Military Participation in Development of a Democratic Political Culture in Nigeria: The Underlying Implications.

Goddey Wilson, Ph.D

Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt. Phone: +234 8037236862, email:goddey.wilson@yahoo.com

Solomon A. Ikunga, Ph.D

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies , Faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education , Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt. Phone: +234 7034378239, email: saikunga@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research intends to give an analysis of the implication of the military rule in development of a democratic political culture in Nigerian political system. The study used secondary data, and adopted content analysis for analyzing the data. The study covers the period of 1960-1999, with focus on military activities in the political industry, and its impact on Nigerian political culture. The study shows that the first political experiment after independence was disrupted by military intervention in Nigeria. And over the years, it has been from one military rule to another, from 1966 – 1979, and 1983 – 1999. Nigeria witnessed military dictatorship without adequate preparation to develop a democratic political culture that could be enduring. This is on account of political squabbles and corrupt practices that do not help in the sustenance of true democratic principles. Nigeria ought to have had solid democratic political culture and thus set the pace for other African nations to emulate. Unfortunately, the protracted military rule has inflicted the political system with several political challenges, thereby developing a poor political culture that does not grantee stability in the system. To that effect, the study advises that the military should keep away from the politics of the state, to allow the nascent democracy strive for re-orientation of proper democratic political culture in Nigeria.

Key words : Military, Political Culture, Development, Democracy.

1. introduction

In 1914, a British colonial representative in Nigeria, Lord Fredrick Lugard, amalgamated the Northern and Southern Nigeria as a union of one entity from, which the foundation of national unity emerged. Interestingly, Lord Lugard conceived the geopolitical entity purely along ethnic lines. Soon after the amalgamation, the country was divided into three regions of North, East and West. And later , the Midwest region was created as the forth region. The regional arrangement weakened the centre politically, as the regions were exercising relative political autonomy.   The experimentation of the Federal system resulted to each of the regions controlling its own internal and external relations. The regionalism resulted to the emergence political parties, although established along ethnic or tribal lines and indeed along regional boundaries. Thus, the regions were seen to command greater authority and loyalty than the central government resulting to weak political affiliations.

In the North, there was the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) led by Late Alhaji Aminu Kano, the Middle Belt of Nigeria had Middle Belt Congress (MBC) led by Joseph Tarka, the Western region had Action Congress (AC) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and the Eastern region had the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), which commanded a larger followership was led by an Eastern politician, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Thus, these political parties had personal or regional interests to propagate and defend, rather than national interest or ideological compatibility. The political leaders were aware of state of affairs which did not guarantee national unity, yet they did nothing to avert the ugly situation of discord and discontent that arose thereafter. The politicians benefitted from the crises that ensured and continued to perpetuate the situation. Major Patrick Chukwuma Nzeogwu, the leader of the Revolutionary Council that overthrew the first civilian government, once lamented in his maiden broadcast that the council's enemies were those that seek to keep the country divided so that they can remain in office as masters or VIPS. On his part, Odumegwu Ojukwu in his speeches has maintained that the political power groups in Nigeria were guarded by sectional interest only. He went on to state that these groups were clearly defined and perpetuated by the constitution itself.

Wilson (2011) adds that apart from the twin evils of tribalism and regionalism, corruption was endemic in the system. During the time, Nigeria was not particularly rich, but public officers lavished the little available

resources for their personal comfort. They were behaving as if Nigeria was their personal estate, while the poor looked helpless with amassment as politicians fed fat on their tax which they paid for the provision of social amenities for the benefit of all and sundry. As a result, protests and political disturbances became the order of the day. The protests, more often developed into arson and wanton destruction of lives and property.

The Middle Belt experienced a lot of violence, which saw many dead. The West also witnessed the same problem. Yet, the politicians ignored them all. The situation was left unchecked even by the Federal parliament, which became a mere field for inter-tribal battles and scuffles. The political atmosphere became tensed up without any constitutional means to put an end to the ugly situation. This prompted the military to take over the political leadership of Nigerian government in 1966, with the view of saving Nigeria from political disintegration. It became a child of circumstance. And ever since, it has been one military rule or the other till 1979, and later on 1983-1999. This implies that their long occupation of the Nigerian political scene makes them develop an influence on Nigerian political culture. No wonder, Nwankwo (1987) tends to ask to what extent is it democratic for a small clique of military authorities to alternate and exploit the nation between themselves using military intervention and turn to civil rule as a disguise for their sadistic motives? Many scholars argued that there can be no democracy in a military rule, so long as the constitution is not upheld and respected. However, what is important here is that military rule is dictatorial and does not allow for a level playing for all political participants and does not enhance the development of a democratic political culture. Indeed, the study is aimed at giving a critical analysis of military rule in Nigeria and its impact on Nigerian democratic political culture.

2. Military intervention in Nigerian Politics

Military intervention in politics has remained a big puzzle among political actors in Nigeria. Nigeria became more vulnerable to military interventions such that the military thought it was their prerogative to intervene whenever they found it convenient. This is because the military is well placed to intervene due to their hierarchical structure and its distinctive pattern of training and recruitment. There is no single variable serving as a key to the explanation of the phenomenon of incessant military appropriation of power. However, Okadigbo (1987:29) posits that the study of military intervention has generated more problems for political thinkers and actors alike. Nonetheless, it is gratifying to say that there are some facts which may otherwise be called facilitators. He goes on to reason that the army establishment is well dispose to take over government because it has the monopoly over the Nation's weaponry. And , coup plotters must have operational command (the battalions) and must invite serious officers to minimize disruption of the army's command structure. African coups are supported largely by the armed forces with the police complimenting the army. Although the place or level of training of coup makers professionally or ideologically has no direct bearing on the plotting and execution of coups. It is obvious that once the military intervenes in a given place, it is often disposed to a repeat performance elsewhere. This means that once the barrier that hinders the military from intervening is removed in one state, it invariably attracts similar action in another state.

Generally, the military intervention in Nigerian politics can be attributed to such factors as follows:
- The failure or inability of the previous government to effectively and competently oversee or pilot the affairs of the nation.
- There are always allegations of corruption, nepotism, and tribalism among politicians and the political class which results in production decline, abandonment of infrastructural development and underdevelopment.

No wonder Babatope (1986:51) argues that the above reasons prompted Buhari Mohammed's group to intervene in the civilian government of Shehu Shagari in order to restore sanity and development of the economy.

However, we can note that the military themselves who are Nigerians are no less realistic than their civilian counterparts, and need not be more aggressive in asserting some tendencies to their own advantage and benefits. The inability of military to instill discipline among its key officers in ensuring pursuit of goals for nation building provokes the military interest for politics. It is for this reason that Okechukwu and Odinchezo (1986:113) lamented that the imperatives for nationhood and political stability as always lacking in the military, and this accounts for the military misplacement of priority.

3. Nigerian Politics during Military Rule

Wiseman (1966) argues that in the development of a political system, it is inevitable for some sociological approaches to be applied in solving some misdeeds of political systems in the development of the economy of every nation. This implies that the absence of a balanced political structure would result to a revolution or a military intervention by political army. During the first republic, there was leadership tussle between the leader of the Action Group, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his Deputy, Ladoke Akintola. The leadership tussle later became a multi-dimensional problem in the state, which graduated from personality clash to splitting of the party

into two rival factions. In the same Western region, there was a large scale riot in the Western House of Assembly culminating in the declaration of a state of   emergency by Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Other challenges are the 1963 census controversy, the 1964 Federal election deadlock etc. All these contributed to the complex nature of Nigerian political experiment during the first republic which threatened the corporate existence of the country.

However, it was later understood that the coup plotters did not intend to succeed the civilian, but they created an avenue for a military takeover. This was evidenced in their voluntary handling over power to the then Senate President, Dr. Orizu Nwafor, who acted as Nigeria's President for Dr. Nnamadi Azikiiwe. Consequent upon this, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi assumed office as the first military Head of State of Nigeria in January 17, 1966. As a result, the emerging military banned partisan activities, legislative and executive institutions were dissolved at the national, regional and local government levels. Some other institutions were retained such as the civil service, the Nigerian police force and the Judiciary. The Supreme Military Council and the Federal Executive Council were created for the main purpose of legislative and executive functions. The Supreme Military Council, which became the highest law making body comprises of the Head of State as Chairman, Governors of the four regions, Chief of Staff of the Armed forces, Chiefs of Army, Naval Staff, Air Force, and the Attorney General, thus, replacing the Senate and the Federal House of Representatives. Laws passed by this body became decrees which substituted acts of parliament.

The establishment of the Federal Executive Council replaced the former Council of Ministers. The council took charge of all matters relating to the executive arm of civilian government. Its composition includes the Head of the National Military Government, Chief of Armed forces, Chief of army, Airforce, Navy, the Inspector General of Police and the Federal Permanent Secretaries. The regional Military Governors were the chief executives of the regions and each region had its own executive council. The military government had oppositions in implementation of their programmes from the Nigerian political elites. As soon as the government abolished the Federal structure and replaced it with a unitary constitution, the opposition was intensified and Ironsi's government was eventually terminated by Danjuma led counter coup of 29 July, 1966. During the counter-coup, Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, the then Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters who was next in rank to take over government went into hiding between   29-31 July, 1966. There was then a vacuum which brought in Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, the Chief of army on August 1,1966 as the Head of State and Commander in Chief of Armed forces. The administration of Col. Gowon retained the previous government institutions. Although, Lt Col. Gowon had some challenges. He was unable to instill adequate discipline in his government. His deputies or lieutenants behaved as they pleased to the extent that they fell foul of the same errors they came to correct. Things were no longer better than they were. In fact, the country degenerated into economic and civil decadence. In spite of the various programmes of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation which were then necessary, Nigeria still faced severe development challenges. The oil boom of that period rather than been a blessing brought a curse, as other sectors of the economy were abandoned and oil became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Gowon's government did not look inwards to develop infrastructures and other institutions capable of enhancing accelerated development within the context of the excess revenues accrued to Nigeria, when the Arabs placed embargo on oil exports to America. The military was no longer the messiah it claimed to be.

As General Murtala Mohammed came to power, he initiated laudable programmes and vigorously pursued them which impacted on the lives of Nigerians. His reform programmes were set up to make a holistic review of all areas of national life.   These programmes were short-lived as he lost his life in a bloody coup by Col. Dimka. Even though the coup succeeded in eliminating General Murtala Mohammed , his successor, Olusegun Obasanjo brought to reality, the programme of handing over to a democratically elected civilian government in 1979.

As the second republic government came on board, it was not allowed to last to its second tenure. The government of Buhari took over and gave reasons why it has to do so. The reasons given by previous military governments also applied here. Buhari embarked on programmes for national reconstruction and transformation and in a bid to see to the implementation of his programmes, the government became more dictatorial than its predecessors. On August 27, 1985, Buhari's government was overthrown on account of its dictatorial tendencies, abuse of human rights and lack of rule of law. It is for this reason that Dudley (1973:32) stated that instability and political crises have tended to destroy Nigeria's democratic future. He maintained that in the midst of instability and uncertainty, there can be no strong political order in Nigeria. So coups and counter-coups can

never usher in stability and political order. Without continuity, the political class cannot learn from the past and to maintain the future democracy.

As soon as General Babangida took over power, he announced programmes for nation building and development. He reorganized the national security organization, reviewed detention without trial decree etc. There was rejection of IMF loan, but introduced Structural Adjustment Programmes that distressed most Nigerians. He encouraged local sourcing of raw material in order to increase agricultural production. There was a Political Bureau headed by Dr. S. J.S Cookey to conduct debate on way forward for the institution of a sustainable democratic structure when the country is eventually returned back to civilian administration. A transitional programme was set for election which included the establishment and conduct of census, a review of 1979 constitution and the setting up of the Constituent Assembly. The ban on party politics was lifted to ensure a rapid transition to civilian rule which would terminate with 1992 presidential election. It is very disheartening to know that the same Babangida government cancelled June 12, 1993 general elections said to have been won by Chief M.K O. Abiola, which to some extent ushered in the vision of a more sustainable political and democratic structure ever known in Nigerian political history. As Babangida stepped aside on August 26, 1993, an interim government headed by Chief Shonekon was instituted which eventually was removed by General Sanni Abacha who took over the political power in a bloodless coup. He was later removed by death and General Abubakar Abdulsalami took over the realm of political affairs. General Abubakar Abdulsalami piloted the affairs of the country and put in place a democratic structure which saw the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo as the civilian president of Nigeria in 1999.

4. The Development of Nigerian Political Culture

The development of Nigerian political culture began with the adoption of some democratic beliefs, idealolgies and emotions which constituted the values of Nigeria's political culture. These beliefs, ideas, and emotions conditioned the people's behaviour and the perception of what constitute governmental powers and authority.

Soon after independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted the Western liberal democratic system of government. In its constitution were specified democratic values, representative government, free and fair elections, the franchise, party system, revenue sharing formula and fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, these values were not in any way institutionalized. They were not previously part of the people's values as they were viewed as alien which were yet to be adopted by the Nigerian populace.

Indeed, within the context of Nigerian culture, there has been a mixture of traditional system with those of modern western system as conceived by a majority of politicians. It was so because most people at the time were illiterates which limited their understanding of the requirements of the modern western cultural values. Commenting on cultural socializations, Almond and Verba (1975:15) have maintained that political socializations can be a process by which political culture is maintained and changed. They went further to assert that there must be intentional teaching of political attitudes in the family and school etc. in order to imbibe strong democratic attitudes to sustain Nigeria's quest for a more advanced democratic political culture.

The tendency in Nigeria has been for people to interpret governmental process the way it will suit their whims and caprices. It is worth stating here that the political atmosphere was never meant to usher in a level playing ground for all actors so long as one can get it by all means. This has been the culture. But it ought not to be so. Once persons resort to the application of obstructive and negative processes to get to political power, it therefore will negate the essence of true democratic political culture needed to make Nigeria grow to western political standards. Within the Nigerian context, authority and power have always been personalized for selfish gains. This is the feeling of a lot of Nigerians over the years. For the military does not tolerate opposition, the democratic culture of our people tends to toe the same military style of government. In many cases, all forms of opposition in every given democracy in Nigeria tend to be crushed or stopped for the party in power to succeed and have overriding authority over all persons irrespective of party affiliation. In fact, this situation is always allowed to thrive as a result of poor political education and socialization. The low political consciousness makes the people vulnerable to political manipulation.

Consequent upon this scenario, people emerge under the culture of hopelessness, apathy and glaring indifference to political processes. What certainly interests the people is when basic social amenities are provided so that political actors can be judged based on their capability to provide the things the masses needed and not by the values that call for order and stability of governmental system. Nigeria as a premobilized modern state falls

under the influence of traditional family and communal ties. So, the political parties, while being controlled by traditional elites are allowed by political circumstance to appeal to traditional and communal loyalties.

5. Influence of the Military Rule on the Development of Political Culture in Nigeria.

As a result of unstable political culture prevalent in Nigeria, Nwankwo (1987:15) has asserted that Nigeria is neither a democratic nor a great country. Nwankwo further states that Nigeria is one of the most disorderly nations in the world, the most corrupt, insensitive and insufficiently placed under the sun. Nwankwo (1987) may be right if viewed from the perspective of the political instability which previously pervaded the Nigeria political system. Some of the changes in the political plain do not either conform or proceed from the rules governing organizational changes as a result of military interventions. That the military has affected the development of the political culture in Nigeria in many ways cannot be over emphasized. Having been independent for over fifty two years ago, and the military longer grip on the ruler ship of the country, it is necessary that the military has impacted much on the country's political culture, as most of the political programmes for civilian rule had been influenced by the military. During the period, the military applied different approaches to the task of nation building from which the democratic political culture was envisaged and the foundation made. Indeed, some of the programmes were short-lived without any thing to offer in terms of pushing the nation towards the direction of developing an indigenous political culture, whereas others such as the military government of Olusegun Obasenjo, Ibrahim Bahangida and Abdusalam Abubakar actually did give the Nigerian people some direction.

Indeed, it is pertinent to note that intermittent military involvement in governance had brought changes and disruptions on the path of democratic development. They made damages to the progress of the Nigerian Nation. Upon assumption of political office, the military had always presented themselves as the much awaited messiah. Based on the above, they go a long way to win the people's mind and support. But very often this same military fall into the same crimes for which they sacked the civilian government.

Military regimes are never democratic. However, even though their policies and programmes appear to be so, it is assumed that they appear so to seek legitimacy which they never had. For instance, the suspension of the constitution, and the promulgation of rush and hasty decrees are quite incompatible with democratic order. Again, under the military, the masses are always coerced instead of coaxed to obey rules or decrees. The military apply rule of men rather than rule of law. In most cases the press is not allowed to exercise freedom in practical terms, while carrying out their duties. The military discourage political education and scares the mass from political participation through the use of decrees and abuse of fundamental human rights, thereby denying the masses the opportunity to partake in resources allocation and values development in Nigeria. These vices were developed by the military in Nigerian politics and passed on to Nigerian political system as a tradition or value system, thereby affecting negatively Nigerian democratic culture.

6. Conclusion

In this study, it has been discovered that the military in the formative years of Nigerian political development had negatively influenced democratic development as a result of their interruptions of Nigeria's political process. In some other way, they have also positively put Nigeria on the part of democratic development having first set up political institutions. Such institutions include formation of political parties, restoration of political campaigns and provision of voters' registration and offices.

Though, looking at the Nigerian experience, one wonders if the military can said to be corrective or redemptive. It cannot be any when the constitution is banned and the rule is by decrees. Military regimes in Nigeria, rather than allowing for a fair playing ground for politicians to test their popularity and acceptance always employ services of their security collaborators to corruptly manipulate the resources of the nation which they are supposed to protect and harness for the benefit of all.

The leaders of military regimes often times are dictators who pay lip service to democracy and democratic processes. Even though they had aided the democratic development, but they did not go far enough to ensure its sustainability. The case of Babangida annulling the election of M.K.O Abiola in June 12, 1993 is a good example. Indeed, the military elites consider themselves unaccountable to the masses and the result is that they continuously deceive the populace, thus making the development of democratic government and culture impracticable.

It has also been seen that the military is grossly incapable of creating a stable political order because of the contradictions in its activities. They jostle for power and stage coups for obvious reasons to engage themselves in the illegal sharing of oil wealth. In other words, the whole intention is to protect their personal interest in the resources of the nation. Therefore, the military in Nigeria cannot said to be impartial arbiters in matters of politics and social change since they clearly ban the constitution in all their activities and they know they have a lot to loose once asked to go back to the barracks.

The military sees political parties as a veritable source of opposition; hence, they do not delay in proscribing them. In this case, one can understand why the military stands out as an obstacle to the attainment of democratic values, beliefs and attitudes which constitute sources of democratic political cultural development in Nigeria.

Therefore, for a sustainable development of a political culture, a civilian government should be replaced by another through constitutional means and not by the military. Otherwise there will be retardation in the political system rather than upward movement. In this case, Nigeria stands out to gain some levels of democratic development, if there is continuity and only if changes can be made through the constitutionally guaranteed electoral processes.

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