

# Insecurity in Nigeria Causes and Implications of Insecurity in Nigeria

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*Abstract: Insecurity, beyond being a fear that every Nigerian experiences, has become a common topic of conversation among Nigerians. It is a condition in which a person feels exposed to danger or harm. This feeling is often linked with anxiety and a sense of vulnerability. The presence of illegal armed groups, ethnic militias, religious extremists, and fanatics serves as clear indicators of insecurity in Nigeria. These groups are responsible for various incidents such as bombings, murders, arson, armed robberies, corruption, and injustices that occur regularly. It is evident that these issues are negatively affecting Nigeria in terms of its political, religious, and cultural aspects. Religious organizations and humanitarian agencies are losing trust in law enforcement. This research paper critically examines the issue of insecurity in Nigeria using published works, textbooks, and online sources. The paper explores the causes and effects of insecurity and its political, religious, and cultural impacts. The research suggests that if the current trend of insecurity continues, there is a risk of political, economic, and civil instability. The study recommends stricter penalties for those who commit violent acts, hoping that this will offer a practical solution to the current insecurity crisis in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Insecurity, causes, implications, Nigeria

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the current level of insecurity in Nigeria and the various criminal groups that contribute to this problem across different regions.

Recently, Nigeria has been subjected to a series of internal conflicts, which have burdened the country, Africa's most populous nation. Since gaining independence, Nigeria has often experienced coups and long periods of military dictatorship from 1966 until 1999, when a democratic civilian government was established. According to Okorochoa (2009), the past fifty years have seen numerous coups and regional, religious, ethnic, and secessionist conflicts. Another source of insecurity has been piracy in the Niger Delta, which has characterized much of the current democratic period. However, in the last two years, new forms of discord and distrust have emerged, with religious extremists, armed militants, and ethnic militia groups posing a greater threat to

security than before. The older militia groups have transformed into more active armed groups, and their activities have intensified. There has been a rise in security incidents, leading to loss of life and psychological trauma for individuals and families. Therefore, citizens are being called upon to be more security-conscious because the threat posed by religious extremists could be greater than ever before. Other security concerns include the long-standing tension between the North and the South, the presence of banditry, growing unrest in the Niger Delta and other regions, and an increase in violent incidents and kidnappings. Ethnic tensions, religious differences, unemployment, and various social and political grievances all fuel instability in Nigeria, creating a fertile ground for violence and insecurity. This paper will place the current insecurity in Nigeria in context by defining and reviewing the causes and effects of insecurity, highlighting the challenges, and assessing its political, religious, and cultural impacts on the nation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review will be discussed under the following subheadings:

- i. Concept of Insecurity
- ii. Brief History of Nigeria
- iii. Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria
- iv. Implications of Insecurity in Nigeria

### CONCEPT OF INSECURITY

According to Michael (2001), insecurity is a state where an individual is at risk of danger or injury, and it is a feeling of anxiety that arises when a person feels vulnerable and insecure.

Michael Ezemonye also supports this definition, referring to insecurity as "a state of being not secure or lacking confidence." To understand this concept better, we can refer to the Advanced English Dictionary, which defines "insecure" as "not confident about oneself or one's relationships with others; not safe or protected." This definition expands

the term to not only cover general meanings but also touches upon a person's lack of self-confidence.

Nigeria is a republic located in West Africa with a coastline along the Atlantic Ocean on the Gulf of Guinea.

Most of the country consists of a low plateau intersected by rivers, particularly the Niger and its main tributary, the Benue. The country is named after its chief river. Until 1991, Lagos, the largest city and located on the southwest coast, was the capital of Nigeria. However, in 1991, Abuja, the new capital situated in the center of the country, became the official capital. Nigeria operates as a federal republic and is divided into 36 states and a federal capital territory. According to Robert Stock (2011), the area that is now Nigeria was home to various ethnically based kingdoms and tribal communities before it became a European colony. Despite European contact beginning in the 16th century, these kingdoms and communities remained autonomous until the 19th century. The colonial era began more seriously in the late 19th century when Britain consolidated its control over Nigeria. In 1914, the British merged their northern and southern protectorates into the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Nigeria gained independence from British rule in 1960. It is by far the most populous country in Africa with over one hundred and fifty million people. The population consists of many different ethnic groups, which give the country a rich cultural heritage but also pose significant challenges to nation-building. Ethnic tensions have been a major issue in Nigeria since its independence in 1960. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation, with Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions being the main faiths. Constitutionally, Nigeria is a secular state.

**Political** – We start with the term politics. The dictionary defines it as the activities involved in gaining and using power in public life, and the ability to influence decisions that affect a country or society. It refers to matters related to the state, government, political systems, public administration, and policy-making within a nation. It is organized with respect to government (Collins 2005). Therefore, politics refers to activities related to policy or the administration of government. For example, political rights are those that can be exercised in the formation or management of the government. John Bouvier (1856) stated that "a political corporation is primarily

concerned with the administration of the government, or to which the powers of government, or a part of such powers, have been delegated" (Bouvier. Inst. n.182, 197, 198).

**Religious** – Religious refers to matters connected with belief in religion, the teaching of religion, or the practice of religion.

Although religion, with all the controversies surrounding its meaning, is defined differently by scholars based on their views and perspectives. For example, Emile Durkheim viewed religion as "an interdependent system of beliefs and practices concerning things that are sacred." However, for the purpose of this presentation, I wish to adopt the definition provided by Ebenezer Ejalonibu Lawal (2005), which states, "Religion is the attempt to bring the relative and temporary, the painful things in life into relation with what is conceived to be permanent, absolute and cosmically opinionistic." This definition is based on the social functions that religion universally performs. (p106)

**Cultural** – The term "cultural" refers to something derived from or characteristic of the ways of living developed by a group of people.

It relates to the shared knowledge and values of a society that are passed from one generation to another and possibly from one society to another. Culture represents the total way of life of a people (John Beattie 1964). This encompasses a wide range of human activities that are learned rather than instinctive, and are transmitted from generation to generation through various learning processes. Bediako (1994) expanded the meaning of culture to include the way of thinking and behavior shared by a significant social group, which gives them a sense of identity in relation to others. By this definition, it means that all individuals participate in one culture or another; people are identified by their culture.

### III. CAUSES OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Brenda .

K. (2008), There has been a significant increase in violence, terrorism, and similar incidents in Nigeria today. Lawless groups are intensifying their campaigns across various parts of the country. We hear reports of bombings, shootings, killings, kidnappings, armed robberies, arson, and so on. These incidents occur from north to south, east to west, and almost on a daily basis. The phenomenon

of "insecurity" has expanded to include other areas such as economic and political insecurity. In this paper, our focus will be on the topic as a whole – as it affects the life and property of citizens. Let us now examine the causes of this problem:

1. Porous borders – The unrestricted flow of migrants from other countries into Nigeria through our ungarded borders allows criminals to enter the country without proper checks.
2. Proliferation of arms and ammunition – Numerous arms seizures have been made at our air and sea ports, with some being in very large quantities. This is not beneficial for the country. These arms and ammunition end up in the hands of criminals who use them in their illegal activities, making life unsafe for people in their localities.
3. Illegal armed groups – The illegal importation of arms and ammunition has made it easy for individuals and groups to possess weapons. We can name groups like Niger Delta Militants, Oodua Peoples Congress, 'Bakassi Boys,' and MASSOB, which possess arms and ammunition.
4. Oil bunkering – Nigeria, as one of the largest oil-producing nations, suffers from illegal oil bunkering activities. This activity is fueled by the existing level of insecurity in the country. It is supported by criminals who are willing to risk their lives on Nigerian waterways. This makes the coastal areas of our oil-producing states unsafe.
5. Labour activists – In early 2012, the Nigerian Labour Congress called for a nationwide strike as a result of the government's increase in fuel prices. They accused the government of insensitivity towards the suffering of the people and of ignoring the challenges of insecurity in the country. Peaceful protests by labor and other civil society groups have often been hijacked by criminals, causing pain to the public and making life in our cities insecure.
6. Kidnapping – This is another visible sign of insecurity in the country. The perpetrators of this crime do not discriminate and have replaced armed robbery and other non-contact crimes in the new wave of this crime. Since this act began in Nigeria, people of all ages, children, males, and females have been kidnapped for ransom. This has made life unbearable for citizens, as people now live in fear of becoming victims of these criminals.
7. Militancy – According to criminal law, militancy refers to violence, illegal force, or the unjustified use of force, or the intimidating effect created by the threat of such an act. This term became prominent in Nigeria when Niger Delta groups took up arms against government exploitation and environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and exploitation. This form of militancy is not limited to the Niger Delta region. Other parts of the country have also witnessed militants who commit atrocities that are worse than those by the youths of the Niger Delta, whose area is given the 'brand name'. Until recently, the term 'insurgence' was foreign to Nigerian society. The activities of the militant Islamic group commonly known as "Boko Haram" have opened this chapter of militancy in Nigeria. Shootings, bombings, kidnappings, arson, car and suicide bombings in various parts of the country are said to be the work of 'insurgence'. These activities have increased the level of insecurity in the nation.
8. Fear and Distrust in the Government – The current trend of violence is affecting the mental state of Nigerians, leading them to believe that the government's security forces are unable to ensure safety and security for the people. This has a significant impact on the general human security of the population, as the situation creates fear and limits the potential for economic development.
9. Unemployment – The increase in crime in Nigeria since the mid-1990s has been linked to unemployment, economic decline, and social inequality, all exacerbated by corrupt and inefficient police and customs forces, as noted by Robert Stock (2008 Encarta Entry). Idle minds become breeding grounds for criminal activities. These individuals, especially the youth, are easily recruited into militant groups and trained to commit crimes such as robbery, killing, kidnapping, smuggling, and hijacking, among others. Accurate unemployment rates are hard to determine, and in a society where many workers are only barely employed and begging is socially accepted, such figures may not reflect the real situation.
10. Religious Fanaticism and Extremism – Religious fanaticism and extremism have been significant contributors to insecurity in Nigeria. Recent attacks on churches and Christians in the northern part of the country by Muslim

extremists have made several states in the north unsafe for life and property. The destructive impact of these extremists is evident in the following words: "religion has unleashed on mankind... it has left in its wake a heavy toll of destroyed lives and wanton destruction of property. It has delayed workable political agreements and brutalised societies... Religious violence has been responsible for the collapse of one political order or the other throughout history. It has given rise to assassination and tempted assassination of various Heads of State or government in recent times... leads to irretrievable breakup of internal harmony, and leads to foreign intervention." (Agi, 1996). This is a true reflection of the Nigerian situation.

11. Wrong Political Ambitions – The desire for political office, while not inherently evil, can lead to negative intentions if not driven by noble motives. Ben Okolo, writing from Johannesburg, South Africa, observed that "the current crisis which started in Bauchi and has engulfed other states in the north has elements of theocratic ambitions in it." The perpetrators of violent activities in various parts of the country are driven by hidden agendas, seeking to establish their own form of government that is selfish, criminal, and unpatriotic. With such ambitions, they may attempt to make the country ungovernable or insecure.
12. Electioneering – Election periods in Nigeria are often times of serious security challenges. According to Shafiu S. Zurmi (Daily Sun, Friday January 21, 2011, p. 19), "While the major political characters intensify their efforts at winning the support of the Nigerian public, ordinary Nigerians are daily becoming more and more apprehensive about the security implications to the country before, during and after the elections. The general anxiety over the nation's security is germane and should be a source of concern to the government." Dr. Franz Fanon once said, "Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable."
13. Ethnic Violence – There have been reports of reprisal attacks by ethnic militias in areas like Plateau and Benue States, causing insecurity in those regions. While security in some parts of the country, such as the South-south, southeast, and southwest, has been compromised, the northern zone, which has historically shown a tendency

for violent conflicts, continues to be a cause for concern. From the usual religious/ethnic conflicts to the Jos ethnic/religious/political conflicts of 2008 up to now, the northern states have demonstrated that the security of people and property remains a major challenge.

14. Desire to Actualize Ethnic Agenda – This has become a common phenomenon in Nigerian society today. Due to various unsatisfactory political, economic, and developmental conditions, some groups want to separate from Nigeria. Examples include the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the South, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the Southeast, Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the West, Boko Haram in the Northeast, Bakasi Boys in the Eastern region, IPOD in the East, Fulani Herdsmen, Banditry in the North-West, and Vigilante groups throughout the country. Each group has its own reasons for its agitation (Michael Ezemonye, Vanguard, Dec 02, 2011).
15. Banditry – Refers to the criminal acts of robbers and bandits, typically involving organized violence, robbery, and extortion, as well as other violent offenses.

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Political Implications of Insecurity in Nigeria – Brenda (2008) states that the current security situation in Nigeria has forced political leaders to "rethink national security," as noted by Ibrahim Bashir of the Daily Sun. This situation requires Nigeria's security agencies to reconsider and refocus national security resources on the unique character of security threats in Nigeria. (Ibrahim, Thursday, March 24, 2011). Nigerians are increasingly concerned about the security implications of the country before, during, and after elections. According to Shafiu S. Zurmi, "the general anxiety over the nation's security is germane and should be a source of concern to the government." (Daily Sun, Friday January 21, 2011, p.19). The weakness of Nigeria's Criminal Justice System has been exposed significantly. This has posed a challenge and highlighted the ineffectiveness and delay in the implementation of policies. General Owoye Andrew Azazi has emphasized the need for more robust legislation on Anti-Terrorism. An effective and enabling Anti-Terrorism Act should establish a

strong institutional and coordination framework to combat and eliminate terrorism in and against the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It should also provide additional judicial guidelines to the Criminal Justice System to ensure the effective and speedy prosecution of terrorists. The Act must also clearly empower the National Security Agency (NSA) to conduct its anti-terrorism measures and activities across the diverse ethnic, religious, political, and social landscapes of the nation. A very important factor is whether the government is willing to take bold steps to clearly articulate, communicate, and implement any existing policies. Political instability can often result from an uncontrollable state of insecurity within a nation. The increasing insecurity challenges in Nigeria are signs of growing public dissatisfaction with the national political system and indicate that past elections may not have been free and fair. Many years ago, John Calvin condemned any practice that harmed or oppressed the poorest members of society as spiritually and politically illegitimate, as quoted by Brenda K. Savage. If the government fails to control and solve the problem of insecurity, it means that the government has failed in its duty to the people. This is because the basic goals of any civilized society are the survival and security of life and property. Karl Marx also highlighted that insecurity is destabilizing, as quoted by Benjamin Ryan in 2008. This is indeed true since a nation that is not secure can destabilize the economy, agriculture, governance, and increase criminal activity in society. It can also undermine the structures established by the government to maintain political stability.

The religious implications of insecurity in Nigeria are significant.

Imobighe (2002) notes that there is a tendency to associate certain forms of violence with religion. This leads the 'outsider' of religion to misuse the name of religion to advance their own agendas. Religious worship places are often targeted through indiscriminate bombing, which frightens people away from regular religious worship and fellowship. Insecurity can lead to the spread of fake religious beliefs and practices. In violent or insecure situations, people may join religious groups not out of genuine belief, but for security reasons. In areas where a particular religion is the majority, people may align with that religion for the sake of their safety and that of their families and businesses. Nothing thrives in an insecure environment. Religious activities, as well as

economic and governance functions, can be affected negatively by such an atmosphere. Religion can play a positive role by promoting and practicing peace, especially in violent environments. It can also initiate dialogue among warring groups.

The cultural implications of insecurity in Nigeria are also profound.

Okoracha (1998) suggests that the continuous development and integration of ethnic communities into a society based on Islamic solidarity, supported by increased interdependence and shared values and goals, should lead to transformation in the relationships between various ethnic groups. However, in the presence of insecurity, this transformation cannot occur. Imobighe (2002) commenting on the Warri experience noted that instead of the expected development towards ethnic integration and peaceful coexistence, what has occurred is a heightened awareness of ethnic identity, extreme communal disharmony, and intensified rivalry and hostility. The continuous loss of lives through bombing, shooting, and other forms of violence undermines the cultural value placed on the sanctity of life in many African societies. The practice of suicide bombing, which has become prominent in Nigeria, is culturally condemned. Cyril Okorochoa discussed several abhorrent practices in the Igbo culture, including homicide, suicide, killing a totem animal or an animal dedicated to a spirit, and stealing or destroying yams, especially when already planted, and incest. Most of these practices involve life. According to Okorochoa, 'if life is the most natural endowment every human being values, then anyone who destroys it is committing a most hideous crime.' Life is valued in all cultures. In most cultures, suicide is abhorred because of the value placed on life. Insecurity arising from ethnic or tribal tensions generates and leaves lasting scars of prejudice, suspicion, distrust, hatred, and discrimination. Cultural practices, which are learned modes of behavior passed down from one generation to the next and from one society to another, are negatively affected by insecurity. These learned behaviors are overwhelmed by negative vices. In Nigeria, many parents, due to the unsafe environment, prefer sending their children to study overseas. This trend is a form of cultural breakdown. These children will absorb new cultures that are foreign to their ethnic background, leading to incompatibility between the local and the foreign.

#### Social Learning Theory of Man

The social learning theory, proposed by Bandura, explains criminal behavior by suggesting that crime-related stimuli are constantly present in the environment, and individuals simply learn to respond to them.

This theory is supported by Bandura and McDonald's research, which found that children who observe aggressive behavior are more likely to exhibit aggression later in life. The frustration theory of crime also holds relevance in this analysis. In Nigeria, corrupt political leaders have used their illicit wealth to maintain power, obstructing the political climate of the nation. Their negative actions have worsened the state of the country, subjecting the people to hardships beyond their control. This political environment, shaped by corruption, has intensified the insecurity crisis that Nigerians are currently facing.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The danger of insecurity cannot be overstated. When a nation faces the problem of insecurity, all other plans are put on hold. Nigeria, a country with a population of over two hundred million people, cannot allow insecurity to derail its political and economic development. The country's young democracy is under threat. Recently, there has been an increase in violent activities in Nigeria, resulting in loss of lives and property. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address this issue before it leads to the country becoming ungovernable.

#### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Unemployment:** As this phenomenon rises, so does the increase in violence and crime, making the country less secure. This has been recognized by scholars and leaders. An unstable environment often leads to job loss. Therefore, the government should focus on tackling youth unrest by investing in job creation and skill acquisition programs that will improve the lives of citizens.
2. **Provision of a Proper Legal Framework:** An editorial from the Punch newspaper on July 13, 2011, highlighted this issue and provided a suitable recommendation. Security chiefs who met with senators in a closed session on July 5, 2011, stated that efforts to control certain groups

were often hindered by the judiciary through the generous granting of bail. They emphasized the need for the judiciary to be effectively integrated into action plans set by security agencies. This would support security operatives in their work and accelerate the process of bringing criminals to justice.

3. **Justice Dispensation:** The same editorial from Punch on July 13, 2011, expressed a strong opinion on the idea of fighting insecurity in Nigeria. In the fight against corruption in the public service and cultism in tertiary institutions, anti-cult agencies and university authorities have often faced obstacles in the courts. Courts have been criticized for delaying justice through injunctions, ex-parte orders, and in some cases, outright acquittals. To address this, the government should, through the justice ministry, monitor these practices and discipline any judge found to be colluding with criminals to hinder justice.
4. **Provision of Basic Needs of the Citizens:** The basic goals of any civilized society are the survival and security of life and property. These goals are non-negotiable, regardless of who wins elections. Therefore, ordinary Nigerians must be protected at all costs through appropriate measures such as information, education, mobilization, job opportunities, pressure-group formation, and legal requirements within the democratic system.
5. **Lack of or Non-Use of Intelligence Network:** The failure of the security agencies in Nigeria to use their intelligence networks to decode the security challenges posed by militant groups and other sects is concerning. The country's Early Warning System Mechanism, designed to prevent deadly conflicts, has failed in many instances to detect early signs of conflict. This failure indicates a weakness in the state structure. The government should focus on developing the Conflict Prevention Mechanism, including establishing an Early Warning System at all levels of government. Early detection and prevention of conflicts will help create a safe and enabling environment for the civilian population and for political and economic development.
6. **Need to Strengthen the Nation's Economic Base:** A weak economy can increase the public's sense of insecurity. According to a report in the Collier Year Book 1997 on the People's Republic of Congo, visitors noted an increase in the activities

of quasi-official militias in the streets of Brazzaville, extorting money. To prevent a similar situation in Nigeria, the government should launch projects and programs aimed at strengthening the country's economic base.

7. Precaution in the Use of Force: The Nigerian government must be cautious in its use of force to address the root causes of insecurity. Government force can often provoke greater retaliation from criminals, leading to more violence, deaths, and destruction, with innocent people—both rich and poor—bearing the brunt of the consequences.
8. Provide Good Governance: According to Dr. Taofeeq Abdul Azeez, the Chief Imam of the University of Abuja, "good governance is a panacea for insecurity in Nigeria" (Daily Sun Newspaper, 01/01/2012). If the government focuses on the welfare of the people by providing jobs for the growing youth population, infrastructure such as roads, water, electricity, and housing, and tackles the declining standards of education and medical care, then insecurity can be significantly reduced, if not entirely eliminated.
9. Need for Collaboration: Addressing the issue of insecurity in Nigeria requires a collective and cooperative approach. It is evident that the government alone cannot effectively resolve this challenge. Therefore, it is essential for religious leaders, traditional rulers, civil society organizations, and labor unions to work together with the government. This collaboration is necessary to confront the threat that is endangering the peaceful coexistence and stability of the nation.

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