



The Security Sector and Conflict Management in Nigeria

Edited by

Isaac Olawale Albert | Benjamin Adeniran Aluko | Olusola O. Isola



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CHAPTER SIX

The Security Sector and Political Participation in Democratic Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

The country's security dynamics are inextricably linked with its national politics (Alao Abiodun, 2000:10).

... there is a danger of security services misinterpreting their mission and acting like a state within the state ... They may hamper democratisation and even increase the likelihood of conflict (Anders B. Johnson and Theodor H. Winkler, 2003).

Broadly speaking, this paper interrogates the nexus between the character of the Nigeria's security sector and the level of political participation in the country. Having said this, it must be clearly stated from the outset that our exposition in this paper is underlie by two complementary assumptions:

- (1) The fact that the security sector, more than any other sector in a nation's life, exemplify the power and might of a modern state; and
- (2) The fact that political participation is one of the basic conditions of functioning democracy.

The centrality of the character of a nation's security sector to our discourse in this paper is emphasised by the fact that whenever we attempt to interrogate the features of a modern state what readily comes to mind and which of course differentiate the state from every other association is that the state is the body that possesses, legally speaking, the monopoly of the instrument of violence. This of course explains why critical values like respect for fundamental human rights and participation in governance and political

processes are largely dependent on the character and nature of a nation's security sector.

Our analysis in this paper is developed in five broad parts: the first section provides a conceptual background to the study. Thus, the key concepts employed such as security sector, political participation and democracy are discussed; the second part contextualises the idea of political participation to the functioning and consolidation of democracy; the third provides an insight into the role the nation's security sector, especially the police, has played in the nation's governance and political processes; the fourth exposes the imperativeness of transforming the Nigeria's security sector to the much required increased citizens participation in the country's political process; and the final section discusses the study's conclusions and recommendations.

Conceptual Framework

As earlier pointed out, the concepts that are central to this study are: security sector, political participation and democracy.

Security Sector

First and foremost, it must be noted that since the third wave of democratisation of the 1990s, the security sector has attracted a great deal of interest especially from scholars in the fields of development, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Consequently, there are almost as many definitions as there are scholars trying to define the 'security sector' from their ideological cum intellectual orientations or perspectives.

Having said this, let us quickly point out that the security sector represents the entire spectrum of security institutions within a state. Broadly speaking, it encompasses all the organisations that have the authority to use, or order the use of, force in order to protect communities, individuals and the state (OECD-DAC, 2005). The United States Institute of Peace, USIP, in one of its publications, 'Peace Terms', edited by Dan Snodderly (2011:47), captures this when it defined the security sector "as those who are, or should be responsible for protecting the state and communities within the state. This includes military, paramilitary, intelligence, border control, and police services as well as those civilian structure responsible for oversight and control of the security forces and for the administration of justice"(USIP,2011:47).

So far, we have given definitions that capture the statutory actors in the security sector. It is germane to point out that following the inability of the statutory actors to effectively tackle the increasing security challenge of the contemporary world, largely due to the dynamics of capitalism, it has become necessary to consider private and non-statutory security actors as part of the *de facto* security sector.

Consequently, a broad and all encompassing definition of the security

sector would include statutory and non-statutory security agencies. In other words, an all-encompassing security sector would be one that includes both the security forces, i.e. police, military and intelligence units etc that are state institutions and are directly under the control of the state and the private security organisations, which are formed by individuals to complement state security agencies.

Let us briefly acknowledge that the contemporary discourse on the security sector is characteristically carried out from two complementary perspectives. Heiner Hanggi in a paper entitled 'Conceptualising Security Sector Reform and Reconstruction' identifies the two perspectives as the 'security perspective' and the 'governance perspective'. The security perspective, according to him, encompasses all those state institutions which are statutorily empowered to be in possession of cohesive instruments such as "the armed forces, the police, the paramilitary forces, the intelligence and secret services, border and customs guards as well judicial and panel institutions". While the governance perspective covers "the authorities responsible for the management and control of the security forces. This includes the executive government, (the relevant ministries of defence and of the interior".

Having said this, let us conclude our exposition on the term 'security sector' by stating very clearly that our analysis in this study is guided by the 'security perspective' of the idea of security sector. In other words, the focus of this paper is what may be called the technical or the professional aspect of the security sector. This aspect refers to the actual employment of instrument of violence by men of the security forces to maintain law and order and promote public peace.

Political Participation

According to Teorell et al. (2007: 336) and Rosenstone and Hansen (2003: 4), political participation represents "every action of ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes: distribution of social goods and norms". Political participation involves activities engaged in by citizens of a state to influence decision-making processes and to determine who controls state power. Verba et al (1995) reiterate this when they state that political participation involves activities directed at influencing government either choosing its cadres or their policies. Broadly speaking, political participation involves activities targeted at influencing the management and control of the state. This includes, among other things, voting, campaigning, taking part in demonstration and making inputs into public policy.

Democracy

It is important to point out at the outset that defining democracy has become very difficult in the light of the fact that the meaning that an individual ascribe to the concept is largely a product of his ideological persuasion or

orientation. A political scientist articulates this when he writes:

But it is a matter of regret that, whereas an almost inexhaustible literature exists on the concept (democracy), there is glaring absence of consensus by scholars on the appropriate delineation of the nation and contours of the term. Such that it is rather difficult to argue for a specific conceptualisation of the term as the proper meaning, since democracy is now generally seen as a term with many meanings (Olaitan, 1992: 424).

However, there is the need for democracy to be defined in this study to facilitate our understanding of the central argument of this work. Having said this, what, then is democracy? Let us begin our conceptualisation of 'democracy' by exposing its etymological meaning. The concept, democracy is a combination of two Greek words – '*demos*' and '*kratia*' which means rule of the people or power in the hands of the people. In a nutshell, democracy is a governance system where the sovereign state power lies with the people. Osaghae (1992:41) captures this very brilliantly when he writes: "in spite of the differences in conceptualisation, and practices, all versions of democracy share one fundamental objectives: how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to the people".

The centrality of the wishes of the people to the whole idea of democracy was articulated by a former U.S. president who defined "democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people" (Abraham Lincoln, cited in Larry Diamond, 1988). The kernel of Osaghae and Lincoln's conceptualisation is that democracy is a system of governance that encapsulates the rule of the people or power in the hands of the people in the management and control of the state.

Having said that the essence of the idea of democracy is the "rule of the people", it is necessary to point out that full participation of all in the governance process is impossible. In view of this reality, the question that looms large is: how do you then realise the essence of democracy – the rule of the people? The truth of the matter is that the size of the contemporary polity has made it practically impossible to have all adult citizens to be directly involved in the governance process. Following this, what we have today is what is known as representative democracy. Phillippe C. Schmitter and Terry L. Karl acknowledge the representative nature of modern democracy when they defined democracy as:

a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives (cited in Kunle Amuwo, 1992: 7).

From the above, we can say that democracy is a governance system that thrives on the dialogue between the rulers (those elected by the people) and

the ruled. In other words, democracy as a governance model is relationship based. That is relationship between the mass of the people and the rulers who exercise power on behalf of the people. The relationship between the rulers and the ruled is said to manifest the essence of democracy when the wishes of the people are supreme and represent the guiding principles of the leadership. The supremacy of the wish of the people and the realisation of the essence of democracy is represented in the two complementary principles or pillars of democracy – the principle of popular participation and the principle of public accountability.

CONTEXTUALISING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRACY

Let us start by stating that the two principles of democracy – participation and accountability – seek to achieve one central objective. And the objective is to make the people sovereign in the management and control of the affairs of the state. It is germane to point out at this juncture that the realisation of the essence of the two principles – which is rule of the people – is a function of the quality of people's participation in the political – cum governance processes. The point that is emphasised here is that the level of people's participation in the political process determines the level of accountability of the leadership. Put differently, if the leadership were to be accountable, then the generality of the citizenry must effectively participate in the political process.

Noam Chomsky (1991:12) underlines the centrality of people's participation to the functioning of democracy when he opines: "a society is democratic in so far as the public can play a meaningful role in managing their own affairs." In fact, the importance of the participation of the citizens in the political process to democratic governance system cannot be over-emphasised. Olu-Owolabi (1999: 8) succinctly expresses this when he states: "Participation as a process permeates the entire life of a democratic community". As a matter of fact, a society is said to be democratic when every person who is a citizen (adult) a country, irrespective of socio-economic pedigree, religious affiliation and ethnic background is free to participate in the process of governance.

Consequent to the primacy of the participation of the citizens to the whole idea of democracy, there are democratic principles and ethos that underline the practice of democracy. These principles and ethos are meant to facilitate and engender the realisation of the essence of democracy. Some of these principles or features are: free press, independence of the judiciary, rule of law, dynamic and robust civil society, credible and independent electoral body; respect for fundamental human rights, etc.

Having given a background to the importance of citizens' participation to the functioning of democracy, it is important to provide an answer to the question: Why do people participate in politics? First and foremost, we need

to acknowledge that this question recognises that there are social characteristics, political attitudes and socio-cultural and environmental conditions that are seen as predispositions of political participation. In other words, the contextual characteristics of a society largely determines the participation of the citizens in the governance process. Katerina Vráblíková in a dissertation research proposal entitled: 'Contextual Determinants of Political Participation in the EU Countries', reiterates the importance of contextual characteristics of a society to the participation of the citizens in the governance process when she opines that beyond the individual characteristics, which propels individuals to participate in politics, the setting of the national political opportunity structure in a given country is a critical factor to peoples participation in politics.

In our exposition on why people participate in politics, it is equally important to point out that individual's socio-economic interests and pedigree have implications for political participation. In a socio-political environment, broadly speaking, there are two groups of people – the political cum business élite and the mass of the people. These groups are motivated to participate in politics by a number of reasons. In political science literature, there are five models explaining why people participate in politics. These models are the civic voluntarism model, the rational model, the social – psychological model, the mobilisation model, and the general incentives model. The general incentives model states that people need incentives to participate in politics. If the elections are free and fair and conducted in a secure environment.

But, generally, the involvement of the mass of the people in the political cum governance processes is influenced by what is known in the social movement literature as the concept of political opportunity structures (POS). According to Tarrow (1998: 76-77) political opportunities can be defined as “‘consistent’ but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provides incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure”. The general incentives model whose essence is that actors need incentives to they participate in politics is conterminous with the concept of political opportunities structures.

The point that is being emphasised here is that the generality of the people are motivated to participate in the governance cum political processes by the nature of the political environment. The question that looms large now is: Who determines or shapes the political environment? There is no doubt that the political environment is largely shaped by the configuration of the political class. But, it must be pointed out that the configuration of the political class is itself shaped by the character of the security sector, especially in Africa where the driving force for engaging in politics is largely self seeking. A security sector that is committed to the rule of law and safety of every member of the society affects the workings of every segment of the society, including

the political class, who provide the leadership for the state. It goes without saying that if elections are free, fair and credible and conducted in a safe and secure environment, certainly these would motivate people to participate in politics.

Let us conclude this segment of the paper by stating very clearly that the level of participation of the citizens in politics is very critical to the functioning of democracy. Where there is involvement of the generality of the people in a nation's politics, though the decision-making process may be slow, the interest of the generality of the people is most likely to be served as opposed to where a negligible number of the citizens are involved in the political process. In fact, effective citizen participation in politics is a *sine qua non* to the enthronement and flourishing of a democratic society.

THE NIGERIA'S SECURITY SECTOR IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Nigerian security sector is a by-product of the nation's political history. It is a reflection of the nation's constitutional making and amendment processes. Indeed, security sector management has been a key issue in Nigeria since the country gained its independence from Britain on 1 October, 1960. Alao Abiodun, (2000: 9).

Having said this, it must be pointed out from the outset that our discussion of the historical evolution of the Nigeria's security sector will be carried in two phases – the pre-1999 era and the post-1999 era. The pre-1999 era, represents the period before the enthronement of the current democratic governance. Though during this period, we had a number of attempts at democratising the governance system – 1960-1966, 1979-1983, and of course the Babangida ill-fated attempts which was terminated with the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections, the period was largely dominated by the military. While the post-1999 refers to the fledging democratic process ongoing in Nigeria.

Characteristically, the military era in Nigeria was marked by violation of fundamental human rights of the citizens, lack of respect for the wishes and aspirations of the people and oppression of the citizenry, which got to its apogee under the Abacha government. Those of course are defining features of a typical military administration. Consequently, we had in the country a security sector that was rabidly committed to the security of the government in power (regime security) to the detriment of the mass of the people.

Under the military regimes, the security sector in Nigeria can be likened to what was the case under the colonial masters. The nation's security sector under the colonial masters was an instrument of oppression of the mass of the people. In fact, the security sector under the various military administrations was an off-shoot of the colonial administration. Unfortunately, the character of the security sector did not change much even during the civilian

administrations that the nation had during the period under review.

The argument that is being advanced here is that the Nigeria's security sector both during military authoritarianism and during the civilian administrations which came up before 1999, was completely committed to the security of the administration in power rather than the security of the mass of the Nigerian people. A scholar captures this in his assessment of the role of the Nigeria Police during elections when he writes:

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) has never been neutral in politics. During the First Republic (1960-1966), officers were willing agents in efforts to destroy opposition to the ruling party. Elections turned unto full scale wars, with the police helping to tie the hands of opponents – not always figuratively: opposition candidates sometimes disappeared until the polls had been closed. During the Second Republic (1979-1983), the activities of the police convinced many ordinary Nigerians that the majority of officers belong to the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). A number of state police commissioners saw themselves as alternative governors, particularly in areas not controlled by the NPN, and tried to determine the political future of these region (Alao Abiodun, 2000: 31).

An analysis of Alao Abiodun's comment on the character of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) during the First Republic and during the Shagari government in the Second Republic reveal that the Nigerian Police Force, a critical arm in the nation's security sector, was largely an instrument of oppression and intimidation in the hands of the ruling class. In fact, there was the case of a man in Ilesa, now in Osun State of Nigeria, previously in old Oyo State, that was beaten blue and black during the 1983 election by the then much dreaded men of the Mobile Force for his open support for Obafemi Awolowo's Unity Party of Nigeria. The report that we had was that following this very bitter experience, the man did not only withdraw from participation in politics, he put his children under oath not to venture into politics.

It is interesting to note that the Nigeria's security sector has not witnessed a remarkable transformation in the post-1999 era even with the enthronement of democratic civilian government. Though, the Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) made a lot of efforts in the transformation of the military and perhaps the police force and the intelligence units of the security sector, the performance of the Police Force during the 2003 general elections left much to be desired. During the elections, the Nigerian Police Force was used by the Peoples Democratic Party led government to rig the elections and intimidate those that were opposed to the administration. In the same vein, the men of the Oyo State police command indirectly supported the members of the Oyo State chapter of the National Union of Road Transport Workers to cause mayhem in the state so much so that the leadership of this union became a law unto itself. The police were always turning blind eye to the union's

lawlessness and brigandage because of its support for the then PDP led government in the state.

The implication of the partisan nature of the Nigerian Police Force in particular and the nation's security sector in general is that a lot of would be participants in the governance cum political process were discouraged from exercising their political rights. There is no doubt, people would be encouraged to participate in politics not only in Nigeria but elsewhere when the security sector is efficient and effective in terms of providing a secure and safe environment and a level playing ground for people to express their preferences and interests. In fact, the nexus between a safe and secure environment to increased participation of the citizens in politics was clearly demonstrated in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria that was better organised in terms of security compared to previous elections in the country.

TRANSFORMING NIGERIA'S SECURITY SECTOR FOR IMPROVED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In the light of the fact that many Nigerians today are not participating in the political process because of the insecurity of life, which largely is as a result of the ineffectiveness of the nation's security sector and the lack of respect for the rule of law that characterise the operations of the nation's security sector, it is imperative that Nigeria's security sector be transformed to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness if the level of citizen's participation in the political process were to be considerably improved.

Thus, the question that looms large now is: how do we transform the Nigeria's security sector to be an instrument for improved citizen's participation in the government cum political processes?

Let us begin by stating that our response to this question will be discussed from two perspectives. One of these relates to the need for the Nigeria's security forces, most especially, the Police to embrace the principles of the rule of law in its operation. This dimension will address the endemic culture of loyalty to the government in power rather than the much required commitment to the nation's constitution and the rule of law. Transforming the Nigeria's security sector, especially the police, to one that respects the rule of law in its operation and activities entails putting in place a comprehensive programme targeted at educating the people that constitute the Nigeria's security sector with a view to making them imbibe the culture of due process, civility and respect for fundamental human rights in their operations.

Furthermore, the respect for the rule of law by men including women in the security forces would not only promote law and order in the society, it would certainly address the culture of impunity that characterise the operation of the security forces in Nigeria. The truth of the matter is that when people are convinced that the security agencies are committed to implementing the rules of engagement in the political process without fear or favour, the

generality of the people are encouraged to participate in politics. Quite a sizeable percentage of Nigerians are discouraged from participation in the nation's political process because of the reality of the partiality of the security forces and its unholy and rabid commitment to the administration in power rather than to rule of law and fairness and equity in their operations.

Let us at this juncture emphasise the fact that the importance of a security sector that is committed to the rule of law and due process in its operations and activities cannot be over-emphasised. In fact, there is so much of corruption in the Nigeria's body polity because the security sector, especially the police that is supposed to be at the fore front in the fight against corruption is itself a facilitator in the looting of the nation's resources by the politicians. More often than not, criminal activities perpetrated by the leadership of the ruling party or those in government are often treated with kid gloves.

Consequent to this, the nation's resources that are supposed to be managed to improve the socio-economic conditions of the generality of the people are converted into private use by the politicians. The corollary to this is that the state is incapacitated from promoting the realisation of her essence as agent for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the people. This, of course, exacerbates the disdain of the generality of the people for the civic public realm, where issues about the state and politics are discussed.

The second approach to the transformation of Nigeria's security sector is to overhaul the nation's entire security sector with a view to riding it of criminal elements and to conscientiously reinvigorate the intelligence gathering unit with a view to making the security forces proactive in the prevention of crimes, most especially, the violent genre that has come to define the nation's political process. The truth of the matter is that all the major political parties in the country have what is technically referred to as the militant wing. The militant wing of these parties, as it were, are the political thugs who are often deployed during electioneering campaigns and on the day of elections to unleash mayhem and prevent the electorates from freely exercising their rights. All these they do perfect the rigging of elections.

The corollary to this is that the people rather than risking their lives for what they have concluded will only benefit the political class simply turn their backs on the process of voting, which is a critical indicator of participation in politics.

The point that is being advanced here is that the Nigeria's security sector needs to strengthen its capacity and expertise with a view to be operating at a cutting hedge when it comes to the issue of providing safety and security for the people. The reality is that the insecurity that define the Nigerian state today is a disincentive to the much required participation of the citizenry in the governance cum political processes. It goes without saying that people are more disposed to participation in politics when the political environment is conducive, more importantly, when there is a safe and secure environment

for people to freely express themselves at no cost.

In-addition, towards re-positioning the Nigeria's security sector for efficiency and effectiveness in the promotion of safe and secure environment there is also the need to conscientiously promote inter-agency collaboration and cooperation. More often than not, the Nigerian's security agencies, i.e. SSS, Police DMI etc work at cross purposes. There are instances where the information provided by a sister agency are ignored simply because of unhealthy rivalry on going between the concern organisations. A purpose driven, strong and security sector is an imperative for the enthronement of safe and secure environment where the citizenry can freely exercise their political rights and become meaningful and effective stakeholders in the nation's political process.

CONCLUSION

We admit that the transformation of the Nigeria's security sector to one that is efficient, effective and respects the rule of law is not the only panacea to the low level of political participation in the country. However, the character of a nation's security sector has serious implications in all ramifications. Its character impacts on every segment of the society-politics, economic, generation of bridging social capital and even religious harmony. The level of efficiency and effectiveness of a nation's security sector has direct relationship with the level of citizen participation in the governance cum political process. Without mincing words, when there is a secure and safe environment coupled with utmost respect for the rule of law, the generality of the people are motivated to engage in dialogue and socio-political interactions necessary for the promotion of increased and robust participation of the citizenry in the governance cum political process.

We want to reiterate, even as we conclude this paper that the political opportunities structures (POS) required to promote participation of the citizenry of the politics of the country is a function of the character of the nation's security sector. A transformed Nigeria's security sector that is committed to upholding the rule of law holds the key to the enthronement of a conducive political environment that is germane to the achievement of increased citizens participation in the politics of the country. At this juncture, it must be pointed out that the fate of the nation's fledging democratic process will be largely determined by the level of citizens participation in politics.

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The Security Sector and Conflict Management in Nigeria presents the opportunity to reflect on both the conference held from 14 to 16 August, 2012, and the enduring values of the problematic issues that presenters, contributors and attendees tackled in those exciting three days.

Globally, we have witnessed a groundswell of opinions calling for a rethink of the role of the security sector in conflict management. Far from ordinarily functioning as custodians of peace, security and public order, security agencies everywhere in the world can be, have been, and have continued to be fomenters of conflict and violence.

The aim of our conference, however, was not the easy one of demonising security agencies. As evidenced in the papers collected in this volume, attendees and contributors were more concerned with coming to terms with the conditions and contradictions that characterise the functionality of security agencies in the peculiar context of Nigerian society.

It is hoped that the analyses and critiques contained in this volume will draw attention to the need for constant and vigilant intellectual engagement with the problems of peace and security in Nigeria.

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