. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank explained that when there is a high standard of legitimacy, representation, transparency and accountability in government, it is labelled good governance.

Democracy, in its essence, allows the populace to select their leaders and hold them accountable for their policies and actions while in office. Huntington emphasizes that the core mechanism of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by those they govern. According to Okeke (2017), democracy is a system of government centred around the people, who determine the leadership at both national and

local levels. This occurs through regular, free, and fair elections where individuals choose from competing political parties. In a democracy, sovereignty resides with the people, making them the highest form of political authority. Power is conferred from the populace to their governmental leaders, who serve as temporary representatives. Citizens have the liberty to critique their elected officials and monitor their governance activities.

Elections at regular intervals, as prescribed by requisite laws, is the hallmark of democratic process. This sets a limit to the terms of elected officials thereby depending on the will of the people to extend leadership tenures, as prescribed by extant laws. In other word, trust democratic society abhors autocracy and authoritarianism. The consent of citizens, the custodian of legitimacy, is crucial for the emergence of the leadership of the government. To ensure the integrity of the outcomes of elections, a neutral and independent umpire without any political affiliation, should be charged with the responsibility of overseeing the process. Such independent body should treat all stakeholders equally. This will guarantee free, fair, transparent and credible electoral outcomes. Voters must be able to vote in secret, free of intimidation and violence. A free and fair election requires a lot of preparation, organization and training of political parties, electoral officials and civil society organizations that monitor the process (Diamond 2024).

The rule of law is one of the cardinal pillars of democratic process. A democratic society must adhere to the prescribed rules that guide the operation of the state. In other word, prescribed rules and regulations enshrined in the law remain the yardstick for governance rather than the will of an individual or groups of individuals. The rights of citizens are protected by extant rules of the law and it also services statutory instruments and frameworks for the maintenance of order and

sets limitations on the power of government. Everybody is equal under the law. There is no room for discrimination against anyone in a democracy based on race, religion, gender or ethnic group. Also, no one may be discriminated against, arrested, imprisoned or arbitrarily exiled. People must respect the law and refuse violence. When people express their opinions, there is a need for them to listen to the opinions and views of other people, even people who hold contrary opinions. Therefore, everyone has a right to be heard (Ukpong, 2011).

The practice of democracy in Nigeria has been subject to analysis by scholars and analysts, who have identified several factors influencing its implementation. These factors include ethno-religious conflict, the absence of accountability and transparency, weak democratic institutions, and electoral malpractices. Additionally, corruption, resource mismanagement, poor macroeconomic policies, public misconduct, insufficient skilled manpower, and a lack of political will have also been suggested as contributors. Each of these factors plays a role in the challenges facing democracy in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Several theories may be relevant to this discourse, but the democratic peace theory and institutional theory offer valuable analytical frameworks for examining the key issues of this study. Democratic Peace Theory emanated from Immanuel Kant's (1795) essay, "*Perpetual Peace*" (Simpson 2019). According to this theory, democratic states behave very differently from non-democratic, authoritarian and autocratic states. The theory argues that democracies are more peaceful than non-democracies. It is contended that democrats do not fight war, they resolve to diplomacy in responding to threats from other state and non-state actors (Simpson 2019). Although the analysis of democratic peace theory is well noted in the study of international relations, its applicability in



domestic politics has become important over the years, the spread of democracy to many developing nations is also expected to promote internal peace, law and order in respective states. Simply put, the internal security of the state is as important as the security of states in the Committee of Nations. Some scholars believe that the internal security of a state determines its power in the international system (Bhuiya & Jahan 2022; Nausheen, Srivastava, & Seth 2021).

The democratic peace theory suggests that before a state can engage in warfare, the opinion of its citizens is usually considered, and the citizens are likely to oppose military action and/or war with another democratic state (Srivastava & Seth 2021). This study uses the theory to propose that adopting democracy as a system of governance could promote global peace and wealth creation through a free-market economy system. Therefore, the democratic peace theory, as applied in this paper, remains relevant in the study of domestic politics.

The responsibility of every democracy is to promote peace, law, order and the safety of people against threats. The institutional theory then engages state institutions in the management of conflict and insecurities in the system. The agents of government which are required to perform this task include the (executive, Legislature, Judiciary and other Security agencies within the state). This school of thought contends that the agent of government must be autonomous and empowered to perform this task if democracy must be consolidated.

### **Socio-Political Insecurity, Good Governance and Nigeria's Democratic Development**

As earlier noted, the consolidation of democracy is synonymous with good governance because all the elements of democracy are embedded in all the indices of good governance (Adebowale, 2011). It should therefore be noted that Nigeria is not on the track to democratising nor is she on the track to promoting good governance in the

face of ethno-religious violence, institutional corruption, electoral violence and other social vices that threaten the organisational stability of the Nigeria State.

### **Ethno-Religious Conflict**

Ethnic-religious conflict is one of the factors contributing to governance challenges in Nigeria and has recently posed a threat to the country's unity. Ethnic-religious conflict refers to situations where relationships between members of different ethnic or religious groups in a multiethnic and multireligious society are marked by a lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion, fear, and a tendency toward violent confrontations (Salawu, 2010). In Nigeria, ethnicity and religious differences have become central to various forms of nationalism, including the assertion of language, cultural autonomy, religious superiority, and demands for local political autonomy and self-determination.

This religious division and discrimination among various ethnic groups explain why ethno-religious conflicts have become a persistent issue in Nigeria. Before the current democratic period, numerous ethno-religious conflicts resulted in significant loss of life and property. Notable incidents include the Maitatsine disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s; Jimeta-Yola disturbances (1984), Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim-Christian skirmishes (1981-1982), cross versus crescent conflict at the University of Ibadan (1981-1985), Zango-Kataf crisis in Kaduna State (1992), and the Muslim-Christian clash during an Easter Christian procession in Ilorin, Kwara State (1986) among others.

Another major ethnic and religious riot in Nigeria occurred in July 1999, when Oro cultists in Sagamu, Ogun State accused a Hausa woman of violating cultist norms, leading to confrontations that escalated into a significant crisis. Many lives were lost, primarily among Yoruba and Hausa communities. The violence was temporarily contained with a dusk-to-dawn curfew in Sagamu. However, reprisal killings ensued in Kano, a major Hausa city, resulting in further

deaths and significant property damage. As peace was being restored in Kano, Lagos experienced another outbreak of violence, apparently in retaliation for the Kano killings. The Oodua People's Congress targeted Hausa/Fulani traders in the Mile 12 market, resulting in two days of violence. These events indicate that several regions in Nigeria have experienced numerous ethnic and religious crises. The prevalence of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has continued into the Fourth Republic.

#### **Leadership Challenges**

The effectiveness of governance in any organised political system is determined by the quality of leadership within the government. Nigeria, a nation endowed with abundant natural and human resources, continues to grapple with leadership and governance challenges even after sixty-four years of independence. The leaders who have held positions of authority since independence have often lacked vision and have been involved in corruption and political conflicts. This has resulted in maladministration, mismanagement of public resources, economic setbacks, and pervasive poverty. Consequently, it is disheartening to question the significance of Nigeria's status as a giant in Africa after sixty-four years of independence without substantive development. It is widely acknowledged that poor leadership has been a significant contributing factor.

#### **Institutionalised Corruption**

Corruption remains one of the significant challenges affecting governance and democracy in Nigeria. Effective governance necessitates the elimination or absence of corruption to achieve good governance. The pervasive corruption in Nigeria is a fundamental cause of political insecurities that have negatively impacted investment and economic growth. Corruption by successive governments has not only undermined the economy and exacerbated deprivation among citizens but also eroded the legitimacy of the

political system, which continuously reinstates these governments (Fagbadebo 2007). The lack of integrity and honesty among Nigerian leaders has perpetuated the country's corruption issues. Politicians can be expelled and later re-admitted to political parties at will.

#### **Lack of Adherence to the Rule of Law**

Apart from ethno-religious conflict, leadership and corruption challenges are the factors militating against good governance in Nigeria, arbitrary use of power dominated Nigeria's democratic governance, especially during the Fourth Republic. The rule of law is the absolute supremacy that performs a mediating role between various stakeholders in society (UNESCO, 2005; cited in Dunu, 2013). Indeed, the obvious demonstration of the absence of good governance is the presence of arbitrariness and disregard for the rule of law.

#### **Electoral Malpractices Challenges**

Election is one of the cardinal tenets of participating in democratic, which is marked by an orderly change of government through credible free and periodic elections (Gardner, 2024; Gu 2024). The problem of electoral malpractices has become a popular phenomenon in Nigeria politics (Ukpong & Mfon 2023; Ejiofor, Anazodo, Okereke, Ajaero, & Ogbu 2024). An average Nigerian believes that elections cannot be won in Nigeria except through rigging and other malpractices (Awopeju 2024). This is the extent to which the electoral system has deteriorated. The irregularities and malpractices of elections are exacerbated by the control of government institutions.

#### **Poverty**

Nigeria is currently identified as the world capital of poverty, with 71 million people living in extreme poverty (Olabamiji & Ajala 2024; Onah et al. 2024). Consequently, 63% of the population (approximately 133 million individuals) are considered

multidimensionally poor (Idiaye & Ibikunle 2024). In 2023, around 12% of the global population in extreme poverty resided in Nigeria, where the poverty threshold was set at \$1.90 per day (Olutola & Faluyi 2024). According to the World Bank's 2020 report, relative and absolute poverty rates in rural communities were 73.2% and 66.1%, respectively, in 2019, compared to 61.8% and 52.0% in urban areas.

Poverty is more prevalent in rural regions than in urban ones, which corroborates scholarly claims that poverty and unemployment are significant contributors to insecurity (Boyer 2024; Omodero 2024; Oladoyin et al. 2024). The World Bank defines poverty as a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by a lack of opportunity, empowerment, and security for individuals within society. Ucha (2010) contends that restricted opportunities for the impoverished population limit their options in various situations, and their lack of security exposes them to diseases, violence, and other threats.

Based on this analysis, it can be asserted that life in Nigeria is severely affected by absolute poverty. There is a noticeable transition from non-poor to moderately poor, and ultimately to extremely poor among the populace. This situation undoubtedly undermines and challenges the legitimacy and integrity of the government, as well as the functionality of the democratic process and the stability of the Nigerian state.

### **Democracy versus Socio-political Security in Nigeria**

Democratic practice in Nigeria is fraught with uncertainties, given the spiral socio-political and security challenges (Izom, Wakili, & Ejiko 2024). The challenge of democratic governance has grave implications for the socio-political insecurity Nigeria had experienced since they returned to democratic rule (Mustapha & Oluwatukasi 2024). Democracy propagators are of the belief that

the spread of democracy will promote good governance and ensure peaceful co-existence within the state. Therefore, toward the achievement of socio-political security in Nigeria Democracy, Nigeria must embark on a series of measures to challenge contemporary narratives.

### **Changing the value that governs the behaviour of actors in the Nigeria Polity**

The value that governs the behaviour of politicians and Nigeria leaders in the public realm must be changed to conform to the universal cultural norms and values that will direct behavioural attitude towards good governance in Nigeria (Elechi 2024). Scholars of behavioural politics have argued that for socio-political insecurity in the country to be forgotten issue, the culture of individuality and corruption, which has eroded and become the norms in Nigeria, should be replaced by the culture of “what is mine belongs to the community” (Covarrubias 2024; Etuk & James 2024)

### **Strengthening the Constitutional and Institutional Framework in the Fight against Corruption**

In Nigeria, corrupt practices have been one of the major challenges in the search for ensuring socioeconomic, political and cultural security as well as productive economy and sustainable development (Olujobi & Yebisi 2024) The effect of corruption in the nation has manifested in uneven distribution of wealth, depleted infrastructure and unhealthy living conditions among a great proposition of the citizenry (Alaye 2024). These have impacted negatively on all aspects of security and development agenda of the Nigeria state. I Fagbadebo (2019) has noted that the institutional mechanism offered by the constitution for the fight against corrupt practices is itself not immune from the plague. Therefore, for Nigeria socio-political

insecurity to be solved, the constitutional and institutional mechanism designed for the fight against all social vices need to be strengthened and revitalised.

Restructuring of the Nation's Socio Economy to Rescue Poverty and Unemployment Poverty and unemployment is a major cause of security problems in Nigeria. Looking at the Nigeria Fourth Republic, the low standard of living of the citizens was due to poverty and it is perceived as a normal way of living for the less privilege and the government on the other side are less concerned about the basic standard of living of the citizens therefore making them to engulf imbibe into various criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, violence and most of all terrorism (Alaye 2024). There is an urgent need for the government to look into the problem of poverty and unemployment in order to reduce the high rate of insecurity in the country through sustainable youth empowerment programmes to help in resolving the issue.

Entrenchment of Good Governance The growing menace of insecurity in Nigeria could be resolved through entrenchment of good governance practices at all levels. The recourse to the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, fair hearing, justice and quick prosecution of criminals, provision of good social amenities such as roads, quality health care, quality schools and other social infrastructure is a task that must be done with an utmost sense of urgency. However, the government should effectively fight the terrorism and above all respect the fundamental human rights of every citizen of the nation without prejudice.

Election policy Reformation: The issue of electoral malpractices in Nigeria Fourth Republic has also been a major setback and concern to having a well-structured democratic system that is free of socio-

political insecurity. Electoral process are meant to be based on free and fair elections whereby the citizens of the country are meant to choose their leader by casting their votes but due to the corrupt electoral body that is in charge of organising elections (INEC) and other top officials of the ruling political party use their power as a result of the corrupt financing of the electoral body to rig the election in their favour. The issue of electoral malpractices is not only criticising the majority of the citizens that have been used by politicians as “Political thug” to cause various havoc during the election such as snatching of ballot boxes, fighting in different polling zones and bribing of voters. Apart from bribing individuals and electoral bodies, the security agencies such as the police that are meant to ensure free and fair elections are being used to manipulate election results. Therefore, there is a need to overhaul election policy reformation to combat the issue of electoral malpractices to eradicate one of the major problems of socio-political insecurity.

#### **Development of Institutions Responsible for Intelligence and Information Gathering**

The government must prioritise intelligence and information gathering. Historical evidence indicates that intelligence reports regarding certain groups are often disregarded. For example, in 2009, the Kaduna State police commissioner submitted a report to the police headquarters, recommending urgent action by the federal government to disband the El-Zakzaky Islamic Sect from their training centres in Dambo village and the Faddiya Islamic centre, both located in Zaria, Kaduna State (The Punch Newspaper, March 19, 2009). The government's failure to act resulted in the unregulated growth and unchecked activities of this militant sect across Northern Nigeria and other regions.



In line with the above, the assumed toll-free lines provided by telecommunication must be genuine and be able to prompt security agencies to swift action like the 911 and other toll-free lines in many Western nations. This will enable members of the public who have information on individuals and groups likely to breach national security to make them available to appropriate quarters with the guarantee of the anonymity of the individual and confidentiality of information.

### Conclusion

Conclusively, it is crucial to understand that one of the main challenges to the credibility of democratic rule, governance and development has been incessant and intractable insecurity perpetrated by non-state actors within the Nigerian state. However, section 14 sub-section (2b) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, states “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.” The implication of this is that every government has the responsibility of providing securing the lives and properties of citizens. Therefore, with the analysis generated in this paper, it is important to note that the solution offered might become thwarted without restructuring the values that govern the behaviour of the government and its agencies. This paper is however concluded on the notion that, effective leadership performance, reducing poverty, addressing the issues of corruption, election policy reformation must be entrenched towards solving the problem of insecurity. Moreover, genuine peace effort and good governance will ultimately lead to democratic stability and security of the Nigeria State.

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