

Challenges and Prospects of National Security, Legitimacy, and Democratic Sustenance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges of national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustenance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which are critical aspects of governance that affect the stability of democratic countries. Utilizing a desk research method, the paper gathers and contently analyzes secondary materials, including academic journals, case reports, published textbooks, and online sources, employing the failed states theory as the explanatory framework. The research identifies key challenges affecting Nigeria's democratic sustainability, such as inherited colonial security orientation, Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen clashes, banditry, ethnicity, separatist agitations, underdevelopment, and electoral malpractices. Based on these findings, the paper recommends a comprehensive review of the national security apparatus, emphasizing people's welfare through good governance, public enlightenment on the values of democracy, and the importance of supporting and protecting democratic institutions. This study contributes to understanding the complex interplay between national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustenance in the context of Nigeria and offers potential solutions for addressing these challenges.

Keywords

national security; legitimacy; democratic sustenance; Nigeria; failed states theory

Introduction

In today's global landscape, modern governments are increasingly characterized by their commitment to democratic practices, which empower citizens with electoral power regardless of their socio-political and economic backgrounds ([Canovan, 1999](#); [Cobb & Elder, 1971](#); [Held & McGrew, 1993](#); [Newton, 1997](#)). National security and legitimacy have emerged as crucial aspects of government policies and programs aimed at enhancing democratic sustainability ([Kagwanja & Southall, 2009](#); [Oyekanmi, Adebajo, & Adenuga, 2022](#)). National security, in particular, has become an enduring cornerstone for states as they strive to meet the needs of their people, safeguard their values, and protect against internal and external threats ([Paleri, 2008](#)).

Political legitimacy is essential to representative governments, as it reflects the people's recognition and acceptance of political authority and leadership ([Blühdorn, 2007](#); [Eglene, Dawes, & Schneider, 2007](#)). Democratic sustainability, meanwhile, involves the preservation of democratic gains and the strengthening of democratic institutions, as well as fostering widespread participation in decision-making processes ([Oyekanmi et al., 2022](#)). The United States has consistently championed these principles and practices, inspiring other countries to adopt democratic systems regardless of their specific contexts and levels of accountability.

Governance in the 21st century has evolved to prioritize popular mandates, democratic values such as justice, peaceful coexistence, and fairness, and the state's responsibility to protect and provide for its

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citizens ([Oyekanmi & Moliki, 2021](#)). Consequently, governments must demonstrate their commitment to national security and legitimacy to maintain power and sustain their democratic systems.

Nigeria's democratic journey reflects this global trend, with its post-independence history marked by military rule, ethno-tribal politics, and efforts to strengthen national security and legitimacy ([Ebeh, 2015](#); [Onapajo & Babalola, 2020](#); [Philip C. Aka, 2009](#)). However, Nigeria's democracy faces significant challenges due to persistent insecurity, including Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and widespread poverty ([Hassan, 2014](#); [Ighoshemu & Ogidiagba, 2022](#); [Ojo, 2020](#)). These issues have fueled mistrust in political leadership and triggered a crisis of legitimacy, threatening the very foundation of Nigeria's democratic system ([Amuwo, 2017](#)).

This article seeks to identify the challenges of national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustenance in Nigeria, examining the interplay between these concepts and their implications for the sustainability of Nigerian democracy. Additionally, the paper aims to propose pragmatic solutions to address the multifaceted challenges posed by insecurity, eroding public legitimacy, and the threatened democracy of Nigeria's fourth republic. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on democratic sustainability, while offering valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders committed to fostering democratic values in Nigeria and beyond.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data gathered from a comprehensive review of academic journals, case reports, published textbooks, online sources, and other printed media materials. The selected information was systematically reviewed and analyzed by the researcher ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014](#)). This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of the trajectory and challenges of national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustenance in Nigeria, drawing on the wealth of available materials on the subject matter.

The decision to rely on secondary sources of data was informed by the researcher's awareness of the extensive materials available in this area, which provide valuable insights into the research topic. By employing a qualitative analysis of secondary data, this study aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Nigeria's democracy and to propose evidence-based solutions to address these issues, ultimately contributing to the ongoing discourse on democratic sustainability in Nigeria and beyond.

Results and Discussion

Fragility of the Nigerian State

The reality is that the existence of national security, legitimacy, and democratic sustainability is rooted in the context of the state and that measuring these key political concepts cannot be effectively done in isolation from the State. Hence, the State failure theory is found suitable to espouse the challenges of sustaining Nigeria's democracy. Although, there have been interchangeable usage of fragile states or collapsed states by other scholars; they have all ended up with some conclusions. Failed states theory was developed by the Fund for Peace Organization (FFP) as a product of many conflict assessment frameworks to explain the state's vulnerability to failure in its statutory responsibilities. The theory was further expanded and adopted by ([Kaplan, 2008](#); [Moliki & Oyekanmi, 2020](#); [Rotberg, 2003](#)).

Generally, the state is a service provider for the enjoyment of the citizens. These services cover the protection of the collective values of the whole population, dignity of life and properties, provision of social welfare, and critical infrastructures. These are postulated roles of the state by the failed state theory. [Rotberg \(2003\)](#) in his expository parameters of failed states, argued that failed states are overwhelmed by internal violence, performance failure in governance, loss of legitimacy in the hearts of the public, and weakness of key institutions of the state. [Erman \(2020\)](#) also stressed that when a great number of the state's political elites and society are opposed to rules regulating power accumulation and distribution of wealth, the state has already wallowed into failure. In sum, the ability of the state to secure the people and the territory, operationalization of rule of law, a higher degree of citizens' political

participation, affordable quality education, and healthcare delivery determine the successes or failure of the state. Failure of the state in these areas is a precursor to violence ([Woodward, 2017](#)).

In truism to Nigeria's experience, the country has manifested all the signs of a failed state. It is unarguably the truth that the country's national security has remained threatened by the unending war of Boko-Haram insurgency that has claimed many lives of her security men, and separatist agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra and Yoruba's nation's town crier have altogether exposed the low capacity of the Nigerian state in the performance of protective functions. This has metamorphosed into a varying crisis of legitimacy, with the people losing trust in the government, of having the right to the continued leadership of the state and providing for their welfare.

Consequently, ensuing civil unrest, protest and flagrant disobedience of the state laws and institutional directives have all manifested as Nigerians' response to the fragility of the Nigerian State. Osaghae (2010) describes Nigeria as a fragile state characterized by social injustice, weak institutions, threatened legitimacy, break-away agitations, and commitment to ethnic interests above national values. One of the drawbacks of the failed state theory is the failure to empirically measure the state performance index that would determine the success or failure of the state in the key responsibilities of the state stated. This is because there cannot be a uniform performance rating of a state in all the critical areas, knowing that some states may not succeed in their protective responsibility and succeed in the provision of essential public services. Do we now categorize such a state as a failure?

The theory also failed to explain the expected roles of the citizens, stakeholders, and other non-state actors to prevent the state from collapsing and to assist the state to succeed in its expected roles. The state or government is a service provider and the people are the beneficiaries of such services or otherwise. Hence, the theory failed to properly situate the expected collaborative efforts of other stakeholders in the evaluation of the stage performances.

Problems of Nigeria's National Security, Legitimacy, and Democratic

The foundation of Nigeria's national security problem is inherent in the dysfunctional nature of the security architecture it received from the British colonialists before its 1960 independence. The perception of national security in this era was on the capacity of the state to build military hardware and other instruments to force people into compliance with the colonial government. Hence, this national security orientation was inherited by the post-colonial Nigerian leaders. Consequently, the Nigerian state governs with the assumption that its citizens are recalcitrant and criminally minded. Thus, the government focuses on ensuring citizens' obedience, while leaving the critical needs of the citizens neglected. According to [Meagher \(2012\)](#), Nigeria's national security challenges are the product of internal contradictions caused by the failure of the government to prioritize developmental policies and good governance as they committed to the state control on the monopoly of violence. Going forward, challenges of Nigeria's national security are herein situated into two levels of analysis:

Security Challenges

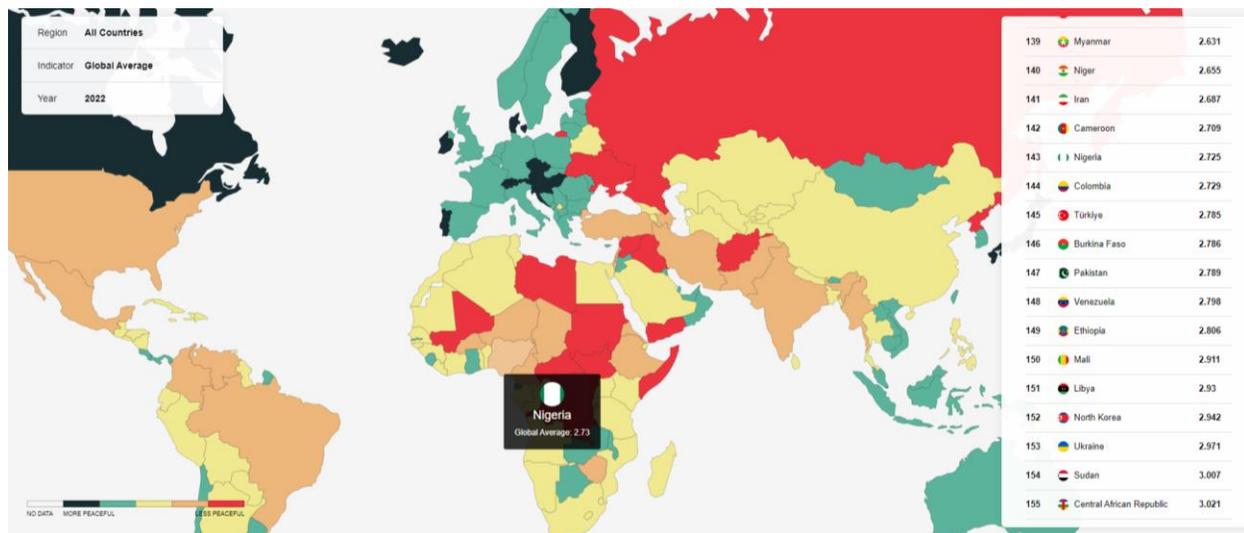
Security challenges are factors or events that are responsible for the ongoing insecurity across Nigeria. These include the Boko-Haram insurgency, the bloody activities of the arrests of Fulani herdsmen, the rise of militia groups, religious crises, and separatist agitation such as IPOB and others. Given the many lives lost and property destroyed due to insecurity, the [Institute for Economics and Peace \(2022\)](#) ranks Nigeria as the 3rd most insecure country in the world after Afghanistan. However, in 2022 this condition will improve slightly. Nigeria occupies the 143rd position out of 163 countries (see Figure 1).

Despite fiscal commitments to strengthen capacity based security agencies and Southwest Regional Security Network lunches such as Amotekun and Egbuegbu in the East, Nigeria's national security appears to be overwhelmed by this ongoing crisis. A case to remember is the Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom urging the people of his state to stockpile weapons in self-defence. Nevertheless, the security challenges in Nigeria remain significant, and the government must continue to make significant efforts to address them.

The case of Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State urging people to stockpile weapons in self-defence is

a clear indication of the failure of the Nigerian government to provide adequate security for its citizens. This situation is further complicated by the fact that some elements within the security agencies are complicit in the ongoing insecurity, as evidenced by their failure to take appropriate actions against the perpetrators of violent crimes.

Figure 1. 2022 Global Peace Index



Source: [Institute for Economics and Peace \(2022\)](#)

Security challenges facing Nigeria are complex and multifaceted, requiring a concerted effort from the government and all stakeholders to address them effectively. It is essential to tackle the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, while also ensuring that the security agencies are adequately equipped and motivated to carry out their duties effectively. Failure to do so will continue to result in the loss of lives and property destruction, and Nigeria will remain a highly insecure country.

Socio-economic Challenges

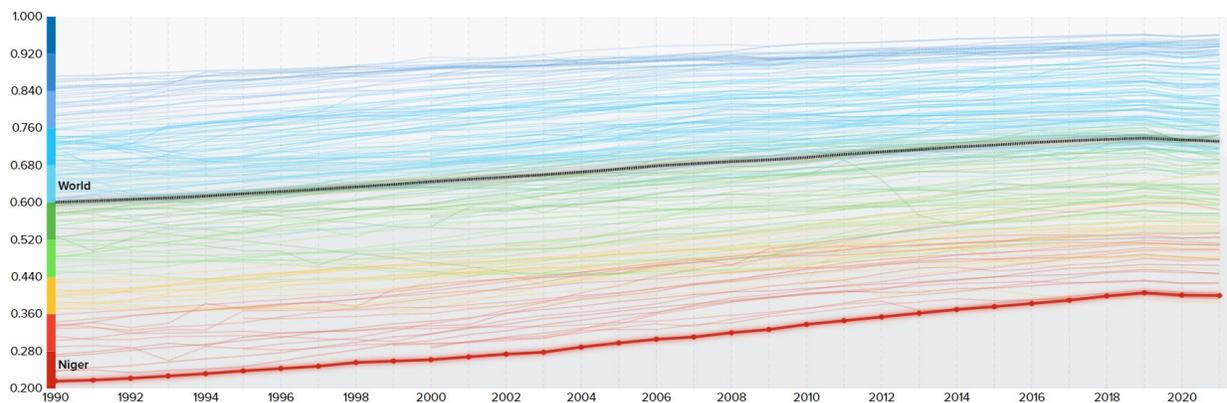
The complex web of socio-economic challenges that undermine national security and legitimacy in Nigeria is inextricably linked to pervasive poverty, policies that do not prioritize the welfare of the people, and the failure of state institutions to deliver essential services to the citizenry. [Adebajo & Oyekanmi \(2020\)](#) maintain that to regain and solidify the trust of the population, the government must prioritize good governance, infrastructural development, and the implementation of poverty alleviation programs that span all regions, encompassing both urban and rural communities. Such efforts would bolster the government's authority and legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

Regrettably, instead of the expected improvements, poverty levels in Nigeria have continued to soar, with corruption becoming an even more deeply entrenched aspect of the country's socio-economic and cultural fabric. This development has fueled increasing resentment towards the affluent and political elites among the economically disadvantaged, giving rise to a significant uptick in money laundering activities. This widening gap between the haves and have-nots exacerbates social tensions, heightening the risk of instability and unrest.

Furthermore, the persistent lack of access to basic amenities and opportunities has left many Nigerians disillusioned with the government and its institutions. The erosion of public trust in governance has resulted in a growing sense of alienation and frustration, which in turn emboldens criminal elements and fosters an environment conducive to lawlessness and violence. As citizens become more desperate, they are more likely to resort to illegal means to survive and protect themselves, further undermining the state's authority and legitimacy.

In light of these challenges, it becomes increasingly vital for the Nigerian government to take urgent and comprehensive action to address the root causes of poverty, inequality, and corruption. By strengthening state institutions, promoting transparency, and fostering inclusive development, the government can begin to rebuild public trust, restore its legitimacy, and ensure the long-term stability and progress of the nation.

Figure 2. Human Development Index



Source: [United Nations Development Programme \(2021\)](#)

The 2022 Human Development Index ranked Nigeria 163rd out of 191 countries worldwide, highlighting the endemic poverty, corruption, and underdevelopment plaguing the nation ([United Nations Development Programme, 2021](#)). This alarming situation has undoubtedly tarnished the legitimacy of the Nigerian state, as citizens increasingly seek alternative means of self-protection and economic prosperity. Consequently, established rules and regulations of the state are often disregarded, due process is compromised, and electoral processes are violated in the desperate pursuit of political power. As a result, democratic institutions and the principles of democratic engagement have become targets for both group and individual attacks. [Okoye \(2016\)](#) warns that, unless urgent solutions are implemented to address the subversion and manipulation of democratic institutions such as electoral laws, the Independent National Electoral Commission, and the state's failure to meet public aspirations, the risk of civil insurrection and a return to military rule could threaten the collapse of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Conclusion

The reason d'état of the State is to guarantee the security of the lives and properties of the people. This includes policies of government to protect citizens from psychological stress, fear, and economic deprivation. These fundamental responsibilities also revolve around the effectiveness of the state to drive economic plans and provide critical services such as infrastructure, employment opportunity and protect national values. The wholesome of these are the undercurrent issues of national security. Going forward, the paper concludes that legitimacy is marked by the respect and loyalty of the people to the state constituted authorities and political system in operation. In effect, the performance rating of the government in her national security issues and the strength of the state legitimacy determine the capacity and survival of the political institutions.

In the case of Nigeria, national security challenges such as ethnocentric politics, dastard insecurity driven by Boko- Haram, Fulani herdsmen, banditry, and separatist agitations have been identified as red-flag issues against national cohesion and peaceful life for all. Hence, many Nigerians have lost trust in the capacity of the state to fulfil their dreams and offer essential services. This has created a general zero-sum approach to personal survival and economic prosperity that has led to weakening the democratic institutions through electoral violence, corruption, and disregard for rule of law. Thus, the gains of Nigeria's democracy from military incursion and popular support for the state may not survive if the

challenges noted are not addressed. In sum, no nation can claim to be democratic or preserve democratic institutions and the ethos of people-oriented government unless it has succeeded to offer adequate protection for the people and provide for their needs through good governance. The clear conclusion herein is that democracy is not a mere political dictum, it must reflect good governance and continued support of the people.

Shift Nigeria's approach to national security from a focus on violence and military force to developmental policies and programs aimed at eradicating poverty and providing essential services. Base national security apparatus decisions, including recruitment and appointments, on meritocracy, competence, and professionalism, rather than ethnocentric politics. Promote public renaissance and mass literacy on the importance of respecting democratic values and institutions, emphasizing active citizen participation in decision-making. Review and amend electoral laws to ensure political parties operate on strong democratic ideologies, including internal democracy and healthy opposition. Recognize that although democracy is not perfect, its values, promises, and people-centered approach make it worthy of protection and appreciation by citizens and non-state actors.

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