

REGIME TYPE AND NATIONAL SECURITY OUTCOMES IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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Abstract. *This paper examines the correlation between the regime type and national security outcomes in Nigeria between 1966 and 2025 based on the Civil–Military Relations (CMR) Theory. It looks at the dynamics of security in military rule (1966–1999) and the democratic rule in the fourth republic (1999–2025), and compares and contrasts their effectiveness in responding to emerging threats. The qualitative research design is a comparative historical-based study, which relies on secondary and documentary sources, and the content and comparative techniques will be used to interpret the findings. The results reveal that military regimes were based on centralized government and coercive force, which allowed responding quickly to the crisis and creating a temporary stability, especially during the civil war. Yet, these achievements were diluted by weak institutions, oppression, politicization of security systems, and low levels of trust in the government. Democratic rule brought about institutional changes, civilian control and diversified security policies including non-kinetic and regional partnership. However, the continued presence of insurgency, banditry, and communal violence are indicative of structural weaknesses, inadequate coordination, and policy implementation weaknesses. The comparative analysis reveals that although military rule brought short-term stability, it was unsustainable, and the democratic regime offers a more sustainable system even with uneven performance. The research comes to the conclusion that effective national security relies not on regime type but on the institutional capacity, the quality of governance, and legitimacy. It advises the reinforcement of oversight mechanisms, intensifying security sector reform, giving primacy to human-centered strategies, and institutional effectiveness to deliver sustainable security outcomes.*

Keywords: National Security, Civil–Military Relations, Military Regimes, Democratic Governance, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The political history of post-independent Nigeria is one of the most educative examples of the regime swing in Africa, which switches between years of military dictatorship and years of civilian democracy. Nigeria has suffered long periods of military rule (1966–1979; 1983–1999) mixed with civilian rule (1979–1983; 1999–present) since the fall of the First Republic in the January 1966 coup. These transitions in regimes

have not only restructured political power and institutional structures, but have also significantly influenced the national security structure in the nation (Dudley, 1982; Osaghae, 1998).

The first military intervention in 1966 was grounded on the need to put order in the face of electoral violence, internal conflicts between the elites and regional conflicts that had shaken the First Republic (Falola and Heaton, 2008). The ensuing anti-coup in July 1966 and the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) entrenched armed forces as a key player in state consolidation and security management (Madiebo, 1980). Subsequent military regimes: Military regimes under leaders like Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Muhammed, Olusegun Obasanjo (as head of state of the military), Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, and Sani Abacha consolidated executive centralism, enlarged coercive institutions, and focused on survival of the regime in a highly securitized system of governance (Siollun, 2009). Although such regimes tended to focus on stability and territorial integrity, they were also linked to authoritarian suppression, civil institutions weakened, and lack of accountability.

Despite the civilian transition in 1979 with the Second Republic, this was only temporary and failed in 1983 due to economic crisis and political instability (Joseph, 1987). A more lasting democratic shift came in the year 1999 and the Fourth Republic was inaugurated upon the death of General Sani Abacha and a transitional programme led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Nigeria has enjoyed continuous civilian government since 1999 with several administrations, namely: Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, which is an example of incremental democratic consolidation and electoral alternation of power (Lewis, 2007; Suberu, 2007)

The security situation in Nigeria has been volatile, even though the democratic form of governance has been institutionalized. After 1999, the Boko Haram insurgency in North-East, widespread banditry and kidnapping in North-West, farmer-herder conflicts in Middle Belt, separatist agitations in South-East, and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea have emerged (International Crisis Group, 2020; Mustapha and Ehrhardt, 2018). These threats are of different magnitude and nature than previous security predicaments during military rule which were mostly characterized by civil war, coup intrigues and repression of the central state. However, the two types of regimes have faced significant national security crises, which have cast intense analytical issues about the nexus between regime attributes and national security performance.

Although there is abundant literature on the political development in Nigeria, there is still a major gap in the literature that is aimed at a systematic examination of the effects of regime type on the performance of national security over time. Current literature tends to describe military and democratic stages or dwell on particular conflicts without settling on a comparative and longitudinal approach that gauges the effectiveness of security, institutional strength, and the capacity of the state among regimes (Lewis, 2007; Osaghae, 1998). In addition, the insecurity research in Nigeria often focuses on structural factors, such as poverty, ethno-religious divisions, lack of good governance, without adequately questioning how the differences in the regime structure, civil-military relationships, accountability, and centralization of decision-making affect security reaction and achievement (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018).

The lack of a regime-sensitive analytical context inhibits our comprehension of whether military authoritarianism spawned greater coercive power at the cost of legitimacy and human security, or democratic government created greater institutional responsibility at the cost of quick and centralized security response. It is especially necessary to fill this gap in the case of Nigeria since it has a demographic imbalance, regional prominence in West Africa, and security instability is still persistent.

It is on this background that this paper has three objectives. First, it aims to analyze the results of national security during military governments in Nigeria (1966-1999), the character of threats, the reaction of the state, the structure of the institutions and stability in general. Second, it evaluates the outcomes of national security under democratic governance in the Fourth Republic (1999-2025), the management of insurgency, communal conflict, and transnational criminality within a constitutional context. Third, it provides a comparison of the relative performance of military and democratic regimes in coping with security issues, which is intended to discern continuity and divergence patterns in security performance, institutional resilience, and legitimacy.

Combining historical analysis with a comparative regime approach, the work leads to the discussion on nexus of regime type and national security outcomes in hybrid and transitional states in security studies and comparative politics. It also offers policy-relevant information on how governance arrangements determine security capacity in the complex, plural societies like Nigeria.

1.1 Conceptual Review

Regime type can be defined as the official and unofficial principles that form the basis of political power, how leaders are chosen, and the level of political participation and accountability in a state. In modern literature, the regime type is viewed as a spectrum between democratic and authoritarian regimes, focusing on the institutional processes, civil freedoms, and political contestation. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way (2020) identify the extent to which elections are free and fair, the opposition parties are allowed to compete effectively, and civil liberties are upheld as the characteristics of a regime.

Likewise, Anna Luhrmann and other authors (2018) state that regime classification must be based on quantifiable variables like electoral integrity, judicial independence, and legislative limitations on executive power. These aspects of the institution allow a finer perspective of the regime dynamics that cannot be traced in binary categories.

The most recent international ratings, such as Freedom House (2023) and Varieties of Democracy Institute (2023) indicate the tendency toward democratic backsliding and the emergence of hybrid regimes, which underscores the instability of the regime types in the modern world. In this context, the conceptualization of regime type in this study is based on the structural form of political power-military or democratic- and on the institutional process by which governance and security policies are made and executed.

1.2 National Security

The traditional national security was aimed at the survival of the state and its territory. But modern scholarship extends the concept to include multidimensional threats such as economic instability, terrorism, cyber threats, pandemics and environmental degradation. Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen (2009, updated discussions in the new literature on security studies) assert that security spans beyond military issues to political, social, economic and environmental arenas.

Newer studies focus on the dynamic and interdependent character of threats. The United Nations Development Programme (2022) defines security in the human development context, revolving around resilience and livelihood protection and the absence of fear and want. Similarly, World Economic Forum (2023) defines global risks, including state fragility, climate change, and technological disruption, as one of the key elements of the modern national security.

Internal stability, effectiveness in counterinsurgency, and trust in the institutions are also the elements of national security in weak democracies and transitional states (OECD, 2020). Thus, the concept of national security in this research is the ability of the state to ensure the sovereignty, internal order, security of citizens, and appropriate reaction to threats of different dimensions.

1.3 Military Governance

Military rule is a government where the political power is directly exercised by the armed forces and usually it comes after a coup d'état or unconstitutional change of power. According to contemporary studies, there is a revival of military intervention in politics, especially in some sections of Africa and the Sahel region. According to Jonathan Powell and Clayton L. Thyne (2011; the dataset was updated in the following years), coups are still one of the recurrent aspects of political instability in the hybrid regimes.

According to more recent scholarship by Naunihal Singh (2014), military regimes typically use the pretext of restoring security and fighting corruption, but they also frequently use these justify a move to suspend constitutions and restrict civil rights. The modern examples of African cases studied by the

International IDEA (2022) demonstrate that military regimes are more likely to concentrate their powers, undermine the legislative control, and focus on the security of the regime instead of human security.

In this research therefore, military governance is conceptualized as a centralized and coercive form of rule where security management is state-centric and is often typified by decree-based policymaking, limited participation in politics and limited institutional accountability.

1.4 Democratic Governance

Democratic governance is typified by a constitutional rule, a competitive election, separation of powers, rule of law, and protection of fundamental rights. The contemporary theory of democracy focuses on not only competitiveness in elections but also accountability, transparency, and efficient service provision. Larry Diamond (2015) claims that the legitimacy and stability of democratic government are improved due to the institutionalization of peaceful conflict resolution strategies.

Empirical evidence indicates that consolidated democracies tend to be more stable over time and to be able to deal with internal violence using institutional means (Luhmann et al., 2018). Moreover, Freedom House (2023) emphasizes the significance of civil liberties, judicial independence, and media freedom to maintain democratic rules.

The latest models of governance promoted by the United Nations (2020) are based on inclusive institutions, participative policymaking, and sustainable development as the main principles of the democratic governance. Unlike military regimes, the democracies institutionalize the civilian dominance of the armed and the security agencies to the legislative and judicial checks.

In line with this, the study defines democratic governance as a civilian-based constitutional system that has an electoral legitimacy, rule of law, institutional accountability and inclusive security management.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The paper is grounded in the CivilMilitary Relations (CMR) Theory, originally by Samuel P. Huntington and perfected by Morris Janowitz, that focuses on the effects that the allocation of power between civilian institutions and the military has on the results of governance and national security. The theory assumes that the character of civil-military relationship plays a crucial role in the development and execution of security policies.

Huntington (1957) differentiates between objective civilian control, that is dominated by military professionalism, autonomy, and political neutrality, and subjective control, which is the politicization of the military in the interest of the regime. This is the key distinction that can be used to analyze the difference between military and democratic regimes. The military rule (1966-1999) in Nigeria manifested itself in subjective control where the political and military power were merged and in which the survival of the regime was placed on centralized and coercive security policies at the cost of institutional building and popular confidence.

On the other hand, the democratic era (1999-present) brought in formal civilian domination, supposedly to increase accountability, rule of law, and institutional checks and balances. Nevertheless, such control, as Janowitz (1960) says, is only effective when there is military professionalism and the strength of political institutions- aspects that are not even in the developing context such as Nigeria.

This paper operationalizes the CMR theory based on three levels namely: military control, degree of professionalism, and accountability practices. These factors give a systematic foundation of comparison between the effects of regime types on security. Finally, the Nigerian case illustrates that the regime type is not a predictor of security effectiveness but the quality of civil-military relations, and thus, CMR theory can be applied to the contexts with institutional fragility.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper is based on a qualitative research design that is based on comparative historical analysis (CHA) to study how the security governance and institutional practices within various political regimes in Nigeria have evolved. Qualitative studies will be suitable in exploring any complex socio-political phenomenon where contextual interpretation and detailed analysis of institutional processes are necessary (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The comparative historical analysis allows the systematic study of past events, institutional evolution and policy adjustments with time, giving researchers an opportunity to determine continuity and change patterns of political systems (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003).

The use of comparative historical analysis is also quite apt in the current study since it can be used to analyze how the structures and policies that govern security in Nigeria have changed over the years of various political regimes. Comparing the military rule and democratic regimes, the research paper examines the institutional processes, policy orientations and regime processes that have influenced national security management in the state. A comparative historical analysis is a common method in political science and security studies to examine the relationship between institutions, political actors, and policy outcomes in diverse historical settings (George and Bennett, 2005). With this design, the study can determine the impact of historical legacies, regime transitions, and institutional reforms on the present-day security governance in Nigeria.

2.1 Data Sources

The research is based mainly on secondary data sources, complementing it with appropriate documentary materials, because documentary analysis is one of the key methods in qualitative studies because it allows accessing historical and institutional records that are vital to the research process of understanding the policy development and governance processes (Bowen, 2009); moreover, the analysis based on multiple data sources increases the reliability and validity of the study through the triangulation of data, and In particular, the research relies on archives and official reports related to the national security, intelligence administration, and governance reforms of the government, policy documents and security reports prepared by government agencies, regional organizations and international organizations studying the government of the security sector, and the coordination of intelligence and the national security strategies.

Moreover, it actively works with academic literature, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, dissertations, and conference papers, which challenge the governance of security, intelligence systems, and institutional reforms in Nigeria and other similar settings, as well as newspapers and media coverage, which offers both current and historical narratives of security developments, debate over governmental policy, and political reactions to emerging threats. Academic interviews of academics, policy analysts and security practitioners where necessary are included to offer specialized knowledge on the nature of the security institutions and governance structures in Nigeria; a combination of these various sources will help produce a holistic picture of the institutional and policy processes influencing the governance of national security in Nigeria.

The study period covers the years 1966 to date and thus includes both the military and the democratic period of Nigeria political history; 1966 is specifically important since it was the first military takeover, and as such, it changed the institutional and security framework of the country basically reorganizing the institutions of governance and security to form highly centralized institutions of governance and security under military command lines. The analysis also goes back to the post-1999 democratic era, when Nigeria shifted to civilian rule, and in the analysis, it is also possible to see recent developments and reforms, thus giving a complete historical picture of continuity and change in the security governance system in Nigeria.

2.2 Data Analysis

The research takes content and comparative analysis as the main methods of analysis. Content analysis involves the logical analysis and interpretation of textual data to determine common themes, patterns, and relationships, in relation to the research goals (Krippendorff, 2018). In line with this, policy papers, archival documents, academic sources and media reports are critically analyzed to draw out major themes associated with security governance, institutional reforms, coordination of intelligence and policy responses to security threats in Nigeria. In a complementary strategy, the comparative analysis is used to identify the differences and similarities between the military and democratic periods of the political history of Nigeria to evaluate the influence of different regimes on the design and performance of security institutions, as well as on their operating strategies. The combination of these methods gives a stringent qualitative evaluation of how national security governance has evolved to bring about institutional persistence and policy changes and provide a deeper understanding of the connection between political regimes, institutional change and the national security policy in Nigeria.

3. RESULTS. HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE REGIMES OF NIGERIA

3.1 Military Governance in Nigeria (1966–1979; 1983–1999)

The history of military rule in Nigeria can be traced back to the overthrow of the First Republic in January 1966 with the coup that led to the start of the era of the military intervention in the political life. Political instability, ethnic division, and crisis of governance were deeply rooted in Nigeria, which could be characterized by coups and counter-coups during the period between 1966 and 1999 (Osaghae, 1998; Akran, 2017). The military regimes which arose during this time created extremely centralized and authoritarian forms of government, whose decision making was highly centralized in elite military organs like the Supreme Military Council and the Armed Forces Ruling Council.

Military regimes were mainly state-centric in their security priorities and were oriented towards their survival, territorial integrity, and suppression of internal dissent. This angle became more pronounced throughout the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) that strengthened the role of the military in the management of national security and the governance system (Falola and Heaton, 2008). As a result, the security institutions such as armed forces, intelligence agencies and the paramilitary agencies were designed to secure the state and not human security. The application of decrees instead of constitutional provisions further institutionalized authoritarian control and undermined institutional accountability and the rule of law (Joseph, 1987).

Despite some of the administrative changes that were brought about by military regimes such as state formation and bureaucratization, policy inconsistency, inadequate institutionalization and low involvement of the civilian population were common in undermining these changes. Furthermore, the transition programmes launched by the military administration after the previous one were often postponed or corrupted, which casts doubt on the willingness of military elites to democratic governance (Akran, 2017). In sum, the military regime had a big influence on the security structure of Nigeria as it instilled a centralized and coercive governance strategy.

3.2 Democratic Governance (1979–1983; 1999–till Date)

The history of democracy in Nigeria can be segmented into two broad periods; the Second Republic (1979-1983), and the Fourth Republic (1999-present). The Second Republic was also a kind of the first effort to institutionalize democratic governance after the military rule, but it ended too soon because of the electoral irregularities, economic downturn, and political instability, and was overthrown by the 1983 military coup (Dudley, 1982).

The shift to the Fourth Republic in 1999 was a turning point in the history of political development in Nigeria, as it established a period of stable civilian rule in Nigeria. This shift was aided by internal factors like the pro-democracy movements and civil societies as well as external factors that promoted democracy in governance (Diamond, 1999). Separation of powers, rule of law and electoral governance framework

was put in place through the adoption of the 1999 Constitution, thus, forming the basis of democratic consolidation.

Compared to the military times, the democratic governance in Nigeria has focused more on the multi-layered security architecture that is more institutionalized. This involves the harmonisation of the military, police, intelligence bodies and special agencies in dealing with critical security issues. New security threats such as insurgency in the Northeast, militancy in the Niger Delta and rampant criminality have come into picture in the post-1999 period necessitating reforms in security governance and policy frameworks (Omede, 2011).

Other democratic reforms have been on the development of better civil-military relationships, strengthening accountability and professionalization of security institutions. However, the lack of effectiveness of the security architecture in Nigeria is still persistently hindered by such issues as corruption, absence of institutional capacity, and deficiencies in coordination (Abubakar, 2020). Nevertheless, the fact that since 1999 there has not been a single interruption in the democratic rule is a positive sign that the democratic norms are gradually being consolidated and the possibility of military intervention into the politics is also low.

3.3 National Security Outcomes under Military Regimes

The history of national security in military governments in Nigeria (1966-1999) is a good representation of the relationship between the state building, forceful rule, and institutional weakness. Although military governments tended to defend their intervention as a remedial process to political unrest, their security framework was more regime-oriented in that the focus was on survival rather than holistic human security. This resulted in both short-term and long-term stabilizing and destabilizing effects.

The need to coup-proof, to quash any political opposition and to maintain territorial integrity essentially influenced internal security in military rule. These coups and counter-coups that happened frequently during the initial years of military intervention showed internal rifts within the armed forces and that there was a lack of institutional cohesion (Siollun, 2009). Thus, the regimes that followed one another resorted to large scale coercion such as emergency decrees, arbitrary arrest, and media control to curb supposed threats in order to consolidate power (Osaghae, 1998).

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) is the most characteristic internal security crisis of the time. The reaction of the federal military government towards the secession of Biafra showed not only strategic military potential but also the constraints of coercive statecraft. Though the war eventually brought Nigeria together in terms of territory, it had serious human consequences and humanitarian costs and this is what has exposed the socio-political divisions that underpinned the war (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In addition to the civil war, the militarization of domestic security governance made the application of force in the control of dissent a norm, which led to a cycle of repression and resistance thereby compromising long term stability (Adekanye, 1993).

3.4 External Security Posture

Military regimes tried to demonstrate their might and show the supremacy of Nigeria in the West Africa region in the context of external security. The growth of military forces and military resources helped the nation to protect its territorial borders and prevent foreign aggression. More importantly, Nigeria came out as a major force in peacekeeping in the region especially its role in multilateral intervention in the name of the regional bodies.

Nevertheless, this external image of power tended to hide internal weaknesses. The regime security versus strategic policy coherence led to the emergence of regime security at the expense of a holistic national security framework that could combine domestic stability and external objectives of defense (Ayoob, 1995). In this regard, the external relations of Nigeria though adding to its influence in the region did not always result in the consolidation of internal security.

The military rule had an immense influence on the organization and operations of national security institutions. The concentration of authority in the ranks of the military undermined democratic institutions and corroded the concept of accountability and the rule of law. Instead of acting as an impartial tool of coordinating national security, the work of intelligence agencies was often reconfigured to act as a means of political surveillance and protection of the regime (Hutchful & Bathily, 1998). Military rule was also marked by great limitations on the judiciary because decree tended to replace the role of the judiciary and legal procedures became subject to the executive. Such a diminishing of institutional independence was experienced especially under the rule of dictatorship, where the law was manipulated to justify the act of oppression (Diamond, 1999).

The human rights abuse was a crucial aspect of the institutional environment. Extrajudicial executions, torture, and extended detention without trial were not only against international standards but also undermined the trust of people in the state institutions. The overall impact was the lack of legitimacy that continued even after the shift to the civilian rule which complicated the reforms of the security sector after the military (Lewis, 2007).

3.5 Patterns, Trends and Security Outcomes

A comparative study of the security trends in the military rule depicts a paradoxical trend. On the one hand, the military managed to preserve the sovereignty of the state and to suppress mass insurgencies, thus avoiding the collapse of the state. Conversely, structural causes of insecurity such as ethnic conflicts, political persecution, and economic inequalities were worsened by the presence of coercion and exclusionary governance (Osaghae, 1998). Additionally, the fact that coups persisted, implies that the military itself was a source of instability, as tensions in the ruling elite were not resolved. The trust towards institutions also dwindled as citizens viewed security agencies as tools of repression instead of safeguarding citizens (Lewis, 2007). This undermining of trust has had long-term consequences on civil-military relations and performance of modern security governance in Nigeria.

Overall, the results of national security in military regimes in Nigeria were marked by a duality: the unity of the state power by coercive means and the at the same time the entrenchment of structural weaknesses. Although these regimes led to short-term stability and unity of the territories, their culture of institutional inefficiency, human rights violations, and lack of trust in the governments remain to influence the security situation in Nigeria.

The national security performance within democratic governance is defined by how the political institutions interact with reforms of the security sector and the rule of law. The democratic transition in the post-1999 Nigeria has created a hybrid security environment in which there is both a progressive institutionalizing and a threatening environment. Although democratic forms of governance have increased accountability, transparency and cooperation between states, it has not been able to curb the structural causes of insecurity especially when it comes to internal conflicts and weak state capacity.

3.6 Internal Security Dynamics

Nigeria has a very volatile internal security situation, which has been characterized by insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and ethnic militia proliferation under the democratic rule. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East is an example of the continued existence of violent non-state actors who take advantage of a lack of government, socio-economic inequalities, and the incompetence of the institutions (Onuoha, 2014). Parallel to this, banditry and kidnapping have increased in the North-West, as well as other areas, as the state loses its power and more illegal weapons become accessible (International Crisis Group, 2020). Internal security is further complicated by ethnic militias and communal conflict, especially in the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta, which strengthens tensions based on identity and weakening national unity (Osaghae, 2005). Though democratic governance offers avenues of political participation and conflict management, they have not translated adequately to effective security results as there are implementation gaps and capacity constraints.

Democracy has greatly enhanced the external security situation of Nigeria, especially via regional cooperation and peacekeeping efforts. Nigeria has led in A West African security architecture and has been a key player in peace keeping operations within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Adebajo, 2011). Moreover, the democratic government has enabled cross-border security cooperation to counter transnational security threats like terrorism, trafficking and organized crime. A case in point is the formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes Nigeria and its neighbors, which highlights a transition to collective security methods of fighting Boko Haram and other elements (Williams, 2017). These changes are indicative of the greater compatibility between democratic governance and cooperative security arrangements and multilateralism.

One of the main characteristics of the democratic governance is reforming the security institutions, making them more accountable, professional and controlled by civilians. In Nigeria, there have been attempts to enhance legislative checks, judicial checks, and executive checks in the running of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies (Owen, 2013). Community policing and public accountability have also been a focus of police reforms as a way of enhancing service delivery and restoring public trust (Hills, 2012). Nevertheless, these reforms are still limited by the systemic issues such as corruption, poor funding, insufficient institutional coordination, and political interference. As such, the discrepancy between the aims of reform and reality still limits the efficacy of security governance.

3.7 Human Rights, Rule of Law and Security Legitimacy

Human rights protection and the rule of law are the key of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the democratic security governance. Democratically, the system improves security through the creation of trust between the people, accountability and inclusive governance (Dahl, 1989). However, in reality, Nigeria has had a very difficult time in balancing security operations and human rights standards. Extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and excessive force especially in counterinsurgency operations have weakened citizens in the security institutions (Amnesty International, 2015). These types of violations do not only undermine state legitimacy but can also be a source of cycles of violence by giving rise to grievances and radicalization. Empowering the law, imposing accountability and institutionalizing human rights norms are thus critical to sustainable security results.

On the whole, the results of national security in democratic governance in Nigeria indicate the existence of an intricate interconnection between institutional reforms and structural challenges that are hard to overcome. Although the rule of democracy has led to increased transparency, civilian checks and balances, and international cooperation, it has not completely dealt with the structural causes of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality, and weak governing institutions. The fact that internal threats are persistent and coupled with advancement in external security interaction implies that democratic government is not effective unless it is properly implemented and institutionalized.

A multidimensional strategy that combines the reform of the security sector with socio-economic development, enhances state capacity, and adherence to the rule of law is necessary to improve the results of national security. This would not only enhance operational effectiveness but also strengthen the legitimacy of the state, thus making the state long-term peace and stability.

3.8 Comparison of Military and Democratic Strategies of security in Nigeria

The security trend in Nigeria since 1966 demonstrates a complicated relationship between military dictatorship and democracy, which has influenced the efficiency, validness, the institutional capability, and the responsibility of the security system within the state. An empirically based and comparative evaluation of these regimes indicates that though both have attempted to deal with insecurity, their approach and results vary greatly both in extent and sustainability.

Security governance in Nigeria during the period of military rule (1966-1999) was extremely centralized and dictatorial. The hierarchical nature of the command structure of the military allowed quick

mobilization and decisive action, especially in times when the nation was facing a crisis of acute nature like the Nigerian Civil War. This stage showed the comparative success of military regimes as a stabilizing factor in the short term and territorial integrity. Nonetheless, on a bigger scale, these short-term advantages did not deal with the structural causes of insecurity, such as political marginalization and economic marginalization, as well as weak institutions of the state. As a result, the transformation of governance into militarization entrenched system vulnerabilities that continued after the military governance.

A paradigmatic shift towards institutionalized security governance occurred with the onset of the transition to a democratic rule in 1999, as the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo was instituted. Democratic governments established reforms through which they tried to enhance the rule of law, improve civil-military relations, and foster participatory methods of security management. In spite of these reforms, Nigeria has remained a country with high rates of insecurity which include insurgency, banditry, communal conflicts and secessionist agitations. The actions of the groups like the Boko Haram make us appreciate the continuity and transformation of security menace during the age of democracy.

The constraints of both regimes are supported by empirical evidence especially in the realization of sustainable security results. Recent statistics show that Nigeria has had about 6,800 deaths involving conflicts and more than 4,600 acts of violence in the first half of 2025, and thousands of abductions (ACLED, 2025). Moreover, the cumulative estimates indicate that almost 30,000 deaths have been caused by insurgency, banditry, and communal violence since 2023 (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project [ACLED], 2025). These patterns underscore the persistence of the military-based responses in the framework of democracy and the constrained effectiveness of such approaches to the multidimensional threats. Although democratic government has widened the range of security intervention tools, including non-kinetic tools like amnesty programmes, development projects, deradicalisation efforts, etc, the net effect has been limited by poor implementation and institutional failure.

Military and democratic regimes have a significant point of divergence in terms of legitimacy and public trust. The Nigerian military rule was typified by deep-rooted lack of legitimacy since it was the rule that was not based on popular approval but coercion. This weakened the trust of people in the state institutions and reduced the cooperation of citizens in security operations. Conversely, democratic regimes have strengthened formal legitimacy by way of electoral systems and constitutional system. Nevertheless, this legitimacy is weak because of the constant issues of corruption, inefficiency in governance and human rights. Legitimacy, as it is observed in the literature, is procedural and performance-based and its loss can greatly affect the efficacy of security interventions (Grimm & Merkel, 2008).

The other dimension of comparison is institutional development. Military regimes focused on survival of the regime and centralized control at the cost of institutional autonomy and professionalism. Consequently, security institutions at this time were feeble, individualistic and extremely unsustainable. The democratic period has seen attempts to enhance institutional capacity by reforming the military, the police and the intelligence services and by putting in place civilian checks and balances. However, these institutions are limited by poor funding, coordination as well as political interference. The fact that Nigeria has been over-relying on the military in its internal security operations is indicative of both its centrality and restrictions of the security architecture and shows some continuum with the military era, but not a total change (Croissant and Kuehn, 2017).

The two regimes also have a difference in terms of human rights and accountability. Violations were particularly common with military rule that involved arbitrary detention, suppression of dissent and extrajudicial acts which led to instability in the long term since they intensified grievances of the society. In theory, democratic rule offers means of accountability in the form of independent courts, legislative checks and balances and a comparatively free press. Nevertheless, the inability to eliminate human rights violations especially in counter insurgency activities points to a disconnect between normative commitments and realities. This void negatively affects the trust of the community and can contribute to increasing conflict dynamics since the excessive application of force can estrange local communities and prevent the collection of intelligence (Milstein, 2021).

All in all, the comparative analysis indicates that military regimes in Nigeria succeeded in short-term stabilization of the situation by coercion but it failed to put in place the institutional and normative frameworks to ensure sustainable peace. Democratic governance, although that is also limited in its procedures and still at risk, provides a more feasible framework of the long-term security through a combination of legitimacy, institutional development, and accountability. Nevertheless, its success will be determined by the empowerment of the state institutions, the quality of governance, and the regular respect of human rights.

The case of the Nigerian experience of 1966-2025 highlights a crucial policy implication: coercion is not enough to attain sustainable security. Instead, it needs the holistic approach of the combination of effective state capacity and legitimacy, inclusive governance, and social-economic development. Security interventions will probably only have short-term and reversible consequences, unless the structural causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and political marginalization, are addressed.

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined national security outcomes under military and democratic governance in Nigeria (1966–present) through the lens of Civil–Military Relations (CMR) Theory. The findings demonstrate that regime type significantly shapes the architecture and effectiveness of national security governance, yet neither military nor democratic rule automatically guarantees sustainable security. The discussion that follows interprets these findings along the three analytical dimensions operationalized from CMR Theory—civilian–military control, degree of professionalism, and accountability mechanisms—while situating Nigeria’s experience within a broader comparative African context.

Applying the three CMR dimensions systematically reveals significant regime-level divergence. In terms of civilian–military control, military regimes (1966–1999) exhibited what Huntington (1957) termed subjective control: political and military authority were fused, with institutions such as the Supreme Military Council and the Armed Forces Ruling Council serving as both executive and security organs. Decision-making was rapid and centralized, which proved effective during acute crises such as the Civil War, but eliminated the institutional checks necessary for long-term stability (Siollun, 2009; Osaghae, 1998). By contrast, the Fourth Republic established formal civilian supremacy through constitutional provisions, legislative oversight, and the subordination of the military to elected authority (Diamond, 1999). Nevertheless, the persistence of military-led internal security operations—such as Operation Lafiya Dole and Joint Task Forces in multiple states—demonstrates that civilian control remains procedural rather than substantive, a condition Croissant and Kuehn (2017) associate with hybrid civil–military relations in transitional democracies.

Regarding the degree of professionalism, military regimes in Nigeria routinely subordinated professional military conduct to regime survival priorities. Intelligence agencies were repurposed for political surveillance, the judiciary was reduced to an instrument of executive decree, and human rights violations—including extrajudicial killings and prolonged detention without trial—became normalized (Hutchful and Bathily, 1998; Lewis, 2007). These practices eroded institutional credibility in ways that persisted well beyond the military era. Democratic governance has introduced reforms aimed at professionalization: police restructuring under the Police Act (2020 amendments), intelligence coordination through the National Security Strategy (NSS, 2014), and the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force for collective counterinsurgency (Williams, 2017). However, systemic underfunding, poor inter-agency coordination, and corruption continue to undermine these efforts, producing a gap between policy design and operational effectiveness (Abubakar, 2020; Hills, 2012).

The accountability dimension reveals what is perhaps the most consequential difference between regimes. Military governance operated with virtually no institutional accountability: decrees replaced legislation, courts were marginalized, and civil society was suppressed (Osaghae, 1998). This absence of accountability not only enabled abuses but also destroyed popular trust in state institutions, a deficit that has proven difficult to reverse. Democratic governance offers formal accountability through elections, legislative oversight, judicial independence, and press freedom. Yet performance accountability remains

weak. Counterinsurgency operations have continued to generate human rights complaints (Amnesty International, 2015), and corruption within the security sector persists, indicating a structural gap between normative commitments and practical outcomes. The dual character of legitimacy—procedural and performance-based—thus operates as a critical mediating variable between regime type and security effectiveness (Grimm and Merkel, 2008).

The Nigerian experience is illuminated by comparison with other African states. Ghana's post-1992 democratic consolidation offers a contrasting case in which sustained civilian control, progressive security sector reform, and relatively strong institutional accountability have produced more stable civil-military relations despite a comparable history of military coups (Hutchful, 1997; Agyeman-Duah, 2002). Ghana's success underscores that democratic transition alone is insufficient; institutional depth and consistent reform commitment are essential. Conversely, the recent resurgence of military coups in the Sahel—Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and Guinea (2021)—demonstrates the fragility of democratic governance where institutional capacity is weak and performance legitimacy is absent (International IDEA, 2022; Powell and Thyne, 2011). These cases validate the core finding of this study: security outcomes are determined less by regime type per se than by the quality of civil-military relations, institutional depth, and governance legitimacy.

These findings extend CMR Theory in two ways. First, the Nigerian case illustrates a condition of hybrid civil-military relations in which formal democratic structures coexist with substantive military dominance of internal security—a pattern that cannot be adequately captured by the binary distinction between Huntington's objective and subjective control. Second, the study identifies legitimacy as the most important mediating variable between governance form and security performance. The persistent militarization of internal security under democratic rule, combined with corruption and human rights deficiencies, erodes performance legitimacy even as procedural legitimacy is maintained through elections. This dual legitimacy framework helps explain why democratic governance in Nigeria yields uneven security results despite its institutional advantages over military rule.

5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has discussed the role of Civil-Military Relations (CMR) Theory in understanding the results of national security in Nigeria since 1966 to date. The results show that regime type has a strong influence on security governance, institutional capacity and the reactions of states to threats. Centralized power and coercion allowed military regimes to gain short-term stability, which was destroyed by fragile institutions, oppression, and poor legitimacy, and thus could not be sustained. Conversely, democratic governance introduced checks and balances, responsibility, and more extensive security strategies, but the results are limited by the structural limitations and gaps in implementation.

Military rule had relatively better short-term performance and worse long-term performance compared to democracy, which offers a better framework even when it has a mixed performance. This implies that good national security is not necessarily driven by regime type but institutional power, quality of governance and legitimacy. The paper also finds that democratic governance provides a more effective basis to sustainable security, as opposed to military rule which is deficient of the institutional depth of long-term stability.

There are some policy measures that are suggested to improve the results of national security. The role of civilian control over the military and intelligence agencies should be strengthened as a measure to hold them accountable and limit abuses. Reform in the security sector should focus on professionalization, modernization and efficient intelligence coordination. The strategies must also be human-based in nature which addresses the socio-economic causes of insecurity. Implementation requires strengthening institutional capacity by providing sufficient funding, technical training and inter-agency coordination. It is also essential to restore the trust of the people by being transparent, honoring human rights, and working with communities.

In general, the challenge of sustainable national security in Nigeria is not so much about the regime type, but the correlation of the institutional capacity, legitimacy, and the importance of good governance.

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