

Insecurity in Nigeria: Political, Religious and Cultural Implications

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1.0 Abstract

Insecurity apart from being the fear of every Nigerian has become the word on the lips of every Nigerian and a discussion topic where two or three Nigerians gather. This phenomenon is a state of being subject to danger or injury. It is the anxiety one experience when one feels vulnerable and insecure. Several illegal armed groups, ethnic militia groups, religious fundamentalist and fanatics, are evidence of insecurity in Nigeria. These have given birth to series of bombings, murder, arson, armed robbery, corruption, injustices that we hear everyday. It is clear that these happenings are negatively affecting Nigeria politically, religiously and culturally. Religious organizations and other humanitarian agencies are losing confidence on the law enforcement agencies. This issue has been critically examined in this paper, through library research and views from the media. These work, therefore, examines, shows the causes, the effects of the political, religious and cultural implications of insecurity in Nigeria. Arising from this research is the threat of political, economic, civil destabilization if the trend of insecurity persists. This research paper recommends stiffer penalty for perpetrators of violence. It is hoped that the result of this research will provide a viable solution to the current insecurity challenge in Nigeria.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION:

In modern history, internal strife has burdened Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria. After independence, Nigeria experienced frequent coups and long periods of autocratic military rule from 1966 until 1999 when a democratic civilian government was established.

The past fifty years, in particular, have witnessed numerous coups as well as regional, religious, ethnic and secessionist violence. Another reason for insecurity is the act of piracy in the Niger Delta which seems to have characterized much of the current period of democracy. In the past two years, however, new forms of discord, distrust, have emerged in which religious extremists, armed militant, and ethnic militia groups threaten to bring about greater insecurity than those that preceded them. The older forms of militia groups have metamorphous into armed groups and have intensified their activities.

Recently, there have been high incidences of insecurity that have resulted in deaths and psychological trauma for individuals and families in the country. This requires the citizens to be much more security conscious considering the threat by religious extremists to bring about greater insecurity than those that preceded them.

Other security indices also include the persistent tension between the north and the south of Nigeria, growing unrest in the Niger Delta area and other parts of the country resulting in rise in violent incidents and kidnappings. Ethnic tensions, religious differences, unemployment and numerous social and political grievances are all fuelling the unrests in Nigeria and contributing to flashpoints for violence and creating insecurity in the country.

This seminar paper will place the current insecurity in Nigeria in context by defining and reviewing the causes, effect and the rise in violent incidences which have characterized the Nigerian society in recent times; highlight the challenges; assess its political, religious and cultural implications to the nation. Let us begin with understanding the terms which are frequently referred to in this paper.

3. DEFINITION OF TERMS

3.1 Insecurity: Insecurity is the state of being subject to danger or injury. The anxiety that is experienced when one feels vulnerable and insecure. Michael Ezemonye (2011) affirms the above definition of insecurity as "a state of being not secure, lack of confidence". To enable us understand this term, we now turn to the meaning of the word 'insecure' which the Advance English Dictionary defines as 'not confident about yourself or your relationships with other people; not safe or protected'. This definition further expounds the meaning of the term to include not just the general meaning but it touches the individual person "not being confident about oneself".

3.2 Nigeria

Nigeria is a republic in western Africa, with a coast along the Atlantic Ocean on the Gulf of Guinea. Most of Nigeria consists of a low plateau cut by rivers, especially the Niger and its largest tributary, the Benue. The country takes its name from its chief river. Until 1991, the capital was the Lagos, the largest city, located on the South-western coast. However, a new city called Abuja, located at the centre of country became the capital in 1991.

Nigeria has a federal form of government and is divided into 36 states and a federal capital territory. Robert Stock (2011) opined that

The area that is now Nigeria was home to ethnically based kingdoms and tribal communities before it became a European colony. In spite of European contact that began in the 16th century, these kingdoms and communities maintained their autonomy until the 19th century. The colonial era began in earnest in the late 19th century, when Britain consolidated its rule over Nigeria. In 1914 the British merged their northern and southern protectorates into a single state called the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Nigeria became independent of British rule in 1960.

Nigeria is by far the most populated of Africa's countries, with more than one hundred and fifty million people. The people belong to many different ethnic groups. These groups give the country a rich culture, but they also pose major challenges to nation building. Ethnic strife has plagued Nigeria since it gained independence in 1960.

Nigeria, apart from being multi-ethnic is multi-religious with – Christianity, Islam and African religion as the three main religions. Constitutionally, Nigeria is a secular state.

3.3 Political – We begin with the word politics. The Dictionary defines it as the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or society. This is that which relates to the state, government, the body politics, public administration, policy-making in a nation. It is an organized or ordered with respect to government (Collins 2005).

Political therefore connotes activities pertaining to policy, or the administration of the government. For instance, Political rights are those which may be exercised in the formation or administration of the government. John Bouvier (1856) said that "a political corporation is one has

principally as its object, 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).

3.4 **Religious** – Religious is that which relates to belief in religion, the teaching of religion or the practice of religion. While religion with all the controversies surrounding its meaning is defined differently by different scholar depending on their persuasion and perspective of the proponents. For instance, Emile Durkheim sees religion as “an inter-dependent system of beliefs and practices regarding thing which are sacred” However, for the purpose of this presentation, I wish to accept the definition given by Ebenezer Ejalonibu Lawal (2005) that says “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 upon the social functions which religion universally fulfills. (p106)

3.5 **Cultural** – ‘cultural’ denotes deriving from or distinctive of the ways of living built up by a group of people and relates to shared knowledge and values of a society that is transferable from one generation to another and possibly from one society to another. Culture is the total way of life of a people (John Beattie 1964). This refers to a whole range of human activities which are learned and not instinctive, and which are transmitted from generation to generation through various learning process (p. 20). K. Bediako (1994) expanded the meaning of culture to include the way of thinking and behaviour share by a substantial social grouping which gives them identity in relation to others. By this definition it means all persons participate in one culture or another; people are identified for who they are by their culture.

4. **CAUSES OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA:**

There is a dramatic increase in violence, terrorism and the like, in Nigeria today. Lawless sects are raising the tempo of their campaign in various parts of the country. We hear of series of bombings, shooting and killings, kidnappings, armed robbery, arson and so on. These take place from north to south, east to west and almost on daily basis.

The phenomenon ‘insecurity’ has been extended to cover other spheres like economic, ob and political insecurity. In this paper, our concentration will treat the topic holistically - as it affects the life and property of the citizenry. Let us now examine the cause of this problem.

4.1. Porous borders – the free flow of migrants from other countries to Nigeria through our unguarded borders allows criminals to enter the country without check.

4.2. Proliferation of Arms and Ammunitions: Several arms hauls have been ceased at our air and sea ports, some in very large quantities. This is not good for the country. These arms and ammunition end up in the hands of criminals who apply same in their nefarious activities in the country thereby making life insecure for the people of their locality.

9.3 Illegal Armed groups – Illegal importation of arms and ammunitions has made possession of arms by individuals and groups very easy. We can name groups like Niger Delta Militants, Oodua Peoples Congress, ‘Bakassi Boys’, MASSOB that possess arms and ammunitions.

9.4 Oil Bunkering – Nigeria being one of the largest oil producing nation suffers from the activities of illegal oil bunkering. This activity is promoted by the spate of insecurity in the country. This is back-up with criminals who are ready to die in Nigeria water-ways. This therefore makes the coastal areas of our oil producing states unsafe.

9.5 Labour activists – Early in 2012 the Nigerian Labour Congress call for a nation wide strike as a result of increase in price of fuel by government. They accused the government of insensitivity to the suffering of the people as well as ignoring the insecurity challenges in the country. Peaceful protests by Labour and other civil society groups have severally been high-jacked by miscreants and inflicted pains on people and made life in our cities insecure.

9.6 Kidnapping – this is another visible sign of insecurity in the country. The perpetrators of this crime do not spare any one in this new wave of crime that seems to have supplanted armed robbery and other non-contact crimes. Since this act began in Nigeria, aged, children, male and female have been kidnapped for ransom. This has made life unbearable to the citizens. People now live in fear of falling victims to these criminals.

9.7 Militancy – According to criminal law, militancy is violence, illegal force or the illegal use of unjustified force or the intimidating effect created by the threat of this act.

This word became pronounced in Nigeria when the Niger Deltans took up arms against government exploitation and environmental degradation of their area due to oil exploration and exploitation. This does not only exist in the Niger Delta area. Other parts of the country have witnessed militants who commit atrocities worse than the youths of Nigeria Delta whose area is given the ‘brand name’.

Until recently the word ‘insurgence’ was alien to Nigerian society. The activities of the Militant Islamic sect popularly called “Boko Haram” have opened this chapter of militancy in Nigeria. Shootings, bombings, kidnappings, arson, car and suicide bombing in various parts of the country are said to be the handiwork of ‘insurgence’. These activities have heightened the spade of insecurity in the nation.

4.8 Fear and Distrust on Government - What the current trend of violence is imprinting on the psyche of Nigerians is that the government security apparatus is incapable of guaranteeing the safety and security of its people. This has, therefore, impact on the general human security of the people as the situation promotes fear, limits the peoples' ability to develop economically.

4.9 Unemployment – The rise in Crime wave in Nigeria since the mid-1990s was as a result of unemployment, economic decline, and social inequality, which are abetted by inefficient and corrupt police and customs forces (Robert Stock (2008 Encarta Entry). The idle minds became devil’s workshop. These people who are mostly youth are easily recruited into militant groups and trained in to rob, kill, kidnap, smuggle, highjack to mention but a few.

Accurate unemployment rates are difficult to obtain and generally mean little in a society where many who work are marginally employed and where begging is a socially accepted occupation.

4.10 Religious fanaticism/extremism – Religious fanaticism and extremism have been among the major cause of insecurity in Nigeria. The recent incidences of attack on churches and Christians in Northern part of the country by Moslem extremists have rendered several states in the north unsafe for life and properties. The damage these extremists have caused can be seen 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 assessment of the Nigerian situation.

4.11 Wrong Political Ambition – The desire for a political office not evil but to nurse negative reasons for that ambition can result to one doing anything to attain it. 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 the violent activities in parts of the country are operating with a hidden agenda. They have the intention of enthroning their own type of government which is selfish, criminal and unpatriotic as Nigerians. With such ambition they can try to make the country ungovernable or insecure.

Electioneering - Election periods in the country seem to be the moment of serious security challenge. 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”.

4.12 Ethnic violence - We have heard in some area like Plateau and Benue States reprisal attacks by ethnic militia unleashing insecurity in these areas. While security in some parts of the country, like the South-south, southeast and the southwest has been compromised, the northern zone that has always shown a propensity for violent conflicts did not disappoint security watchers. Starting with the usual religious/ethnic oriented conflicts to the Jos ethnic/religious/political conflicts of 2008 till date, the northern states have shown that security of persons and properties is still far from being realized.

4.13 Desire to actualize ethnic agenda – This has become a phenomenon in Nigeria society today. Because of certain unsatisfactory or unfavourable situation politically, economically, developmentally and so on they would want to be separated from Nigeria. We hear of, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the South, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South East, Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the West, BOKO HARAM in

the North, BAKASI BOYS, Fulani HERDSMEN, and VIGILANTE groups all other the country. Each one of these groups has reasons for their agitation (Michael Ezemonye. Vanguard, Dec 02, 2011)

5.0 IMPLICATIONS OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA:

5.1 Political Implication of Insecurity in Nigeria

The current security situation in Nigeria has forced the political leaders to a 'rethinking national security' as Ibrahim Bashir of the Daily Sun puts it. This situation demands Nigeria security agencies to rethink and refocus our national security resources on the unique character of security threats in Nigeria. (Ibrahim, Thursday, March 24, 2011). Nigerians are daily becoming more and more apprehensive about the security implications to the country before, during and after the elections. I agree with Shafiu S. Zurmi that 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 greatly. This has posed a challenge and showed the ineffectiveness and delay in the implementation of the policy.

General Owoye Andrew Azazi has given some imperative, one of which is

... the need for a more robust legislation on Anti-Terrorism. An effective and enabling Anti-Terrorism Act must provide the institutional and co-ordination framework for combating and elimination the acts of terrorism in and against the Federal Republic of Nigeria...provide for additional judicial guidelines to the Criminal Justice System for the effective and speedy prosecution of terrorists and must clearly enable NSO to conduct their anti-terrorism measures and activities across many of our national ethnic-centric, religious, political and social biases.

Very important is whether the government will be willing to take the bold steps necessary to clearly articulate, communicate and implement whatever policy that is in place. Political instability sometimes results from uncontrollable state of insecurity in a nation.

The growing insecurity challenges in Nigeria are signs of the growing popular discontent with the national political system and indications that past elections were not free and fair. Many years ago John Calvin condemned any practice that could harm or oppressed the poorest element in society as spiritually and politically illegitimate (qtd. by Brenda K. Savage). If the government is unable to control and solve the problem of insecurity it means that that government for the common has failed. This is because the basic goals of any civilized are the survival and security of life and property.

Karl Marx added a voice that "Insecurity as destabilizing" (qtd. By Benjamin Ryan: 2008). This is true in that when a nation is not secure it can destabilize the economy, agriculture, governance and increases criminality in the society. It can also destroy the structures put in place by the government for political stability.

5.2 RELIGIOUS IMPLICATION OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

The tendency to hijack any form of violence and branding it religious is possible. Based on this the 'outsider' of religion will give it a bad name in order to hang it.

Religious worship places are being desecrated through blood shedding resulting from indiscriminate bombing of religious worship centres. It scares members away from regular religious worship and fellowship.

Insecurity in a nation can help spread or promote fake religious faith and practice.

Violent or an insecure situation drives people into various religious groups not by reason of believing but for security purposes. In an environment where a particular religion commands majority, the residents would like to align with the popular religion there for the sake of securing their lives and that of their relations and possibly their business investments. Nothing thrives in an insecure environment. Economic, religious activities, as well as governance can be frustrating in such an atmosphere.

Religion can play a positive roll of preaching peace and living out same in an environment that is prone to violence. Dialogue could be initiated amongst warring groups.

5.3 CULTURAL IMPLICATION OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

It is expected that the continuous growth and development of ethnic communities into an integrated society based on Islamic solidarity cemented by increased inter-dependence and harmonization of shared values and goals will bring about transformation of the relationship between the various ethnic groups. But in a situation where there is insecurity this desire cannot materialize. T. A. Imobighe (2002) commenting on Warri experience said "Rather than the expected evolutionary change towards ethnic integration and peaceful co-existence, what has taken place in Warri is a heightened awareness of ethnic identity, extreme communal disharmony and a more intense rivalry and hostility (p.66). The incessant taking of life through

bombing, shooting and other forms of violence renders the sanctity of life which many African cultures uphold to be baseless.

The problem of suicide bombing which has become a very prominent way of destroying lives in the country is an act or practice which is condemned culturally in Nigeria. Writing on the abominable practices in the Igbo culture (Cyril Okorocho) pointed out four of such practices – homicide (including poisoning with intent to maim or kill); suicide; killing a totem animal or an animal dedicated to a spirit; and stealing or destroying yams, especially when already planted; incest. Most of these abominations have to do with life. According to him “if life is the *summum bonum*, then anyone who destroys it is committing a most hideous crime indeed”. Life is valued in all cultures. In most cultures, suicide is abhorred because of the value place on life.

Insecurity that arises from ethnic or tribal setting generates and leaves scars of ethnic prejudice, suspicion, distrust, hatred and discrimination. And culture consisting of learned modes of behaviour that are socially transmitted from one generation to the next, from one society or individual to another will be affected negatively by the wave of insecurity. The learned mode of behaviour will be overwhelmed with negative vices. In Nigeria most parents, due to unsafe learning environment preferred their children studying overseas. This trend is tantamount to cultural breakdown. These children are bound to imbibe new cultures which are alien to their ethnic group. The foreign and the local will basically be incompatible.

6.0 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CONCLUSION

The danger of insecurity can not be over emphasize. When a nation is saddled with the problem of insecurity every other plans are stalled. Nigeria a country with a population of over one hundred and fifty million people cannot allow insecurity to derail her political and economic development plans. The country’s young democracy is being threatened.

Recently, we have experienced increased in violent activities in Nigeria which has claimed several lives and properties. There is therefore urgent need to tackle it before it makes the country ungovernable.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.2.1. Unemployment: As this phenomena rises so also is the increase in violence and crime making the country insecure. This has been identified by scholars and leaders alike. Also an insecure environment will definitely result in job lose. Government should therefore tackle and arrest youth restiveness by investing on job creation.

6.2.2 Provision of Proper Legal Framework: The editorial in the Punch newspaper of Wednesday 13th of July 2011 gave the following summary that addresses this fact and stands as a suitable recommendation:

Security chiefs who met with senators at a closed Session on 5th July 2011 claimed that efforts to rein in the sect had often been thwarted by the judiciary through generous granting of bail... (they) were unanimous on the need to have the Judiciary effectively integrated into action plans instituted by the security agencies.

This will encourage the security operatives in their work and hasten the process of bringing to justice the perpetrators of criminal activities in the country.

6.2.3. Justice Dispensation: The Punch Editorial of July 13 2011 made a very frantic opinion on the idea of fighting insecurity in Nigeria

In the fight against corruption in the public service and against cultism in tertiary institutions, the anti-craft agencies and university authorities have often been up against a brick wall in the courts. The courts have been repeatedly blamed for frustrating justice delivery through all manners of injunctions, exparte orders, and in some cases, outright acquittals.

On this problem, I strongly recommend that the government should through the justice ministry check these excesses and discipline any judge found to collaborate with criminals to stall justice dispensation.

6.2.4. Provision of Basic Needs of the Citizens: The basic goals of any civilized society are the survival and security of life and property. These basic goals are not negotiable, no matter who wins or loses in election. Therefore, the ordinary Nigerians must be given protection at all cost through appropriate information, education, mobilization, job opportunity, pressure-group formation and legal requirements in our democratic politics.

6.2.5. Lack of or non-use of Intelligence Network: The failure of the security cluster in Nigeria to make use of its intelligence network to decode the security challenge the militant groups and all such sects poses to the peace and security of the nation leaves much to be desired. The country's Early Warning System Mechanism to preventing such deadly conflicts from erupting should be

developed. The intelligence sector and the conflict prevention mechanism of the country failed in many instances to pick up the tell tale signs and this is indicative of failure of the state structure. What the government should do is to develop the Conflict Prevention Mechanism in the country, including the establishment of an Early Warning System at all levels of government. Through the early detection of impending conflicts and its prevention, the government will be providing a safe and enabling environment for the civilian population, and for political and economic development to thrive.

6.2.6. Need to Strengthen the Nations' Economic Base. A weaken economy increased the public's sense of insecurity. It is reported in Collier Year Book 1997 about People's Republic of Congo that "visitors reported an upsurge of activities of quasi-official militia that circulated in the street of the capital city of Brazzaville extorting money. To avoid similar situation in Nigeria the government must initiate projects/programmes that will strengthen the economic base of the country.

6.2.7. Precaution In the use of Force: The Nigerian Government has to take precaution in the use of force to tackle the root cause of insecurity because Government force seems to galvanize greater retaliation by the 'criminals' and the masses end up bearing the brunt - with more violence, deaths and destruction of innocent people, the poor and the rich.

6.2.9. Provide Good Governance: I agree with Dr. Taofeeq Abdul Azeez, the Chief Imam of the University of Abuja that 'good governance is a panacea for insecurity in Nigeria' (Daily Sun Newspaper of 01/01/2012). If the government will focus on the welfare of the people by providing jobs for our teeming youth, infrastructure like good roads, water, electricity and housing and tackle the problem of falling standard of education and medical care, then insecurity would have been reduced to minimum if not eradicate.

6.2.10. Need for Collaboration: There is the need for a collaborative effort in solving the insecurity problem in Nigeria. The government definitely cannot tackle the problem alone. The Religious Leaders and traditional rulers, civil society groups, Labour Unions must team up with government to find solution to this monster that is threatening the fabric of the nation's peaceful co-existence.

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