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Insecurity and Its Implications for Development in Nigeria: An Assessment

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Abstract

This article examines the pervasive issue of insecurity in Nigeria and its profound implications for national development. Insecurity in the country is multifaceted, stemming from poverty, unemployment, corruption, weak governance, and ethno-religious divisions. The paper argues that these structural deficiencies have created an enabling environment for insurgency, terrorism, and violent crimes, with groups such as Boko Haram and Niger Delta militants exemplifying the security crisis. The analysis draws on both theoretical and empirical perspectives to highlight how leadership failure, institutional collapse, and mismanagement of national resources have compounded the insecurity challenge, thereby perpetuating underdevelopment. The discussion underscores that security is a prerequisite for development, as no nation can achieve sustainable growth without peace and stability. Nigeria's experience demonstrates that violent conflicts and insecurity disrupt economic activities, deter foreign investment, and divert critical resources from developmental programs to security operations. The study also explores policy implications, advocating for a shift from militarized responses to strategies rooted in dialogue, justice, and inclusive governance. It emphasizes the importance of social justice, tolerance, and unity as fundamental values for promoting peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. The article concludes by asserting that tackling insecurity in Nigeria requires addressing its root causes rather than its symptoms. This involves strengthening institutions, enforcing the rule of law, creating economic opportunities for youth, and fostering national cohesion.

Keywords: An Assessment, Insecurity, Development, Nigeria, Policy Implications.

Introduction

Nigeria is often described as one of the most resource-endowed countries globally, possessing abundant natural and human resources. Yet, paradoxically, it remains among the world's poorest nations when assessed by the living standards of its citizens (Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2022). This contradiction is particularly striking given Nigeria's position as the eighth largest exporter of crude oil and its significant human capital, while a large proportion of its population lives below the poverty line, largely due to corruption and economic mismanagement (Sani, Mukhtar & Isa, 2015). Although some socio-economic and political challenges confronting Nigeria stem from globalization, many are internally generated, compounding the nation's development crisis. Among these, corruption and poor governance have been consistently identified as the most critical problems (Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022). These factors serve as catalysts for pervasive insecurity manifested in various forms, including religious extremism (Mukhtar, Bello, Isa & Idris, 2022), terrorism, insurgency (Mukhtar, 2025a), armed robbery, rape, kidnapping (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017a), cybercrime (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017b; Mukhtar, 2025b), political thuggery, and trans-border criminal activities (Sani et al., 2015).

From a historical and socio-economic perspective, Dangiwa, Mukhtar & Maina (2016) and Mukhtar & Dangiwa (2017) emphasized the role of political leadership in institutionalizing corruption, which has contributed significantly to the current insecurity in Nigeria. This paper shares this position, arguing that historical, social, and economic factors have combined to perpetuate insecurity, thereby making national development elusive. Successive governments have attempted to address insecurity; however, most interventions have failed to tackle its root causes (Sani et al., 2015). The solution lies in instituting good governance, fostering visionary leadership, and promoting unity and equitable treatment among Nigeria's diverse cultural and religious groups (Mukhtar & Dangiwa, 2017).

Against this backdrop, the paper examines how insecurity emerged as a byproduct of developmental challenges and how, in turn, it poses significant obstacles to national development.

Conceptual Issues: Security, Insecurity, and Development

Security remains a contested concept within academic discourse (Baylis, 2008; Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2022), but there is general agreement that it entails freedom from threats to core values for both individuals and groups. Debates persist over its focus on whether security should primarily concern individuals, nations, or the international system (Baylis, 2008). Fundamentally, security refers to the condition in which people's lives and property are safeguarded. It ensures peaceful coexistence, stability, and social order, which are essential for life free of fear, threat, and anxiety (Sani, Mukhtar & Isa, 2015). Olayiwola (2013) captures this dual dimension by defining security objectively as the absence of threats to acquired values and subjectively as the absence of fear of such threats.

Security is not confined to protecting territorial integrity or strengthening military capabilities, nor is it limited to policing internal affairs. It is a multidimensional concept encompassing the protection of human needs and preventing any condition that threatens societal well-being (Sani et al., 2015). Thus, security takes various forms, including political, national, regional, community, and domestic security. As defined by Dambazau (2011), national security represents the collective security interests of individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political institutions, and entities within Nigeria. It involves safeguarding citizens' welfare by creating an environment free from threats or impediments to their well-being, as well as maintaining law and order. Conversely, insecurity denotes a state of vulnerability to risks or dangers, resulting in fear, anxiety, and instability. Like security, insecurity is multidimensional. It encompasses personal, community, economic, political, food, and environmental dimensions. Importantly, security is indispensable for good governance and sustainable development (Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2022).

Development, another contested concept, is multidimensional. Rodney (1972) defines it as a multifaceted process that, at the individual level, implies enhanced skills, creativity, freedom, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being. Development is not merely demographic or economic growth. Instead, as Mukhtar, Mukhtar, Mohammad & Abdullahi (2014) argue, it is an evolutionary process that includes biological, social, physical, and structural transformations. In this context, development refers to national development, encompassing political, economic, and social progress, particularly peace and security. The political economy of any nation relies heavily on peace; without it, achieving sustainable progress or development becomes nearly impossible.

Theoretical Framework: Collective Security and Underdevelopment

To understand the nexus between insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria, two theoretical perspectives are particularly useful: Collective Security Theory and Underdevelopment Theory. Both frameworks originate within the discipline of international relations, though they emphasize different dimensions (Sani et al. 2015). The former (Collective Security Theory) is on interstate cooperation for peace and security, and the latter (Underdevelopment Theory) is on global inequality and the structural vulnerabilities of less developed states (Mukhtar, Muhammad & Saleh, 2015; Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2022).

Collective Security Theory emerged prominently after World War I but traces its philosophical roots to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who proposed an ethical alternative to just war through mutual disarmament and renunciation of aggression. Earlier contributions from Hugo Grotius and even the Stoics' concept of "international citizenship" also resonate with this approach. The core principle of collective security is that peace among nations is achievable when the security of one state is considered the concern of all. Under this system, states agree to uphold common norms and cooperate against aggression. Kupchan and Kupchan (2011) affirm that institutionalized collective action based on "all against one" offers greater stability than self-help arrangements where each state acts alone. This theoretical foundation underpins

institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, which operate on the principle that "an attack against one is an attack against all."

However, collective security is not without criticism. Many states resist surrendering sovereignty to supranational organizations, especially when such bodies fail to act swiftly or effectively. Morgenthau (1948) warned that for collective security to function, member states must quickly mobilize sufficient force to deter aggression, an ideal yet to be fully realized. While the United Nations has recorded successes in facilitating peace processes, its interventions have often been slow and politically constrained. Nevertheless, the theory provides a basis for understanding international efforts to assist Nigeria in combating insurgency, even though regional actors like Niger and Cameroon have sometimes contributed more practically than global powers.

Underdevelopment Theory, rooted in dependency thought and championed by scholars like Kwame Nkrumah, attributes the persistent backwardness of developing states to neo-colonial structures that perpetuate economic dependency and political subordination. Underdevelopment manifests in economic inequality, cultural disorientation, and political fragility. As Ujo (2008) notes, it can be measured through economic indicators (such as unequal wealth distribution), demographic indicators (high fertility rates, infant mortality, and low life expectancy), and socio-political indicators (illiteracy, political instability, gender inequality, and ethnic or religious violence). Nigeria typifies these features: rapid population growth, weak democratic culture, widespread poverty, and systemic corruption exacerbate insecurity (Mukhtar et al. 2015). Nkrumah (1971) argues that neo-colonialism fragments formerly united territories into small, economically weak entities dependent on former colonial powers for security and finance, conditions still evident in Nigeria's reliance on external actors for security and economic assistance.

This paper adopts Underdevelopment Theory as its primary framework because it most accurately explains Nigeria's insecurity-development paradox. The persistence of illiteracy, inequality, and cultural disintegration, combined with governance failures, aligns with the theory's postulates. Ultimately, these structural conditions create fertile ground for insecurity, undermining sustainable development and deepening the country's vulnerability to internal and external shocks.

Insecurity and Its Implications for Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development thrives in an environment where individuals live in peace, free from threats to life and property. Unfortunately, many African nations, including Nigeria, remain trapped in persistent insecurity fueled by poverty, injustice, unemployment, lack of visionary leadership, and ethnic fragmentation. Wole Soyinka strongly criticized African governance, asserting that the dreams of peace and prosperity have been shattered by "greedy, corrupt, and unscrupulous" leaders whose self-serving ambitions undermine modest goals such as environmental cleanup, health services, education, and poverty eradication (Owoye & Bissessar, n.d.). Nigeria's predicament is characterized by institutional collapse, elite disorientation, poor resource allocation, and weak administrative systems. These systemic

failures have entrenched corruption at all levels of governance due to the absence of accountable leadership (Mgbeke, 2009). State complicity in insecurity exacerbates the situation; governments often deploy violence internally to suppress opposition, a phenomenon Macionis (2009) identifies as state-sponsored terrorism. Electoral malpractices, political killings, and fraudulent governance have rendered politics the most lucrative enterprise, fostering instability (Ulu, 2009). The Boko Haram insurgency illustrates this dynamic, emerging partly from government failures to provide employment and uphold justice.

Nigeria has witnessed decades of ethno-religious and political violence, culminating in widespread destruction of lives and property. Violent conflicts have eroded charismatic leadership and destabilized governance structures, leaving the nation bereft of patriotic leaders (Afegbua, 2010). Radda (2008) underscores the essence of governance as a social contract centered on security, welfare, and rights protection. However, this ideal remains unrealized in Nigeria, where governance often contradicts democratic principles and the utilitarian view of government as an instrument of collective welfare (Pojman, 2003). Rampant poverty compounds these challenges. In 2005, 91% of Nigerians lived on less than $2 per day (World Population Data Sheet), while USAID (2006) estimated 60% in extreme poverty. By 2014, the World Bank reported that over 100 million Nigerians lived in poverty, ranking the country among the world's poorest (Council for Foreign Relations, 2014). Insecurity perpetuates this cycle by discouraging investment, reducing government revenue, and undermining development programs (Afegbua, 2010). Ultimately, insecurity, driven by corruption, unemployment, ethnic and religious crises, remains a critical obstacle to Nigeria's developmental aspirations

Policy Implications for Addressing Insecurity in Nigeria

Justice remains the most effective instrument for achieving sustainable peace within any society. As Gulen (2004) advocates, love and tolerance should replace hatred and envy as guiding principles for social harmony. Nigeria's plural nature (characterized by its multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious composition) should not serve as an excuse for recurring conflicts and insecurity. Rather, diversity should function as a catalyst for national development, as seen in countries such as the United States and India. Government responses to security challenges must prioritize dialogue and peacebuilding over coercion. The use of amnesty programs, as implemented by former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to resolve the Niger Delta crisis, exemplifies an effective non-violent approach that restored relative peace in the region. Conversely, the decision to employ military force against Boko Haram insurgents transformed parts of northeastern Nigeria into conflict zones.

The International Crisis Group (2014) warns that heavy-handed military and police operations risk driving more frustrated, unemployed youths into extremism. Therefore, peace initiatives and preventive measures should be integral to Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy. Accountability is equally critical (Mukhtar & Dangiwa, 2017). The principle of the rule of law dictates that no individual, regardless of status, is above the law. Allegations linking prominent Nigerians to Boko Haram activities must be thoroughly investigated, and perpetrators

(whether political elites or ordinary citizens) should face prosecution. Eliminating impunity will strengthen public confidence in state institutions and deter complicity in terrorism. In addition, security agencies must enhance surveillance and intelligence gathering. This requires increased government investment in modern security infrastructure and capacity building at federal, state, and local levels. Furthermore, combating insecurity should not rest solely on government efforts; citizens must adopt a communal sense of responsibility. Unity, irrespective of ethnic or regional differences, is essential. Nigerians should collectively resist divisive narratives and recognize that insecurity is not the fault of any single community but rather the actions of a minority, including foreign actors, within the system.

Conclusion

Insecurity remains one of the greatest impediments to Nigeria's socio-economic and political development. The analysis reveals that insecurity in Nigeria is not an isolated phenomenon but a complex interplay of poverty, unemployment, corruption, weak governance, ethno-religious tensions, and poor institutional frameworks. These factors have created a fertile ground for insurgency, militancy, kidnapping, and other violent crimes, which have collectively undermined national stability and economic progress. Despite the country's vast human and material resources, Nigeria continues to lag behind in development indicators because the persistent state of insecurity erodes investor confidence, disrupts economic activities, and diverts resources meant for development toward security expenditures. The failure of leadership emerges as a recurring theme in the discourse. Leadership that prioritizes self-interest over national interest has entrenched corruption and inefficiency, resulting in fragile state institutions incapable of addressing security challenges effectively. Moreover, the state's over-reliance on coercive military approaches has often exacerbated conflicts rather than resolving them. The contrasting cases of the Niger Delta amnesty program and the militarization of the Boko Haram crisis demonstrate that sustainable peace requires dialogue, justice, and inclusive governance rather than force alone.

To move forward, Nigeria must embrace a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of insecurity. This includes promoting social justice, reducing poverty through equitable economic policies, strengthening institutions to enforce the rule of law, and fostering national unity through inclusive governance. Security is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of justice, opportunities, and mutual trust among citizens and the state. As Gulen (2004) emphasizes, love, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence should replace hatred and division in multicultural societies like Nigeria. Ultimately, the Nigerian government, civil society, and citizens must collectively assume responsibility for peacebuilding. Unity, vigilance, and accountability are indispensable in countering terrorism and insurgency. If these measures are systematically implemented, Nigeria can overcome its current security challenges and redirect its resources and energy toward national development. Without such a deliberate and coordinated effort, insecurity will remain an obstacle to achieving the aspirations of peace, progress, and prosperity that Nigerians earnestly desire**.**

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, study makes the following recommendations with a view to addressing security challenges and achieving sustainable development in Nigeria:

1. The Government should establish strong anti-corruption frameworks and enforce transparency in governance through digital systems and open budgeting.
2. The Government and development partners should launch targeted youth employment and empowerment programs in high-risk regions to reduce poverty and prevent recruitment into violent groups.
3. The Government and community members should develop community-based policing models that integrate traditional leaders, local vigilantes, and formal security agencies to enhance trust and local intelligence.
4. The Government and community members should invest in intelligence-driven security operations and reduce reliance on indiscriminate military force that often escalates conflicts.
5. The Government should institutionalize inclusive governance through power-sharing mechanisms and dialogue platforms for marginalized groups, ethnic communities, and religious leaders.
6. The Government should strengthen the judiciary by creating fast-track courts for terrorism and corruption cases, and provide adequate funding and training for judicial officers.
7. The individual philanthropists and development partners should expand access to quality education and vocational training in conflict-prone areas, with a focus on technology-driven learning to bridge gaps in rural communities.
8. The Government should establish a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission to mediate conflicts, promote reconciliation, and design long-term strategies for peaceful coexistence.
9. Civil societies should call Government's attention implement nationwide peace education programs and interfaith dialogue initiatives to foster tolerance, unity, and national identity across diverse communities.

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