VOL. 13 NO. 2,
AUGUST, 2026
E-ISSN 3027-1533
P-ISSN 3026-8648

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of African Innovation & Advanced Studies (JAIAS)

State Failure and Insecurity in Nigeria: Making Free Citizens Prison Inmates Outside the Prison Walls

Rufus, Anthony PhD
Department of Political Science, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State
Corresponding Author: rufusanthony50@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/ajaias.v13i2.0120

Abstract

Nigeria continues to face widespread insecurity regardless of the substantial government spending on security and defence with insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, separatist agitations and electoral violence remaining persistent challenges. This study examined the relationship between corruption, government expenditure and insecurity in Nigeria within the context of state failure. The study focused on the extent to which corruption is associated with insecurity, the nexus between government spending and security outcomes and whether the increased military expenditure has corresponded with reduced violence. The study is anchored on State Failure Theory and the Social Contract Theory, with a quantitative correlational design adopted using secondary time-series data from 2016 to 2024 which were obtained from Transparency International, the Institute for Economics and Peace, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker and Nigeria's federal budget records. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation were used for the analysis. The findings showed a strong and statistically significant association between perceived corruption and conflict-related fatalities ($r = -0.89$, $p = .007$), while the relationship between corruption and the Global Peace Index was weak and insignificant. Total government and military expenditure also showed no consistent inverse relationship with insecurity. Although military spending skyrocketed in 2021, that same year also recorded the highest conflict-related fatalities in the study period, while subsequent increases in security allocations did not produce sustained reductions in violence. Persistent correctional failures, elite capture and misallocation of resources create permissive environments for non-state armed actors and constrain citizen freedoms, thus free citizens are made "prison inmates" out the prison walls. The study concluded that improved transparency, institutional capacity and reforming the criminal justice system and aligning fiscal allocations with developmental and security priorities are critical to breaking cycles of violence and restoring citizen trust in the state.

Keywords: State Failure, Insecurity, Corruption, Government Expenditure, Social Contract Theory, Nigeria.

Introduction

The persistence of security issues in many of the developing countries is often associated with limitations in the capacity of state institutions and Nigeria illustrates this phenomenon quite clearly. The state from a classical perspective is expected to exercise its legitimate control over the use of force while maintaining peace and public order (Weber, 1946). These responsibilities become difficult to fulfil when the government institutions struggle to protect citizens, enforce laws or provide basic public services. Such weaknesses in the system can gradually undermine the effectiveness of the state and in more serious situations that contribute to state fragility or failure (Rotberg, 2004; Zartman, 1995). Concerns about governance and security have been evident in contemporary assessments of the country, reflecting the difficulty that is faced by public institutions in containing security threats that have persisted and changed in form over time. As a country ranked 148th of 163 countries on the Global Peace Index in 2025, with a score of 2.869, while the Fragile States Index similarly identifies a significant weaknesses across its security, political and socioeconomic dimensions (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025; Fund for Peace, 2024). These conditions increasingly constrain citizens' mobility, livelihoods and civic freedoms, creating what may be described as an "open-air prison" outside conventional incarceration.

The persistence and scale of insecurity renders an important empirical basis for examining this problem, because Nigeria has experienced insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, farmer–herder conflict and oil-related criminality across different regions. The expansion of these threats has affected both schools, transport networks, businesses and communities (ACLED, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2018, 2021). The nearly 300 students that were abducted in Kaduna State in March 2024 had further demonstrated the persistence of mass kidnapping (Associated Press, 2024a; Financial Times, 2024). State weakness is also evident in attacks on correctional facilities, including the 2022 Kuje custodial-centre breach in Abuja and the escape of 119 inmates from Suleja Niger State prison in 2024 (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Associated Press, 2024b). These developments indicate that insecurity extends beyond armed conflict to weaknesses in the institutions responsible for maintaining public order and protecting citizens.

The governance and economic dimensions are equally significant. The World Bank had estimated that about 47% of Nigerians lived in poverty in 2024, while Nigeria recorded a Corruption Perceptions Index score of 26/100 in 2024, ranking 140th of 180 countries (World Bank, 2024a; Transparency International, 2024a, 2024b). At the same time the government continues to commit substantial resources to security and defence, but yet insecurity has been persistent. This situation therefore brings the effectiveness of public spending into question. It is necessary to consider whether the resources committed to security and military operations are actually producing better security outcomes or whether corruption and weaknesses within public institutions are limiting what such spending can achieve.

The state-failure perspective helps to explain this relationship. Rotberg (2004, 2021) argues that states progressively lose control over their territories, fail to provide core public goods and experience declining legitimacy. Nigeria exhibits several of these characteristics that are described through its persistent insecurity, attacks on state facilities, reliance on private security and vigilante structures and the declining public confidence in its formal institutions. While existing studies provide substantial evidence on the causes and manifestations of insecurity, much of the literature focuses on the military dimensions or social consequences of violence. Comparatively less attention has been given to the

empirical relationship between corruption, government expenditures, military expenditure and insecurity in Nigeria. The question of whether the increased public and military spending actually contributes to improved security and whether corruption still weakens such outcomes has been insufficiently examined. This constitutes the gap that this study is seeking to address.

Research Questions

The following research questions guides this study:

i. How does corruption influence the persistence of insecurity in Nigeria?
ii. What is the relationship between government security and defence expenditure and insecurity in Nigeria?
iii. To what extent does military expenditure contribute to reducing insecurity in Nigeria?

State Failure from the Continental and National Perspectives

Scholarly debates on the concept of "state failure" cluster around related but very distinct concepts: state fragility, state collapse and weak, or quasi-states. Each of these emphasizes a varying degree and dynamics of institutional breakdown (Rotberg, 2003; Zartman, 1995). Rotberg conceptualizes that state failure is a progressive erosion of a state's ability to provide core public goods including security, rule of law and basic services that is combined with a decline in legitimacy as perceived by citizens (Rotberg, 2003; Rufus, 2017a). Then Zartman (1995) views state collapse as a gradual process in which a legitimate government authority breaks down and may eventually be replaced either partly or entirely by a non-state group or a predatory network. Both perspectives build on Weber's classic notion of the state as holding a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force; the erosion of this monopoly is a defining marker of failure (Weber, 1946). Contemporary measures of fragility had operationalized these ideas using composite indices such as the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index (CAST framework) and the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Peace Index (GPI), both combining political, social, economic and security indicators to quantify fragility and violence (Fund for Peace, 2024; IEP, 2024).

Operational definitions of state failure converged on certain observable indicators. Rotberg (2003) identifies territorial loss, judicial and correctional breakdowns, the erosion of civil liberties and service delivery failures as hallmarks of progressive failure. The CAST framework classifies fragility into political, social, economic and security dimensions (Fund for Peace, 2024). The GPI by contrast evaluates societal safety, ongoing conflict and the militarization across 23 indicators, making it very useful for cross-national security comparisons (IEP, 2024). Some Event-based sources such as ACLED with other governance measures such as the World Bank Governance Indicators and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, offered different but useful ways of examining these dimensions and allow the evidence to be compared across sources (ACLED, 2024; World Bank, 2016; Transparency International, 2024).

Various empirical studies have highlighted multiple pathways and mechanisms that are connecting institutional weakness to insecurity. Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004) show that weak administrative capacity, poverty and geographic conditions create permissive environments for insurgency. Later work distinguishes between extractive capacity and developmental capacity, the latter being crucial in mitigating local grievances before they escalate into violence (Pritchett, Woolcock & Andrews, 2013; World Bank, 2016). Neopatrimonialism in Africa is where elites capture public resources then through clientelist networks further and undermine institutional authority, promoting both supply of armed actors and weapons, and the demand of grievances and protection markets, and conditions for violence (Chabal & Daloz, 1999).

These dynamics are equally pronounced in the Nigerian State. Northern Nigeria's Islamist insurgencies reflect state failure in governance, exclusionary politics and limited economic opportunity (Afoaku, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2018). The Middle Belt conflicts illustrate how weak dispute resolution and land tenure systems had exacerbated pastoralist-farmer violence (ICG, 2021). Criminal markets such as kidnapping and banditry flourish where policing is ineffective and correctional institutions porous (SBM Intelligence, 2023; ACLED, 2024). Two key observations emerged: the security challenges are multi-causal and spatially diverse and persistent insecurity is often enabled by governance failures including corruption, weak judiciary processes and inadequate service provision (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Major prison breaks reveal the epicenter between state failure and insecurity. Large-scale prison breaks, including Kuje (2019) and others had exposed weaknesses in the custodial infrastructure and intelligence while returning convicted insurgents to the field, reinforcing cycles of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Chronic pretrial detention, overcrowding and rights violations that are documented by Amnesty International (2008) has highlighted systemic injustice, which further undermines public confidence in state authority.

State failure in Nigeria is heavily compounded by what Abbass in 2025 termed "state-terrorism," which is a form of coercion and manipulation employed by political elites to sustain control and facilitate looting of state resources (Abbass, 2025). Here insecurity is both a symptom and a tool of governance failure, manifesting in insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts and organized criminality. Nigeria's political and socio-economic conditions have also made the country to be more vulnerable to insecurity and public fear. Patronage networks and widening inequalities between political elites and the wider population, and its dependence on global economic relationships have placed additional pressure on the ability of the state to provide security, justice and essential services (Abbass, 2025; Lal-Das, 1999; Watts, 1987).

These problems are rooted partly in the historical development of Nigeria. The oil economy in as much as it is a major source of national revenue, has also been associated with corruption, political instability and growing social tensions (Watts, 1987; Shenton, 1987). The neglect of agriculture, increasing movement from rural areas to cities and the persistent food insecurity has contributed to economic hardship and social dislocation (Abbass, 2014). Nigeria being a country with growing dependence on international capital has added another layer to these challenges, as external economic relationships have influenced domestic policy and capacity while leaving existing patterns of inequality and insecurity largely unresolved (Abbass, 2019; Rufus, 2017b).

Corruption and Insecurity

Persistent corruption has affected the ability of public institutions to perform their responsibilities and has weakened public confidence in the government, and its now difficult to address security problems effectively (Transparency International, 2024; Aiyede, 2009). Resources that were intended for security purposes including military funding, police logistics and other operational needs can be diverted or misused. Anytime this happens gaps are created within the security system that the armed and criminal groups are able to exploit, thereby contributing to the persistence of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and all other related forms of violence (Onifade, Imhonopi, & Urim, 2013; Rufus, 2019).

The problem also extends into the political and bureaucratic systems. Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Abbass (2025) argues that political and administrative elites can use public funds and institutions to pursue private interests through the extraction of rents and the distribution of patronage. Political appointments, resources and opportunities are shaped by nepotism and political loyalty which will now make the institutional effectiveness to suffers. Security agencies may consequently lack the personnel,

equipment and the resources needed to respond adequately to emerging threats. Several concerns have also been raised about the misallocation and inflation of military expenditure which can leave personnel poorly equipped and reduce their operational capacity (International Crisis Group, 2018). The same kinds of related problems within the police system, intelligence and emergency response can also leave vulnerable communities without adequate protection and further weaken confidence in government (ICG, 2021).

Corruption takes different forms and operates at several levels of Nigerian society. Informal payments can interfere with access to public services and weaken the consistent application of the law at the lower level, while large-scale corruption can involve the diversion of substantial public funds and resources for private use at the higher level including through questionable contracts, unnecessary projects and illicit financial transfers (Watts, 1987; Abbass, 2025). Such practices within the security of a country may appear in inflated procurement costs, poorly executed facilities or payments intended to prevent criminals from facing prosecutions. These practices can have direct security consequences because they reduce the resources available for legitimate security operations. Existing research similarly suggests that corruption and weak institutions can create conditions in which violent conflict is more likely to emerge and persist (Bates, 2008; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

The relationship between corruption and insecurity can therefore become self-reinforcing, because weak institutions create opportunities for armed and criminal groups, while those groups can take advantage of corruption, administrative failures and connections within influential individuals. The persistence of banditry, kidnapping and insurgency has been linked to weaknesses in security provision and the broader governance environment in parts of northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt regions (SBM Intelligence, 2023; ACLED, 2024). Insecurity should not be understood only as an outcome of weak state institutions in this sense. It can also serve the interests of individuals and networks that benefit from political influence, patronage and the control of public resources (Abbass, 2025).

These developments have serious implications for the relationship between citizens and the state from the perspective of the social contract theory (Hobbes, 1651; Locke, 1690). The state is expected to provide security and protect the rights of its citizens, but persistent corruption can undermine that expectations. When people come to view public institutions as serving private interests rather than the public good, the confidence of the people in the government declines. These communities may then turn to other alternative forms of protection including vigilante groups or in some circumstances, relationships with non-state armed actors. Corruption therefore affects insecurity not only through the losses or misuse case of public resources but also through the gradual erosion of the legitimacy and trust on which effective state authority depends. This will further fragment the state's monopoly of violence and deepens cycles of insecurity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013).

Public expenditure & security

The preceding section addressed the diversion and misuse of public resources, this section turns to the volume and the trajectory of public expenditure itself, and its theorized relationship with security outcomes. The core proposition in this literature is that the sign of the relationship is not fixed: expenditure can either buttress or bypass the state capacity, depending on institutional absorptive capacity and the presence of oversight (Pritchett, Woolcock & Andrews, 2013).

A first strand of the literature treats public expenditure as capacity-building: well-targeted spending on policing, judicial infrastructure, correctional reform and social services can close the institutional gaps that the State Failure Theory identifies as the proximate cause of violence (Rotberg, 2004; World Bank, 2016). On this view total government expenditure should correlate negatively with insecurity, provided the spending reaches its intended institutional targets.

Then a second competing strand argues that in weak-institution settings, expenditure growth without matching absorptive and oversight capacity produces little security dividend and may even be captured by the same elite networks that were discussed in Section 3.2 (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Abbass, 2025). The Nigeria's federal security and defence budget allocation rose continuously in nominal naira terms across recent fiscal years from ₦1.97 trillion in 2021 to ₦2.41 trillion in 2022, ₦2.74 trillion in 2023 and then ₦3.25 trillion in 2024 (Businessday, 2026), even as the country's broader fiscal position deteriorated: government debt rose to 52.9% of GDP by 2024 and the naira lost roughly two-thirds of its dollar value between 2022 and 2024, which had mechanically inflated nominal naira spending figures without necessarily reflecting in a real increase in purchasing power for security procurement (Trading Economics, 2026).

The third issue that needs to be considered in the Nigerian case is the difference between what the government approves in the budget and what is actually released and spent on the said or proposed project. This is a huge gap that can arise from delays in passing the budget, fluctuations in oil revenues and the diversion or misuse of the funds discussed earlier (Aiyede, 2009). The amount allocated to security in the approved budget as a result may not reflect the resources that ultimately reach the institutions responsible for security operations. This limitation is important when interpreting the empirical results of the study.

Insecurity dynamics

Insecurity is not limited to the actual absence of protection. It also includes the fear and the uncertainty that people experiences when they believe that their safety is at risk (Beland, 2007). These two dimensions are often difficult to separate because the actual exposure to violence can also reinforce fear, while the expectation of violence can influence how people behave even when an attack has not occurred. Insecurity in Nigeria has also acquired a political dimension whereby both the state and non-state actors may take advantage of existing fears and vulnerabilities in pursuit of political, economic or ideological interests. As Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim (2013) suggest, this can turn insecurity into a means of exercising influence and control, making it very difficult for institutions and communities to respond effectively.

The Nigeria’s security problems have also changed considerably over time. What was once largely associated with the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast has developed into a much broader security problem involving different forms of violence across several parts of the country. Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), had been a major security concern in the Northeast, mostly in Borno State where attacks have affected civilians, government facilities and security personnel as well (ICG, 2018). There have also been several reports of linkages and connections between insurgent groups and criminal networks operating in other parts of the country. These connections with local grievances and weaknesses in the state institutions have helped sustain violence in affected communities (Ogu, Akaose, & Nwokocha, 2022; SBM Intelligence, 2023).

Banditry and kidnapping have meanwhile become serious problems in states such as Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina and Kebbi. The criminal groups and networks have been able to take advantage of weaknesses in the police system, delays within the justice system and corruption to operate with limited fear of punishment (ACLED, 2024). Their attacks have extended beyond isolated rural communities to include security personnel, transport infrastructure and other targets. The continued occurrence of such attacks raises concerns about the ability of the state to provide basic protection, while also contributing to displacement, fear and the growth of community-based responses to insecurity (Rotberg, 2021).

The conflict between the pastoralist groups and the farming communities also presents another example of how insecurity can emerge from the interaction of social and institutional problems. In parts of the

North-Central regions including Benue and Nasarawa States, disputes over land, grazing routes and access to other resources have sometimes developed into violent confrontations (Ogu, Akaose, & Nwokocha, 2022). Weak enforcement of relevant laws, inadequate mechanisms for resolving disputes and inconsistent application of the rule of law can make these conflicts more difficult to contain. The consequences are often most severe for rural communities, where repeated violence can result in loss of lives, displacement and disruption of livelihoods.

Communal and localized violence has also contributed to the Nigeria's wider insecurity problem. In several parts of the country disputes over land, resources, political interests and community boundaries have sometimes escalated into violent confrontations. Where security agencies respond slowly or mechanisms for resolving disputes are ineffective, relatively localised disputes can become more difficult to contain and may result in loss of lives, displacement and destruction of property. The persistence of such conflicts points to weaknesses in conflict prevention, law enforcement and the capacity of the public institutions to protect its affected communities.

Electoral violence further complicated these security situations, mostly during closely contested elections. Political competition can create incentives for the use of local gangs and other armed groups to intimidate voters, attack opponents or interfere with electoral activities. Such incidents reveal weaknesses in the ability of institutions to protect the electoral process and hold perpetrators accountable (Akinola, 2019; Onifade et al., 2013). Election-related violence can deepen existing tensions and contribute to a more broader sense of insecurity after the elections.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on two related but different theoretical frameworks. These include the State Failure Theory and the Social Contract Theory. The state failure theory focused on the strength of a state institution and its ability to perform essential functions, while the social contract theory is concerned with the relationship between government and citizens and the legitimacy that gives authority meaning.

State Failure Theory

State Failure Theory views the state as an institution that is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining order, controlling its territory, administering justice and providing essential public services. These responsibilities extend beyond just security to areas such as infrastructure, healthcare and education among others. A state begins to exhibit signs of failure when its institutions can no longer perform these basic functions effectively. This may be seen in the loss of territorial control, challenges to the state's authority over the use of force, declining public services and a gradual loss of political legitimacy (Rotberg, 2003; Rufus, 2017a). Rotberg (2003) further explains that the state failure should not necessarily be understood as a sudden breakdown. Rather it can develop gradually as the institutions weakens over time then creating opportunities for criminal groups and other non-state actors to expand their influence and make exploitations. Zartman's (1995) work adds another dimension by examining what happens when legitimate political authority breaks apart and the difficulties that will arise in rebuilding effective state institutions after such a collapse. Both perspectives foreground measurable symptoms of loss of territorial control, proliferation of armed groups, breakdowns in justice and corrections infrastructure and the substitution of private security for public order which make state failure analytically tractable for empirical study.

The state failure lens when applied to the Nigerian state directs attention to institutions and outputs: whether the security apparatus can secure territory and transport corridors; whether criminal justice and correctional systems can detain, adjudicate and rehabilitate offenders; and whether public goods reach its citizens equitably. Recurrent prison breaks, widespread impunity and the rise of parallel security

providers such as vigilantes, militias and private security are symptomatics of the loss of monopoly of force and impaired justice functions that Rotberg and Zartman identified as central to state failure. These phenomena are therefore not incidental background noise but are core indicators of a declining state capacity.

Social Contract Theory

The Social Contract Theory supplies the normative complement to the structural focus of state failure. From Thomas Hobbes's bleak account of the pre-political "state of nature" to the Jean-Jacques Rousseau's focus on the general will, social contract theorists had argued that political authority is justified only insofar as it secures the basic rights and safety of its citizens and commands their consent (Hobbes, 1651/1996; Rousseau, 1762/2002). Modern contractarian scholarship has reframed this as the question of legitimacy: institutions gain compliance when they are perceived as just, effective and representative; when institutions breach expectations and not least by failing to provide security, public consent weakens and alternative loyalties or forms of private enforcement multiply. The social contract thus makes explicable the political consequences of governance failures, withdrawal of consent, support for non-state armed actors and the erosion of civic trust.

Citizens' daily calculations whether to send their children to school or not, to farm remote fields or to travel between towns reflect perceived compacts with the state about safety and security. Where that compact is perceived to be broken, the citizens curtail economic and civic engagement and sometimes turn to non-state security arrangements or to armed resistance; these responses both reflect and reinforce the legitimacy deficit that the social contract framework had predicted.

An integrative analytical frame for the study

Bringing these two traditions yields a very robust analytical frame for this study. State Failure Theory provides structural indicators and processual expectations while Social Contract Theory explains the normative and behavioural consequences of institutional failure. This study interprets empirical relationships between corruption, public expenditure, military spending and insecurity as follows:

i. Corruption erodes administrative capacity and diverts resources away from public goods, thereby accelerating the structural decay that is identified by Rotberg and Zartman; it also deepens the legitimacy breach which is central to the social contract account. Thus higher levels of corruption should be associated with higher insecurity through both capacity and legitimacy channels.
ii. Total government expenditure is ambiguous in its expected coefficient: if it is well-directed and administered efficiently, greater expenditure can repair institutional deficits; if it is captured by elite rent-seeking then expanded budgets may produce little security-producing capacity. State Failure Theory suggests that without institutional absorptive capacity, the spending yields low returns; Social Contract Theory suggests that visible misuse of public funds will further delegitimize the state.
iii. Military expenditure may suppress short-term violence in the targeted theatres but can be counterproductive if used without accountability, if it crowds out social spending that addresses root causes or if it undermines civilian legitimacy when accompanied by human rights abuses.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, correlational research design that is based exclusively on secondary time-series data to examine the relationship between corruption, government expenditure and insecurity

in Nigeria over the period 2016–2024. Data are drawn from Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index; the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Peace Index and the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker which includes insecurity measured respectively as a composite peacefulness score and as annual conflict-related fatalities; the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's Military Expenditure Database; and Nigeria's federal budget appropriation documents as compiled by the Budget Office of the Federation and reported by Businessday and KPMG Nigeria..

Because these sources report on different fiscal-year conventions and are not all available as a single harmonized panel for every year in the study window, the analysis proceeds in two complementary steps rather than a single multivariate regression, which the available secondary data cannot support without introducing spurious precision. First descriptive statistics summarize the year-on-year trajectory of each indicator (Section 6). Second for the years where matched annual observations exist across indicators principally 2016–2022 for corruption, peacefulness and fatalities, bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients are computed to test the direction and strength of association implied by the theoretical framework in Section 4.3. A conservative empirical approach was adopted by reporting only the relationships robustly supported by the data. It explicitly highlights instances where the matched yearly sample is limited (n = 7 or fewer). Because this study relies on aggregate and ecological-level data where all calculated coefficients are interpreted strictly as descriptive and exploratory rather than causal.

This approach was chosen over a full multivariate regression because the latter would require monthly or state-level panel data on expenditure execution that are not consistently published by Nigerian fiscal authorities for the full study period; presenting simulated or estimated regression coefficients in their absence would misrepresent the evidentiary basis of the study. The correlational approach adopted here directly answers each research question using verifiable, cited figures, while transparently noting the limits of what a seven-to-nine-year, country-level time series can establish.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the data assembled for the study and uses them to answer the three research questions in turn.

Corruption and Insecurity Indicators, 2016–2022

Table 1 reports Nigeria's annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score, Global Peace Index (GPI) score and conflict-related fatalities as recorded by the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, for the seven years in which all three series are available on a consistent annual basis.

Year	CPI score (0–100; lower = more corrupt)	GPI score (higher = less peaceful)	Conflict-related fatalities
2016	28	2.899	5,763
2017	27	2.832	4,618
2018	27	2.831	6,565
2019	26	2.895	8,340
2020	25	2.916	9,694
2021	24	2.840	10,575
2022	24	2.841	9,079

Sources: Transparency International (2016–2022 CPI editions, as compiled by World Scorecard, 2026); Institute for Economics & Peace (Global Peace Index, various years, as compiled by CountryEconomy.com); Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria Security Tracker (as reported in Businessday (Terzungw, 2026).

Corruption and the Persistence of Insecurity in Nigeria

A Pearson correlation between the CPI and annual conflict fatalities across 2016–2022 (n = 7) is strong, negative and statistically significant (r = -0.89, p = .007). Because lower CPI values indicate higher perceived corruption, this means that years of worsening corruption perception are closely associated with years of rising conflict-related deaths: Nigeria's least corrupt year in the series (2016, CPI = 28) recorded the fewest fatalities (5,763), while its most corrupt years (2021–2022, CPI = 24) recorded the highest fatality counts in the series (10,575 and 9,079).

However when insecurity is measured instead by the GPI score, a broader composite covering militarization and external as well as internal conflict; the correlation with CPI is weak and not statistically significant (r = 0.14, p = .77). This divergence is itself an informative finding: it suggests that corruption's association with insecurity in Nigeria is most visible in direct, lethality-based measures of violence which are more sensitive to the day-to-day breakdown of policing, justice and military effectiveness that corruption directly undermines than in the GPI, whose year-to-year movement also reflects militarization and regional/external-conflict indicators less directly tied to domestic corruption.

On the strength of the fatality-based correlation and consistent with the theoretical expectation set out in Section 4.3, corruption is significantly and substantively associated with the persistence and escalation of insecurity in Nigeria as measured through direct violence outcomes, though the strength of this relationship is sensitive to which insecurity indicator is used. This finding should be read with two caveats appropriate to a seven-year, country-level time series: it establishes association, not causation and it cannot rule out the possibility that a third factor such as declining oil revenue or currency instability, independently worsened both governance quality and security in the same years.

Relationship between government security and defence expenditure and insecurity in Nigeria

Table 2 reports Nigeria's federal security and defence sector budget allocation, the fiscal aggregate most consistently reported across the study period, alongside available conflict-fatality figures.

Year	Federal security/defence budget allocation	Conflict-related fatalities
2021	₦1.97 trillion	10,575
2022	₦2.41 trillion	9,079
2023	₦2.74 trillion	11,869
2024	₦3.25 trillion	12,162

Sources: Federal budget appropriation data as reported in Businessday (Terzungw, 2026); fatality figures for 2021–2022 from the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker (as reported in Businessday (Terzungw, 2026); 2023–2024 figures from Nigeria Watch's Fourteenth Report on Violence in Nigeria (2024).

Nigeria's nominal security and defence budget allocation rose every year from 2021 to 2024; a 65% nominal increase over three years. Conflict fatalities did not fall correspondingly: after a dip from 10,575 (2021) to 9,079 (2022), fatalities rose again to 11,869 in 2023 and 12,162 in 2024 (Nigeria Watch, 2024), even as nominal budget allocations continued to climb.

Within 2021–2024, increases in total security-sector government expenditure were not associated with a corresponding reduction in insecurity.

Two qualifications matter for interpreting this pattern responsibly. First the naira lost substantial value against the US dollar over this period mostly after the June 2023 exchange-rate reforms, so part of the

nominal naira increase in the budget reflects currency depreciation rather than a real expansion of purchasing power for security procurement (Trading Economics, 2026). Second is these are appropriated figures rather than confirmed disbursed expenditure; Nigeria's federal budget-implementation reports have historically shown gaps between appropriation and actual releases (Aiyede, 2009). Both qualifications point in the same direction as the State Failure Theory expectation set out in Section 4.3: nominal spending increases, on their own, provide only a partial and potentially overstated picture of the resources actually reaching frontline security institutions, which helps explain why rising allocations have not tracked with falling violence.

Military Expenditure and the Reduction of Insecurity in Nigeria

Table 3 reports Nigeria's military expenditure in current US dollars, as tracked by SIPRI, for the years with confirmed figures.

Year	Military expenditure (US$ billion, SIPRI)	Conflict-related fatalities
2019	1.86	8,340
2020	2.57	9,694
2021	4.47 (series peak)	10,575 (series peak)
2022	3.11	9,079
2023	3.19	11,869
2024	1.14*	12,162

*The sharp nominal-dollar decline in 2024 substantially reflects naira depreciation rather than a real cut in defence spending; SIPRI reports Nigeria's military expenditure as a share of total government spending falling from 6.21% (2023) to 3.07% (2024) over the same period (TheGlobalEconomy.com, 2026, citing SIPRI). Sources: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, as reported by Macrotrends (2025) and Trading Economics (2026); fatality figures as in Tables 1 and 2.

The most direct test is the series peak: 2021 was simultaneously Nigeria's highest year of military expenditure ($4.47 billion) and its highest year of conflict fatalities (10,575) in the sampled period. If military expenditure reliably suppressed violence, the peak-spending year should show among the lowest, not the highest, fatality counts. A Pearson correlation between military expenditure and fatalities for the three years with the most confidently reported figures (2020–2022) is positive ($r = 0.76$) though not statistically significant at conventional levels given the very small sample ($p = .45$), a result that should be read as inconclusive rather than as evidence that military spending increases violence, but that clearly does not support the proposition that higher military expenditure has reduced insecurity over this period.

On the evidence assembled here is that the extent to which military expenditure has contributed to reducing insecurity in Nigeria over 2019–2024 has been limited: the episodes of higher spending have coincided with stable or worsening fatality counts rather than consistent reductions and the years with declining military expenditure (2022, and nominally 2024) did not correspond to declining violence either. This is consistent with the qualitative literature's account of inflated procurement, poor personnel welfare and accountability deficits diluting the security returns to military spending (International Crisis Group, 2018, 2021) and with the integrative theoretical expectation that coercive capacity alone cannot substitute for institutional legitimacy and administrative integrity.

Summary of Findings

i. The study finds that corruption is strongly and significantly associated with higher conflict-related fatalities in Nigeria ($r = -0.89$, $p = .007$, 2016–2022), although its association with the broader Global Peace Index score is weak, thereby indicating the relationship is sensitive to how insecurity is measured.

ii. The rising nominal federal security-sector expenditure (2021–2024) has not been accompanied by a corresponding reduction in conflict fatalities; part of this nominal rise reflects currency depreciation rather than the real spending growth and appropriated figures likely overstate the actual disbursed resources.

iii. The study also found that there is no clear evidence that higher military spending was associated with lower levels of insecurity between the periods of 2019 and 2024. In fact 2021 was recorded as the highest military expenditure during the period, but it was also the year with the highest number of conflict-related fatalities.

Conclusion

This study explored how corruption, government spending and military expenditure relate to insecurity in Nigeria over the periods of 2016 to 2024. The findings were considered within the broader arguments of State Failure Theory and Social Contract Theory. The evidence shows that corruption is significantly associated with a higher level of lethal violence, that the increase in nominal security-sector expenditure have not been matched by the improved security outcomes and that Nigeria's highest year of military spending eventually coincided with its worst year of conflict fatalities in the sampled period. These findings confirm the theoretical expectations that raw expenditure in the absence of institutional capacity and accountability does not reliably translate into security outcomes, and that corruption functions as a structural enabler of violence rather than being a peripheral governance problem. Then at the same time the lived experience of Nigerian citizens such as the restricted mobility, displacement and growing reliance on informal or private security arrangements reflects the social contract account of legitimacy erosion that was described in Section 4.2. Insecurity in Nigeria is therefore both a governance challenge and a social contract problem: addressing it requires not simply more spending or increase in security budget but spending that is transparent, accountable and matched by institutional capacity to convert resources into protection.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the findings;

i. **Strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms in the security sector:** Corruption is significantly correlated with conflict fatalities. This warrants an independent, regular auditing of military, and police procurement and logistics budgets, mainly not only general public-sector anti-corruption measures, given that Section 3.2 documents inflated procurement contracts and embezzled policing and intelligence funds as a specific channel through which corruption enables violence.

ii. **Shift federal budget reporting from appropriation to verified disbursement for the security sector:** In section 6.3 the rising nominal security-budget allocations between 2021–2024 did not track with falling fatalities and that the naira's depreciation and the appropriation-disbursement gap both distort nominal figures. Being able to publish quarterly, currency-adjusted disbursement data for the security sector would let policymakers and researchers

distinguish real spending growth from nominal and currency effects, and would directly test whether future spending increases are reaching frontline institutions.

iii. **Condition further increases in military expenditure on accountability and welfare reforms, not on volume alone:** Section 6.4 shows that Nigeria's peak military-spending year which is 2021 coincided with its peak fatality year and that spending increases and fatality trends have not moved in the expected inverse directions. This suggested a marginal naira spent on personnel welfare, oversight and intelligence-led operations rather than on procurement volume alone, is more likely to affect the fatality outcomes measured in the study.

iv. **Strengthen the criminal justice and corrections system:** The correctional breakdowns directly return convicted insurgents to active conflict, a mechanism that is distinct from the expenditure and corruption channels tested above but corroborated by the same conflict-fatality trends. The Digitized records reduced pretrial detention and infrastructure investment in custodial facilities addresses this specific documented pathway.

v. **Promote community-based and data-driven security monitoring:** The divergence between the CPI–GPI correlation and the CPI–fatality correlation shows that national composite indices can mask locally significant violence trends. Local early-warning systems and a publicly accessible disaggregated fiscal-security-governance database would let the relationships identified in Section 6 be tracked at the sub-national level where the underlying violence is concentrated.

References

Abbass, I. M. (2025). Terrorism and state failure: The Nigerian state and politics of national security. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research,* 13(2), 336–348. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15515915

ACLED. (2024, March 15). What does the recent escalation of mass abductions in Nigeria tellus?https://acleddata.com/brief/what-does-recent-escalation-mass-abductions-nigeria-tell-us-joint-brief

ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project). (2024). ACLED data and analysis on Nigeria. https://acleddata.com/

Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2013). Why nations fail: *The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. Crown Business.

Afoaku, O. G. (2017). Islamist terrorism and state failure in northern Nigeria. Africa Today, 63(4), 21–42.

Amnesty International. (2008, February). Nigeria: *Prisoners' rights systematically flouted* (AI Index: AFR 44/001/2008). Amnesty International. https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/afr440012008eng.pdf

Aiyede, R. O. (2009). Corruption, governance and political economy of development in Nigeria. Africa Spectrum, 44(1), 53–77.

Associated Press. (2024a, March 9). Gunmen kidnap nearly 300 students in northwest Nigeria. https://apnews.com/article/3fd64cbd482c2011d2e8c18acc18ba0b

Associated Press. (2024b, April 25). More than 100 inmates break free from an old Nigerian prison after heavy rains. https://apnews.com/article/ecbda2eb7e814926e9bc03d00db79cef

Bates, R. H. (2008). When things fell apart: *State failure in late-century Africa.* Cambridge University Press.

Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2024). Nigeria country report 2024 (BTI Transformation Index). https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/NGA

Beland, D. (2007). Defining insecurity: Conceptual frameworks for fear and protection. Security Studies Review, 15(3), 21–40.

Chabal, P., & Daloz, J.-P. (1999). Africa works: Disorder as political instrument. James Currey.

Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. Oxford Economic Papers, 56(4), 563–595.

CountryEconomy.com. (2025). Nigeria – Global Peace Index. https://countryeconomy.com/demography/global-peace-index/nigeria

Financial Times. (2024, March 9). Armed men kidnap hundreds of Nigerian children from their school. https://www.ft.com/content/2c6856dc-1ce7-4022-ab0d-ec6fd10250e5

Fund for Peace. (2024). Fragile States Index 2024: *A world adrift (Annual report)*. https://fragilestatesindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FSI-2024-Report-A-World-Adrift.pdf

Human Rights Watch. (2023). World report 2023: Nigeria. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/nigeria

Hobbes, T. (1651/1996). Leviathan (P. Laslett, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Institute for Economics & Peace. (2025). Global Peace Index 2025: Measuring peacefulness in a changing world. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/resources/global-peace-index/

International Crisis Group. (2018, July 26). Stopping Nigeria's spiralling farmer–herder violence (Report No. 262). https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence

International Crisis Group. (2021, September 4). Ending Nigeria's herder–farmer crisis: *The livestock reform plan* (Report No. 302). https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/302-ending-nigerias-herder-farmer-crisis-livestock-reform-plan

Locke, J. (1689/1988). Two treatises of government (P. Laslett, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Macrotrends. (2025). Nigeria military spending/defense budget 1960–2025. https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/nga/nigeria/military-spending-defense-budget

Nigeria Watch. (2024). Fourteenth report on violence in Nigeria 2024. https://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/Reports/NGA-Watch-Report24.pdf

Onifade, C. A., Imhonopi, D., & Urim, U. M. (2013). Addressing the challenge of insecurity in Nigeria: The imperative of moral values and virtue ethics. Global Journal of Human Social Science, 13(2), 28–37. https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume13/5-Addressing-the-Challenge-of-Insecurity.pdf

Ogu, E. C. S., Akaose, I. C., & Nwokocha, C. V. (2022). Politicization of insecurity and efficient management of the Nigerian Correctional Service, 2015–2022. Global Journal of Political Science and Administration, 10(4), 45–57.

Pritchett, L., Woolcock, M., & Andrews, M. (2013). Looking like a state: Techniques for persistent failure in state capability for implementation. Journal of Development Studies, 49(1), 1–18.

Reuters. (2024, March 25). Nigeria food banks cut back on handouts as prices soar. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigeria-food-banks-cut-back-handouts-prices-soar-2024-03-25/

Rotberg, R. I. (Ed.). (2004). When states fail: Causes and consequences. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7scrg

Rotberg, R. I., & Campbell, J. (2021, May 31). Buhari's Nigeria is a failed state. Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/31/nigeria-buhari-failed-state-security-terrorism-economy/

Rousseau, J.-J. (1762/2002). The social contract (G. D. H. Cole, Trans.). Everyman.

Rufus, A. (2017a). Corruption and inequality in Nigeria: Lessons from Plato's theory of justice. Bassey Andah Journal of Social and Cultural Studies, 9–10, 2016–2017.

Rufus, A. (2017b). The Lockean state of war and the Nigerian state: A comparative analysis. Global Journal of Human-Social Science, 17(F3), 35–41. https://socialscienceresearch.org/index.php/GJHSS/article/view/2346

Rufus, A. (2019). The traverse of a nation betrayed: Examining Nigeria's susceptibility to state failure. Journal of Political Inquiry, 4(1), 270–281.

SBM Intelligence. (2023, August). The economics of Nigeria's kidnap industry (2016–2023). https://www.sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/202308_Kidnap-report.pdf

SBM Intelligence. (2024, March). Mass abductions in Nigeria: Trends and implications. https://www.sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/202403_Mass-Abductions.pdf

Suberu, R. T. (2001). Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria. United States Institute of Peace Press.

Suberu, R. T. (2010). The Nigerian federal system: Performance, problems and prospects. Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 28(4), 459–477. https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2010.512740

TheGlobalEconomy.com. (2026). Nigeria military spending, percent of government spending. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Nigeria/military_spending_percent_government_spending/

Trading Economics. (2026). Nigeria military expenditure; Nigeria government debt to GDP. https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/military-expenditure

Terzungw, S. (2026, June 28). The killing fields: Inside Nigeria’s staggering human cost of insecurity. BusinessDay. https://businessday.ng/life/article/the-killing-fields-inside-nigerias-staggering-human-cost-of-insecurity/

Transparency International. (2024a). Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 (global overview). https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024

Transparency International. (2024b). Nigeria country profile (CPI 2024). https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/nigeria

Weber, M. (1946). Politics as a vocation. In H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (Eds.), From Max Weber: Essays in sociology (pp. 77–128). Oxford University Press.

World Bank. (2024a). Poverty & equity brief: Nigeria (April 2024). https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099108001062551445/pdf/IDU1f5d0747512dbb149e81b9fa14c9860311661.pdf

World Bank. (2016). What is state capacity? Open Knowledge Repository. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24865

World Scorecard. (2026). Nigeria's Corruption Perceptions Index (2025) – Trends & historical data. https://worldscorecard.com/scorecards/nigerian-score card/corruption-index/

Zartman, I. W. (Ed.). (1995). Collapsed states: The disintegration and restoration of legitimate authority. Lynne Rienner Publishers.