

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Democracy has been an acceptable platform of interaction in the committee of nations. It is also the most widely acceptable system of governance. Essentially, the birth of democracy in Nigeria has endured for over a decade, but the democratization process in Nigeria suffers from several security issues, given that the citizens have been exposed to high levels of insurgency, poverty and unemployment. Social and economic insecurity has being a major setback to democratic governance in Nigeria and this has impaired the participation of the citizens in democratic governance, thereby leaving governance for a privilege few. This paper examines the linkage between social and economic insecurity and the participation of Nigeria citizens in democratic governance. The researchers adopted a public opinion questionnaire based on experts' judgment; and using the Cronbach alpha formulae; internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. The data collected was analyzed using the one sample t-test, with hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance. Findings indicate that social and economic insecurity negatively impact on democratic participation; given that the fear of violent attack, poverty, absence of the dividend and unequal distribution wealth reduce democratic participation. Recommendations are made that politicians should be obliged by law to fulfill the promises made during campaigns or before elected into offices. Government should create an enabling environment to address issues of poverty, unemployment, corruption among governing class and insurgency, so that security for life and property will be assured.*

KEYWORDS: Democratic Participation, Socio-Economic, Insecurity, Security, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Democracy implies that all voices are being heard. According to the renowned former American President-Abraham Lincoln, democracy can be representative or participatory (Igwe, 2010). Therefore participating in governance is not just being attentive in politics (that is, watching news, discussing politics with friends etc.), but doing politics. People can be involve in democratic participation in different ways including voting, working in and contributing to electoral campaigns and organizations, contacting government officials and attending protests, marches, or demonstrations (Hix, 2005; Ogundiya, 2010; Arowolo & Aluko, 2012). In addition, are working informally with others to solve some community problems, serving without pay on local elected and appointed boards, being active politically through the intermediation of voluntary associations and contributing money to political causes in response to mail solicitations are other means of democratic participation (Emeka, 2015). Moreover, democratic participation establishes a social contract between the citizens and the representatives; hence, patriotism can be expected from citizens when everyone takes an active participation in the government of society (Idris, 2013). Democracy is a veritable tool for national integration, socio-economic cohesion and all other developmental indicators. It ensures the well-being of its citizenry by eliminating insurgency, poverty and unemployment (Hix, 2005; Ojo, Aworawo & Ifedayo, 2014). This is because people with low income, job

seekers and those displaced by insurgence are less interested and active in participating in governance than those above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and the working population (Martin & Christian, 2014).

In the global village, democracy is fast spreading due to its ability to provide basic requirements for good governance, to ensure security of its citizenry (Idris, 2013). Since, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the New World Order, there has been a significant renaissance interest on democracy (Okpata & Nwali, 2013). This development has brought an end to the struggle for supremacy as to which system of government is best due to hegemonic emergence of liberal democracy as the predominant human government. It is because of the role which democracy plays in development and modernization that global citizens are clamoring for its enthronement as the best system of governance that can move a society forward (Igwe, 2010; Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). However, this has not been the case as many of the citizenry are yet to experience and enjoy the dividend of democracy in Nigeria.

Given the democratic dispensation in Nigeria, the issue of security has remained topical and indeed constituted a serious course for concern to well meaning individuals in the country. In recent times, security has emerged as a key concept in Nigeria's struggle for good governance, sustainable democracy and development (Omoyibo & Akpomera, 2012; Emeka, 2015). Everyone expected that the return of Nigeria to democratic rule will bring about development-socially and economically; on the contrary Nigeria is still left behind in this sphere of human development. This has left many people still in doubts on whether development is achievable under the present democratic dispensation due to growing terrorism, kidnapping, crime rate, poverty, corruption and unemployment (Idris, 2013). It can be argued that the efforts to build a virile democracy in a heterogeneous culture with fear of political domination and perceived insecurity, social injustice and neglect of the principles of the rule of law have resulted to several unrests, frustrations, deep seated hatred, insinuations and killings which indeed culminated to the current security challenges (Joseph, 2013; Ojo et al, 2014). Hence, this has significantly affected the participation of citizens in democratic governance to a large extent.

Okpata and Nwali (2013, p. 173) assert that "political struggles among the political class, politics of rancor and bitterness, ethnic based politics and intimidation of opposition groups, the use of state apparatus to undermine others are the major source of insecurity in Nigerian state." Over the years this has led to various terrorist tendencies in the country, as it is witnessed in many parts of Nigeria (Omoyibo & Akpomera, 2012) via: Niger Delta militias, Boko Haram insurgencies in the North, and kidnappings in all parts of the country, spate of bombing and killing of innocent souls without recourse to the protection of human life, poverty and unemployment without any plan to enhance the welfare of the citizens ((Okpata & Nwali, 2013; Joseph, 2013).

Researches across varying contexts recognized that poverty appears to be the major underlying threats to security in Nigeria (Ajakaiye, 2002; Hix, 2005; Jega, 2007; Joseph, 2013; Martin & Christian, 2014; Ojo et al., 2014). The prevalent abject poverty and deprivation is condition that has been considered a great impediment to democratic participation in Nigeria. Nearly, 112.519 million Nigerians live on less than One US dollar a day (Premium Times, 2015). Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released a report showing that the percentage of Nigerians living in absolute poverty had increased nation-wide from 61-67% between 2010 and 2014 and this made Nigeria the third among countries with the highest population of extreme poor or people with abject poverty in the world (NBS and World Bank as cited in Premium Times, 2015).

According to Emeka (2015), Boko Haram has waged a violent campaign for a separate Islamic homeland in the Northeast, which has seen more than 20,000 deaths since 2009 and also unemployment cases has worsen as 1.3m lost jobs in second quarter of 2015. The fact that many societies have experienced an erosion of order and government disintegration under the pressures of violent conflict and internal war poses some intractable obstacles or challenges to the institutionalization of democracy and human security (Cavin & Robin, 2003; Ewetan & Aluko, 2012). Despite successive attempts by Nigerian government to address the canker worm through public policy alternatives such as regional and state mechanisms, federal character principle, inter alia, the security problem still remains a thorny issue in the country and has taken a staggering dimension (Joseph, 2013). Claude as cited in Joseph (2013) identified four characters of the Nigerian state that have disabled it from effective response to the security issues. These are the coercive nature of the state because it has been an exploitative state. Secondly, the Nigerian state is quite indifferent to social welfare, thirdly, the state has an image of a hostile coercive force, as a result of its colonial origin as exacerbated by its post-colonial abuses; and fourthly, it lack of autonomy.

It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to highlight the human rights violation; unjust and inequitable distribution of national resources including political posts, poor investments, social-economic hardship, unemployment, hunger, starvation that serve as insecurity measures that could significantly affect citizens' participation in democratic participation.

Statement of Problem

Democracy is a government of the people by the people and for the people. According to the renowned former American President- Abraham Lincoln, democracy can be representative or participatory (Igwe, 2010). Democracy therefore involves the participation in the process of governance, equality among citizens, sovereignty of the people, promotion and protection of human rights and essential freedoms, supremacy of the rule of law, and separation of powers between the three arms of government (Malam, 2009). Emphatically, true democracy does not regard some persons as citizens and others as slaves; everyone is equal before the law and everyone has equal opportunity, be they male or female, rich or poor, members of the elite class or the masses, minority or majority (Danjibo as cited in Joseph, 2013). Unfortunately these components of democratic system of governance is lacking in Nigeria form of democracy.

Based on the characteristics of a democratic government highlighted above, when this become eliminated from democratic practice of a nation the citizenry of that nation become disappointed, frustrated and above all diminish their participation in democracy rule. In a situation where citizens are not given the opportunity to enjoying the dividend of democracy after sacrificing their time, energy and even resources to peaceful and fair election yet they are marginalized, victimized, oppressed and discriminated against by the leaders they vote/elect in power (Idris, 2013; Ogundiya, 2010). As a result the unpleasant experience that electorate have experience over time impaired the level of participation in democratic governance. Oftentimes, the youth in Nigeria take it upon them to ensure that a particular person emerge as a president, governor, local government chair etc, with the view that when he/she finally emerge winner will care for their welfare but at the end they are marginalized or neglected in the scheme of things (Igwe, 2010). Also look at a situation where most members of a community abandoned their farms, business and other means of their livelihood to campaign and vote for an aspirant with the hope that he/she will bring the dividend of democracy to their community (Joseph, 2013). However, when some aspirants assume office they only concentrate in the development of their personal interest and that of their relatives at the expense of community members.

Currently, in Nigeria the appointment of citizen into public offices has been lopsided where the Northerners are getting more appointment than people from other geopolitical zone. These are some of the many factors that have hindered democratic participation. Consequently, because the social and economic lives of the citizenry are not secured after active political participation and when it is time for them to be actively involve again (Arowolo & Aluko, 2012; Ewetan & Urhie 2014). The questions that they often ask are: Will they remember me when in power? Is it going to put food on my table? Is it going to give me job? Will they employ my children by the time they enter office? Will they pay my pension? These and some other questions are what citizens ask when they are expected to participate in democratic governance. The inadequate security of life and property due to insurgency, worsen poverty, rising unemployment rate and lack of social welfare services to enhance the social functioning of the citizens in Nigeria motivates this study. The problem is now highlighted in the hypotheses below:

Hypotheses

1. The fear of violent attack does not significantly reduce the level of Nigeria citizens in democratic participation.
2. Poverty does not significantly hinder democratic participation.
3. The absence of the dividend of democracy does not significantly affect democratic participation in Nigeria
4. Unequal distribution of the wealth of the Nigeria Nation will not significantly affect Nigerians democratic participation.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to ascertain whether insurgency such as fear of violent attack, militancy, kidnapping and demand for ransom; poverty; unemployment; the absence of the divided of democracy; unequal distribution of the resources of the nation and unequal opportunities affects democratic participation in Nigeria politics. The findings of this study will be beneficial to policy makers and politicians in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises of all eligible voters in Benin City, Nigeria. Using simple random sampling technique, a sample of seven hundred and twenty was selected. The instrument used for data collection is a twenty item questionnaire, adopting the five point Likert format with options ranging from strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was content validated by three experts, a social worker; a sociologist and a political scientist, and then the comments and suggestions made by them were adapted in the final copy of the questionnaire. In order to determine the reliability of questionnaire it was administered to thirty eligible voters who are not to form a part of the sample of study. The data collected was analyzed using the Cronbach alpha formulae; a coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. The questionnaire was thereafter administered to the selected sample by the researchers and other trained research assistants.

The data collected was analyzed using the one sample t-test, with hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

The data calculated was significantly analyzed and results presented below to test the stated hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1

The fear of violent attack does not significantly reduce Nigeria citizens' democratic participation.

Table 1: One sample t-test of fears of violent attack on democratic participation

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Test Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Fear of violence	371	16.65	3.48	15.00	9.141	.000

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

Table 1 shows a calculated t value of 9.141 and a p value of .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the p value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that "the fear of violent attack do not significantly reduce Nigeria citizens' democratic participation" is rejected. Consequently, the fear of violent attack significantly reduces the level of Nigeria citizens' democratic participation.

Hypothesis 2

Poverty does not significantly hinder Nigeria citizens' democratic participation.

Table 2: One sample t-test of poverty on democratic participation

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Test Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Fear of violence	371	18.23	3.48	15.00	17.873	.000

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

Table 2 shows a calculated t value of 17.873 and a p value of .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the p value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that "poverty does not significantly hinder Nigeria citizens' democratic participation" is rejected. Consequently, poverty significantly hinders Nigeria citizens' democratic participation.

Hypothesis 3

The absence of the dividend of democracy does not significantly affect democratic participation in Nigeria.

Table 3: One sample t-test of dividend of democracy on democratic participation

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Test Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Fear of violence	371	16.16	4.27	15.00	5.247	.000

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

Table 3 shows a calculated t value of 5.247 and a p value of .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the p value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that “the absence of the dividend of democracy does not significantly affect democratic participation in Nigeria” is rejected. Consequently, the absence of the dividend of democracy does significantly affect democratic participation in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 4

Unequal distribution of the wealth of the Nigeria nation will not significantly affect Nigerians democratic participation.

Table 4: One sample t-test of unequal distribution of the wealth on democratic participation

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Test Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Fear of violence	371	16.15	3.65	15.00	6.091	.000

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 4 shows a calculated t value of 6.091 and a p value of .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the p value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that “unequal distribution of the wealth of the Nigeria Nation will not significantly affect Nigerians democratic participation” is rejected. Consequently, unequal distribution of the wealth of the Nigeria Nation significantly affects Nigerians democratic participation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study revealed that fear of violent attack reduces Nigerian citizens’ democratic participation. These research findings are in agreement with the findings of Joseph (2013) and Ojo et al. (2014) that security challenges to a large extent significantly affect the democratic participation of citizens in democratic governance. This is also in consonance with the studies that confirm that traced intimidation of opposition groups brew violence, which hinders political participation (Okpata & Nwali, 2013; Arowoo & Aluko, 2014). This study also found out that poverty limits political participation. This is in congruence with the findings of Idris (2013) and Ewetan and Urhie (2014) that poverty and unemployment hinders political participation, since the process is expensive and the poor can only aspire to elective positions, if sponsored by a wealthy individual. Ajakaiye (2002) and Jega (2007) are in agreement that poverty is a reason why most citizens can not actively participate in some aspects of the democratic process such as viewing for political positions.

Moreover, it is concluded in this study that political participation are reduced due to poor dividends of democracy and unequal distribution of wealth in the Nigerian context. Ogundiya (2010) and Martin and Christian (2014) confirm that lack of faith in government due to its inability to provide solutions to the problems confronting the society, such as poor infrastructure and unemployment make the citizens unmotivated to participate in democratic governance. As a consequence, Hix (2005) in his work corroborates that non participation in democratic process in the Nigerian context can be closely linked to citizens dissatisfaction with the government in ability to provide for the well being of the citizenry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study revealed that fear of violent attack, poverty, absence of the dividends of democracy and unequal distribution of wealth reduces participation of the citizens of Nigeria in the democratic process. Governance, which is the complete task of organizing, synthesizing, coordinating and directing the working part of government, if effective, could help to positively promote meaningful democratic participation in the Nigerian context. It has been clearly demonstrated that governance is a collaborative effort between the governing class and the governed. It is also worthy to note that the way in which the welfare and affairs of the governed are managed depends on the credibility of the people in power.

From the findings of this research, the Nigerian government should adequately fund and set up monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the security agencies are able to handle cases of political violence and also take deliberate steps to stop the proliferation of fire arms. Although democracy is still new in Nigeria, it is expected that her citizen should benefit from the available dividend. Given the democratic administration in Nigeria, it is evident that only the privileged few benefit, leaving behind so many others, which may expose the Nigerian nation to serious insecurity challenges. However, for democratic participation to be completely restored and achieved in Nigeria, poverty, unemployment, corruption among governing class and insurgency, should be totally eradicated so that security for life and property will be assured. Secondly, employment opportunities should be created either in the private or public sectors and government should create an enabling environment for foreign investors and for self-employment in order to subdue the menace of unemployment and poverty. Finally politicians should be compelled by law to fulfill the promises made during campaigns or before elected into offices.

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