

CIVILIANS UNDER ATTACK: CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE SECURITY IN DEMOCRATIC NIGERIA

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Abstract

The alarming prevalence of violent attacks on civilians, along with the rise of banditry and terrorism, has been a recurring issue in the nation. The Nigerian government, in a bid to perform its traditional role of securing, must expediently seek a sustainable solution to these disintegrative and terrifying occurrences of Boko Haram, bandits, Terrorism has been a persistent issue in the nation. The Nigerian government, in an effort to fulfill its conventional duty of ensuring security, must promptly pursue a sustainable resolution to these issues. Disintegrative and alarming events involving Boko Haram, robbers, and other violent organizations have led to substantial loss of life and property in Nigeria. This study examines the issues encountered by civilians during attacks and the quest for lasting security in democratic Nigeria. Nigeria has been identified as one of the countries facing significant challenges due to a high rate of attacks on civilians, leading to its classification among nations affected by terrorism. A considerable number of lives and valuable assets have been lost, resulting in many citizens becoming homeless. This study utilised secondary data from publications, journals, newspapers, internet resources, and government archives concerning civilians and insecurity in the country. The research findings indicate that civilians are facing serious attacks and require protection from both the Nigerian government and international communities. Furthermore, government resources related to security issues have significantly and positively affected economic development. This indicates that investment in security has contributed to mitigating the adverse impacts of terrorism and insecurity, even with the positive correlation between security spending and economic growth. This paper concludes with a recommendation for the government to declare war on violent crimes and terrorism while also seeking support from international communities to address the issue of insecurity. The government must intensify efforts to combat insurgency and prioritizing enhancing security measures within the country.

Keywords: Civilians, Terrorism, Peace building, Security, Nigeria

Introduction

Globally, the traditional responsibilities of government encompass the protection of life and property of its citizens (World Economic Forum, 2017). Despite the expansion of governmental functions in contemporary times, security remains an indispensable and unquestionable duty of government. In the pursuit of achieving comprehensive security architecture, diverse frameworks are established across layers of governance, which may encompass the navy, police, Airforce, and local police, contingent upon the nomenclature of society and the orientations of national leadership. To that end, the security of nations is a statutory mandate that must be fulfilled relentlessly (Bryden & Funmi, 2011). The ongoing conflict in Nigeria with insurgent factions, coupled with the enduring issue of governmental corruption, poses significant challenges to the stability and political integrity of Africa's most populous nation (Emmanuel, 2020). Since 2011, Boko Haram is recognized as one of the foremost Islamist militant organizations in Africa has perpetrated acts of terrorism against secular and political entities, local law enforcement, and military forces, while also launching indiscriminate assaults on civilians in bustling markets and rural communities (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2024). The abduction of over two hundred girls from the region of Chibok in Borno state in April 2014 attracted worldwide attention to the persistent threat posed by Boko Haram and the government's inability to address it effectively. After extensive negotiations facilitated by the International Committee for the Red Cross, a total of 103 women have been released from the clutches of Boko Haram (Adebiyi, 2020; Orji, 2018).

The former President, Muhammadu Buhari, who had a prior tenure as a military leader and succeeded in his electoral challenge against incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, was elected in 2015 with a campaign centered on counterterrorism initiatives. Despite his

dedication to tackling insecurity, Nigeria appears to be enduring a grim reality under the influence of Boko Haram. In alignment with this, military involvement in combating the Boko Haram insurgency appears to yield results that fall short of expectations, as residents in the northwest and east continue to live in fear due to the tyranny of the terrorist organization (Emmanuel, 2020; Premium News, 2015).

In tandem with the previous discussion, Amnesty International (2020) reported that the armed group Boko Haram, in conjunction with herders and bandits, continuously committed serious offenses throughout the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, including war crimes and potential crimes against humanity. Boko Haram has caused the deaths of hundreds of civilians and has executed abductions of individuals as a result of inter-communal violence and bandit attacks. The terrorist group employs excessive force, resulting in a concerning prevalence of unlawful killings, torture, and various forms of ill-treatment. This is exemplified by the fate of numerous members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), who disappeared in 2015 and remain shrouded in uncertainty (Amnesty International, 2021).

Terrorism continues to be a significant threat to global security and international relations in contemporary times. The emerging ideological threat functions on a global scale due to its resilience and its tactic of unlawfully targeting innocent civilians to fulfil political, religious, economic, and ancillary objectives. Boko Haram exemplifies the most extreme manifestation of terrorism, as noted by Pérouse de Montclos (2014). While Boko Haram benefits from international sponsorship, the organisation primarily directs its actions against Nigerian state forces and their coalition partners. The organisation has broadened its operational scope, which was originally focused in Northeastern Nigeria, to establish a presence in Niger, as well as in Chad and Cameroon, thus extending its influence and activities across borders. The

security challenge posed by terrorism continues to be complex, as it evolves and often lacks clarity both within national boundaries and across international borders (Ani & Onyebukwa, 2016).

The pervasive insecurity and terrorism in Nigeria, affecting both the northern and southern regions, has emerged as a significant concern for the government. Since 1990, when the activities of the Niger Delta militants commenced, and continuing into the present era marked by the emergence of Boko Haram insurgents in the northern region, Nigeria has experienced a series of unparalleled security challenges (Olanrewaju, Folarin & Folarin, 2017). The array of challenges includes kidnapping, suicide attacks, bombings, ritual killings, assassinations, and armed robbery, resulting in the devastation of lives and property. These issues have impeded business activities, dissuaded both local and foreign investors, and escalated government spending on security, collectively stifling and hindering Nigeria's socio-economic development (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). This paper explores the complexities surrounding sustainable security in democratic Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the plight of civilians facing threats.

Conceptual Discourse

Sustainable Security

Sustainable security transcends conventional military state defenses by creating comprehensive solutions that identify security sources and foster enduring environmental protections through peaceful means as it has been coloured with diverse luminaries' perspective. Rogers (2010) defines sustainable security as a sophisticated framework that emphasizes= three key components: social inequalities, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation. Sustainable security is supported by Barnett and Adger (2007), who assert that it necessitates an understanding of

environmental transformations in relation to human security needs, as well as the advancement of strategies to combat climate change and foster adaptable capabilities to prevent conflict arising from resource scarcity. Dalby (2009) advances the concept by integrating ecological sustainability with human security, examining the Anthropocene planetary boundaries that emerge from significant human-induced environmental changes. Matthew (2014) asserts that sustainable security prioritizes conflict prevention through the resolution of poverty and inequality, as well as addressing environmental degradation. It promotes proactive cooperative strategies rather than reactive military interventions. The concept of human security, as outlined by the UNDP in 1994, emphasizes essential principles that foster sustainable security. It prioritizes individuals in the analysis of various factors, including economic, food, health, environmental, and political aspects, rather than focusing solely on the sovereignty of nation-states.

Homer-Dixon (1999) discusses how the depletion of environmental resources leads to social conflicts and generates significant disputes, highlighting the necessity of resource conservation for maintaining security. Brauch (2008) asserts that the concept of "environmental security" highlights the necessity of safeguarding ecosystems to ensure the continuity of their services for the future. Gleditsch (1998) and O'Brien et al. (2007) illustrate the necessity of incorporating environmental policies into security planning and elucidate the impact of climate change on human defense capabilities. Furthermore, Detraz (2011) emphasizes that the social dimensions of sustainable security warrant focus, as environmental and security policies predominantly affect women and necessitate a comprehensive strategy aimed at mitigating gender discrimination. Floyd (2010) and Conca and Dabelko (2002) explore two strategies that harmonize environmental

sustainability with social justice in their analysis of conventional security paradigms. The analysis by Kaldor (2007) links sustainable security to human security by highlighting the importance of safeguarding individuals from poverty, environmental threats, and diseases. Swatuk (2005) and Dyer (2010) examine specific resource management challenges related to water and energy systems, emphasizing the necessity of sustainable approaches to prevent conflicts and ensure enduring stability.

Democracy

The concept of democracy, as examined by various scholars, encompasses a sophisticated and dynamic system of governance that links citizen engagement with both accountability and the protection of individual freedoms. Dahl (2020) asserts that democracy operates as a governing system dependent on extensive political engagement, equitable governance, and responsive administration, supported by reliable elections, principles of civil liberties, and frameworks for minority protection. Schmitter and Karl (2021) describe democracy as a system in which rulers are required to respond to institutional accountability mechanisms, including elections, checks and balances, and the rule of law, while highlighting the importance of governance quality and citizen participation. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) assert that democracy necessitates political actors to uphold institutional restraint and foster tolerance among one another to prevent democratic decline and the emergence of authoritarian rule. Mounk (2018) examines the connection between popular rule and constitutional liberties, particularly in the context of rising populism and authoritarian political systems. In contrast, Norris (2022) outlines democracy as comprising four essential components: elections, free societies, and participatory and deliberative elements that highlight the importance of citizen engagement and transparency. Fukuyama (2020) asserts that democracy

derives its legitimacy from public consent, which upholds human dignity and self-empowerment; however, it encounters obstacles due to corruption and inefficiency. Runciman (2018) argues for a reevaluation of traditional perspectives on democracy, advocating for an adaptive definition that effectively responds to the challenges posed by modern globalisation and digital technology. Przeworski (2019) defines democracy as an institution that introduces voting uncertainty to prevent power from being monopolized by a single group, emphasizing the importance of competitive elections and peaceful transitions of authority. O'Donnell (2021) identifies horizontal accountability as the mechanism through which judicial institutions, media organizations, and civil society can effectively limit executive power to avert authoritarian control. Diamond (2021) asserts that authentic democracy necessitates three components: free elections, the safeguarding of human rights, and the establishment of the rule of law, while cautioning against pseudo-democracies that undermine fundamental principles. According to Habermas (2022), democracy is characterized as a deliberative process in which rational discourse promotes collective decision-making and enhances democratic legitimacy.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) argue that the success of democracy relies on the distribution of power among various groups, as this fosters inclusive institutions that promote economic development. Sen (2021) posits that democracy serves as a development mechanism for human growth through social justice initiatives by creating the necessary infrastructure for individuals to attain freedom and capability implementations. Tilly (2020) posits that democracy is an active process that evolves through rights-based actions of crowds, which in turn promotes the development of democratic practices and institutions. Keane (2023) defines monitory democracy as the continuous oversight of power by watchdogs,

citizens, and digital platforms to address contemporary governance challenges.

Methodology

The paper employed qualitative content research method to examine security risks impacting civilian safety within Nigeria's democratic framework. This study employs an explanatory research design that provides comprehensive insights into the complex security issues related to civilian assaults. The systematic description method outlined these phenomena, while the exploratory research approach allowed researchers to uncover security patterns along with their underlying causes. In light of its appropriateness for examining complex democratic-security relationships in Nigeria, researchers adopted a dual research approach.

Researchers selected qualitative content research method as it facilitates the capture of both objective and contextual elements related to security and civilian safety. The primary distinction between quantitative research is its reliance on numerical data, whereas qualitative investigation focusses on uncovering the underlying factors that drive social processes. The research examined security challenges in Nigeria by exploring the interplay between historical events and political decisions, alongside socio-economic factors. This approach offers organized insights into security experiences, public perceptions, and the national response to threats.

The study utilized secondary data due to its established high levels of reliability, credibility, and relevance for the research. The research utilized secondary data due to its accessibility and cost-effectiveness, along with the comprehensive information it provided regarding security operations in Nigeria. The researcher's choice of secondary data enabled an examination of historical security patterns and trends that would have been unattainable without the inclusion of these datasets, had primary data collection been omitted. The research utilized sources

from academic journals, books, and peer-reviewed articles obtained from JSTOR and Google Scholar databases. The security incidents, along with policies and counter-terrorism efforts, were thoroughly documented through official reports from Nigeria's Ministry of Defense and the United Nations. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch released reports that analyzed the responsibilities of both civilian attacks and those of the army and insurgent groups. BBC, Al Jazeera, and Premium Times released media reports that offered real-time insights into government initiatives and public responses to civilian attacks and security incidents. The study's analysis was significantly enhanced through data collected from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which provided valuable measurements of civilian attack rates and intensity.

A qualitative content analysis enabled researchers to identify thematic elements and significant narratives within the collected data. The analytical method integrated a coding approach alongside thematic and narrative evaluation techniques. During the coding phase, the researchers systematically organized the collected data into various themes, which encompassed the factors contributing to civilian attacks, government actions, and the effectiveness of sustainable security measures. The study employed thematic analysis to identify ongoing patterns, in addition to narrative analysis, which elucidated how various groups within media and institutions interpreted security concerns through their reporting content.

Throughout the research, all investigators adhered to ethical standards by properly documenting secondary sources and respecting intellectual property rights. The discussion included recognition of biases in media reports as well as limitations of secondary data, which encompass outdated records and incomplete information. The researchers addressed these limitations by employing various information sources to

validate data and concentrating on contemporary studies from reputable publications.

The study highlighted numerous benefits; however, it required addressing several limiting factors. Media information reveals bias through stakeholder and political agendas, which distorts the accurate presentation of facts. The current security environment contrasts with the representations found in earlier published reports. The researchers restricted the generalizability of their study by focusing on contextual information through qualitative data rather than employing statistical data for a wider representation. Although the study has certain limitations, they do not diminish its significant contributions, as it provides comprehensive insights into Nigeria's democratic security challenges, establishing a foundation for future research and political guidance.

Findings and Discussions

Issues of Civilians under Attacks in Democratic Nigeria

Amnesty International reports that instances of human rights breaches and assaults on civilians by the Nigerian government and terrorists have garnered significant attention and outcry from the international community (Amnesty International, 2025). Presented below are several occurrences of assaults on citizens in Nigeria:

Abuses by Armed Groups

Boko Haram has particularly targeted civilian structures. Boko Haram has intentionally targeted civilian structures protected by international law, including schools, mosques, churches, jails, hospitals, and markets, as well as water installations. According to reports from Nigeria, all social infrastructure has been destroyed in many areas liberated by armed forces. According to education authorities, 338 schools were damaged or destroyed in Adamawa, Borno,

and Yobe states between 2012 and 2014. Boko Haram has inflicted severe damage in several areas, including the destruction of bridges connecting villages, most notably in Kubroshosh, Borno State. Boko Haram set fire to a mosque in Kwajafa village, Borno State, on April 6, 2015, killing an unknown number of people. In June 2015, improvised explosive devices and suicide bomb assaults were carried out against a church in Postikum, Yobe. On July 7, 2015, 44 persons were killed in two separate bomb strikes on a restaurant and a mosque in Jos, Plateau State (BBC, 2015). During their attacks, victims repeatedly complained that Boko Haram damaged, appropriated, and looted homes. The behaviors were common and important to the group's battle techniques, which attempted to maintain territorial supremacy and deter escapees from returning. During a series of raids in December 2014, fire devastated multiple villages in Nigeria's Borno state. Many witnesses who managed to flee and then returned after the assaults described the extent of the devastation. Numerous others reported Boko Haram fighters taking over their homes and snatching their valuables and food supplies. Thousands of people were left homeless and seeking sanctuary overnight as a result of Boko Haram strikes in Cameroon's Mabas, Maxi, and Tourou, Niger's Lamana and Ngoumao, and Nigeria's Baga. According to data obtained by the International Organisation for Migration, 40 percent of registered internally displaced persons in north-east Nigeria indicated that Boko Haram had burned down or destroyed their homes, while 26 percent had suffered damage or destruction. According to the International Organization for Migration (2015), 21% of migrants were unaware of the situation in their homes, churches, prisons, hospitals, and markets. Water installations were also compromised. According to reports from Nigeria, all social infrastructure has been destroyed in many areas liberated by armed forces. According to education authorities, 338 schools were damaged or

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Unlawful attacks

Over 1,531 people were killed and hundreds relocated as a result of intercommunal violence, especially between herders and

farming communities, as well as bandit attacks in the north-central and north-western districts (Amnesty International, 2021). More than 1,015 people were held hostage by unidentified criminals; in December, almost 300 students from the Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina state, were kidnapped from their dorms before being released a few days later. The violence forced many rural families to relocate to cities or displacement camps. Between January and July, at least 366 people died in villages across Kaduna State as a result of alleged herder activity. In May, it was reported that 74 people were killed in Sokoto State after gunmen attacked four communities in the Sabon Birni Local Government Area (Amnesty International, 2021). Civilians were also killed as government forces launched indiscriminate attacks on Boko Haram. On April 13, at least ten children and seven women were killed when the Air Force erroneously bombed the village of Sakotoku in Borno State's Damboa Local Government Area. Numerous people were internally displaced as a result of intercommunal violence and attacks by armed groups in the northern areas. Military actions targeting Boko Haram have resulted in a substantial number of displacements. On January 3, 2020, military soldiers destroyed the villages of Bukarti, Ngariri, and Matiri, forcing hundreds of civilians to seek safety in a camp near Maiduguri, Borno state. In September, the Governor of Borno State oversaw the return of around 1,000 people who had been displaced for years to their homes in Baga (Amnesty International, 2020).

Excessive use of force

The security forces engaged in serious violations of human rights, including instances of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as the application of excessive force that, in certain cases, led to unlawful killings. In January 2020, security personnel shot and injured five members of the Islamic MN during a protest advocating for the release of their

leader, Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky, and his wife, Zeenah, in Abuja. The authorities suppressed human rights, encompassing freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and freedom of movement (Amnesty International, 2021). During the enforcement of COVID-19 measures, there were significant violations reported: between 30 March and 13 April 2020, at least 18 individuals lost their lives due to actions taken by the Nigerian Correctional Service, the police, and the military. The National Human Rights Commission recorded 105 complaints of human rights violations from March to mid-April, which included instances of excessive force used by security forces in 24 of the country's 36 states and in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (AlJazeera, 2020).

On 23 August 2020, security forces discharged firearms against unarmed individuals associated with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) during a meeting at a school in Emene, Enugu state, resulting in the deaths of at least four individuals. According to witnesses, personnel from the Department of State Services (DSS), police, and military were present at the location, with some reportedly firing directly at IPOB members who were armed with stones and sticks (Amnesty International, 2022).

Officials reported that two officers from the security forces lost their lives in the incident. In October 2020, security forces employed excessive measures to disperse peaceful protests and assemblies, including the #EndSARS demonstrations, leading to the fatalities of 56 individuals, comprising protesters, bystanders, and security personnel. SARS, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, is a police unit dedicated to combating violent crime (Amnesty International, 2021).

Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions

The military persisted in the detention of thousands of individuals. Individuals suspected of having connections to Boko Haram were arrested and detained without due process. Detainees were prohibited from engaging with their family members and legal

representatives and were not presented before judicial authorities. Children who escaped from regions under Boko Haram's control were subsequently apprehended and confined within military detention facilities, such as Giwa barracks in Maiduguri and the Kainji military base in Niger state. In June, the Borno state government received the release of 602 individuals suspected of affiliation with Boko Haram for the purpose of resettlement. The military disregarded a High Court order in Abuja issued in July, which mandated the release of Martins Idakpini, an army officer detained in June for publicly criticizing the military's approach to combating Boko Haram insurgents (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Enforced disappearances

Arbitrary detention as an unacceptable human rights violation affects Nigeria extensively because security forces including the police and both military and DSS regularly abduct people illegally. The victims of these disappearances include people deemed dangerous to national security as well as political opposers plus members of groups who challenge government policies (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Numerous families face uncertainty about their missing relatives because the Nigerian government maintains complete lack of responsibility in answering questions about such disappearances despite worldwide criticism. Since 2015 approximately 600 members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria are missing without explanation. The violent attack by soldiers against IMN followers led to minimum 347 deaths in Kaduna State after the incident. Human rights organizations together with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have repeatedly asked for information on the missing persons but the government continues to avoid both disciplinary action and information release regarding the killings and disappearances (Amnesty International, 2022). Enforced disappearances persist in Nigeria because they demonstrate both official

protection against punishment and excessive actions to silence dissenter groups. The security forces detain people without proper legal procedures and refuse access to lawyers while holding them at undisclosed secret detention facilities for significant time periods. Nigerian enforcement of disappearance breaches domestic constitutional laws and violates international human rights agreements along with other agreements such as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance accepted by Nigeria (Amnesty International Nigeria, 2022). Security agencies maintain extreme secrecy while implementing their practices which prevents people from being able to challenge their violations because there are no effective enforcement mechanisms in place. Forcing a person to disappear would lead to intense psychological turmoil and profound social deterioration in addition to economic breakdown. The families of disappeared persons endure years of unanswered concern while suffering through intense emotional turmoil since they fear seeking justice might lead to counteraction by those responsible. Those prisoners who make it out of detention describe subjecting to cruel treatments and destitution and forced admission of guilt. Non-transparent government activities produce distrust among citizens who then diminish democratic institutions along with rule of law (United Nations, 2021).

Impunity

Nigeria confronts a significant obstacle in its struggle for human rights, as the persistent protection afforded to offenders during the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency exacerbates the situation. The Nigerian government continues to engage in protracted and insufficient investigations regarding the transgressions committed by Boko Haram, as well as those perpetrated by state security forces (Agbibo, 2013). The members of Boko Haram have evaded authentic judicial

accountability for their transgressions, which encompass mass killings, abductions, and acts of sexual violence. The military faces significant concerns related to its handling of individuals suspected of affiliations with Boko Haram, as it detains individuals without due process and carries out executions beyond the bounds of legal frameworks. Allegations have emerged against security forces concerning war crimes linked to their counterinsurgency operations, which reportedly include forced disappearances, civilian fatalities, and instances of torture (Amnesty International, 2022).

The Nigerian military exemplifies a prominent instance of amnestied conduct in relation to its alleged transgressions. The documentation presented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch indicates that military personnel have engaged in unlawful killings, alongside acts of sexual violence and inhumane treatment of detainees suspected of insurgency. The continuation of these instances of abuse occurs in the absence of adequate investigations or trials for the individuals implicated (Amnesty International, 2015). The military systematically dismisses responsibility claims concerning misconduct, characterizing them as mere fabrications or invoking the necessity of national security protocols. The inability to oversee these unaccountable actions results in a concurrent erosion of public confidence in governmental assurances regarding security and the defense against violence. The pursuit of enduring peace in Nigeria's north-east continues to be a challenge, as the government has demonstrated an inability to ensure accountability for Boko Haram militants and security forces alike. The individuals affected by the violent actions of Boko Haram pursue justice on behalf of displaced families, relying on those whose relatives have been abducted, all while governmental responses appear to be either superficial or entirely absent (Ibrahim & Bala, 2018). The quest for justice among victims of military abuse is rendered

exceedingly challenging by the pervasive intimidation and threats that confront local communities. Effective accountability frameworks would yield more favourable outcomes for reconciliation efforts; however, the lack thereof leads to an increase in grievances, potentially fostering radicalism and exacerbating national issues.

Freedom of Expression

The Nigerian authorities enforce rigorous measures that restrict press freedom and undermine human rights standards, employing both formal legislation and informal tactics, resulting in the detention and arrest of activists and dissenters. Non-state entities actively restrict free expression through various methods, including the intimidation of journalists and the imposition of both verbal harassment and physical violence (Omojunikanbi, 2024). The Nigerian government utilizes legal frameworks to suppress dissent, thereby effectively silencing journalists, activists, and political opponents. Civil society organizations and human rights advocates, in conjunction with media professionals, express their apprehensions concerning the two significant legislative proposals known as the Social Media Bill and the Hate Speech Bill (Okegbile, 2023).

This legislation, formally known as the "Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations Bill," seeks to govern online content through the establishment of criminal prohibitions on the spread of misinformation. The unclear stipulations provoke concerns among detractors about the possibility of retributive actions against those who challenge the government's power (Onyeabor, 2023). The Hate Speech Bill outlines penalties that include capital punishment; however, its insufficient definitions of hate speech make it vulnerable to potentially arbitrary application of these penalties. The legislative discussions surrounding both bills continued in the Senate during the final months of 2021, eliciting concerns about an increased curtailment of

free expression. In Nigeria, independent journalists frequently encounter ongoing and intentional attacks as they delve into investigative reporting on sensitive topics such as governmental corruption, security operations, and public health crises (Amnesty International, 2019). Journalists face not only physical assaults and threats of harassment but also endure mistreatment when reporting on sensitive political matters or cases involving the misuse of authority by political elites. A landscape laden with danger necessitates that journalists impose limitations on their pursuits, motivated by the fear of severe consequences (Akanbi, 2024). The intentional restriction of media freedoms and human rights by the government in Nigeria leads to a variety of negative outcomes. The erosion of democratic principles presents considerable challenges, as the freedom of the press serves as the foundation for maintaining accountability within power institutions. The effectiveness of the Press in its endeavor to unveil corruption and human rights abuses is markedly undermined by the threats posed to journalists. The stifling of dissent erodes the foundation of civic engagement and political participation, as the state enforces punitive measures against those who voice opposition. The global press freedom rankings consistently place Nigeria among the lowest tiers, a situation stemming from inadequate performance metrics that result in reduced international involvement concerning the nation's governance and advancements in human rights (Akeem, 2010). The concern regarding the safety of journalists compels practitioners to limit their investigative reporting on corruption, human rights violations, and security abuses, consequently ensuring that these vital issues remain hidden from public consciousness (Akeem, 2010).

The systematic oppression of journalists, marked by intimidation and arrests, highlights a troubling trend of diminishing civil society functions in Nigeria. The imposed regulations regarding online discourse, alongside hate

speech laws, present a considerable threat to the foundational principle of freedom of expression and may jeopardize the independence of the media if implemented. The Nigerian government should consider the abolition of existing laws that penalize journalistic activities and peaceful dissent, or, as an alternative, undertake reforms to ensure they conform to recognized standards (Akpoveta, Ifurueze, Osuka & Ndubuo, 2024). The Nigerian government should undertake a thorough evaluation of the Social Media and Hate Speech Bills to protect critics and journalists from possible misinterpretations of these proposed regulations. It is essential for law enforcement agencies to engage in thorough training regarding the safeguarding of human rights

and the democratic principles of journalism, as this will greatly aid in diminishing unlawful detentions and acts of intimidation. The Nigerian government should prioritize the preservation of press freedom, while civil society organizations and international bodies must amplify their initiatives to champion a strong media independence from governmental influence. Nigeria is at a critical juncture, where the absence of necessary reforms could lead to a significant deterioration of its democratic framework. This situation poses a serious risk to governance, the protection of human rights, and the active participation of citizens in the democratic process (Amnesty International, 2019).

A Summary of Boko Haram Attacks in Nigeria between 2009-2020

S/N	Year of attack	States attacked	Causalities
1	2009	Yobe, Borno Bauchi, and Kano,	About 800 persons killed.
2	2010	Borno, Abuja and plateau	330 persons was killed and Freed 700 prison inmates
3	2011	Borno, Kaduna, Yobe, Niger, Bauchi, Abuja, Katsina And Plateau	Killed over 425 persons, and over 300 persons injured. Bombed UN building in Abuja.
4	2012	Adamawa, Kano, Kaduna, Kogi, Bauchi, Plateau, Yobe, Abuja, Sokoto and Katsina	Killed over 1047 and many persons injured.
5	2013	Borno, Adamawa, Kano, Plateau, Gombe, Yobe, Bauchi	Killed over 732 persons and several persons injured.

6	2014	Borno, Adamawa, Yobe	Kidnapped of Over 270 girls from chibok village in Borno State, Kidnap of some women in Adamawa state, killed over 200 persons and several injured.
7	2015	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe, Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Taraba	3,500 was estimated to be killed in Nigeria
8	2016	Gombe, Adamawa, Yobe, Borno	The sporadic attack in this region internally displaced 1.8 million persons with 191,000 fleeing to neighbouring countries
9	2017	Gombe, Yobe, Adamawa, Borno	Over 411 civilian death and abduction of over 73 people.
10	2018	Kano, Bauchi, Taraba, Kogi Kaduna Gombe, Borno, Yobe, Adamawa	An estimate of over 6,562 was killed in abducted, killed and massacre.
11	2019	Borno	11 suicide bombing and 68 deaths in 4 out of 10 zones.
12	2020	Yobe, Borno	110 was killed in Koshebe, 113 Dapchi, Yobe

Source: Adapted from Avweromre, 2014; Ikenga and Efebeh, 2013; Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013 with up-to-date compilation by the Author.

Other crimes perpetrated by the Islamic sect include the destruction of cars, arson of churches, police stations, colleges, hospitals, clinics, shops, army barracks, and residential homes, as well as the abduction of expatriates. The conflicts in the Niger Delta, which commenced in the 1990s due to the activities of certain terrorist groups, have had

detrimental effects on Nigeria's economic development (Nwogwugwu et al., 2012). The militant groups include the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF), and the Niger Delta People's

Volunteer Force (NDPVF), among others (Ajibade, 2021). These militant enterprises have executed fatal and debilitating assaults on oil and gas installations, Nigerian Naval personnel, and oil industry labor groups, resulting in fatalities and severe injuries to others. Additional criminal crimes perpetrated by the businesses include hostage-taking, bombing (Abuja, October 1, 2010), sexual assault, and assassination. A significant lack of confidence in a project currently underway in Nigeria pertains to the activities of the Fulani Herdsmen. Numerous assaults were perpetrated by these herdsmen around the nation, resulting in fatalities and displacing individuals.

Challenges/Drivers of Insecurity and Incessant Attacks on Civilians in Democratic Nigeria

The Nigeria-South Africa Chamber of Commerce, from a press conference on 18 April 2021, identified the following as the challenges of security in democratic Nigeria:

I. **Porous Borders** - A significant immediate element contributing to insecurity in Nigeria is the country's unmonitored borders, where individual movements remain generally untracked. The permeability of Nigeria's borders poses significant security risks for the nation. Due to open borders and a deficient security system, guns often infiltrate Nigeria from other nations. The proliferation of Small armaments and Light Weapons (SALWs) and their accessibility have facilitated militant and criminal organizations in acquiring armaments with ease. Nigeria is reported to own over 70 percent of about 8 million illicit firearms in West Africa. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders has facilitated an unwanted influx of migrants from neighboring nations, including Niger, Chad, and Benin. The majority of these migrants, predominantly young men, are among the offenders of crime in the nation.

- ii. **Rural and Urban Rift:** The migration of unemployed youth from rural regions to urban centers contributes to insecurity in Nigeria. Nigeria exhibits a significant rural-to-urban migration trend. Numerous metropolitan regions in Nigeria have surpassed their environmental carrying capabilities and current infrastructure, leading to a deterioration in living conditions. Frustration compels young youths to engage in criminal activities.
- iii. **Unemployment and Poverty:** The elevated rates of unemployment and poverty among Nigerians, particularly the youth, significantly predispose them to engage in violent crime. The inability of successive Nigerian administrations to tackle poverty, unemployment, and the unequal distribution of income across ethnic groups is a primary contributor to the nation's insecurity.
- iv. **Terrorism:** Terrorism is currently the most significant source of insecurity in Nigeria, primarily rooted in religious fanaticism and intolerance. It is defined as the premeditated use or threat of violence by an individual or group to instill fear, cause destruction or death, particularly against unarmed targets, property, or infrastructure, with the intention of compelling authorities to meet the demands of the perpetrators. This phenomenon has resulted in a cost equivalent to 13.4 percent of the global gross domestic product. Nigeria has experienced significant loss of life in the Northern region since 2009 owing to the insurgency of the notorious group, Boko Haram, which has been devastating the area.
- v. **Corruption and Bribery:** Corruption in Nigeria seems to be pervasive and manifests in several forms: from substantial contract fraud to minor

bribery, from outright embezzlement to intricate money laundering operations, from misappropriating the salary of fictitious employees to allocating lucrative positions to relatives and acquaintances. Certain authorities indulge in extravagant privileges, commonly regarded as a manifestation of legalized corruption. Bribery is a prevalent manifestation of corruption, and the terms are often used interchangeably in popular discourse, scholarly theories, and legal documents. Bribery is, however, distinct from other forms of corruption. In contrast to extortion, it is voluntary. It is transactional—entailing money, gifts, or favors exchanged for an unlawful or criminal advantage. In the Nigerian context, these advantages span from the trivial (obtaining permission from a police officer to traverse a road checkpoint) to the substantial (acquiring a license from the petroleum minister for a profitable oil block) (Page, 2018).

4.3 Suggestions in Curbing Attacks on Civilians and Insecurity in Democratic Nigeria

Leadership development: Nigeria must cultivate visionary leadership that is devoid of tribal affiliations, ensuring that only individuals capable of instilling the concept of common citizenship as the paramount unifying principle among all Nigerians—regardless of tribe, gender, religion, or socio-economic status—occupy leadership positions. There is need for leaders that transcend the interests of their home state, tribe, or religious affiliations, concentrating instead on actions and statements that effectively and positively influence the entire citizens of the federal republic. The rationale for this is that such leaders "will facilitate the integration of conflicting ethnic and religious groups into harmony and assist in alleviating the perceived mutual distrust among them."

Good Governance: Effective governance is

the solution to the insecurity issue in Nigeria. The conflict against insecurity can only be resolved by enhancing governance standards, specifically by fostering a culture of good governance in which the Government is accountable and responsible to the populace. Numerous others have similarly associated security with the governance structure. The prevailing perspective is that peace and security are contingent upon effective governance. Good governance relies on effective, visionary, transparent, trustworthy, and credible political leadership, aimed at enhancing the collective well-being of citizens through well-conceived and effectively implemented economic policies and human development programs. The fundamental premise of effective governance is prioritizing individuals as the primary aim of governance.

Socioeconomic Advancement: This element is regarded as the principal determinant of peace and security in Nigeria. The difficulty in addressing Nigeria's insecurity issue lies in hastening the development process. In this sense, development entails establishing an economy with pertinent social, economic, and physical infrastructure to facilitate business operations and industrial expansion, hence ensuring gainful employment, advanced educational institutions, and healthcare for the populace.

Eradication of Corruption and Establishment of Social Justice: Corruption is universally perceived as a hindrance to Nigeria's progress and development. It is the scourge of our society. It is a formidable social and economic entity. The reason of inequality and the inequitable distribution of the nation's wealth among its residents is the fundamental source of disaffection among Nigerians. Many theorize that combating corruption and achieving victory in this endeavor will result in an egalitarian society characterized by fairness, social justice, and universal rights.

Radical Change in Values: A fundamental

transformation in values has been proposed and underscored by numerous individuals, taking into account the significance of values in governance, leadership development objectives, and attitudes toward corruption. It is contended that until our values are correct, we can only achieve rectitude as a nation in some specified areas. If we fail to address those areas effectively, the populace will persist in experiencing deprivation and injustice, leading to dissatisfaction and disaffection, ultimately resulting in an unstable environment.

Effective Intelligence and Surveillance: To address insecurity, it is essential to conduct intelligence collection and surveillance, enabling law enforcement to be proactive and accurately anticipate probable criminal activity rather than only responding to it. The threat of insecurity necessitates a novel strategy based on reliable intelligence collection. The Government must not only maintain engagement with security professionals but also increasingly acknowledge the necessity of prioritizing security intelligence, enhancing capacity building to align with global best practices, and acquiring advanced technologies.

Enhancement and Advancement of Security Personnel: It is imperative to modernize security services through training, intelligence dissemination, cutting-edge technology, logistics, motivation, and a shift in orientation. This initiative will improve the operational efficacy of Nigerian security services by pinpointing strategies that will allow them to effectively address internal security issues and other threats. Furthermore, a comprehensive reform of the nation's security institutions is necessary to align with worldwide best practices to prevent security breaches. A robust institutional strategy is necessary, as opposed to the episodic and reactive measures currently employed by the Government following attacks. Furthermore, the Government at all tiers must uphold the law. The judiciary should have established

timelines for cases at this point in our evolution. A time should have existed to ascertain a cause, conclude the case, render a verdict, and impose punishments. In Nigeria, cases pertaining to corruption and insecurity are frequently compromised. Consequently, the law no longer serves as a deterrent. Consequently, our law enforcement agencies must be uncorrupted and equitable. To achieve this, it is essential to provide incentives, favourable working conditions, and social security.

Conclusion

This paper asserts that the foremost obstacle to sustainable security in democratic Nigeria is the persistent attacks on civilians. The persistent attacks on individuals stemming from insurgency, banditry, communal strife, and abductions have endangered lives and property, concurrently eroding public trust in governmental security measures. The failure to implement prompt and strategic defensive measures would lead to an escalation of assaults, thereby undermining democracy, hindering progress, and disrupting societal cohesion. The challenges surrounding security demand a proactive approach at the national level, as Nigeria must not depend on the mere passage of time for resolution. The government is obligated to devise and execute thorough security strategies that directly tackle the fundamental origins of attacks on civilians. A thorough security strategy ought to incorporate intelligence-led policing, bolster community safety initiatives, fortify relationships with law enforcement agencies, and impose more stringent border regulations to thwart the trafficking of weapons and criminals. Therefore, society is compelled to address three essential socioeconomic factors contributing to insecurity: inadequate income and the political exclusion of certain segments of the population. Democracy entails a comprehensive commitment to the security of its citizens, transcending the limitations of mere governmental oversight. Various segments of civil society, alongside

individual contributors, engage with NGOs to carry out essential initiatives focused on promoting stability and peace. Non-governmental organizations champion the principles of human rights by providing support to survivors of violence and pursuing peaceful resolutions. It is imperative for individuals to place national security at the forefront of their concerns, while simultaneously engaging with security agencies and endorsing initiatives that foster harmony among the populace.

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