

Understanding insecurity in Nigeria from the prism of terrorism and insurgency in the fourth republic

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Abstract

The Nigerian state is faced with the challenge of curbing the menace of terrorists that engage in economic sabotage, and kidnapping for ransom, and whose attacks on national and international installations are capable of threatening the peaceful coexistence of the citizenry. However, economic disenfranchisement, ideological orientations and religious convictions have mostly influenced the support base of these terrorist activities, thus making the situation intractable. This study examined the effects and strategies adopted to combat the activities of the terrorists and insurgents in Nigeria. Conflict and political economy theories were employed as the framework of analysis. Data from secondary sources were adapted and utilized. The study found that the security situation has improved in the southern region due to the timely response and approach adopted by the federal government. However, it recommended decisive steps to consider engaging existing traditional institutions and religious organisations to deconstruct the already ideologically brainwashed sympathizers of the members of the groups in the northern region.

Keywords: terrorism, insurgency, insecurity, government, Nigeria

Introduction

Contestations over the control of resources have been rife before independence, which only continued in another dimension afterwards, especially around the year 2000. While these contestations have played out as a struggle over land and agitation for resource control in some cases, religious expansionism has been responsible for others. However, these have implications for the socio-economic and political lives of the people. Although sometimes attributed to crises of governance, they predate the 1960 independence. Notably, colonialism fostered the seed with a total disregard for the ethos of the territories they met on the ground, such that people and territories in Nigeria were forcefully united for the interest of the colonialists. Also, foreign companies such as the Royal Niger Company aided the movement of natural resources and agricultural products without the corresponding economic development or growth. The strategy of British rule is such that magnifies and nurtures ethnic differences rather than similarities (Falola & Daudu, 2017). With ethnicity deeply embedded in politics and governance, governments freely control the provision and distribution of social amenities and development infrastructures. However,

these provisions are not based on compatibility or need but rather on personal political exigency. The government at every level is created to secure lives and property, maintain law and order, and then provide an enabling environment for the prosperity of the people, among others. Thus the postcolonial system of governance in Nigeria is confronted with the challenge of deconstructing the values, legacies and ideological orientations of the colonial legacies and their integration into the search for economic and institutional developments.

Across the country, there have been the formation and growth of armed militias who agitate for one thing or the other either for group or regions. Postcolonial Nigeria has experienced parliamentary, military and civil rules at different times. However, the demands of the people for an improved and developed society are yet to be met. The failure of governance has been adduced as the reason for the wave of insurgency and terrorism (Ali, Bubaram & Adamu, 2018; Olorunfemi, 2013; Oyoniyi, 2010).

However, since the advent of democracy and the return to civil rule in 1999, agitations that later turned violent began

in the oil-rich South-south region of Nigeria over resource control. This brought about the emergence of several terrorist groups such as the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF) led by Ateke Tom and the Bush Boys, among others. Meanwhile, the emergence of a radical Muslim religious sect in 2002 known as the *Yusuffiyya Movement* marked the beginning of religious sect violence in the northern part of the country in the fourth republic. Its operations started specifically in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state; Damaturu, the capital city of Yobe; Bauchi with the capital city in Bauchi, and Gombe with the capital city in Gombe. The group is officially referred to as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*, translated to mean people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teaching and Jihad. But it is popularly called *Boko Haram* because of its detest for the western style of education (Ibrahim, 2013).

The struggles in both southern and northern parts have either been ideological and/or religious. Unfortunately, the activities of these

terrorist groups have threatened the peaceful coexistence of the Nigerian state as they involve varying degrees of threat and actual violence that include vandalisation of pipelines, kidnapping of expatriates and school children as well as adults, bombing, actual takeover and constitution of a government within the government, among others.

This study utilized secondary sources to examine terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria as well as the strategies of their operations and their effects on the country by using the Niger Delta and Boko Haram as examples. It is divided into sections to include the conceptualization of terrorism and insurgency, theoretical framework, terrorism in Nigeria, effects and strategies to counter it as well as a conclusion.

Conceptualizing terrorism and insurgency

Terrorism is the use of threats to force a party into submission. It uses threats to influence the government or intimidate the public or a section of the public. The threat is made to advance a political, religious or ideological cause (Terrorism Act, 2000). It is the systematic use of violence and intimidation to coerce a government or community into acceding to specific demands (Pearsall & Trumble,

2006). Also, it might involve violence against persons, endangering of lives and serious damage to property other than that of the person committing the action or sometimes both.

According to the United Nations (1992), terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent actions, employed by a semi-clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby in contrast to assassination the direct targets of the violence are (mostly) not the main targets. However, it can be domestic or international. Notably, terrorism thrives on political, ideological, secular and religious cleavages. Meanwhile, it generally uses violence to create fear and often targets the third party as the prey. It can also mean the use of violence by states against subjects; isolated extremist acts of violence; the use of violence in liberation and nationalist movements; and emergent transnational configuration which targets hegemony or values.

Insurgency is a struggle between states or groups to secure control of an already occupied geographical and political space. It is an armed rebellion against a constituted authority recognized by the United Nations, when those taking part in

the rebellion are not recognized as belligerent (Robert & Ash, 2009). It has also been defined as an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed struggle. The act requires the organized use of violence to seize, nullify or challenge political control of a section of the country.

Powell and Abraham (2006) refer to it as violent moves by a person or group of persons to resist or oppose the enforcement of the law or running of government or revolt against the constituted authority of the state or of taking part in an insurrection. Traditionally, it is an attempt to overthrow an existing order and establish in its place one that is commensurate with the political, economic, ideological and religious goals of the terrorist group (Gompert & Gordon, 2008). However, organized struggle to claim geographical and political space may not always be negative. Kilcullen (2006) espouses a distinction between classical and contemporary insurgencies; he submits that the latter seeks to replace the existing order while the former sometimes strives for the expulsion of foreign invaders from their territory or seeks to fill an existing power vacuum.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts conflict and political economy theories. The theories capture the introduction of violence in the agitations, the economic dimensions and governmental responses to the upsurge of terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria which has occurred in various degrees and at different times. Conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the contours of conflicts in society. Also, it considers reasons, forms and effects, and assumes that unequal distribution of scarce resources and power is the reason for conflicts. Thus the social and economic distribution gaps in the Nigerian nation, as well as unbalanced power-sharing relations among elites of the major regions have oftentimes resulted in the adoption of self-help as a strategy (Abioro, 2017; Falola & Dauda, 2016).

Furthermore, the development of conflict theory gained currency in the work of Dahrendorf (1959) with the title: *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. The work departed from Marx's focus and centrality on the conflict between the social classes and looked instead to the conflict between interest groups and established that social inequalities have their basis not only in economics but also in bureaucratic power. Marx was

concerned with class and the dialectics of capitalism and argued that capitalism would produce its own grave diggers by creating the conditions under which class consciousness and a failing economy would come into existence (Allan, 2010).

The Nigerian experience witnessed the relationship between oil companies and multinational corporations investing and exploring the oil-rich Niger Delta community. This operated under a clear capitalist agenda and the relationship between the organisations and the citizens replicates master-servant affairs. Also, the underlying tone of negligence and economic disenfranchisement arising from class in the ideological contestation of the Boko Haram sect against the Nigerian state has exacerbated the situation. The conflict did not completely target the economy but the state and economy together set up conditions for the conflicts.

Understanding the category and levels of involvement, Dahrendorf (1959) categorized groups contributing to the conflict to be quasi-group which represents the aggregate of people occupying identical power positions and holding latent interests or unconscious role expectations. Also, there is the other group known as the interest group, that

is, the association of people mobilized into action by virtue of their membership in groups they share manifest interests or conscious goals. Lastly, the conflict group attempts to instigate revolutionary social change, sometimes through violent means. In this sense, all categories can be identified as playing one role or another at various times in the agitation and violent clashes in the oil-rich southern and religious conscious northern regions of the country.

Political economy from a global standpoint and approach is employed to reflect the perspective of individuals and groups who engage in economic activities as and when they can. The concept has gained almost universal recognition as a study or an inquiry concerned with the production, distribution and exchange of wealth. It expresses the reciprocal interaction of wealth and power which takes place within the institutional framework of very important forms of social organisation, state and the market (Abioro, 2016). Also, the socio-economic, interreligious, intercultural and interethnic tensions within the country precipitate domestic and political conflagrations of immense and diversified proportions (Olanrewaju, Folarin & Folarin, 2017; Isyaku 2013).

The two dominant assumptions in economic theory are the correlation between economic activity and some form of class development as well as the influence of individuals cum strong actors on the market and how such forces drive development. Even as Boko Haram started as a group and sect driven by religious convictions, its involvement did not end with religious and ideological convictions but extended to political aspirations as well as social and economic manipulations. This study relied on the above-mentioned theories to explain the conflictual relationship, socio-economic and political struggles in two different regions in the country, especially in the fourth republic, and how groups and government interrelate and struggle for recognition and economic survival.

Terrorism in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

The Niger Delta inhabits over 15 million people with different languages, but the people are united by their historical status in Nigeria. Notably, they share a common identity as southern minorities. The region is described as a 'mostly flat, low lying, swampy basin crisscrossed by a dense network on meandering rivers and creeks' with broad ecological zones which are from the coast inland, the coastal

sandy barrier ridge zone, the mangrove swamp zone, the freshwater swamp zone and the lowland rainforest zone (Ojakorotu & Olaopa, 2009; UNDP, 2006; NDDC, 2004). The area of the natural Delta of the Niger River is the area to the east and west, which also produces oil, covering approximately 25,900 square kilometres with a northern boundary located close to the bifurcation of the Niger River at Aboh. The western and eastern boundaries are around the Benue River and Imo River respectively, in the geographical sense; it is made up of Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. However, the land area extends to cover 75,000 square kilometers and includes three additional states of Ondo, Imo and Abia which are recognized as oil-producing areas under the NDDC-Act (Environmental Resources Management Limited, 1997).

Despite being democratized, the country is yet to be freed from disturbing socio-economic, cultural and political disagreements. The cycle of the uprising in the Niger Delta has mostly been limited to the question of 'oil' and its control which has subsequently led to group agitation (Odomovo, 2014; Dokubo, 2004; Agbese, 1993). Similarly, the 1998 conference of youth activists in the

region which was later to produce the 'Kaiama Declaration' was to strategize for the survival of their ethnic nationality.

The Kaiama Declaration was issued by the Ijaw Youth Council on 11th December 1998 with categorical calls for the control of oil and other mineral resources. It also asserted the degradation of the environment of Ijawland by transnational oil companies and the complicity of the Nigerian state mainly because the people have been robbed of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land. The Declaration also referred to the predicaments of the Land Use Decree (1978), the Petroleum Decrees (1969 and 1991) and the National Inland Waterways Authority Decree No. 13 (1997), among others. All of these have put control of exclusive resources under the federal government. Evidently, apart from the increasing marginalization of the oil-producing areas in revenue allocation in the federation, there is also the problem of ecological disaster and environmental degradation that oil exploration, spillage and gas flaring engender in those communities (Ojakorotu & Olaopa, 2009). Also, poor management of oil exploration manifests in spillage that eventually dislocates the economic life of the people.

Terrorism in northern Nigeria

The Nigerian federation has 36 states that are sharply divided into the north and south. There are three geo-political zones in each, namely Northwest, Northeast and North-central regions as well as Southwest, Southeast and South-south. For the purposes of the study, it is important to identify the catchment area of Boko Haram which is in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba with an estimated population of 22.3 million people who are predominantly Muslims. It is a vast and extensive region which extends from Lake Chad in the Northeast corner to beyond Toro near Jos in the south corner, and from Jama're bordering Kano in the Northwest corner to Wukari in the Southeast. This region is inhabited by people of different ethnic groups, but the major ethnic groups are Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri. It is also home to many minority groups such as Shuwa Arabs, Mumunye, Chamba, Marghi, Kaka, Mnaga, Tera, Jukun, Wurkum, Tiv, Bachama, Lungudu, and Waja among others.

Northern Nigeria has been profoundly influenced by religion and politics, and the former is often being used as a dialect of social organization to the

latter. Meanwhile, Boko Haram is neither the first nor the only radical Islamist organization from the northern part of Nigeria to denounce western education just as several others in the past including the *Talakawas* in the 1940s and 1950s led by Aminu Kano rose against British colonialists and the ruling elites. Kano's criticisms were extended to native authority establishments and he rallied teachers, clerks, servants, craftsmen, workers and lesser '*ulamas*' to achieve the purpose. The *Yan Tasine* in the 1960s and 1970s was led by Mohammed Marwa who was nicknamed *Maitatsine*, translated as the one who curses (due to his fondness for making curse-laden speeches against the Nigerian state). His followership was mainly religious scholars, unemployed migrants, youths, and others who felt mainstream Muslim leaders were not doing enough for the community. Also, other groups such as the *Darul Islam* and followers of the Ndimi mosque as early as the year 2000 among others have sought a return to religious rule in society with the adoption of both or either violent and non-violent social movements (Omotoso & Abioro, 2020).

Notably, Boko Haram was founded in Maiduguri, Borno state by Yusuf

Mohammed in 2002 when he gathered youths who felt abandoned by the government and shortchanged in the economy. Also, the group is opposed to any western form of democracy and expressed that the western system is responsible for the current national social ills as well as corruption. Walker (2013) stated that he was one of the thousands of Almajiri children-religious students who lived on the streets. He however spent several years in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and on his return to Nigeria he assumed office as one of the leaders of the youth wing of a *Salafist group* at Maiduguri's popular Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi mosque.

Similarly, Kwaja (2011) and Buchanan-Clarke and Knoope (2018) identified disenfranchisement and inequality in an economic system that favored only the politically connected elite as the reason for the establishment of the sect. The group was populated by unemployed and impoverished Islamic students, clerics, university students and others. Notably, the sect by most accounts was non-violent until it had overcrowded and uncontrollable numbers, and between 2005 and 2009, the group became radicalized and confrontational such that it eventually led to the murder of the

leader in 2009 during a 'confrontation' with state forces. Since then, the group went underground only to resurface in 2011 under the new leadership of Abubakar Shekau who was the second-in-command to Yusuf. The coordinated attacks by the sect include the bombing of the United Nations Office in Abuja in 2011 (Olanrewaju, 2018). It also drew on international attention and engagement of the Al-Qaeda, and recently is enjoying the support of Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).

Effects of terrorism and insurgency

Though terrorism has rational, psychological, and cultural origins, the attacks and other forms of insurgency in northern Nigeria play out through the use of guerrilla warfare, kidnapping, hostage keeping, coercion and intimidation, propaganda, subversion of existing authority and political mobilization, among others (Ali, Bubaram & Adamu, 2018; Olorunfemi 2013). According to Simonsen and Jeremy (2000), rational terrorists think through their goals and options by making a cost-benefit analysis, while the psychological motivation for resorting to terrorism is derived from dissatisfaction with the terrorist's life and accomplishments. Also, terrorism can grow out of an environment of political

activism, where goals are directed at influencing government decisions. Other causes of terrorism and insurgency include religious motivation, the proliferation of weapons of war, corruption, poverty, unemployment, weak institutional structure and so on (Adedire, Ake & Olowojolu, 2016).

The various dastard acts of terrorists and insurgents in Nigeria have led to the loss of lives in thousands and hundreds of thousands with millions of people already displaced. Furthermore, Mohammed (2018) states that more than 1.3 million are currently displaced due to the insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe and Taraba states, and as of December 2015, three million refugees are already dispersed in the northeast and Lake Chad region with more than 800,000 children scattered and taking refuge in Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, among other places. In other instances, the military bombardments of creeks in the Niger Delta and the military activities launched against the Boko Haram sect in the north recorded casualties.

The sect mounted ferocious attacks on both governmental and non-governmental offices and civilians. These attacks come in different ways including oil pipeline vandalisation, kidnapping,

planting bombs in worship centres (mosques and churches), house-to-house killings and more recently suicide bombing and the bombing of soft targets (market squares, public spaces like schools, and garages). Also included are Boko Haram's seizing of border towns and abductions of students, prominent among which are the Chibok girls from Borno state and Dapchi girls from Yobe state which have caused sustained security threats to social and economic activities (Omotoso & Abioro, 2020).

The economic activities of the country have been adversely affected by sabotage in the form of oil pipeline vandalisation, hostage-taking of expatriates and oil company workers, conspiracy and destruction of the nation's infrastructure commonly carried out in the Niger Delta. In addition, the northeast region of the country has been badly affected by the activities of the insurgents, as a substantial part of the economic life of the region has been shut down.

Closely related to poor economic performance is the high rate of unemployment and poverty. Similarly, the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2017) observed that the menace to Nigeria's national security cannot be discussed without mention of the jobless youths

that amounts to about 75.9 million. According to Muhammed (2012), the region is the poorest in Nigeria since 1985 with the highest incidence of poverty ranging between 54.9% and 72.2%. Moreover, it has the highest unemployment rate and currently the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The humanitarian cost of violence is high as victims are exposed to harsh ecological and climate conditions in recent years. In addition to disrupted economic activity and food production, it has resulted in extreme levels of deprivation (UNHCR, 2017). As spillage has affected land and farming activities in the Delta communities, so also have villages been razed, infrastructure (hospitals, schools, police stations, markets etc.) destroyed and millions displaced in the northeastern region since the beginning of the insurgency. Furthermore, it has led to an increase in the number of Nigerian refugees currently being hosted in other parts of the country and continent such as Cameroon, Chad, Niger and other parts of the world.

In addition, violence has resulted in the constant breakdown of social cohesion

and communal violence in the country. As the Niger Delta region experienced the breakdown of social cohesion within the potent days of the violent agitations, the UNHCR (2016) reports that the chaos and trauma created by the insurgent Boko Haram have led to an increase in inter-communal violence (struggle for land and other economic resources), banditry (cattle rustling) and a general breakdown in social cohesion. It is estimated that the three million IDPs in the region have an impact on the general population as 80 percent of them live among host communities and the internal migration puts acute strain on traditional economic, social, and justice systems (Abioro, 2016). Furthermore, this has resulted in communal violence between local farming communities and nomadic herdsman whose spillover has plagued the middle belt region of the country.

On the international dimension, the activities of the 'agitators' in the creeks of the Niger Delta and Northeastern region have created a negative perception and image for the country; also, the United Nations Refugee Agency (2014) stated that a large number of the inhabitants of the region are now refugees in other countries.

Countering violence, terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria

Fanon (1963) expressed that colonial violence influenced the colonized to be violent, making them manifest the aggressiveness which has been deposited in their bones against their own people. Moreover, the confrontation with the colonial order of things placed them in a permanent state of tension and the colonized native was an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the prosecutor. Although violence subtly gets justified in postcolonial Africa in the name of national identity, security and postcolonial development, all are seen as necessary to secure postcolonial modernity. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012) located the logic of violence in Africa in coloniality and the reproduction of African subjectivities where race is used not only to denigrate the black population but to rob them of their very humanity, so as to justify the use of violence against them.

African leaders willingly reproduce and entrench new forms of identity and consciousness. Often, religion and ethnicity are manipulated to get power, as well as retain and/or legitimize it such that it serves as the basis for inclusion and exclusion. Oyeniya (2010) noted that

some activities of these groups enjoy the tacit endorsement of the state. This manifests through criminal silence of conspiracy and/or the creation of poorly armed vigilante groups, among others.

Specifically on the Niger Delta disturbance, the government through a Bill on 10 April 2002 sought to outlaw certain armed groups and associations in Nigeria. Though very ambiguous and somewhat unclear, it seeks to prohibit any group of persons, an association of individuals or a quasi-military group to retain, organize, train, or equip any person or group of persons for the purposes of enabling the group of persons or association of individuals to use or display physical force or coercion in order to promote any political objective or interest, ethnic or cultural interest, social, occupational or religious interest. Even without a monopoly of power, states have a greater influence on the legitimate use of force; thus they should birth the programme or such other activity that can counter violence even before it starts. For instance, there should be a review and update to meet the existing reality and exigency of Nigeria's Soft Approach to Countering Terrorism. The scheme had four clear streams which are initiatives to de-radicalize convicted terrorists and

suspects awaiting trial, improve relationships and acknowledge sharing of information between government and civil society on issues of violent extremism, build the capacity of the military and law enforcement agencies to engage in strategic communication, and bring together governors of the six northeastern state to design targeted economic revitalization programmes in areas most prone to recruitments.

Moreover, the Partners Against Violent Extremism (PAVE), Civil Society Groups, governments at all tiers and the Office of the National Security Adviser should redesign the security architecture to accommodate more participants, especially the traditional institutions, religious institutions, local guards, hunters and adult members of the community to ensure a collective and holistic approach to resolving the menace.

Notably, while tackling terrorism in the Niger Delta, the government employed dialogue and negotiation which has proved to be effective. It involved not only the agitators but also top political heads of the region to negotiate peace in the region with the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC). Also, the political initiative of the Amnesty

Programme of President Sheu Musa Yar'adua that entailed unconditional pardon and cash payments for rehabilitation to rebels who agree to lay down their arms within a stipulated period could be advanced in addressing the insurgent crises in the northern region, though with modifications to address reclaiming of lands and territories by the original owners. Even Adedire, Ake and Olowojolu (2016) opined that effective democracy, breaking the channel of supply of weapons, sanctions rogue states and building institutional structures are some of the ways terrorism can be curtailed. Lastly, the government needs to identify and cut off every support base of terrorism in terms of contact, food, funding and supply of arms and other logistics.

Concluding remarks

Unlike the terrorists and insurgent acts ravaging the northern part of Nigeria, the rate of structural destruction and ideological violation resulting from similar activities in the southern region has subsided, especially since the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme for ex-insurgents. Therefore, the government's decisiveness and commitment to halt attacks on citizens and other national and international installations should be

urgently extended to the Northern region of the country. Furthermore, decisive steps to engage existing traditional institutions and religious organisations to deconstruct the already ideologically brainwashed sympathizers of the members of the groups in the northern

region should be encouraged. Lastly, the rehabilitation of the victims of kidnapping and displaced persons as well as persons who have lost means of livelihood, property and loved ones should be of priority across the regions.

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