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The Military Factor in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for Future Democracy

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Abstract

This study examines the significant involvement of the military in Nigeria's democracy, focusing on its implications for democratic consolidation and stability. The Fourth Republic in Nigeria continues to witness profound military participation in democratic governance. Although there is a constitutional provision empowering the military to protect the nation's territorial integrity against external aggression and to suppress internal insurrection, when necessary, Nigeria's democratic experience has seen the military addressing civil matters that fall under the jurisdiction of the police and other paramilitary security forces. In many instances, the military has become a tool for executive officials who have used it to perpetuate undemocratic practices. The Odi and Zaki-Biam incidents, the imposition of emergency rule in certain states, the suspension of elected officials, the deployment of military personnel for election duties, the suppression of peaceful protests, and the enforcement of orders are all clear examples of impunity and military overreach. This study is based on qualitative research methods and draws from secondary sources, mainly published academic literature. The core of our argument is that Nigeria's democracy is a consequence of prolonged military rule, which has ingrained a culture of impunity and despotism into the societal fabric, thereby undermining democratic institutions. While the military has continued to assume a messianic role in stabilizing democracy, the institution has ironically been the architect of the country's democratic failures. Hence, military's deep involvement will continue to pose a significant threat to democratic stability and consolidation.

Keywords: Military, Democracy, Institutions, Human Rights, Governance.

Introduction

The military has been a major player in the politics and governance of most African States since the 1960s. The continent's past political history is incomplete without the frequent military coups, which were a conduit for seizing power, culminating in the establishment of military regimes in various nations. Buttressing this, Adams & Shuaibu (2024) noted that the military as a security institution has historically wielded considerable influence over governance structures in numerous African countries, even after the return to civil rule.

In Nigeria's political history, military's overwhelming influence on governance and political structure cannot be underplayed, having stayed in power for almost 3 decades before returning power to civil rule in 1999. It is important to note that the character of the military administration in Nigeria emphasized centralized power, authoritarian rule, martial law and decree system. It is

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also safe to argue that the long years of military administration influenced the people's socio-political culture, which began to be apparent in the country's Fourth Republic. According to Ehwarieme (2011), the arrogant nature of the Nigerian military as a social organisation has been transferred to the governance structure of the Nigerian State. Building on this assertion, Onwutuebe (2022) noted that the prolonged period of military governance has led to the adoption of military culture in the current democratic system.

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria commenced in 1999, marking the military's disengagement from politics. Nonetheless, the military has sustained its significant role in the country's political landscape, therefore, frequently obscuring the boundaries between civilian and military authority. Although the military's role in politics ostensibly ended, the Constitution still provides for military involvement in maintaining internal security when necessary. Section 217 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) specifically outlines the roles and responsibilities of the military, comprising the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The primary duties of the military include defending Nigeria against external aggression, maintaining her territorial integrity, and securing her borders from violation on land, sea, or air (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as Amended in 2011). Additionally, the military is tasked with suppressing insurrection and assisting civil authorities in restoring order when called upon by the President, subject to conditions prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly. Furthermore, the military may perform other functions as specified by an Act of the National Assembly.

However, beyond the constitutional roles, the military's deep involvement in civil-related matters has raised serious concerns about the implications of this phenomenon on the country's democratic governance. This phenomenon posed a significant challenge to the Fourth Republic, highlighting the complex interplay between military influence and democratic governance. As Nigeria continues to navigate the challenges of democratic consolidation, it is essential to interrogate the military factors that have influenced Nigeria's Fourth Republic with a view to unearthing how the military factors impacted the country's democratic governance and institutions, and what are the implications of these military factors for Nigeria's future democratic governance and stability.

A vast array of literature exists on the theme of military intervention in Nigerian politics, with several of them focusing on various aspects such as the collapse of civilian rule, frequent coups d'etat, patterns of military administration, the transition from military to democratic rule, and the military's role in securitizing Nigeria's democracy. These works, no doubt, offer a profound understanding of significant military roles in Nigeria's political history, as well as valuable insights into the gradual militarisation of Nigerian society. Building on this foundation, this study aims to investigate the implications of continuous military involvement in civil-related matters within a democratic framework. By examining the complex relationships between the military and civilian institutions, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges therein Nigeria's democratic landscape.

This study is divided into seven (7) sections. Following the introduction, section two provides a deep insight into the tortuous journey to the fourth republic, while section three examines the hurdles before the democratic government. Section four discusses the impact of military rule on democratic governance in the Fourth Republic, section five interrogates the manifestation of military character and authoritarianism in Nigeria's democracy, section six provides an insight into the military's critical roles in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and section seven

analyses the military in civil affairs and the implications for democratic consolidations, while section eight concludes.

Tortuous Journey to the Fourth Republic

According to Eyinla (2000), Nigeria's path to democracy in 1999 was tumultuous. The assertion was majorly hinged on the endless military transition programmes, which eventually came to fruition in 1999. This assertion was corroborated by Ogbonnaya et al. (2012) and Matfess (2016) while marking out the fundamental roots of the fourth republic's democratic challenges. The journey to the fourth republic would not be adequately understood without recourse to the unending democratic transition of the military regimes under General Babangida and Abacha. Specifically, the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election and General Sani Abacha's subsequent return to power were pivotal events that severely undermined Nigeria's progress toward democratization, dashing the country's hopes for democratic rule. Nigerians resented Abacha's regime, demanding the installation of Chief MKO Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the June 12 election. Abiola's declaration of himself as President led to his arrest and detention in 1994. Despite a glimmer of hope for smooth democratic transitions in other African countries, Abacha's attempt to extend his rule faced fierce opposition from pro-democracy activists, including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the Pan-Yoruba group, Afenifere. These groups suffered persecution, forcing some into exile and others into detention.

To boost his popularity, General Abacha's initial agenda was surprisingly vague about setting a timeline for the military's withdrawal from politics. However, he did inaugurate a constitutional conference, which was a strategic move to appease pro-democracy groups that had long advocated for a National Conference (Obioha, 2016). Abacha's introduction of a new transition programme was met with disappointment, particularly from those who had expected him to hand over power to Chief MKO Abiola, the widely recognized winner of the presidential election. Despite his efforts to garner public support for his coup, Abacha struggled to overcome the widespread disillusionment that followed the collapse of the previous transition project, which had cost an estimated N30 billion (Suberu, 1997).

The formation of five (5) political parties, namely, the Committee for National Consensus (CNC), United Nigeria People's Convention (UNPC), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), and Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM) and elections into constituent assemblies marked a surprising turn of events. Ironically, all the five (5) parties endorsed General Abacha as their presidential candidate, exposing his intentions to retain power. Chief Bola Ige, one-time Governor of Oyo State and Minister of Justice, described these parties as "the five leprosy hands," highlighting their compromised nature (Stephen Kola-Balogun, 2002). The transition programme under Abacha's regime was shrouded in suspicion, and this drew widespread criticism from pro-democracy activists and civil society organizations. This led to severe repression, including censorship of newspapers, sealing of media houses, proscription of labour unions, and many other actions which targeted the pro-democracy. Abacha's response to the pro-democracy opposition took the form of state-sponsored terrorism, assassination and killing of members of these groups, however, many of them went on self-exile to escape persecution and death. (Amuwo, 2001). Many journalists, labour leaders, student leaders, politicians, and pro-democracy activists were arrested and detained. By March 1998, when Pope John Paul II visited Nigeria, Abacha's government held over a thousand political prisoners in various Nigerian prisons, highlighting the regime's repressive nature (Ogbondah, 2000). This is outside those who have fled the country, seeking self-exile to evade arrest or

The tumultuous years of General Abacha's transition programme came to an end with his death, marking the termination of his attempts to retain power and thwart Nigeria's return to a democratically elected civilian government. Until June 1998, when General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over as Head of State, the transition programme had been marred by schemes aimed at self-perpetuation. In contrast, General Abubakar's transition plan, which lasted less than a year in power, paved the way for a smooth democratic transition in Nigeria. This made some sections of the Nigerian society adjudge him, to be honest and determined to transfer power to democratically elected civilians, a move that was initially met with skepticism by many Nigerians. He freed all the political detainees, released guidelines for the transition programme, and on February 27, 1999, General Abubakar made good on his promise by conducting a presidential election without controversy (Obi, 2000). Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired military general and one-time head of state, won the presidential election under the platform of the Peoples' Democratic Party. This milestone marked the end of his military regime and the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999.

Hurdles Before the Democratic Government

The return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 was met with widespread jubilation and enthusiasm, marking a significant milestone after years of struggling against authoritarian military regimes. In the late 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, democracy gained widespread acceptance globally, not only due to its popularity but also because of its inherent virtues. These virtues, which include respect for human rights and freedoms, self-government, accountability, the rule of law, and transparency, have earned democracy legitimacy and moral authority as a form of governance. This legitimacy stems from the belief that democratic governments derive their power from the people, ensuring that authority is exercised in a way that aligns with the public's expectations and constitutional norms.

Nigerians' triumph over military rule was largely facilitated by the global shift towards liberal democracy, a phenomenon coined by Huntington (1991) as "the third wave of democratization". This wave was characterized by intense internal and international pressure to adopt democracy as a universal governance framework, ultimately paving the way for Nigeria's transition to democratic rule. With the dawn of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, hopes were high that the country would finally shed its militarized past and embrace liberal values. The public expected that the return to democratic governance would restore the freedoms lost under previous regimes, marking a significant turning point in Nigeria's history. However, these aspirations have been increasingly dashed as crises fueled by lingering militarization tendencies have marred the democratic process. According to Ibrahim & Garuba (2008) and Animashaun & Borisade (2021), the underlying power dynamics in Nigeria have remained largely unchanged since independence, with the primary outcome being merely a change in leadership.

While some Nigerians were skeptical about the survival of the country's democracy, others were optimistic, holding high hopes for the future. The skepticism stemmed from Nigeria's prolonged period of military rule and the unexpected rise of Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military leader, to the presidency as a democrat. President Olusegun Obasanjo, upon assumption of office, declared his commitment to tackle Nigeria's deep-seated problems, which include over-centralization, lack of transparency, lack of economic diversification, corruption, lack of human security, human rights abuses, and ineffective leadership. All of these were mostly inherited from the past military regimes. Aside from the above deep-seated problems facing the new

government, many Nigerians viewed the military as a major obstacle to the country's fledgling democracy, hence the clamour for good governance and the professionalization of the military to prevent future interventions. In response, President Obasanjo took a bold step by retiring a large number of military personnel who had held various appointments since 1976, a move aimed at curbing the military's influence in politics (Eyinla, 2001).

Another burning issue arising from the military past regimes was injustice and abuse of human rights. Ajayi and Oyedokun (2024) catalogued arrays of injustices and human rights abuses meted on individuals and groups during the Babangida and Abacha administrations. Immediately after the inauguration of the democratic government in 1999, Obasanjo's administration was committed to addressing past injustices of the military administrations as a crucial step toward building a strong and healthy nation. To achieve this, the regime established the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC), also known as the "Oputa panel," which was modeled after South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC) was mandated to investigate human rights abuses that occurred from January 15, 1966, onwards, with a particular focus on ascertaining whether these abuses resulted from deliberate state policies or actions (Umukoro, 2012; Olusegun, 2020). This initiative aimed to provide a comprehensive account of Nigeria's troubled past and pave the way for reconciliation and healing. The HRVIC hearings facilitated a highly charged national debate over democracy and government accountability.

The early years of President Obasanjo's administration were confronted with ethnonationalism, religious fundamentalism and militarism, culminating in rising civil strife. For instance, several ethnic militias such as the Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Egbesu Boys of the Ijaw in the Niger Delta, the Ijaw National Congress (INC), and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Arewa Consultative Forum, the Middle Belt Forum, among others ethnic militias sprang up to entrench themselves in the body polity of the country, creating a sphere of influence for themselves among their ethnic groups (Ajisebowo and Onoyemeakpo, 2021). Alongside the emergence of ethnonationalism, there was the politicisation of Islam with the introduction of Islamic law, also known as Sharia, in some core Northern states of Nigeria. Salawu (2010) argued vehemently that the rise of ethnonationalism and the politicisation of Islam significantly undermined the government's efforts to promote national integration, ultimately hindering the democratisation process and political development in Nigeria. This toxic mix of ethnic and religious tensions inevitably led to a surge in devastating ethno-religious conflicts. Sadly, within the few years of democratic experience in Nigeria, the country was plagued by several ethnoreligious conflicts, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives and the destruction of billions of Naira worth of property (Salawu, 2010). The escalating civil unrest and disturbances prompted the invitation of the military to intervene and restore order, thereby marking the inception of military involvement in the country's democratic affairs. Since then, the military has become an indispensable feature of democratic governance in every aspect.

Impact of Military Rule on Democratic Governance in the Fourth Republic

Africa has a history of frequent military interventions and authoritarian governments; these have resulted in practices that contradict democratic principles. Animashaun and Borisade (2021) noted that these interventions have impeded democratic progress in the continent. In Nigeria, the numerous coups and counter-coups and decades of military rule have significantly impacted Nigeria's political and governance structures.

Francis and Wilfred (2012) offered profound insights into the effects of military rule on Nigeria's democracy, highlighting that the country's democratic system is undermined by values and norms that inherently contradict the principles of democratic governance. This highlights the significant challenges facing Nigeria's democracy, which has struggled to establish a strong foundation since it transitioned from military rule in 1999. Politicians often adopt a militaristic approach, treating the democratic space as a battleground. This mindset perpetuates a culture of warfare, leading to a governance structure that contradicts democratic principles. According to Francis & Wilfred (2012), the legacy of military governance in Nigeria has instilled a culture of immediacy, where decisions are made without deliberation or consultation in many instances. This approach has rendered the rule of law ineffective, leading to administrative rule by decree, social chaos, and a breakdown in social cohesion. This gave rise to the current prevalence of impunity, gangsterism, and militarism in Nigeria's political landscape. In the avowal of Oladipo (2017), military rule in Nigeria solidified the notion of "might is right" as the foundation of governance. This enabled rulers to justify their actions through force alone, disregarding the views and opinions of the populace. Consequently, this approach has had a lasting impact on Nigeria's political landscape, cultivating a culture of authoritarianism and disregard for democratic principles.

Also, the decades of military rule have weakened the country's sense of nation-building and democratic ideals. The culture of impunity and the lack of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, which characterized military rule, have persisted in Nigeria's democratic dispensation. Consequently, the return of Nigeria to democracy provided ample opportunity and space for the expression of suppressed ethnic demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule. In doing this, the State is perceived as unable to guarantee their safety, thereby forming alternative organizations to protect their people (Ajisebowo and Onoyemeakpo, 2021). Addressing the challenge, the people resorted to self-help by forming ethnic militias, which have exploited the military's failure at civil governance. A series of events in Nigeria since 1999 reveals that Nigeria is home to numerous ethnic militias who pursue ethnic nationalism vigorously, and as such, these militias have created a sphere of influence among their respective ethnic groups, often with devastating consequences for national unity and security.

Another area where military rule has affected democratic governance in Nigeria is the inability to conduct credible elections. The country's electoral history has been marred by violence reminiscent of the military era. Each election cycle, from 1999 to 2003, 2007 to 2011, and 2015 to 2019, and the last one held in 2023, has been characterized by brutality, arson, and human carnage (Jega, 2015; Onuoha, et al, 2020; Eguegu & Iwara, 2023). This culture of violence is a clear legacy of military rule, which continues to undermine democracy in Nigeria. The political class and their loyalists have largely relied on brutal force and political intolerance to achieve their objectives. This has led to a pervasive culture of violence and intimidation, which threatens the very foundations of democracy in Nigeria. The country's civil space remains largely militarized, and a democratic culture is yet to take hold. The consequences of this culture of violence are far-reaching. It has led to a breakdown in social cohesion, erosion of trust in institutions, and a general sense of insecurity among citizens.

Also, Ogundiya (2010) noted that the lengthened years of military rule had an overwhelming impact on Nigeria's social fabric, promoting moral decadence and disregard for social norms. This led to a culture of violence, normalizing the use of force and repression in governance and undermining democracy and human rights. The legacy of military rule continues to influence Nigerian politics, where moral values and social norms are often disregarded.

Political actors frequently employ immoral and illegal means, fostering a culture of impunity and disregard for democratic principles. The prolonged military rule in Nigeria has severely weakened key institutions, including the police, the judiciary, and the Department of State Services (DSS). These institutions were exploited as instruments of terror and have lost every sense of professionalism rather than serving their intended purposes. Oladipo (2017) captures the historical challenges of the police to include underfunding, poor remuneration, capacity issues, shortage of personnel, inadequate training, lack of equipment and tools, corruption, among others, and by implication, the challenges have continued to weaken the police.

While assessing the democratic anomaly since 1999, Bako (2008) posits that Nigeria's democratic polity exists in name, its essence is complex and often repudiates the fundamental principles of democracy, including the rule of law, democratic institutions, and values. In essence, Nigeria's democratic government has inherited some of the authoritarian tendencies of its military predecessors, including the suppression of political freedoms and civil rights. This has resulted in a system of governance that is more akin to authoritarianism than democracy.

Manifestation of Military Character and Authoritarianism in Nigeria's Democracy

The military is only essential in a democratic state when it safeguards democracy, maintains neutrality through an act of professionalism subordinate to civilian authority, and adheres to the rule of law. However, all these have been difficult because of the long years of military rule, which have had a devastating impact on professionalism, operational effectiveness, and accountability within the Nigerian military. Drawing a similar experience from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Muhammad (2014) contends that weak political institutions, vested interests in the military, the legacy of the British army, and political corruption are primary causes of military involvement in politics.

In addition, the decades of military rule in Nigeria have had a profound impact on the country's democratic government, rendering it a semblance of despotic rule. The manifestation of authoritarianism in democracy is the deployment of the military into civil-related matters that democratic institutions would have handled, thereby resulting in human rights abuse. It is appalling to note that since Nigeria transitioned to democracy in 1999, civilian authorities have consistently deployed the armed forces to quell civil and political unrest without restraint. A notable example is the deployment of troops to Odi community in the Niger Delta. On November 20, 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo made a decision that would become one of the worst human rights violations in Nigeria's history. This decision was in response to the alleged kidnapping and killing of 12 policemen by irate youths, the federal government declared a state of emergency in Bayelsa State. The military invasion of the Odi community resulted in significant loss of life, destruction of properties, and displacement of residents (Umukoro, 2012). Many surviving community members were taken to military barracks as prisoners of war. The Odi community was left in ruins, with only a trickle of residents remaining. Similarly, in 2001, the perennial Tiv-Jukun crisis further exacerbated Nigeria's human rights crisis, with the Nigerian army's invasion of Gbeji, Zaki-Biam, and surrounding Tiv villages resulting in over 200 civilian deaths and hundreds more wounded or mutilated. Interrogating the nature of human rights violations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Umukoro (2012) argued that the Odi and Gbeji-Zaki Biam incidences along with numerous other human rights violations a product of long the military rule which has implanted violence and impunity into the fabric of the society. Even though Nigerians and the international community condemned these atrocities, the people had to live with wounds.

The Nigerian government's handling of civil matters has been marred by authoritarianism and undemocratic tendencies, as exemplified by the use of the military to disperse Shiites' protests in Zaria, Kaduna and Abuja. Also, there was military enforcement of COVID-19 lockdown directives, which is typically a police responsibility. During the pandemic, following the police inadequacies, military personnel were deployed to some urban centres, particularly in Lagos, Kaduna and Kano, to enforce sit-at-home orders. Furthermore, the #EndSARS protests in October 2020 highlighted the government's heavy-handed approach to civil dissent. The Nigerian military's use of live ammunition against peaceful protesters in Lagos resulted in the reported deaths of at least 15 people (Abati, 2020). The EndSARS incident has left a lasting impact on young Nigerians, who continue to reel from the shock and aftermath of the government's response. All these raised concerns about the militarization of civil affairs.

Another manifestation of Nigeria's military and authoritarian tendencies in Nigeria's democratic governance was the declaration of a state of emergency in certain states plagued by political impasses, ethno-religious conflicts and the rise of the armed non-state actors. In May 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo announced a six-month state of emergency in Plateau State in response to escalating ethno-religious violence, which resulted in widespread killings and destruction. The governor and state assembly were suspended, and Major General Chris Alli (retd.) was appointed administrator to restore order. A similar scenario unfolded in Ekiti State in October 2006, when a leadership crisis prompted Obasanjo to impose emergency rule. The crisis was sparked by the contentious impeachment of Governor Ayo Fayose, which plunged the state into chaos. Brigadier General Adetunji Olurin (retd.) was appointed administrator until the situation stabilized. In May 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa amid the escalating Boko Haram insurgency. This time, the latter type of emergency rule was dissimilar from the former as it did not involve the suspension of governors and state assemblies. The federal government swiftly deployed additional troops and imposed curfews to curb insurgent activities. The justification of emergency rule is contained in Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution, which empowers the President to declare a state of emergency under strictly defined conditions. Such conditions include the proclamation must be formally published in the government gazette and transmitted to the National Assembly for approval. Furthermore, a two-thirds majority vote by the National Assembly is required to validate the declaration. This ensures a system of checks and balances, preventing potential abuse of executive powers. However, the way and manner the emergency rule was declared under President Obasanjo's administration pointed to the authoritarian tendencies of a democratic President who employed a military style of governance.

The involvement of armed forces personnel in election duties has become a visible aspect of military presence in Nigeria's democratic governance. This trend began in 2014 during the Ekiti State gubernatorial election and has continued until the 2023 general elections (Onuoha et al., 2020; Aliyu et al., 2024). The deployment of armed forces personnel for election duties has however sparked criticism, with many labeling it as the "militarization of elections." While reviewing military involvement in Nigeria's electoral process, Momoh (2022) noted that the deployment of soldiers in elections without any insurrection is a blatant disregard for democratic principles and constitutional democracy. This assertion is reinforced by reports of soldiers' misconduct during the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Specifically, it was reported that overzealous soldiers stormed INEC collation centers across the country, forcibly dispersing accredited party agents, election monitors, and journalists (Eguegu and Iwara, 2023). The obvious interference by soldiers was corroborated by both local and international election

observers, who noted that the military's excesses contributed to the outbreak of violence that resulted in a loss of lives during the elections (Essien, 2017). Rather than alleviating security concerns, this approach has contributed to widespread political apathy among citizens. Aliyu (2024) noted that since the introduction of the military in election matters, many electorates have refused to participate in the off-cycle gubernatorial elections in states like Ekiti, Kogi, Imo, Ondo, Anambra, and Bayelsa, largely due to the heavy mobilization of armed forces personnel for election duties.

The military's significant influence on the country's political affairs persists, despite the nation's democratic status. This phenomenon is attributed to the fact that Nigeria has been led by either former military personnel or individuals with ties to the military. Consequently, the military's involvement in internal security operations has raised concerns about the blurring lines between military and civilian roles, as well as the potential for human rights abuses. The Fourth Republic of Nigeria has had five executive presidents from 1999 to 2025, namely General Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, General Muhammadu Buhari, and Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu. Two of these leaders, General Olusegun Obasanjo and General Muhammadu Buhari, are ex-military personnel. There was insinuation that their military background has influenced their approach to governance, and they have been criticized for retaining authoritarian tendencies due to their military training. Leaning on this, President Obasanjo's handling of the Odi and Zaki-Biam crises reflects his military background. His approach to addressing the ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State and the political stalemate in Ekiti State, which led to a state of emergency, also bears the hallmarks of his military training. Similarly, President Muhammadu Buhari's increased deployment of military forces during elections, as well as his handling of Shiite and pro-Biafra protests, demonstrates the influence of his military background on his decision-making.

Another significant factor contributing to the military's continuous involvement in internal and civilian issues is the inadequacy of the Nigeria Police Force. Poor funding, inadequate equipment, and insufficient training have hindered the police force's ability to tackle internal security challenges, prompting civilian authorities to rely heavily on the military's expertise. As such, the Nigerian military has assumed the role of first-line defence against internal security threats, a position that rightfully belongs to the police. This has led to blurring lines between military and civilian roles, sparking concerns about human rights abuses and the erosion of democratic institutions.

Military's Critical Roles in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Despite the negative impact of military rule on Nigeria, which causes democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic to be bumpy, the role of the Nigerian military cannot be overstated. One could argue that the military institution has shown considerable loyalty and subordination to democratically elected civilian administrations by adhering to their professional code as the entity responsible for protecting the state during periods of violent conflict. Furthermore, while transitioning power to a democratically elected government, the institution implicitly pledged support for the success of democratic governance. Quoting from Ughulu and Ihaza (2023), General Victor Malu, then Chief of Army Staff, at the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, acknowledged the strain on military-civilian relationships due to the military's past involvement in politics. He expressed optimism that the new democratic era would foster a healthy environment for citizens' development, allowing the army to assume its rightful role in facilitating a secure and peaceful atmosphere conducive to nascent democracy growth. In

addition, the supreme law of the land, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, clearly outlines the duties of the military, comprising the Army, Navy, and Air Force, in Section 217. Their primary responsibilities include defending Nigeria against external aggression, maintaining territorial integrity, securing borders, suppressing insurrection, and aiding civil authorities in restoring order, subject to conditions prescribed by the National Assembly (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The Constitution also empowers the President to deploy federal forces to address domestic disturbances that threaten the rights of individuals or groups in specific areas, particularly if these disturbances pose a threat to national security (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The implication is that the military is permitted, under the presidential directive, to assist civil authorities in maintaining law and order.

The constitutional provision has provided a basis for military intervention in maintaining peace and order, particularly in quelling riots, demonstrations, terrorism, and other security threats to Nigeria as a State. Since the era of President Olusegun Obasanjo to the present administration of President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, the military has employed kinetic warfare tactics against non-state actors involved in armed violence, including ethno-religious crises, youth restlessness, Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflict, banditry, kidnapping, secession agitation in the Southeast, etc. Considering the country's complex and multifaceted security challenges, the military has undertaken numerous Internal Security Operations (ISOs) in at least 32 states (Aiao et al., 2023). The Nigerian military has recorded significant successes in the fight against multifaceted security challenges. Notably, the military has made substantial gains against Boko Haram, reclaiming territories, liberating communities and substantial numbers of internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes. In the Niger Delta region, crude oil production was at its lowest ebb before the deployment of the military against militancy, youth restiveness, kidnapping of oil expatriates, and oil pipeline vandalism. For example, in 2006, Nigeria was losing 300,000 barrels per day. However, the combination of amnesty efforts and military operations in the Niger Delta since 2009 has significantly reduced militancy and oil pipeline vandalism, contributing to improved national security and stability.

It is also noteworthy to state that the military has successfully contained separatist movements, Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), in the Southeast part of Nigeria. Through Operation Crocodile Smile and Python Dance, many arsonists and 'unknown gunmen' have been arrested and are facing trials, while some attacks have been repelled. Likewise, the military has made strides in combating banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder clashes and armed violence, which have become a daily occurrence in every part of Nigeria. For instance, since 2014, the Nigerian military has launched 7 different Internal Security Operations (ISOs) against the infamous banditry in the Northwest of Nigeria (Aina, Ojo & Oyewole, 2023). The same effort was also replicated in the North-Central and Southwestern parts of the country to mitigate specifically farmer-herder clashes and kidnapping. This has yielded fruitful results as several of the armed non-state actors perpetuating violence have been apprehended and some abductees have been rescued.

Although security challenges remain a pressing concern, Nigerians have greater confidence in the military's capacity to tackle the country's diverse and intricate security problems.

Military in Civil Affairs and Implications on Democratic Consolidations

The deep-seated involvement of the military in democratic affairs across Africa poses significant threats to the consolidation and expansion of democracy, primarily due to the pervasive

influences of militarism and militarization. Adams and Shuaibu (2024), while citing Flores-Maciás and Zarkin (2019) and Magaloni (2020), contend that the consolidation and expansion of democracy are under threat from militarism and militarization. This phenomenon is of particular concern as it undermines the very foundations of democratic governance and the rule of law. The intersection of military power and democratic institutions has been a longstanding challenge in Africa, with many countries struggling to establish clear boundaries between the two. As a result, the prospects for democratic consolidation and expansion remain uncertain, with the specter of militarism and militarization looming large over the continent. Military personnel are trained for warfare and often struggle to comprehend civilian methods of administration and coexistence. According to Ogunmade (2019), the primary reason for the military's response pattern is that their strategies and tactics are ill-suited for the operations they are typically tasked with, unlike civil authorities, who receive specialized training for law enforcement.

Nigeria's military has developed a messianic complex in responding to internal crises, spookily reminiscent of the country's past military rule. This phenomenon has led to the military's emergence as the go-to solution for maintaining public safety, security, and peace. However, this reliance on the military has come at a steep cost to Nigeria's democracy, as the militaristic approach to crisis management has resulted in excessive force and numerous human rights violations.

The Fourth Republic of Nigeria has been marred by numerous military interventions in civilian affairs, which have had far-reaching consequences. As mentioned earlier, notable examples include the military invasion and destruction of Odi in 1999 and Zaki Biam in 2001, as well as the declaration of a state of emergency and suspension of elected officers in those states. Furthermore, Ughulu and Ihaza (2023), citing Ajala (2019), noted that there was an ambiguity in the killings of Shi'ite members in Zaria and Abuja in 2015 and 2018 and the killing of Pro-Biafra protesters in 2015 and 2016. Wilmot (2019) expressed concerns about President Buhari's order to shoot on sight at election offenders during the 2019 elections, while Abati (2020) sees military's involvement in the shooting of protesters during the 2020 EndSARS demonstrations as an affront to democracy which has contributed to the erosion of trust on the country's version of democracy. Given all these circumstances, it is awful to note that under a democratic dispensation, these military actions have been characterized by blatant violations of citizens' fundamental human rights, blatant disregard for court orders, and a complete disdain for human dignity, resulting in significant loss of lives and property. The cumulative effect of these incidents has been a deepening mistrust and increased loss of confidence in democratic values as practiced in Nigeria.

The continuous deployment of the military in civil-related affairs will only serve to exacerbate gross human rights abuses while concurrently undermining the police and other paramilitary institutions that are specifically trained to handle civil matters and conflict resolution mechanisms. Additionally, this trend will enable political officeholders to persist in exploiting the military to perpetuate unconstitutional acts, impunity, and blatant disregard for the rule of law. The effect is that it could result in a total breakdown of democratic institutions, which is a potential military takeover or coup.

Conclusion

Nigeria's history has been marked by a significant period of military rule, spanning nearly twenty-nine years, which has profoundly impacted the country's democratic practice. This

prolonged exposure to militarism has led to considerable challenges, including a lingering culture of militarism and a civic culture that has been eroded over time. As a result, Nigeria has become increasingly averse to displays of militarized political culture, which has contributed to a culture of human rights violations and impunity. In essence, the country's democratic fabric has been compromised, with militarized culture taking hold and undermining the rule of law. The increased military involvement in Nigeria's internal crises under democratic dispensation can be attributed to the liberalization of the political space, which emerged from the demystification of almost 3 decades of military rule that suppressed citizens' opposition and agitations. The military can safeguard democracy by maintaining its neutrality, subordinating itself to civilian authority, and adhering to the rule of law. This involves avoiding involvement in partisan politics, refraining from interfering with the electoral process and respecting the rights of citizens. By doing so, the military can ensure that its actions align with democratic principles, thereby protecting the democratic system and preventing the erosion of democratic institutions.

In ensuring that the involvement of the military in a democratic process is minimized and actions align with democratic principles, the effectiveness of the Nigerian Police Force cannot be overemphasized. By efficiently performing their constitutional duties, such as maintaining law and order, safeguarding citizens' rights, and providing security, the police can reduce the need for military deployment in civil matters. To achieve optimal performance, the police force must undergo professionalization through reforms borne out of political will, comprehensive training, and the allocation of sufficient resources to handle civil disturbances. Decentralization and accountability are also essential, as decentralizing the police force will make it more accountable to the community it serves.

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