

## BETWEEN LEVIATHAN AND ANARCHY: HOBBS AND THE CRISIS OF SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Nigeria's post-independence history has been marked by recurrent security challenges, including the civil war that nearly led to its fragmentation. In recent years, however, persistent insecurity—manifested in insurgency, banditry, communal violence, kidnapping, and secessionist agitations—has reached alarming proportions, raising critical questions about the state's capacity to maintain order and exercise effective sovereignty. This study interrogates these challenges within the theoretical framework of Thomas Hobbes's political philosophy, particularly his concept of the Leviathan, which contends that only a strong, centralized sovereign can prevent societal descent into chaos. Adopting documentary analysis and conceptual inquiry as its methodological approach, the paper examines the disjunction between Nigeria's formal sovereignty and its limited capacity to monopolize the legitimate means of coercion across its territory. Drawing on insurgency in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, secessionist violence in the South-East, and recurring ethno-communal conflicts as illustrative cases, the paper argues that the erosion of effective sovereign authority underlies the country's deepening insecurity, weak state structures, and a crisis of legitimacy. It contends that restoring state authority requires not only enhanced coercive capacity but also strengthened institutional coordination, adherence to the rule of law, and the rebuilding of public trust. The paper concludes that Hobbesian insights provide a compelling framework for diagnosing Nigeria's security crisis and rethinking pathways toward sustainable political order.

**Keywords:** Hobbesian Political Theory, State Sovereignty, Security Crisis in Nigeria, Leviathan and State Authority, Political Order and Anarchy, Governance and Legitimacy

### 1. Introduction

Nigeria's post-independence history has been marked by persistent and multifaceted security challenges. These include insurgency in the North-East, banditry and kidnapping in the North-West, ethno-communal violence, and secessionist agitations in the South-East (Adebayo, 2020; Okeke, 2019). Such challenges expose structural weaknesses in the state's capacity to exercise authority, enforce law, and maintain political order, raising profound questions about the nature of sovereignty and the mechanisms necessary to sustain civil peace (Ikelegbe, 2018). At the heart of this tension lies a Hobbesian concern. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1651/1996, p. 89) argues that, without a strong sovereign capable of monopolizing the legitimate use of force, human society risks descending into a condition of insecurity and perpetual conflict. He vividly depicts this state of nature:

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain... continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

This stark depiction underscores the inherent link between insecurity and the absence of effective authority. Hobbes' insight provides a normative lens for evaluating modern states, particularly those in which sovereignty is contested or weak. Scholars such as Skinner (2018) and Tuck (1993) highlight that Hobbes' analysis of fear and human vulnerability offers both diagnostic and prescriptive tools for understanding governance failures. Pettit (2008) emphasizes that the Leviathan functions as a conceptual benchmark, delineating the conditions under which a state can maintain legitimacy, compliance, and social cohesion. From this perspective, Hobbes' theory allows for critical evaluation of the nexus between state authority and the state's ability to secure, provide for, and earn the trust of its citizens.

Considering this framework in light of Nigeria's contemporary security challenges, the central question guiding this study is: how does Hobbes' concept of the Leviathan illuminate Nigeria's security crisis, and what insights can it offer for restoring effective state authority? To answer this, the study pursues three objectives. First, it provides a conceptual analysis of Hobbes' Leviathan and its relevance for modern statehood. Second, it examines Nigeria's contemporary security challenges, highlighting the gap between formal sovereignty and practical authority. Third, it explores policy-relevant implications, demonstrating how philosophical principles can inform strategies for reinforcing governance and public trust.

Methodologically, the study employs the library method for data collection, engaging critically with primary philosophical texts, scholarly interpretations, and documented examples of Nigeria's security challenges. Data interpretation is conducted through textual analysis, combining close conceptual reading with argumentative engagement to evaluate Hobbes' Leviathan in the context of Nigerian governance. The article is structured as follows. Section 2 situates Hobbes' Leviathan within its historical, conceptual, and normative context, emphasizing human nature, the social contract, and sovereign authority. Section 3 examines Nigeria's security crisis, illustrating the consequences of weak state authority. Section 4 applies Hobbesian theory to assess the erosion of legitimacy and social order. Section 5 reflects on implications for governance and security policy, offering lessons from Hobbes for restoring state authority and ensuring sustainable political order.

## 2. Hobbes and the Leviathan (Polished)

Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy emerged in the turbulence of seventeenth-century England, a period marked by civil war, political instability, and pervasive fear of social collapse. Scholars such as Tuck (1993) and Skinner (2018) emphasize that Hobbes' reflection on human nature and political authority was shaped by both historical contingencies and philosophical inquiry. For Hobbes, political theory is inseparable from the realities of insecurity; fear of violent death and societal fragmentation motivates his insistence on a strong sovereign. Central to Hobbes' argument is the state of nature, in which individuals lack a common authority, resulting in inevitable conflict. Hobbes (1651/1996, p. 88) observes:

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man.

This passage complements the Introduction, emphasizing the continuous insecurity that defines the state of nature. Pettit (2008) underscores that Hobbes' conceptualization is both diagnostic and prescriptive: it identifies the threat posed by anarchy and justifies the necessity of sovereign authority. Tuck (1993) interprets the state of nature as a philosophical tool for measuring the legitimacy and scope of political power.

The social contract emerges as the mechanism through which humans escape this condition. By collectively surrendering certain natural liberties to a central authority, individuals create a sovereign with the monopoly on legitimate force. As Hobbes (1651/1996, p. 120) asserts: "Covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." This emphasizes that law and agreement are ineffective without enforceable authority. Tuck (1993) interprets it as the core of Hobbes' political realism: sovereignty is justified by necessity, not moral idealism, and is evaluated by its capacity to prevent chaos rather than its intrinsic virtue. Skinner (2018) adds that the social contract is both normative and instrumental, providing a framework to understand the legitimacy of political obedience and the prevention of societal fragmentation.

Building upon the social contract, the Leviathan embodies centralized authority and the guarantee of social order. Hobbes (1651/1996, p. 136) describes the Leviathan as:

One person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defense.

This depiction highlights that the sovereign acts as the representative of collective consent, wielding authority both absolute and instrumental to the preservation of peace. Pettit (2008) emphasizes that the Leviathan serves as a conceptual benchmark, enabling assessment of contemporary states in which sovereignty is fragmented or contested. Weak authority, by Hobbesian logic, reproduces conditions analogous to the state of nature: insecurity, distrust, and social fragmentation prevail.

The relevance of Hobbes' Leviathan to modern statehood and security is immediate. In contexts where the state's capacity to enforce law and maintain order is uneven or contested, the Hobbesian framework clarifies the causal link between weakened sovereignty and persistent insecurity (Ikelegbe, 2018). Hobbes' emphasis on centralized authority, institutional coherence, and legal enforcement resonates with contemporary debates on state fragility, security sector reform, and legitimacy. By situating Hobbes' theory within these challenges, one gains both a diagnostic lens for understanding governance failures and a normative guide for conceptualizing effective political authority.

## 3. Nigeria's Contemporary Security Crisis

The security crisis confronting Nigeria is not abstract or peripheral — it is profound, pervasive, and entrenched, affecting millions of lives and challenging the very foundations of state authority. Official reports, scholarly studies, and international analyses all attest to the scale and severity of these threats, which collectively reveal the state's inability to exercise effective authority across its territory. Rather than mere episodic violence, these are

systemic crises whose persistence raises urgent questions about governance, legitimacy, and monopoly of coercive power — core concerns in Hobbesian political thought.

### **3.1 Insurgency in the North-East**

The Boko Haram insurgency (and its splinter, the Islamic State West Africa Province—ISWAP) has engaged in sustained campaigns of violence primarily in Nigeria’s North-East. Since its emergence in 2009, the group’s activities have constituted one of the most severe security challenges in Nigeria’s postcolonial history. Scholars and observers consistently underscore the staggering humanitarian and political costs of the insurgency. Mustapha (2021) describes it as “the most lethal security threat in Nigeria’s post-independence history” (p. 213). Humanitarian estimates indicate that the violence has displaced more than 2.5 million people and caused tens of thousands of deaths across the Lake Chad Basin (UNOCHA, 2024). Similarly, the Council on Foreign Relations’ Nigeria Security Tracker reports that Boko Haram and related violence have resulted in over 40,000 deaths and the displacement of more than 2.5 million people since 2011 (CFR, 2024).

The scale and brutality of the insurgency have attracted widespread international condemnation. The United Nations has repeatedly denounced the group’s tactics, including mass kidnappings, attacks on schools, and indiscriminate violence against civilians; notably, the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok provoked global outrage and sustained advocacy campaigns (UN News, 2014). As Human Rights Watch (2015) observes, Boko Haram’s operations—ranging from suicide bombings to village raids—have systematically targeted both civilian populations and state institutions, thereby destabilizing entire communities and eroding public confidence in government protection.

Beyond its human toll, the insurgency has also been marked by significant territorial ambition. At its peak, Boko Haram exerted control over extensive areas of the North-East. Government sources reported that the group once “held and administered an area the size of Belgium,” a claim that underscores the scale of its territorial reach and the extent of state retreat (Sahara Reporters, 2021). Scholarly estimates corroborate this assessment, placing Boko Haram’s territorial control at approximately 20,000 square miles across multiple local government areas in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states (Onuoha, 2014). Crucially, this space functioned not merely as a theatre of insurgent activity but as a quasi-governed domain, within which the group imposed taxation, enforced ideological codes, and exercised forms of administrative control.

There is, however, no consensus among scholars regarding the primary drivers of the insurgency. One line of interpretation emphasizes socio-economic deprivation, marginalization, and youth unemployment in the North-East as conditions that facilitate recruitment and radicalization (Mustapha, 2021). Another perspective foregrounds structural governance failures, arguing that the state’s inability to project authority and provide security created the enabling environment for Boko Haram’s expansion (Ibrahim, 2022). While these accounts differ in emphasis, they are not mutually exclusive. Rather, from a Hobbesian standpoint, they converge on a deeper problem: the erosion of effective sovereign authority. Where the state fails to monopolize the legitimate use of coercive force and guarantee basic security, insecurity ceases to be episodic and instead becomes systemic, approximating the very condition of disorder that Hobbes associates with the absence of a common power.

### **3.2 Banditry, Kidnapping, and Revenue Generation**

Beyond the North-East, Nigeria’s North-West has witnessed the rise of armed banditry that transcends traditional criminality. Armed groups in states such as Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto engage in cattle rustling, armed robbery, mass kidnappings, and extortion. According to analyses by SBM Intelligence (2025), more than 4,700 kidnappings occurred between July 2024 and June 2025, with ransom demands totaling approximately ₦48 billion, and confirmed ransom payments exceeding ₦2.57 billion. Another assessment found over 7,500 kidnappings in a 12-month period, with ransom demands near ₦11 billion (Alli, 2024).

Notably, bandit groups now operate with increasing sophistication. Field reports indicate that they levy payments from local villagers and commuters, acting as informal tax collectors where governmental presence is minimal (Abimbola, 2022; Obadare & Akinola, 2020). A widely reported case involved the abduction of more than 300 students and teachers from St. Mary’s Catholic School in Niger State, an incident that sparked national outrage and debate over security policy (Ademola, 2021).

Scholars such as Obadare and Akinola (2020) argue that these developments are not isolated criminal phenomena but structural outcomes of weak governance, where failed extension of state authority has allowed non-state actors to exercise coercive functions traditionally reserved to the state. This dynamic parallels Hobbes’ concern about the absence of a central authority, wherein insecurity and alternative power structures emerge in the vacuum left by a weak sovereign.

### **3.3 Secessionist Agitations, Sit-at-Home Orders, and Communal Violence**

In Nigeria’s South-East, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), have become salient actors in both political agitation and local security dynamics. Supporters of

IPOB/ESN justify their actions — including community protection efforts — as responses to perceived failures by the state to protect civilians, particularly from herder-related violence (Eze, 2023). This framing has enhanced IPOB's popular support in some communities, where the state is seen as incapable of ensuring safety.

One distinctive tactic associated with this agitation is the enforcement of sit-at-home orders, during which economic activities across South-East states are suspended. The International Crisis Group (2025) reports that enforcement violence related to these orders has contributed to more than 700 deaths and economic losses estimated at ₦7.6 trillion over recent years. Another assessment suggests total cumulative losses of over ₦17 trillion, highlighting the severe impact on regional economic life and perceptions of state legitimacy (ICIR Nigeria, 2026).

Communal and inter-ethnic violence in North Central Nigeria adds another layer of insecurity. In Benue and Plateau states, clashes between farming communities and armed herder groups have resulted in hundreds of deaths and the displacement of thousands (World Bank, 2023). Scholars debate the root causes: some emphasize resource competition and climate pressures (Okorie, 2023), while others highlight institutional absence and defective dispute resolution mechanisms as proximate causes of recurring violence (Olowu, 2021). In either case, the recurrence of such conflicts signals a breakdown in the state's capacity to mediate disputes, enforce law, or secure justice.

### 3.4 Implications: Weak Territorial Control, Declining Trust, and Governance Challenges

These overlapping security crises have far-reaching implications for Nigeria's political order:

- **Weak territorial control:** Boko Haram's historical territorial reach in the North-East and bandit domination in the North-West illustrate that significant portions of Nigeria are effectively outside the direct control of state security apparatuses. This state of affairs challenges the very heart of Hobbesian sovereignty — the monopoly on legitimate coercive force.
- **Declining public trust:** Prolonged insecurity has eroded public confidence in governmental institutions. Afrobarometer (2023) data show declining trust in federal and state security agencies. Many citizens now turn to local militias or private security arrangements, further fragmenting authority.
- **Governance challenges:** The appeal or acceptance of groups such as IPOB/ESN in certain communities reflects a crisis of legitimacy. Where citizens perceive the state as incapable of protection, they may turn to alternative providers of security, undermining the social contract that binds them to the formal sovereign.

Collectively, these dynamics reveal a deep crisis of sovereign authority in contemporary Nigeria, where the state's inability to secure life, property, and economic activity undermines its legitimacy and raises fundamental questions about the structure and efficacy of political authority.

### 4. Between Leviathan and Anarchy: A Hobbesian Reading of Nigeria

The preceding analysis reveals a fundamental tension at the heart of Nigeria's political system: the disjunction between formal sovereignty and effective control. While the Nigerian state is constitutionally vested with authority over its territory, empirical realities suggest that this authority is unevenly exercised, fragmented, and, in some regions, profoundly contested. This gap between juridical sovereignty and practical capacity or the *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignties, raises a critical question central to Hobbesian political theory: can a state that lacks effective control still function as a Leviathan, or does it risk relapse into conditions approximating the state of nature or anarchy?

Hobbes' answer to this question is unequivocal. Sovereignty, for Hobbes, is not merely a legal abstraction but a functional necessity grounded in the capacity to command obedience and enforce order. As he insists:

The obligation of subjects to the sovereign is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them (Hobbes, 1651/1996, p. 153).

This formulation establishes a direct relationship between protection and legitimacy: where the sovereign cannot guarantee security, the basis of political obligation is weakened. Applied to the Nigerian context, this raises troubling implications. In regions where insurgents, bandits, or communal militias exercise *de facto* control, the state's claim to sovereignty becomes increasingly nominal rather than substantive.

Scholars diverge on how best to interpret this condition. One strand of analysis emphasizes state fragility, arguing that Nigeria retains formal institutional structures but lacks the capacity to enforce authority consistently across its territory (Ikelegbe, 2018). From this perspective, insecurity reflects institutional weakness rather than systemic breakdown. A competing view, however, suggests that Nigeria exhibits features of hybrid sovereignty, in which state and non-state actors simultaneously exercise coercive power (Obadare & Akinola, 2020). In this reading, bandits collecting taxes, insurgents governing territories, and secessionist groups enforcing compliance are not anomalies but evidence of pluralized authority structures.

While these interpretations offer valuable insights, they risk underestimating the normative force of Hobbes' argument. For Hobbes, sovereignty is indivisible and absolute in its functional dimension: the existence of competing centers of coercion is not a variation of sovereignty but a sign of its erosion. As he famously observes:

Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice... Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues (Hobbes, 1651/1996, p. 90).

This passage is particularly instructive for understanding Nigeria's security landscape. The proliferation of insurgent violence, bandit taxation, and communal reprisals reflects not merely institutional weakness but the partial collapse of the state's monopoly on legitimate coercion. In such contexts, individuals and communities increasingly resort to self-help strategies — vigilante groups, ethnic militias, or alignment with non-state actors — thereby reproducing dynamics akin to Hobbes' state of nature.

This condition may be described as quasi-anarchic: not a complete absence of the state, but a situation in which the state's authority is insufficient to regulate violence or guarantee order. In Nigeria, this is evident in the North-East, where insurgent groups have exercised territorial control; in the North-West, where bandits impose levies and conduct kidnappings with relative impunity; and in the South-East, where non-state actors enforce compliance through mechanisms such as sit-at-home orders. These phenomena indicate that the state's coercive capacity is spatially uneven, producing zones where sovereignty is effectively diluted.

The consequences of this quasi-anarchic condition are profound. First, it undermines political legitimacy. As Hobbes makes clear, legitimacy is contingent upon the sovereign's ability to provide security. Where citizens perceive the state as incapable of protection, their allegiance becomes conditional and, in some cases, transferable to alternative authorities. This helps explain the local support for groups such as IPOB/ESN, which are often perceived — rightly or wrongly — as filling security gaps left by the state.

Second, the erosion of sovereign authority destabilizes social order. Without a credible central authority to enforce rules and adjudicate disputes, cycles of violence become self-reinforcing. Communal conflicts in regions such as Benue and Plateau, for instance, persist partly because the state is unable to function as a neutral and effective arbiter. In Hobbesian terms, this reflects a regression toward a condition in which fear, uncertainty, and preemptive violence shape social interaction.

Third, it transforms citizen-state relations. The social contract, understood as the exchange of obedience for protection, becomes strained when protection is no longer guaranteed. As a result, citizens may disengage from formal institutions, evade state authority, or seek security through informal networks. This erosion of trust further weakens governance, creating a feedback loop in which insecurity and institutional decline reinforce one another. Taken together, these dynamics situate Nigeria in an uneasy position between Leviathan and anarchy. The state retains formal sovereignty, yet its inability to consistently enforce order across its territory places it at risk of approximating the very condition Hobbes sought to overcome. The Nigerian case thus illustrates a critical insight: sovereignty is not secured by constitutional proclamation alone but must be continuously sustained through the effective exercise of coercive authority and the provision of security. Where this capacity falters, the foundations of political order are correspondingly weakened.

## **5. Implications for State Authority and Security Governance**

If the Nigerian state is situated, as argued, between Leviathan and anarchy, then the challenge before it is not simply one of security management but of reconstituting the very conditions of sovereign authority. From a Hobbesian standpoint, the restoration of order requires more than episodic military responses; it demands the reconstruction of a political order in which the state can credibly guarantee security, command obedience, and sustain legitimacy. This section draws out four interrelated implications: the rebuilding of coercive capacity, institutional coordination, adherence to the rule of law, and the reconstruction of public trust.

### **5.1 Rebuilding Coercive Capacity**

At the core of Hobbes' political philosophy lies the insistence that the sovereign must possess sufficient coercive power to deter violence and enforce compliance. The Nigerian case illustrates the consequences of failing to meet this requirement. As Hobbes maintains, "Covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all" (Hobbes, 1651/1996, p. 120). This insight underscores a fundamental principle: security precedes order, and order is the precondition for all other political goods. In Nigeria, the uneven presence of security forces and the persistence of ungoverned or weakly governed spaces indicate that the state's coercive capacity remains inadequate.

Scholars differ, however, on what rebuilding this capacity entails. A state-centric perspective emphasizes increased military deployment, modernization of security infrastructure, and expansion of territorial control (Ikelegbe, 2018). By contrast, a human security approach cautions that excessive reliance on coercion may exacerbate grievances and undermine long-term stability (Mustapha, 2021). While this tension is important, a Hobbesian framework suggests that these positions are not mutually exclusive: coercive capacity is necessary, but its

legitimacy depends on its effective and restrained application. The task, therefore, is not simply to strengthen force, but to ensure that such force is predictable, coordinated, and oriented toward the protection of life.

### **5.2 Institutional Coordination and Intelligence-Sharing**

A second implication concerns the fragmentation of Nigeria's security architecture. Multiple agencies — military, police, intelligence services — often operate with limited coordination, resulting in inefficiencies and gaps in response. From a Hobbesian perspective, such fragmentation is deeply problematic, as it undermines the unity of the sovereign will. Hobbes' conception of the Leviathan presupposes a centralized and coherent authority, capable of acting decisively and uniformly. As he writes:

Because the major part hath by consenting voices declared a sovereign, he that dissented must now consent with the rest... or else be left in the condition of war (Hobbes, 1651/1996, p. 121).

This emphasis on unity highlights the dangers of disjointed authority structures. In Nigeria, the lack of effective intelligence-sharing and operational coordination has often allowed threats to escalate before being contained. Scholars such as Ibrahim (2022) argue that the problem is not merely resource constraints but institutional incoherence, where overlapping mandates and inter-agency rivalry weaken collective response. The implication is clear: restoring effective sovereignty requires not only capacity but coordination. Intelligence systems must be integrated, command structures clarified, and operational responses streamlined to ensure that the state acts as a single, unified authority rather than a collection of competing institutions.

### **5.3 Rule of Law and Accountability**

While Hobbes is often interpreted as a defender of absolute authority, contemporary scholarship complicates this view. Skinner (2018) and Pettit (2008) argue that Hobbes' sovereign, though powerful, is not arbitrary in purpose: its legitimacy is tied to the preservation of peace and the avoidance of conditions resembling the state of nature. This has important implications for the rule of law and accountability in modern states. In Nigeria, concerns about extrajudicial actions, human rights violations, and selective enforcement of law have complicated efforts to restore security. Critics argue that such practices undermine legitimacy and may even fuel cycles of violence (Olowu, 2021). A strictly coercive approach, detached from legal and moral constraints, risks reproducing the very insecurity it seeks to eliminate.

From a Hobbesian standpoint, the rule of law is not opposed to sovereign authority but is integral to its effectiveness. Laws must be clear, consistently applied, and enforceable, providing citizens with predictable expectations of state behavior. As Hobbes suggests, the purpose of authority is not domination for its own sake but the creation of a stable framework within which individuals can pursue their lives without fear. Accountability mechanisms, therefore, are not external constraints but conditions for sustaining obedience and trust.

### **5.4 Reconstructing Public Trust and State Legitimacy**

Perhaps the most critical implication concerns the reconstruction of public trust, which lies at the heart of the social contract. As earlier noted, Hobbes grounds political obligation in the provision of security: where the state fails to protect, the basis of obedience is weakened. This dynamic is evident in Nigeria, where citizens in some regions increasingly rely on non-state actors for protection.

Scholars debate the nature of legitimacy in such contexts. A procedural view emphasizes democratic participation and constitutional order as the basis of legitimacy, while a performance-based view stresses the state's ability to deliver security and services (Pettit, 2008). The Nigerian case suggests that both dimensions are intertwined: democratic structures without security are fragile, while coercive stability without legitimacy is unsustainable. The persistence of local support for groups such as IPOB/ESN or community vigilantes reflects a crisis of confidence in state authority. In Hobbesian terms, this signals a weakening of the social contract, as citizens seek alternative guarantors of security. Rebuilding trust, therefore, requires more than rhetorical commitment; it demands visible and sustained improvements in security provision, fairness in law enforcement, and responsiveness to citizen concerns. Ultimately, legitimacy is not merely claimed but earned through performance. The state must demonstrate, in practical terms, that it is capable of fulfilling its most fundamental obligation: the protection of life and the maintenance of order. Only then can it reassert its position as the primary locus of authority and restore the conditions necessary for stable political order.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has argued that Nigeria's contemporary security challenges is best understood as a problem of sovereign effectiveness rather than mere institutional deficiency. By bringing Thomas Hobbes' concept of the Leviathan into conversation with empirical realities, the paper has shown that the persistence of insurgency, banditry, communal violence, and secessionist agitation reflects a deeper disjunction between formal sovereignty and the actual capacity to command obedience and secure life. The central claim advanced is that where the state

fails to monopolize the legitimate means of coercion, insecurity becomes systemic, and political order is correspondingly weakened.

Nigeria, in this regard, appears caught in an uneasy space between order and disorder. It retains the institutional architecture and juridical status of a sovereign state, yet significant portions of its territory experience conditions in which authority is fragmented, contested, or substituted by non-state actors. The analysis of Boko Haram's territorial control, bandit taxation systems, and the enforcement of sit-at-home orders illustrates that the Nigerian state, while not collapsed, exhibits features of what may be described as partial or uneven sovereignty. This condition approximates, in localized and differentiated forms, the Hobbesian anxiety about the erosion of a common power capable of keeping all in awe.

The continued relevance of Hobbes lies precisely in his insistence that political order is neither automatic nor self-sustaining. It must be actively constituted and continuously reproduced through the effective exercise of authority. As Hobbes reminds us, "The end of obedience is protection" (Hobbes, 1651/1996, p. 153). This insight provides both a diagnostic and normative framework: where protection is uncertain, obedience becomes fragile; where authority is diffused, conflict becomes normalized. Contemporary Nigeria exemplifies this tension, demonstrating that sovereignty cannot be reduced to constitutional formality but must be evaluated in terms of its practical capacity to secure peace and prevent violence.

The implications of this analysis point toward the necessity of reconstructing the foundations of political order. This entails rebuilding coercive capacity in a manner that is effective yet restrained, enhancing institutional coordination to ensure unity of purpose, strengthening adherence to the rule of law, and, crucially, restoring public trust in state authority. These are not merely technical reforms but conditions for reconstituting the social contract itself. Without them, efforts at security governance risk remaining reactive and fragmented, unable to address the underlying crisis of legitimacy. On the whole, Nigeria's predicament underscores a broader philosophical lesson: the stability of political order depends on the alignment of authority, legitimacy, and coercive capacity. Where this alignment is disrupted, the state risks drifting toward the very condition of insecurity that political society is meant to overcome. A Hobbesian reading thus not only illuminates the nature of Nigeria's security challenges but also clarifies the pathways toward a more sustainable and coherent political order, grounded in the effective protection of life and the credible authority of the state.

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