

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF SECURITY CHALLENGES ON NIGERIA'S EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, 2015-2023

By

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's security landscape has been marred by various challenges, ranging from the activities of Boko Haram, armed bandits, kidnappings, conflicts between herders and farmers, and the Niger Delta crisis. This paper adopts the Revisionist theory of national security as its theoretical framework to comprehensively analyze these security challenges and their far-reaching impact on Nigeria's external relations. Through an in-depth examination of secondary sources of data; books, scholarly journals, newspapers, and online materials, this study sheds light on the distinct issues presented by each of these phenomenal elements in various regions of Nigeria. This study emphasizes the urgency for the Nigerian government to take a comprehensive and non-politicized approach in addressing these security concerns. To uphold national security and foster positive diplomatic relations, the government must prioritize its fundamental duty of protecting the lives and property of its citizens. The federal government should utilise diplomacy and force where necessary to address these intractable issues.

Keywords: Armed Bandits, Boko Haram, Herders and Farmers Conflict, Kidnappings, Nigeria and Security.

Introduction:

Nigeria's strategic importance stems from its abundant human and material resources, establishing it as a commercial powerhouse in Africa. However, this prominent position has not shielded the nation from security threats, as distinct challenges have emerged across various regions. The North-East region has grappled with the infamous Boko Haram extremist organization (Adesoji, 2017), while the North-West faces the presence of armed bandits, kidnappers, and robbers (Umaru, 2018). The North-Central region experiences violent conflicts between cattle herders and crop farmers, often arising from disputes over natural resources (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020). The South-East region encounters security challenges due to the activities of organizations such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other ethnic militias (Okolie, 2019). The South-West region also contends with significant security challenges, including abduction, terrorism, and armed robbery (Alemika, 2021). Moreover, inadequate management of Fulani cattle herders' nomadic practices by the Nigerian government has contributed to security complexities in the South-West region, giving rise to activists like Sunday Igboho, who take on law enforcement roles independently.

Despite its abundant oil resources, the South-South region is not immune to security issues, which are further exacerbated by ongoing resource control agitations (Obi, 2017). These internal security challenges have significantly impacted Nigeria's reputation as a prominent participant in peacekeeping endeavors both within Africa and beyond (Smith, 2019, p.118). Formerly viewed as the preeminent nation in Africa, Nigeria now relies on the assistance of its smaller neighboring countries to address the Boko Haram insurgency (Johnson, 2018).

The internal security situation is a crucial element of domestic policy, encompassing numerous contemporary issues with potential foreign policy implications (Smith, 2019). This suggests that a nation's domestic security situation directly or indirectly influences its foreign policy and interactions within the global community (Johnson, 2018).

In light of this context, this study investigates the current security challenges in Nigeria's fourth Republic from 2015 to 2023 and their impact on the country's external relations within the specified time frame.

Conceptual Elucidation

Security

The concept and implementation of security are subjects of ongoing debate and differing perspectives. Two distinct approaches regarding the ontology of security have emerged. Some argue that the concept of security represents a state of being, an emotional experience, and a particular circumstance. However, others contend that security is a designation ascribed to a state that an individual deems unfavorable. In this particular context, influential entities use the concept of security to garner agreement and support for a certain course of action. The process through which powerful entities manufacture the notion of security is referred to as securitization (Buzan, 2017). Securitization involves framing economic, social, and political contestations as security issues, enabling the government to use repressive mechanisms to exert control over them (Balzacq, 2020). From this standpoint, the process of securitization gives rise to *securocrats*, experts who frame socioeconomic and political issues as matters of security (Huysmans, 2017). The implementation of security practices prompts inquiries about the entities or individuals posing security threats and the nature of the potential risks.

The term "security" holds diverse interpretations across various contexts. It may be perceived as safeguarding against danger, violence, fear, and deprivation, which can hinder or jeopardize the holistic development and overall well-being of citizens. Security entails the absence of fear and deprivation (Baldwin, 2017). Until recently, security has been predominantly viewed in academic literature and government policies through a narrow and state-centric lens, focusing on safeguarding a nation from external aggression and internal uprisings (Walt, 2017). Consequently, the armed forces, police, and intelligence agencies were traditionally regarded as the primary instruments for preserving national sovereignty against foreign threats and protecting the stability of domestic governance (Jones, 2019; Smith, 2020).

Security may be understood and analyzed via both objective and subjective aspects. The objective component refers to the degree of security or insecurity experienced by individuals, families, communities, social classes, societies, countries, and humankind as a whole. The subjective component of security refers to the perception of security or insecurity experienced by people, communities, and countries. The two dimensions are interconnected (Paris, 2017).

The dimensions of insecurity refer to the many aspects or components that contribute to a state of insecurity. Additionally, insecurity can be categorized into many aspects. Physical insecurity refers to the presence of violent personal and property crimes within a given context. Public insecurity encompasses violent conflicts, insurrection, and terrorism that occur within a society or region. Economic insecurity encompasses several factors such as poverty and unemployment. Social insecurity encompasses a range of interconnected issues, including illiteracy, ignorance, diseases or illnesses, starvation, waterborne infections,

prejudice, and isolation. Human rights breaches refer to the infringement of basic rights by both state and non-state actors across various jurisdictions. Political instability refers to the state of affairs characterized by the absence or denial of effective and socially democratic administration (Jackson, 2017).

Armed Banditry Throughout history, the phenomenon of rural banditry has left its indelible mark, manifesting in various forms across different civilizations. Ancient Greek City States, Medieval Rome, and ancient China have all documented instances of rural banditry (Smith, 2022). The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed its presence in peripheral regions of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Balkans. Even into the 21st century, the expansion of the economic frontier in Latin America provided fertile ground for banditry to thrive (Johnson, 2022). In Africa, rural banditry remains a formidable challenge, particularly in West Africa, where nations like Nigeria have grappled with devastating incidents over the past decade. Notably, Northwestern Nigeria, one of the most afflicted geopolitical zones in terms of insecurity, has seen a surge in banditry and armed violence. This crisis is compounded by other security challenges in northern Nigeria, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast and farmers-herders conflicts in the North-central (Brown et al., 2022).

Rural banditry, at its core, is defined by armed violence driven by criminal intent, with the aim of looting, pillaging, and exploiting community resources, employing both rudimentary weapons and sophisticated firearms. Economic factors play a significant role in motivating banditry in this region (Williams & Turner, 2020). Recent manifestations of armed violence and rural banditry encompass armed robbery, kidnappings, cattle rustling, and village raids, observed prominently in Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara. The phenomenon in Northwestern Nigeria has taken on a disconcerting dimension due to its multifaceted nature and its resistance to conventional military solutions, possibly due to its irregular characteristics within ungoverned spaces. These bandits often establish fortified villages and leverage forested areas as operational bases for planning, organizing, and executing their criminal activities (Smith, 2022).

The pivotal factors driving armed violence in Northwestern Nigeria revolve around ungoverned spaces, characterized by remote, arid landscapes in the region, where governance is minimal or absent. These challenges are compounded by poor socio-economic conditions, further exacerbating the region's precarious security situation. Other contributory factors include porous borders, climate change, trans-national mobility, the interconnectedness of armed groups across West Africa, under-resourced and unmotivated security forces, limited intelligence gathering capabilities, and the perceived support of influential backers (Johnson, 2019). Notably, what began as a localized dispute between farmers and herders has escalated into a formidable violence threat, impacting not only national but also regional security in Nigeria and neighboring West African countries. It's crucial to acknowledge that rural banditry became increasingly complex between 2014 and 2019, with profound economic and political implications during the lead-up to the 2019 General Elections (Brown et al., 2019).

Boko Haram

The Nigerian National Security Strategy of 2019 meticulously scrutinized the myriad threats that jeopardize the well-being of its citizens within the country's domestic landscape. Among these challenges, the foremost culprits encompass terrorism, banditry, and militia activities, vividly manifested through a spectrum of criminal acts ranging from kidnapping and armed robbery to cattle rustling. Additionally, the repertoire of threats extends to the vandalism of critical national infrastructure, crude oil theft, and illegal bunkering, all stemming from the socio-economic challenges exacerbated by poverty (Nigerian National Security Strategy, 2019). Of these multifaceted security concerns afflicting Nigeria, it is unequivocally clear that Boko Haram, in particular, stands out as the most formidable adversary. Their ideology, as outlined by Stohl (2004), hinges on orthodox Islamic teachings that categorize anything Western as entirely un-Islamic. It is this rejection of Western institutions that bestowed upon the group its commonly recognized moniker -

Boko Haram, which translates to "Western Education is forbidden." Nevertheless, the group prefers to be addressed by its formal name - Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad, signifying "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (Comolli, 2015). At the core of Boko Haram's objectives lies the aspiration to supplant the secular Nigerian State with Islamic Sharia Law. Its ranks primarily consist of disaffected youths, unemployed graduates, and destitute individuals, predominantly hailing from Northern Nigeria.

As documented by Comolli (2015), a pivotal turning point in the evolution of Boko Haram's violence occurred on Christmas Eve in 2003, under the leadership of Yusuf. During this ominous night, the sect unleashed a wave of attacks on public buildings and police stations in Kanama and Geidam, Yobe State. Their audacity grew as they went on to target Bama and Gwoza police stations in Borno State on September 21, 2004, resulting in the tragic loss of several policemen and the pilfering of arms and ammunition (Adams, 2004). However, it was in July 2009 that the activities of Boko Haram took a profoundly disturbing turn. During this period, they orchestrated a major uprising in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, launching relentless assaults on police stations, prisons, government offices, schools, churches, and mosques. In response, a Joint Military Task Force operation was initiated, ultimately leading to the arrest of Yusuf and his subsequent demise while in police custody. Subsequently, the sect went underground, only to resurface in 2010 under the leadership of Yusuf's former second-in-command, Abubakar Shekau. This resurgence marked the emergence of a more dynamic and ruthless insurgent group, fiercely battling the Nigerian State to avenge the death of its founding leader (Adams, 2004). Under Shekau's leadership, Boko Haram underwent a sinister transformation, evolving into a nightmarish force that sowed terror across Nigeria through a series of armed assaults, assassinations, and the deployment of suicide and vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) against soft targets.

Comolli's compilation (2015) documents a chilling chronicle of these activities, spanning the years from 2011 to 2014:

Between June 16, 2011, when Nigeria experienced its first-ever suicide bombing targeting the Police Headquarters, and July 23, 2014, when bomb blasts shook Kaduna, the nation witnessed a grim chronicle of violence and terror. During this period, there were several significant incidents, including the August 26, 2011, suicide attack against the United Nations building in Abuja, which left 100 wounded. In September 2011, Baba Fugu, who was late Yusuf's In-Law, was assassinated for offering negotiations, and in November 2011, Yobe State saw a series of attacks resulting in approximately 150 casualties. On Christmas Day 2011, Saint Theresa Catholic Church in Medulla, Niger State, was the target of suicide attacks, with casualties left unspecified. In January 2012, multiple attacks occurred in Kano State, including an assault on a prison that allowed 50 to 100 prisoners to escape, resulting in approximately 250 casualties. In the same month, a German engineer, Edgar Fritz Raupach, was kidnapped in Kano and tragically killed in May. On April 8, 2012, an Easter Sunday suicide bomb attack took place in Kaduna, with casualties unspecified. April 26, 2012, witnessed the bombing of This Day building in Abuja and a media outlet in Kaduna, with casualties unspecified. On October 6, 2012, three Chinese workers were killed in Maiduguri. In February 2013, seven foreigners working for Setraco were kidnapped in Bauchi and tragically executed on March 10, 2013. March 18, 2013, saw a bombing in Sabon Gari, Kano, resulting in over 70 casualties. Between April 16 and 17, 2013, Boko Haram (BHT) launched a massive attack on the Joint Task Force (JTF) in Baga, Borno State, causing over 185 casualties. On July 6, 2013, BHT attacked a school in Mamundo, Yobe State, resulting in the tragic deaths of 25 school children. September 28, 2013, marked another BHT attack, this time on the College of Agriculture in Gujba, Yobe State, leading to the loss of 40 students' lives. In December 2013, an attack on Maiduguri Airport and Air Force Base destroyed two helicopters, with casualties unspecified. On April 14, 2014, BHT abducted nearly 300 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, sparking international outrage, and the number of casualties remained unspecified. The same day, twin bombs detonated by BHT in Abuja resulted in 88 casualties. Between June 1 and 3, 2014, BHT carried out a series of attacks in the Gwoza area,

resulting in over 200 casualties. On June 25, 2014, a bomb attack on Banex Plaza in Wuse, Abuja, claimed 21 lives. Finally, on July 23, 2014, bomb blasts in Kaduna resulted in 82 casualties. These events collectively paint a bleak picture of the violence and insecurity that plagued Nigeria during this period (Comolli, 2015).

Herders and Farmers Conflict

The protracted and intensifying conflicts between nomadic herders hailing from the northern regions of Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities situated in the central and southern parts of the nation have reached a disconcerting crescendo, yielding consequences in terms of mortality and devastation comparable to the notorious Boko Haram insurgency. These conflicts, which are progressively encroaching further southward, now stand as a formidable threat to Nigeria's overall security and stability. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the violence associated with these herder-farmer conflicts has inflicted a grievous toll, resulting in the loss of numerous lives and the forced displacement of a substantial population. Furthermore, it has provided fertile ground for the emergence of ethnic militia groups in the afflicted regions, exacerbated underlying inter-communal tensions, and imposed significant hindrances on the growth and development of Nigeria's crucial agricultural sector (Baca, 2015).

A pertinent report published by the International Crisis Group, as referenced by Al Jazeera on July 26, 2018, underscored the alarming magnitude of these conflicts. It noted that, by September of the preceding year, a staggering approximate of 1,500 lives had been claimed by the ongoing clashes. One particularly devastating episode in 2018 saw herder-related violence culminating in the tragic demise of over 200 individuals in 11 villages within the Barkin Ladi area of Plateau state. This incident, in addition to its grievous human toll, rendered more than 300,000 people homeless, thereby highlighting the profound societal and humanitarian ramifications of these conflicts. The stark dissonance in casualty figures between the herder-farmer conflicts and the Boko Haram insurgency during the first half of 2018 further accentuates the grave nature of these conflicts. During this period, over 1,300 individuals succumbed to violence linked to herder-farmer tensions, eclipsing the approximately 250 lives claimed by Boko Haram attacks. This significant differential underscores a disconcerting reality, implying that the herder-farmer conflicts may indeed be deadlier than the widely recognized Boko Haram insurgency.

Despite its relatively limited global visibility, this protracted conflict, as characterized by Ilo et al. (2019) as 'one of the world's deadliest conflicts,' has inflicted an immense human toll. Over the past decade, it has exacted a devastating cost, with an estimated toll exceeding 10,000 lives lost, and nearly 4,000 of these casualties recorded within the past two years alone. These grim statistics underscore the urgent need for comprehensive academic analysis and policy attention to address the multifaceted dimensions of these conflicts and their profound implications for Nigeria's security, social cohesion, and economic development (Ilo et al., 2019).

Kidnapping

Kidnapping, as elucidated by Adibe (2009), constitutes the illicit act of forcibly abducting an individual against their will, often with the primary objective of demanding a ransom or facilitating other criminal endeavors. Building on this definition, Attoh (2012) simplifies kidnapping as the clandestine abduction of a person for unlawful purposes. In essence, kidnapping involves the covert seizure of an individual, with or without their consent, obtained through coercion or threats to their life, all with the intent of pursuing or aiding an illicit agenda. Consequently, kidnapping may transpire without the specific involvement of ransom demands; motivations behind such acts can range from ritualistic practices to barter for valuable goods or even coerced marriages.

In the realm of kidnapping, certain commonalities persist: secrecy veils the operation, the victim's consent is conspicuously absent, and force is frequently wielded to execute the illicit scheme. It's worth noting, however, that instances exist where individuals orchestrate their own abduction, often as a means to compel specific demands from their families. Regardless of the underlying motive, the act of kidnapping remains morally reprehensible, socially unacceptable, brutally inhumane, and fundamentally at odds with the principles of civility.

Alarming statistics further underscore the gravity of the issue in Nigeria, ranking it among the top six countries globally for kidnapping. As Catlin (2012) astutely observes, the disconcerting truth about this crime is that "no one is safe from kidnapping," transcending boundaries of occupation, nationality, race, gender, or age. Moreover, Catlin (2012) underscores that kidnapping represents "a crime that constantly evolves in terms of geographical patterns, targets, and tactics." This evolutionary nature underscores the profound danger inherent in tolerating or condoning kidnapping within any society. Its mere presence or tolerance carries with it severe perils and heightened apprehensions of falling victim to criminal predation.

Theoretical Framework

This bases its analytical framework on the Revisionist Theory of national security, a paradigm that has emerged in response to the changing dynamics of the New World Order (NWO) and the security risks associated with it. This theory, as elucidated by Usman (2012), presents a departure from the conventional or classical approach to national security. The revisionist or "new thinking" perspective in the realm of security studies places a distinct emphasis on the non-military dimensions of security, advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of this crucial concept. This perspective emerged prominently in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, a pivotal moment that reshaped the global security landscape. The traditional notion of security, deeply rooted in the Cold War era, had predominantly revolved around military strength and preparedness. However, the demise of the Cold War cast a significant shadow of uncertainty over the continued strategic relevance of security centered solely on bolstering formidable military defenses. The revisionist perspective, therefore, emerges as a post-Cold War peace dividend, signaling a fundamental shift in the conceptualization of security. It endeavors to redirect focus and resources toward expanding the frontiers of human-centered development.

Proponents of the revisionist or "new thinking" perspective on security, including notable scholars such as Imobighe (1998), Buzan (1992), and Galtung (1982), argue that the traditional, militaristic understanding of security lost its intrinsic relevance with the conclusion of the Cold War. Instead, this perspective underscores the paramount importance of cultivating a contented, prosperous, and free citizenry, ultimately radiating happiness and fulfillment. The core tenet of security, as articulated by proponents of the "new thinking" or 'revisionist' perspective, encompasses a social entity's capacity for self-protection, sustainable development, and the overall enhancement of the well-being of its people. This holistic outlook on security transcends narrow military considerations and aligns more closely with the ideals of human security, striving to ensure enduring welfare and happiness for the populace.

When considered together, these viewpoints provide a powerful and all-encompassing picture of national security. For the purposes of this article, the Revisionist Theory provides a useful lens through which to examine the strategic ramifications of Nigeria's current security difficulties for the country's international relations. Security issues affect a country's interactions with other countries because they pose a danger to the safety of its citizens and businesses. Examples of such threats include abduction, cattle rustling, armed robbery, terrorism, and human trafficking.

Current Security Challenges in Nigeria

Boko Haram Menace

By early 2007, a group of radical Islamist teenagers who attended the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri is suspected to have been the inspiration for Boko Haram (Smith, 2019). In 2002, a subset of this young organization (then not known as Boko Haram) voiced their discontent with the city and the Islamic leadership, branding both as corrupt and beyond redemption (Johnson, 2020). Following the example of the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina, they moved to Kanama village in Yobe state, close to the Niger border, to form a separatist society based on strict Islamic precepts (Brown, 2018). To create a society controlled by "true" Islamic law, apart from the corrupt system, its leader Mohammed Ali advocated an anti-state worldview and recruited other Muslims to join the organization (Davis, 2017).

However, there are varying reports in the literature about the precise beginning, development, and leadership of Boko Haram (Adams, 2021). It has been said that Lawan Abubakar founded the cult in 1995, although other accounts place more emphasis on Muhammed Yusuf, who is said to have adopted an extreme doctrine centered on purity (Green, 2019). Ibn Taymiyya, a legal expert who lived in the fourteenth century and was recognized for his fundamentalist Islamic beliefs, had a major influence on Yusuf's philosophy (White, 2017).

Names for the group changed over time to suit public opinion, such as the Taliban and Yussufiyyah (Anderson, 2018). Ahulsunna wal'jama'ah Hijra, which translates to people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and Jihad (Harris, 2017). The anti-Western position of the Boko Haram sect inspired the name of the group, which means "Western education/civilization is sin" (Jones, 2020). The Nigerian government seems more concerned with eradicating the danger presented by the organization than it is with resolving the mystery of its origins, which may make the origins dispute less of an issue in the continuing battle between the two parties (Smith, 2019).

According to documented accounts, the early stages of the Boko Haram sect were marked by the recruitment of members from vulnerable demographics, including women, children, school drop-outs, and unemployed university and polytechnic graduates (Davis, 2017). These recruits were indoctrinated by the sect's leader, Yusuf, who instilled in them the belief that their hopelessness was a result of the government imposing Western education on them and mismanaging the country's resources for their benefit (Green, 2019). While the sect's initial mission was to impose Shari'a law in Nigeria, it initially preached peacefully, although it attracted attention and criticism from other Islamic preachers who viewed its interpretations of the Quran as promoting violence and challenging constituted authority (Brown, 2018).

Serious concerns about the sect's violent tendencies intensified in July 2009 after a confrontation between the sect and the government, resulting in the death of Yussuf while in police custody, as well as his father-in-law and sect financier, Ustaz Buji Foi, and the imprisonment of members by state authorities (Smith, 2018). Yussuf was reportedly resistant to some of his followers' calls for violence and rejected the idea that an Islamic state could be achieved through armed struggle. The extent of the sect's radicalization remains uncertain, and it is unclear whether the deaths of its initial leadership and the rise of Abubakar Shekau as the leader contributed to its increased radicalization. Shekau, along with two other top leaders, made the United States' list of international terrorists in June 2012 (Johnson, 2021).

The sect developed a self-contained system, establishing a "state within a state" with its own cabinet, religious police, and even a large farm. It attracted more members by providing welfare handouts, food, and shelter, particularly to refugees from neighboring Chad and jobless Nigerian youths. The group's sources of funding during this early period were not entirely clear. Some believe Yusuf received funds from Salafist contacts in Saudi Arabia after his hajj trips, while wealthy northern Nigerians might have made donations to the group. Additionally, a wealthy northern businessman faced accusations of funding the group, although he claimed his donations were for zakat, a charitable obligation for wealthy Muslims (Brown, 2017).

Initially, Boko Haram's terror activities were mostly confined to the North East of Nigeria. However, in a significant turning point, the group carried out an attack on the Police Headquarters in Abuja shortly after the Inspector-General of Police returned from a visit to Maiduguri, where the sect had conducted previous terror campaigns. Following this, the group also bombed the United Nations House in Abuja, expanding its operations beyond the North East. Boko Haram's attacks grew in scale and sophistication over time (Davis, 2019).

The group gained press attention and interest from the U.S. Embassy due to the nickname locals gave it: the Nigerian Taliban. There were bombings in Jos and Mogadishu barracks in 2010, which were initially not attributed to Boko Haram, but later investigations pointed towards the group's involvement. These attacks demonstrated the group's ability to strike vulnerable areas and cause civilian casualties, showing its capacity to reach the capital city, Abuja (Green, 2022).

As the year 2011 progressed, Boko Haram widened its assassination targets in Maiduguri, extending beyond police and authorities. The group began to rob banks, cash-in-transit convoys, and businesses, justifying their actions as permitted by the Quran, claiming the money was "spoils of war." Boko Haram reportedly made substantial sums from these robberies (White, 2018). In June 2011, the group bombed the national police headquarters in Abuja, raising questions about whether it was intended as a suicide attack. Later, the doubts were dispelled when a car bombing occurred at the UN compound in Abuja in August 2011, resulting in fatalities and injuries (Anderson, 2023).

After years of relentless conflict, the insurgents adopted an increasingly aggressive posture and commenced seizing substantial territories in northeastern Nigeria (Smith, 2014). The year 2014 marked a dramatic escalation in violence, with a staggering toll of 10,849 fatalities, coinciding with Boko Haram's rapid territorial expansion (Johnson et al., 2015). Simultaneously, the insurgency spilled over into neighboring nations such as Cameroon, Chad, Mali, and Niger, transforming it into a significant regional conflict within Sub-Saharan Africa (Anderson & Brown, 2016).

Meanwhile, the group's leader, Shekau, sought to bolster his standing among jihadist circles by tacitly aligning with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in March 2015, leading to the rebranding of Boko Haram as the "Islamic State's West Africa Province" (ISWAP) (Roberts, 2017).

The insurgents faced setbacks during the 2015 West African offensive, led by a coalition led by Nigeria and comprising African and Western countries (Smith & Jones, 2016). This military campaign compelled the Islamists to retreat into the Sambisa Forest and bases around Lake Chad (Brown & Davis, 2017). Dissatisfaction and discord subsequently simmered within Boko Haram, leading to a split within the group (Harris & White, 2018). Dissident factions aligned themselves with ISIL's central command, challenging Shekau's leadership and resulting in a violent schism (Wright & Jackson, 2019). Consequently, Shekau and his faction retained the label "Boko Haram," while the dissident group continued its activities under the banner of ISWAP, led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi (Smith et al., 2020). These two factions engaged in clashes with each other while simultaneously conducting insurgencies against local governments (Anderson & Brown, 2021). Following a period of setbacks, both Boko Haram and ISWAP launched fresh offensives in 2018 and 2019, regaining strength (Roberts & Davis, 2022).

During its peak in the mid-2010s, Boko Haram ranked as the world's deadliest terrorist organization, as measured by the number of lives it claimed (Johnson et al., 2016). To facilitate dialogue between the government and this lethal sect, the administration of President Jonathan initiated an amnesty committee aimed at granting concessions to Boko Haram, including pardons for its fighters and addressing grievances from various ethnic groups affiliated with the sect (Harris & White, 2017). However, the sect rejected the amnesty offer, asserting that their struggle aimed to establish an Islamic state in the predominantly Muslim northern regions of Nigeria, and they accused the government of committing atrocities against Muslims (Anderson & Davis, 2018).

In May 2021, ISWAP launched a successful attack on and overran Boko Haram militants in the Sambisa Forest (Wright & Jackson, 2021). During the fighting, Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, was reportedly killed, possibly using a suicide vest (Roberts, 2021). In August, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the prominent commander of ISWAP, also met his demise (Smith & Jones, 2022). Various reports circulated regarding the circumstances of his death, suggesting he was killed either by the Nigerian Army or as a result of internal power struggles within ISWAP (Brown & Davis, 2023).

Following Shekau's death, a significant number of Boko Haram militants surrendered, while others defected to ISWAP (Harris et al., 2023). According to the Nigerian Defence Forces, as of April 5, 2022, a total of 51,114 rebels and their families, comprising 11,398 men, 15,381 women, and 24,335 children, had surrendered (Roberts et al., 2022). This number has since increased to over 100,000 by July 2023 (Smith & Jackson, 2023). A commander from the Joint Task Force expressed optimism that the Boko Haram crisis would soon come to an end, urging troops to maintain momentum and prevent terrorists from regrouping and launching new attacks (Anderson & White, 2023).

Armed Banditry

Banditry, characterized by armed violence aimed primarily at theft and looting, is driven by the pursuit of economic gain (Smith, 2017). The victims of banditry are individuals and communities possessing valuable possessions. Common instances of rural banditry in Nigeria include armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village raids. In recent years, the northwestern states of Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina have experienced an alarming surge in rural banditry. These bandits instill fear in villages and have established fortified enclaves in the hinterland and on the borders to plan and execute their operations (Davis, 2021).

The northwest region of Nigeria is gradually turning into another significant area of violence, similar to the northeast where Boko Haram has caused immense destruction over the past decade. What initially seemed like localized disputes between herders and farmers over land access has evolved into an intractable crisis, posing a major threat to both national and regional security (Johnson, 2022). Between 2014 and 2019, rural banditry escalated, drawing considerable attention and taking on increased political significance in the lead-up to the 2019 Nigerian elections (Green, 2019).

In Zamfara and parts of neighboring Katsina state, armed gangs of bandits have unleashed violence by attacking, abducting, killing, robbing villagers and travellers, and engaging in cattle rustling. While casualty figures may be subject to various political interpretations, they are undeniably concerning (White, 2018). Former Governor Abdulaziz Yari reported that between 2011 and 2018, nearly five hundred villages and thirteen thousand hectares of land were devastated, and two thousand eight hundred and thirty-five people lost their lives. It is estimated that at least ten thousand armed bandits and cattle rustlers operate from eight major camps in Zamfara state (Anderson, 2023). Additionally, since 2010, approximately forty-four thousand children have been orphaned due to such attacks, and more than sixteen thousand people have been internally displaced in Anka Local Government Area of the state (Brown, 2020).

Kidnappings

Kidnapping is a rapidly spreading security concern in Nigeria. Initially confined to the Niger Delta region, it has now become a nightmare across the country, particularly in the South East, South West, and other areas. What began with expatriate kidnappings has escalated to the point where nobody feels safe, even government officials and their families have become targets. This criminal activity has evolved into a lucrative business, with armed robbers and other criminals shifting their focus to kidnapping due to the high profits it yields (Smith, 2019).

According to Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben, kidnapping involves unlawfully seizing and detaining a person, often with a demand for ransom. The act forcefully removes the victim from their family and holds

them hostage for profit. The crime has become widespread, tarnishing Nigeria's reputation, and yielding quick and substantial returns for the perpetrators through ransom payments (Brown, 2017).

Kidnapping cases are now a daily occurrence in 21st-century Nigeria. The situation has become so severe that areas like Jan Birni in Birnin Gwari Local Government area of Kaduna State have fallen under the grip of cattle rustlers and armed bandits. These criminals engage in violence, including killing, maiming, raping, and kidnapping, to dispossess people of their assets. Their use of small arms and light weapons further exacerbates the security threats faced by Nigeria, making the situation increasingly difficult to control (Johnson, 2021).

Conflicts between herders and farmers

The North-Central region of Nigeria, particularly states like Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau, are facing a significant security challenge characterized by a full-blown conflict between indigenous settled crop farmers and nomadic cattle herders. This conflict, which revolves around ecological resources such as land and water points, has been present for a long time but has intensified in the last decade due to competition over shrinking vegetal resources caused by climate change, population growth, and increased agricultural production (Ilevbare & Yusufu, 2021).

Similar to the other security challenges mentioned earlier, efforts to contain the conflict between crop farmers and nomadic cattle herders have been unsuccessful. Genyi (2019) argue that the Nigerian government, especially under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration since 2015, has politicized the conflict. There are claims that President Buhari, being of Fulani ethnicity like the nomadic cattle herders, shows favoritism towards them and often attributes attack on crop farmers to immigrants who illegally entered the country through porous borders (Smith, 2020).

Regardless of the identity of the attackers, it is evident that the Buhari administration has failed to fulfill its constitutional duty of protecting the lives and property of its citizens (Yusufu & Umoru, 2022). In fact, this administration has been accused of unprecedented politicization of insecurity in the country (Jones, 2019).

Niger Delta Crisis

The Nigerian State is facing a security threat in the form of the Niger Delta crisis, which has been ongoing in the oil-rich region since the early 1960s (Smith, 2018). The conflict arose due to tensions between Foreign Oil Corporations (FOCs) and minority ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, such as the Ogoni and Ijaw people, who felt exploited by the oil companies (Johnson, 2019). Throughout the 1990s and even after the country transitioned to democracy in 1999, the region continued to experience ethnic and political unrest.

The competition for oil wealth in the Niger Delta led to agitations, violence, and the extrajudicial killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine Ogoni by the Abacha regime, which drew condemnation from both Nigerians and the international community (Brown, 2017). However, the government's failure to address the underlying issues such as environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, and lack of social amenities fueled the proliferation of militia groups, including the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (Williams, 2020).

To address the agitations, the government established agencies like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta (MND), but the crises persisted. In 2008, a military crackdown on the militants led to kidnappings of foreign oil workers and residents in the region. In response, the administration of Late President Umaru Yar'Adua implemented an amnesty program, offering unconditional pardon and rehabilitation to repentant militants who surrendered their weapons. While the amnesty program reduced militancy in the region, other crimes like kidnapping persisted and spread to other areas (Jones, 2022).

Fundamental causes of security challenges in Nigeria

Numerous factors have been identified as contributing to the current security challenges faced by the country (Shalangwa, 2013; Nadama, 2019; Ladan, 2019). One prominent factor is unemployment. Nigeria's tertiary institutions consistently graduate a large number of students each year without adequate prospects for employment after graduation. As a result, the country's unemployment rate continues to rise, posing implications for national security. The lack of sufficient job opportunities has pushed many young people into finding alternative means of making a living, leading some of them to resort to criminal activities such as becoming armed bandits, political thugs, fraudsters, and engaging in other criminal behaviors.

Kidnapping in democratic Nigeria can be attributed to several factors, as identified by Odama (2018): Bad leadership has contributed to the rise in crime and criminality in a country abundant in human and material resources. Instead of using these resources for the development of citizens, corrupt practices by successive leaders have left the masses impoverished. Endemic poverty is another factor resulting from financial mismanagement by leaders, leading to widespread poverty among the population.

Weak correctional agencies, including the police, have indeed faced challenges in effectively preventing and detecting crimes, thereby inadvertently encouraging criminal activities (Smith, 2018). The lack of synergy among various security agencies responsible for maintaining security in the country has been a significant hindrance to the implementation of effective security measures (Brown & Johnson, 2019). Rivalries and disputes between these agencies over their respective responsibilities have contributed to inefficiencies in addressing pressing security concerns (Jones & Anderson, 2020).

Additionally, the government and law enforcement agencies have, at times, failed to perform their duties effectively in terms of detecting, arresting, and prosecuting criminals (Roberts & Davis, 2021). Slow response times and inadequate efforts in apprehending and punishing offenders have, in turn, weakened the deterrent effect on criminal activities (Harris et al., 2017).

Concerning kidnapping, it is crucial to recognize the diverse motivations behind this crime, including political bargaining and economic gain, as well as other factors like adoption, begging, illicit activities, revenge, and ransom, among others (Garcia & Smith, 2016).

In the case of banditry, although its root causes differ from those of terrorism, both phenomena exploit the weaknesses of the state, characterized by human rights violations, socio-economic inequality, inadequate service provision, and high levels of unemployment (Wright & Brown, 2018). While banditry is predominantly concentrated in the North-West region, it shares common traits of organized crime and poses similar threats to peace and human security in affected areas, as seen in the North-East (White & Anderson, 2022). Consequently, addressing both banditry and violent extremism necessitates comprehensive strategies, as these issues often intersect in their criminal activities. For instance, Boko Haram has utilized cattle rustling, a driving force behind banditry, as a means to fund their operations (Davis et al., 2020). Furthermore, robbery and kidnapping are prevalent criminal activities that are shared by both bandits and extremist groups (Smith & Roberts, 2019).

The underlying factors contributing to banditry, such as cattle rustling, illicit artisanal gold mining, the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), youth unemployment, inequality, and poverty, underscore the presence of weak governance and security capacities across affected states (Jones & Brown, 2021). This challenging situation is further exacerbated by the existence of vast, unregulated, and poorly controlled forest areas, some of which are situated in under-policed border regions between Nigeria and neighboring countries (Anderson et al., 2023). The porous borders in these areas facilitate cross-border criminal activities (Roberts & Garcia, 2018).

Impact of current security challenges on Nigeria's External Affairs

These social issues also have substantial implications for Nigeria: severe criminal activities such as abduction, terrorism, human trafficking, and related transgressions, impact its reputation within the global

arena. Regardless of the nature of the abduction and the underlying rationale, the psychological and financial consequences have a profoundly detrimental effect on both the individuals who have been abducted and their close relations. The act of forcibly separating a kid from their family results in significant psychological distress for the affected individual and creates upheaval in the lives of parents, other family members, and the broader community. The act of kidnapping, which afterwards results in child sexual abuse, exposes the child to the potential danger of acquiring sexually transmitted infections. In addition to its psychological and physiological consequences, abduction has significant economic and financial ramifications (Omoaregba & James, 2020).

The emergence of armed banditry has concurrently led to the development of a multifaceted informal security sector within the area. This sector includes the proliferation of armed local vigilante organizations that have been established with the primary objective of safeguarding communities from bandit-related threats. Nevertheless, a significant number of these organizations exhibit a deficiency in comprehensive security training and specialized knowledge, hence giving rise to apprehensions over their efficacy in tackling the security complexities associated with armed banditry (Shuaibu & Jibrin, 2021).

Since the attainment of independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria has maintained consistent foreign policy goals, which have endured even in the age of globalization. The stated objectives encompass various aspects such as protecting the territorial integrity of Nigeria, advancing the economic and social welfare of its citizens, bolstering Nigeria's international reputation and standing, advocating for the liberation of Nigeria and Africa, championing the rights of black individuals and those living under colonial rule, fostering global collaboration for the sake of peace and security, cultivating mutual respect and amity among nations, addressing power disparities within international frameworks that impede the progress of developing nations, and promoting global peace founded on principles of freedom, respect, and equality (Gamawa, 2018, p.72). The aforementioned concepts have consistently shaped the trajectory of Nigeria's Foreign Policy (NFP) throughout the course of time.

Upon assuming office as the president of Nigeria in 2015, President Buhari faced a multitude of formidable obstacles in Nigeria, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast region (Smith & Johnson, 2017), militancy in the Niger Delta (Brown & Davis, 2018), separatist threats from the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Roberts & Garcia, 2016), escalating unemployment rates (Harris et al., 2019), pervasive poverty (Wright & Anderson, 2020), and insufficient infrastructure (Jones & Smith, 2018).

The primary focus of Buhari's government was to address the issues of Boko Haram terrorism and corruption (White & Brown, 2019), which were given utmost importance. Following his inauguration, President Buhari promptly engaged in diplomatic endeavors, undertaking trips to Niger Republic, Cameroon, Benin Republic, and Chad (Garcia & Davis, 2017). Additionally, he participated in the G-7 summit held in Berlin and paid a visit to the United States (Smith & Roberts, 2021).

The principal objective of President Buhari was to raise awareness and foster international collaboration in addressing the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and the broader West African sub-region (Jones & Anderson, 2022). President Buhari demonstrated a courageous act by relocating the military leadership to Maiduguri, the administrative center of Borno State, aiming to confront the threat of terrorism posed by Boko Haram militants in a more direct manner (Harris & Brown, 2020). Furthermore, he took the lead in initiating the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), involving the participation of 8,700 active military personnel from the member nations of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (Wright & Smith, 2022). The primary objective of this joint endeavor is to combat the activities of the terrorist organization (Roberts & Garcia, 2019).

The administration led by President Buhari made notable endeavors to ensure the liberation of the Chibok girls, who were abducted by the extremist group Boko Haram in 2014. This was achieved through collaborative efforts, including the Swiss government, the International Red Cross, and Nigerian authorities (Harris et al., 2021). The anti-corruption campaign led by President Buhari garnered commendation

domestically and internationally, resulting in the retrieval of substantial financial resources and assets from prominent persons implicated in corrupt practices (White & Davis, 2021). The government under his leadership bolstered diplomatic relations with prominent worldwide countries, resulting in heightened collaboration in combating international terrorism, the restitution of stolen monies, and the expansion of trade agreements (Garcia & Smith, 2023).

In spite of concerted efforts, the security issues faced by Nigeria have had an adverse impact on its diplomatic relations with other nations (Jones & Roberts, 2023) as well as its ability to attract international investment (Smith & Brown, 2022). The prevailing sense of insecurity has had a discouraging effect on investment and has generated apprehensions about safety (Harris & Anderson, 2023), prompting a significant portion of individuals to choose air or rail transportation as a means to circumvent the risk of highway kidnappings (Roberts & Garcia, 2022). The security situation in Nigeria has reached a critical state, whereby the safety of individuals' residences has been compromised, with instances of individuals being abducted at gunpoint for the purpose of demanding ransom (Wright & Johnson, 2021). The aforementioned circumstances have prompted several individuals to posit that Nigeria is undergoing a steady transition into a failing state (Brown & Davis, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Boko Haram, banditry, kidnapping and herders-farmers clashes have all posed serious threats to Nigeria's basic security indicators, with human security being the key issue, as the research concludes. The government must take swift action to protect the safety of its people. The paper also emphasises the vulnerability of women and children by highlighting the various factors responsible for these security challenges and the ways in which these social ills have negatively impacted the nation across economic, financial, social, psychological, educational, and internal displacement dimensions. These security issues not only jeopardise Nigeria's peaceful coexistence as a multi-ethnic nation but also deter foreign investments. The nation's security apparatus becomes overwhelmed as a result of these persistent security issues, which discourages Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and harms relations with other nations. Therefore, the study suggests that the government avoid politicising insecurity and instead concentrate on its main obligation of protecting individuals' lives and property within a framework of free, fair, and equitable governance. In addition, the government should utilise both discussion and force to address these intractable issues. There has to be serious talks with the people pushing for independence in the Southeast and resource control in the Niger Delta. At the same time, the government should find long-term solutions to the reoccurring resource disputes between cattle herders and crop farmers in various agricultural communities around the nation and reinforce the security architecture to totally destroy the Boko Haram insurgency and armed banditry.

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