

## Understanding Community Insecurity in Nigeria: A Multifaceted Approach

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### Abstract

The unprecedented spread of insecurity in the West African region is alarming and mind-bugging to the citizens and local and international communities. The spate of community insecurity cuts across Mali, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, with its manifestation in insurgency and terrorism, secessionist movements, religious conflicts, urban crimes, ethnic violence, banditry, abduction, mass killings, suicide bombing, rape, disruption of properties, herders and anti-democratic activities. However, the phenomenon has become more evident in Nigeria in the last fifteen years as new dimensions of insecurity with more devastating implications are emerging. The core of human, economic, and political security is prevention-oriented responses to community-based crises by the government and individuals within the environment. The absence of community insecurity is human safety, economic empowerment, and democratic advancement. Its existence, however, poses human, financial, and political security questions among scholars and policy-makers alike in the global environment. The attempt to solve the questions has culminated in adopting different security strategies ranging from self-help security arrangements and community policing at the local level to joint security task forces at state and central levels in Nigeria. The complexity of issues like social inequality, marginalisation, weak institutions, human rights abuse, bad governance, poverty, globalisation, militarization of migrants, constitutional abuse, and widespread corruption are very germane to the contextualisation of community insecurity. Contingency model has been employed to explain the causation and control of community insecurity.

**Keywords:** Community insecurity, threat, human, economic, political security

### Introduction

Community security has become a topical issue among scholars, political class and citizens in the global environment. Modern states define their security through their military and policy. Security issues in Africa are viewed from the protection of the state, territory, institutions, regime sustainability, military defense, properties and lives—the West Africa region desires a peace-driven environment with a mutual relationship between the government and citizens. Unfortunately, the region lacks the capacity for peace and tranquillity due to citizens' low confidence in the government. In Nigeria, the government aims to maintain a society that enables citizens to pursue their political, economic, and social desires within the purview of the law. The various governments are responsible for protecting their citizens against external aggression and internal violence by raising effective military and police institutions.

Admittedly, adequate protection of citizens by the government and proper conduct of individuals are major factors for national development in any society. Development in Nigeria has been impaired by the persistent threat to her economy by community violence and insecurity. The departure of some foreign investors, aside from the inadequate supply of social amenities, is not unconnected with the threat to lives created by bandits, Boko Haram, Herdsmen, Secessionist

groups, and abductors. For over a decade, the Northeastern region of Nigeria has been ravaged by insecurity, as the militant group Boko Haram has destabilised border communities. The damage ranges from loss of life to destruction of property and farmlands. This unlawful act became more pronounced in Nigeria with the return to democratic rule in 1999 with a different range of conflicts arising from ethno-religious crises, wholesale abduction, hostage taking, arson, incidents of cattle rustlings and terrorism, first from the North, and later spread to other regions of Nigeria.

The phenomenon of community insecurity became more pronounced in Nigeria over two decades with the emergence of different militant groups posing threats to the survival of governments, foreigners and citizens. The implication of insecurity has led to substantial budgetary votes for security to enable the government to counter the menace. The attack on government facilities and individuals has compelled the federal government to tag this criminal act as terrorism, a fundamental factor for the Anti-terrorism Act in 2011 and the purchase of surveillance gadgets. 2021 Nigeria was ranked 146<sup>th</sup> on the Global Peace Index and 8<sup>th</sup> least peaceful in Africa (Olaiya, 2021; IEP, 2021). This puts the country in the least peaceful countries, such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Iraq (The Sun, 2021).

The existing studies have suggested that violence in Nigeria in the form of Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram terrorism, and herdsmen attacks may be considered as a consequence of economic and political factors such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption and poor governance (e.g., Olawale, 2003; Ikelegbe, 2006). Many experts have argued that violent extremism in Nigeria today is a consequence of decades of pervasive corruption and neglect of governance (Fagbadebo and Oluwalogbon, 2023; Evans & Kelikume, 2019). For example, Osagie, Fred and Samuel (2010) showed that deprivation of the indigenes of the dividends of oil proceeds was the greatest cause of conflict of the Niger Delta. Nigeria is the wealthiest country in Africa as reflected by its gross domestic product (GDP). This study sets out to examine the nature and extent of community insecurity in Nigeria and assess the impact of community insecurity on human security (lives, health, and well-being).

### **Security, Human Security and Community Security**

Security is increasingly viewed as an all-encompassing condition in which people and communities live in freedom, peace and safety, participate fully in the governance of their countries, enjoy the protection of fundamental rights, have access to resources and necessities of life, and inhabit an environment which is not detrimental to their health and well-being. the security of people and the security of the state are mutually reinforcing (OECD, Development Assistance Committee, 2000). However, Zedner (2000:201) argued that “the pursuit of security appears to require not merely an absence of threats but the positive reinforcement of public perceptions of their safety”. The UNDP identified several threats to human life, such as economic, food, personal, community, and environmental (UNDP, 1994).

Security embraces all aspects of the society including economic, political and social dimensions of individual, family, community, local and national life. The security of a nation must be constructed in terms of the security of the individual citizen to live in peace with access to necessities of life while fully participating in the affairs of his/her society in freedom and enjoy all fundamental human rights (OAU Kampala Document, 1991). Security is a dynamic condition involving a state's relative ability to counter threats to its core values and interests (Omede,

2012). The security of a nation hangs on two critical pillars which are (1) the maintenance and protection of the socio-economic order in the face of internal and external threat and (2) the promotion of a preferred international order, which minimizes the threat to core values and interests, as well as to the domestic order (McGrew, 1998).

In today's world, human security has become essential in response to the complex array of old and new security threats. These threats include persistent poverty, domestic and international terrorism, ethnic conflict, and financial stress, which have far-reaching consequences for individuals and communities. To effectively address these challenges, policymakers must adopt a comprehensive approach prioritising Human Security. This involves protecting fundamental freedoms that are essential for human life, such as freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live with dignity. Human security goes beyond traditional notions of security by recognising the interdependence of political, social, environmental, economic, military, and cultural systems. It seeks to create an enabling environment that provides people with opportunities for survival, livelihood, and dignity, preventing them from experiencing severe and pervasive threats. Human security is about empowering individuals and communities to thrive in a world filled with uncertainty and risk. By prioritizing Human Security, we can build a more just, equitable, and peaceful world where everyone has the chance to reach their full potential.

Human security is a people-centred approach that prioritizes the individual as the primary focus of analysis. It adopts a multi-sectoral perspective, addressing the root causes of threats such as persistent poverty, unemployment, hunger, malnutrition, environmental degradation, physical violence, child labour, inter-ethnic and religious tensions, political repression, and human rights abuses. This approach is comprehensive, integrating all elements of threats to tackle insecurity in a nation-state. It recognises that insecurities vary across different regions and demand context-specific solutions. Human security is prevention-oriented, emphasising protection and empowerment. Notably, it is not intended to replace state security but rather to co-exist with it in a mutually interrelated manner. It acknowledges the broad scope of threats experienced by individuals within a state, complementing traditional state security concerns. (Oluwalogbon, 2018)

By addressing human insecurities' complex and interconnected nature, Human Security provides a more nuanced and practical approach to building a safer and more secure world. Human security is value-driven regarding security, stability, and sustainability of development gains. Secondly, human security makes no distinction between different kinds of human rights, be it political, economic, social, cultural, or legal. The Human Security approach requires assessing vulnerabilities and the affected communities' capacities. It involves an assessment of the strategies needed to help prevent and mitigate the recurrence of insecurities. This will enable threats, vulnerabilities, capacities and strategies to be effectively examined (United Nations office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (n.d.).

A community is defined by shared characteristics such as a common territory, history, culture, or established relationships among families living together interdependently. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), community safety or security is an approach that aims to operationalize human security, human development, and state-building paradigms at the local level. The core objective of community security is to ensure that communities and their members are "free from fear". This involves protecting people from the loss of traditional relationships and values, as well as from sectarian and ethnic violence. Community security is

achieved through constant engagement between state representatives, such as security providers and local authorities, and community members. At its core, community security is a process that promotes a community-driven approach to understanding and providing security. It focuses on improving relationships between communities, authorities, and institutions, and involves participatory governance, interactions between social groups, and better service delivery.

By adopting this approach, community security seeks to empower communities to take ownership of their safety and well-being, rather than relying solely on external actors. This inclusive and collaborative process recognizes each community's unique needs and concerns and works to address them through democratic governance and social interaction. Ultimately, community security aims to create a safe and secure environment where individuals can thrive and reach their full potential.

### **Community Insecurity in Nigeria**

The elements of community insecurity in Nigeria include insurgency and terrorism, successionists' movement, inter-community conflicts, urban crimes, ethnic violence, banditry, abduction, mass killings, suicide bombing, rape, disruption of properties, herdsmen and anti-democratic activities. Insurgency represents an intermediate step in the spectrum of conflict, which ranges from stable peace to general war (U.S. Army, Field Manual, 2008). The principal strategy for insurgencies is the use of violence within the context of direct, armed struggle in asymmetric modes of warfare for political claim-making (Kiras, 2007). According to Tanko (2021), Nigeria is faced with an unprecedented wave of different but overlapping security crises - from kidnapping to extremist insurgencies - almost every corner of the country has been hit by violence and crime. Literature on causes of violence in Nigeria identifies many factors like corruption, injustice, hunger, poverty and despondency in the midst of plenty cornered and monopolized by the leaders who use instruments of coercion to suppress the masses in their agitations (Hendrix, 2016; Okoli and Nachanaa, 2016; Oladipo, 2013; Olu-Adeyemi, 2017; Onuoha, 2014).

Furthermore, the degree of participation in local violence is tantamount to the level of unemployment in a country. The rate at which employment has increased in Nigeria is alarming since the 90s, with many graduates roaming the streets. With the daily collapse of industries and the departure of foreign investors, the certainty of securing jobs is high. Youth unemployment as at 2020 was 21.7%. The figure, however, rose to 32.5%, and the country is in the middle of one of the worst economic downturns in 27 years (Tanko, 2021).

Internal and external influences also impact on community insecurity within and outside the state. The wealthy citizens use their resources to promote violence in order to disorganise the peaceful environment. The supply of ammunition by the rich to the agents of violence increases the outright disregard for laws regulating citizens' conduct. Secondly, influence from other members of terrorist groups outside the country has further polarize violence in communities. The vulnerability of communities in Nigeria to attack by the various violent groups resulted from the government's failure to provide for security in that remote area. This development has allowed arbitrary penetration in those communities without fear of reprisal. The vulnerability of a human settlement is affected due to its location and inability for physical resistance (Brauch, 2011). Individuals not empowered to develop resilience to difficult situations in their communities (CHS, 2003).

The institutional capacity determines the extent of overcoming the vulnerability of agents of community violence puts in place by the government. The security institutions have to improve their performance to enable them to overcome the onslaught of the militant groups. Improvement will be attained when an adequate security budget is granted to military institutions, well-sophisticated ammunitions are purchased, regular military training is put in place, and capacity, effective military surveillance, security intelligence and military reforms exist. Nigeria's institutional framework's foundations are very shaky and have provoked the deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability (NSACC, 2021).

The ethnic composition of the Nigerian state, with each trying to have dominance over the economic, political and social system, also accounts for insecurity. While it is true that Nigeria is a federation, it is equally valid right that it is created out of circumstances through the emergency of states that coexisted in coercive unity. The agitation for recognition by those in the minority at the federal level for even development resulted to the establishment of different insurgent groups to distabilise the society by unleashing terror on innocent citizens. This has often led to community clashes, lack of tolerance, attempts to usurp the rights of members of other communities, and expansionist tendencies. Ethnic crisis is so rampart and often generate destruction of properties, economic activities, political instability, maiming and killing of people. According to Stremiau (1999), "polarisation between ethnic groups and resulting conflict between them as they compete for resources, political and economic power and other goals, has spawned negative consequences of tremendous proportions, of which genocide, ethnic cleansing and civil war are but a few examples, have caused several losses of lives, livelihoods, displacements as well as properties.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Contingency Model of Community Insecurity offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the complex and multifaceted issues surrounding community insecurity. This model acknowledges that community insecurity arises from a combination of factors, including social inequality, weak institutions, human rights abuses, poverty, globalization, militarization of migrants, constitutional abuse, and widespread corruption. To address community insecurity, the Contingency Model proposes a contingency approach that involves identifying the specific factors contributing to insecurity in a given context, assessing their severity and impact, and developing targeted responses and strategies to address each factor. This approach also emphasizes the importance of implementing and monitoring these responses, as well as evaluating and adjusting them as needed.

At its core, the Contingency Model emphasizes the importance of community engagement and participation, collaboration between security providers and local communities, addressing the root causes of community insecurity, fostering trust and building relationships, and encouraging a culture of peace and tolerance. By adopting this model, stakeholders can develop effective strategies to address community insecurity and promote human, economic, and political security. This approach recognises that community insecurity is a complex problem that requires a nuanced and multifaceted response and that addressing its root causes is essential to creating a more secure and stable community. The Contingency Model offers a valuable framework for understanding and addressing community insecurity, and its emphasis on community engagement, collaboration, and addressing root causes makes it a valuable tool for stakeholders seeking to promote security and stability in their communities.

## **Impact of Community Insecurity on Human Security**

Community insecurity profoundly impacts human security, affecting individuals' lives, health, and well-being in profound ways. When communities are plagued by violence, crime, and instability, the very fabric of human existence is threatened. The effects on lives are immediate and devastating. Community insecurity leads to increased mortality rates, as individuals become victims of violence, terrorism, and other forms of brutality. The constant fear of attack or abduction creates a climate of anxiety, making it difficult for people to go about their daily lives. Health and well-being also suffer greatly. The stress and trauma caused by community insecurity can lead to a range of physical and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Furthermore, the lack of healthcare services and facilities in insecure environments exacerbates these issues. The impact on well-being is equally significant. Community insecurity erodes trust and social cohesion, leading to a breakdown in community structures and social support networks. This can result in feelings of isolation, disempowerment, and hopelessness, making it challenging for individuals to maintain a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Community insecurity can also limit access to necessities like food, water, and shelter, compromising human security. When community insecurity reigns, the very foundations of human existence are threatened. Access to basic necessities like food, water, and shelter becomes a daunting challenge, further eroding human security. The consequences of this limitation are far-reaching and multifaceted. Food insecurity takes hold, as agricultural activities are disrupted, leading to shortages and price hikes. The result is a vicious cycle of malnutrition, starvation, and related health issues. The most vulnerable members of society, including children and the elderly, bear the brunt of this crisis. Water scarcity becomes a harsh reality, as insecurity damages or destroys water infrastructure, leaving communities without access to clean water. Dehydration, water-borne diseases, and hygiene-related issues become rampant, further compromising human health. Shelter and housing become scarce, as homes are destroyed, leaving individuals and families exposed to harsh weather conditions, health risks, and increased vulnerability to violence.

Displacement becomes a cruel fate, as people are forced to flee their homes, leading to internal displacement or refugee crises. Overcrowding, poor living conditions, and inadequate access to essential services become the norm, further exacerbating human insecurity. Economic instability sets in, as insecurity disrupts economic activities, leading to unemployment, poverty, and reduced purchasing power. Access to necessities becomes a luxury, further entrenching human insecurity.

Healthcare limitations become a stark reality, as insecure environments damage or destroy healthcare facilities, leaving communities without access to medical care, vaccinations, and other essential health services. Education disruptions become a devastating consequence, as community insecurity leads to school closures, disrupting education and future opportunities for individuals, particularly children and youth. The cumulative effect of these limitations is a significant decline in human security, making it essential to address community insecurity to ensure access to basic necessities and promote overall well-being. The very future of communities hangs in the balance, and urgent action is needed to restore security and dignity to those affected.

## **The Way Forward**

The Nigerian policing system is in dire need of reform. Policing, which encompasses measures and actions taken by various institutions and groups to regulate social relations, ensure community safety, and enforce conformity to societal norms, is facing numerous challenges in Nigeria. The country's police force is plagued by widespread disregard for the law, lack of operational autonomy due to political interference, and citizens' distrust of law enforcement. Furthermore, the police lack adequate resources and facilities to combat crime and violence, and corruption is rampant. Poor recruitment practices, inadequate remuneration, and denial of pension benefits have also weakened the institution. Weak institutional leadership and inconsistent training and technological exposure have further exacerbated the problems.

To address these challenges, policing reforms are necessary. The government should reform the policing system to enable states to adopt security measures tailored to their communities' needs. This can be achieved by passing a bill into law that allows states to organize their security structures to counter community insecurity. For instance, the federal government should support initiatives like the Amotekun established by Oodua state governments. Additionally, vigilante groups like the Civilian Joint Task Force and organized hunters have played a crucial role in supporting the fight against Boko Haram, presenting a unique challenge to post-conflict security. By addressing these challenges and reforming the policing system, Nigeria can improve community safety and security and create a more stable and prosperous society.

The prevalence of violence in some Nigerian communities can be attributed to the persistence of bad leadership. Since gaining independence, the country has struggled with a succession of ineffective leaders, both during democratic and military regimes. Good governance is essential for addressing societal dissatisfaction and promoting overall well-being. Effective governance is built on fundamental principles, including the rule of law, constitutional sovereignty, human rights, social amenities, equity, justice, a sound economic system, democratic consolidation, job creation, peaceful conflict resolution, and robust security institutions. According to Oluwa (2012), good governance relies on visionary, transparent, trustworthy, and credible political leadership that prioritizes citizens' collective well-being through well-designed economic policies and human development programs. In essence, good governance is the foundation upon which a prosperous and harmonious society is built. It is the antidote to violence, discontent, and social unrest. By embracing good governance, Nigeria can overcome its challenges and create a brighter future for its citizens.

The illicit importation of ammunition into Nigeria through its porous borders has reached alarming levels, with a steady increase in the daily influx of destructive weapons. This has made it effortlessly easy for insurgent groups, herdsmen, kidnappers, Boko Haram, and secessionist groups to access these weapons, perpetuating a culture of violence and instability. To stem this tide, it is imperative to impose severe penalties on companies and individuals involved in the illegal importation of ammunition, serving as a deterrent to would-be offenders. The unchecked flow of migrants from neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Benin has further exacerbated the situation, as noted by Adeola and Oluyemi (2012). The easy availability of small arms and light weapons has emboldened militant and criminal groups, allowing them to create a state of chaos and lawlessness within their communities. This has devastating consequences for the safety and security of innocent citizens, making it essential to address the issue of illegal ammunition importation with urgency and firmness.

The Nigerian government's inability to effectively address conflict-ridden communities stems from its reliance on outdated ammunition and equipment to combat insurgents and terrorists, who perpetuate human insecurity, economic regression, and political instability. To rectify this, the government must prioritize increasing the security budget to procure sophisticated and modern equipment. Phenson (2014) notes, security agencies, particularly the Nigerian Police, lack basic equipment and are technologically outdated in terms of modern crime-fighting technologies. They require essential tools such as fire-power; forensic laboratories, modern communication, and technical equipment to perform professionalized police duties comparable to those in developed countries. However, The Guardian (2021) reports that the government acknowledges the need to increase security personnel, recognizing that this would enhance the effective tackling of Nigeria's rising insecurity. By equipping security officials and agencies with modern equipment and technology, the government can improve their capacity to combat insecurity and protect citizens.

Nigeria's societal fabric is fragile and complex, comprising numerous ethnic groups with diverse values and demands, making governance a daunting task. The country's history has been marred by frequent military interventions, disrupting democratic governance. Despite over 60 years of democratic experimentation, citizens have yet to experience its benefits, leading to widespread disillusionment. The failure of ruling elites to deliver on campaign promises has fueled citizens' resistance to authority and order. To create an environment of peace, the government must adopt robust constitutional arrangements, uphold the rule of law, combat corruption, establish effective security measures, implement electoral reforms, and respect fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, the leaders of the Fourth Republic have fallen short in these essential aspects of good governance, creating an environment conducive to violence and instability. By addressing these shortcomings, Nigeria can foster a more peaceful and harmonious society, where citizens' needs are met, and their rights are respected.

## **Conclusion**

Community insecurity poses a significant threat to human, economic, and political security in Nigeria. The pervasive nature of insecurity has resulted in loss of lives, displacement of communities, and destruction of property. The economic consequences are equally dire, with a decline in economic activities, food insecurity, and a significant strain on the country's resources. Politically, insecurity has undermined the government's authority, eroded trust, and threatened the very fabric of Nigeria's democracy. To address this menace, it is essential to adopt a multi-faceted approach that involves the government, civil society, and local communities. This includes addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. Investing in education, job creation, and social welfare programs can help reduce the allure of criminality and extremism. Furthermore, strengthening security agencies, improving intelligence gathering, and enhancing community policing can help prevent and respond to security threats. Promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and community engagement can also help build trust and foster a sense of shared responsibility for security. Ultimately, ensuring human, economic, and political security in Nigeria requires a sustained and collective effort to address the complex challenges of community insecurity. By working together, Nigerians can build a safer, more prosperous, and more stable future for themselves and future generations.



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