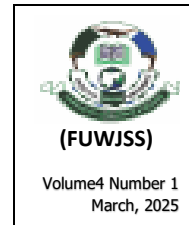# NIGERIA'S HISTORY OF INSECURITY AND POLICING, 1960-2017

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Abstract

Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, the nation had been plagued with myraids of insecurity; ranging from ethno-religious crises in some parts of Northern Nigeria, terrorism and banditry, kidnapping and abduction in the South-South, South-East and the South-West, Armed robbery and political assassination, unemployment, porous borders, environmental degradation, climate change and desertification. Adopting a holistic approach to security, this paper discusses the history of insecurity and policing in Nigeria. The paper argues that national security is positively correlated with the increase in the distributive capability and genuine democratization of a given system; that the tranquility and well-being of a society are pre-conditions for security. Findings culminate to show that national insecurity has impacted on policing in Nigeria in the sense that it has brought to the fore the fact that Law Enforcement Agencies in Nigeria have struggled to effectively manage and tackle threats. The paper concludes that insecurity in Nigeria is largely a consequence of political instability which manifests in forms such as: military intervention in national politics, electoral violence, ethno-religious conflicts, militancy, and terrorism. The paper recommends that there is need for security agencies, the media, and judiciary to collaborate with each other in collectively maintaining law and order in Nigeria.

Keywords: National security, policing, media, judiciary, social order

Introduction

Since independence and over recent years Nigeria has been facing rising levels of insecurity in other parts of the country which have manifested themselves in various ways with repercussions on the country and Nigeria security agencies have been in the forefront of trying to maintain law and order. These range from Ethno-Religious Crisis in some parts of Northern Nigeria, Terrorism and Banditry, Kidnapping and Abduction in the South-South, South-East and the South-West, Armed Robbery and Political Assassination, Unemployment, Porous Borders, Environmental Degradation/Climate Change and Desertification. The reasons for this are not far-fetched**.** Sociologically, most African States such as Nigeria are multi-ethnic societies with populations that are sharply divided along racial, cultural, linguistic, religious, and similar lines. Politically, the colonial powers imposed arbitrary control from outside and worked in accordance with alien and unfamiliar rules and regulations in disregard, often in ignorance, of indigenous institutions (Aloziuwa, 2012).

Today Nigeria is the most populous African State by far with an estimate of almost 250 million people. However, despite years of large

revenues from oil, it remains poor, with an estimate of almost 70% of the population being multidimensionally poor. Nigeria is also both an ethnically and religiously plural state. Three main ethnic groups, the Yoruba in the southwest, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Hausa in the north, have traditionally dominated politics. That still leaves an estimated further 250 ethnic groups further divided along religious lines in the country, some of them very large and politically influential (*Almanac Book of Facts*, 2006).

Gaining independence from Britain in 1960, with a Federal Constitution comprising of three States, Nigerian politics has witnessed a series of military coups d'état, the first in 1966, and the most recent in 1993. In 1999, the military regime returned the country to constitutional democracy. Post-independence Nigerian politics have been marred with tensions. The 1966 coup d'état, itself the outcome of bitter ethnic conflict involving the mainly Igbo and Northern Nigeria officers, was followed by an even more bitter Civil War. An estimated two million people died as Federal forces battled to suppress an attempted secession by the Igbo-dominated Southeast, including the oil-producing region of the Niger Delta. Since the end of the war in 1971, successive military regimes have attempted to restructure the country in an effort to harness ethnic tensions, most notably by the division of the political system into many more sub-Federal States. At present, the Nigerian Federation consists of 36 states including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Oil, which began to yield significant income in the 1970s with the spiraling price of the commodity, has done very little to raise overall standards of living. The Nigerian political system can be said to be notorious for its instability, corruption, inefficiency, and brutality. Economically, infrastructure is either non-existent or of a low quality, the political elites have squandered oil revenue.

Elaigwu (1997) notes that although African states have come a long way down the road in terms of nation-building process, with many heterogeneous or multinational states having to resort to varying ways of resolving their inter-group relations, many of the States still convulse from one shock after another arising from sociological and political divergencies.

According to Mijah (2007) in his paper titled 'Democracy, Internal Security and the Challenges of policing in Nigeria', following the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria underwent a relative deteoration of its internal security which was to threaten the countries national unity and cohesion. He argues that the violent character of politics, rampant corruption, ethno-religious/communal crisis, police brutality, electoral fraud, armed robbery, proliferation of ethnic militia, etc all which constitute credible threats to security in Nigeria derived from the structural foundations of the society. He says that as a result of the multi-ethnic character of Nigeria and the failure of the nationalist project to evolve a true nation and a corresponding national identity, ethnic, religious and other primordial points of reference assumed added importance. Thus, so called dominant ethnic groups systematically excluded minority ethnic groups from national and even regional (State) processes and from the acquisition of resources and opportunities for individuals and collective development (ibid).

Ota and Okoko (2013) assert that 'Insecurity is a consequence of political instability whose manifestation include military intervention in

national politics, electoral violence, ethno-religious conflicts, militancy, and terrorism'. Even years following the end of the civil war up to end of military rule in 1999, Nigeria was and still plagued by various security threats (Peterside and Brown, 2014) complicated by arms smuggling and proliferation of small arms. Some of these threats "have led to a weak, volatile and unpredictable internal security situation, which has, more than ever, resulted in heavy military aid to civil authorities" (National Defence Policy for Nigeria, 2006).

Research Methodology

This study largely depended on secondary sources. This involved the location and examination of relevant publications or other sources of information to the research topic. Use of the internet was involved as well as the use of various libraries to collect materials on policing as far as they are useful to the subject of the investigation. Journals, newspapers, and published works, lectures and seminar papers presented by scholars and analysts were used.

This study follows the thematic approach. Thematic approach has to do with organizing and presenting the findings on the basis of similarity of ideas as opposed to the chronological approach based on sequence of events. In the thematic procedure, the sequence of events is maintained under each theme. In this way focus is easy to maintain in the description and analysis of issues throughout the study.

The findings of this research are presented using both descriptive and analytical methods. The descriptive method is a method that provides a vivid description of experience, memory, etc in the way the reader can easily get its physical reality produced through the achievement of the author's detailed description. Though representation can come in the form of a figure, model, or picture, description can also represent or give an account of events in words.   On the other hand, an analytical method requires the writer to examine his response to, and thoughts about, the reading he has done. To compose an analysis, the writer collects the information that is central to the argument he is examining- the claims, the evidence- and interprets the strength and weaknesses of all sides in the debate. In other words, an analytical method focuses primarily on the writer's use of evidence to support his claim or argument.

National Insecurity: The Nigerian Experience

According to Okene (2011), National Security implies the ability of a country to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished interest, legitimate values and enhance the standard of living and well-being of its people, guests and visitors. Osakwe (2013) also adopts the scope of National Security from territorial security to also the security of the people. According to him, it is the concept of human security that encompasses the protection of lives and property; a pre-condition for the improvement of people's wellbeing; protection of human rights; and the provision of basic human needs. Implicit in these definitions of security is that when adequate security is provided for the citizens of any nation, a congenial environment for development and self-actualization is achieved.

Hence what we can deduct from both scholars is that that security measures must also be directed towards immaterial objects like lifestyle,

culture, freedom, identity, and the protection of nature. This is so because any state which has not satisfied his or her basic needs like food, clothing, housing, health, education, etc of its citizenry can hardly be called secure – no matter how much weaponry it may have at his disposal (Fage, 1999). This is in line with the 1994 Human Development Report (HDR) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which broadens the scope of security analysis and policy from territorial security to also the security of the people and thus adopts the term 'Human Security' over 'National Security' (Gomez, 2013). Unfortunately, the Nigerian landscape puts the issue of Security and National Security to question, incessant ethnic and religious conflicts, poor ecological conditions, youth restiveness and chronic unemployment, border encroachments, lackadaisical attitude toward crime, institutionalized corruption, and the pilfering of oil and other natural resources by local and international bandits.

This paper adopts the holistic approach to security. Therefore, the domestic, socio/economic and political environment of a sovereign state is the all-important and critical factor in national security considerations. Put succinctly, national security is positively correlated with the increase in the distributive capability and genuine democratization of a given system. The tranquility and well-being of a society are pre-conditions for security. By well-being, what is meant is the ability of the democratic state to provide its public with social economic and political conditions conducive to happiness and relative prosperity.

The media is the means through which a society disseminates and receives information. The traditional instruments of the mass media today are the newspapers, magazines, radio and television. It's a channel of communication that serves many diverse functions, such as offering a variety of entertainment with either mass or specialized appeal, communicating news and information, or displaying advertising messages. The Journalist reports events and activities which make up the source of his information. Whether the information disseminated by the journalist could be harmful or useful depends on its contents. This is where the issue of security comes in. Thus, the media transmit messages about a particular society to achieve a goal.

Anthony Ali notes that the media has been the major player in bringing to the fore issues in Nigeria's national security since independence. That unfortunately, when Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the mass media orientation shifted towards reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to national unity, identity and integration. Also, the media became parochial in their content, and they dedicated themselves to the articulation of ethnic interest. Thus, press reports during this period greatly heightened tension, which created suspicion among the citizenry and almost led to the disintegration of the corporate existence of the country (Danladi, 2013). Udoudo and Asak (2008) also note that:

> The news media seemed to have abandoned their core duty of truthfully reporting events, activities and personalities. Instead they joined the fray, individual taking sides either in favour or against the government in power.

Okoye (2013) further argues that:

> In the original journalistic sense: objectivity required that the journalist kept himself out of his report by not injecting his emotion, personal opinion and bias into the news report. But this is very difficult, if not impossible. Since journalist may be required to offer interpretation and explanation of the issues they write about, they may consciously or unconsciously inject their own personal opinions and understanding of the issue. In fact, if the mass media should pursue objectivity at all cost, the media audience will be short-changed.

Thus, the Nigeria media on many occasions has not acted professionally in the discharge of its own duties. The media has over the years been, shaped or influenced by emotions, sentiments and other extraneous forces at work. The power of the media to decide what the people should read, see or hear has cannot be overemphasized. This has often brought to the fore the issue of propaganda. Propaganda can serve to rally people behind a cause, but often at the cost of exaggerating, misrepresenting, or even lying about the issues to gain that support. While the issue of propaganda often is discussed in the context of militarism, war and warmongering, it is around us in all aspects of our socio, political, and economic life.

What has been the center of controversy is the professionalism of those whose hands reside such enormous powers to use that power objectively and in public interest. In other words, they have the options to either use the power of the media in their hands to ethically serve the nation or sacrifice ethics for self-serving interest. Hence, the media could serve as a threat to security by way of espionage, by which a nation, organization or individuals employ to procure information concerning the interest of another country to which they are not, by law entitled. The information sought pertains to the secret affairs of the target country in strategic areas including military, industries, politics, technology etc. for hostile purposes (ibid). In other words, espionage; by which a nation, organization or individuals employ to procure information concerning the interest of another country to which they are not, by law entitled. The information sought pertains to the secret affairs of the target country in strategic areas including military, industries, politics, technology etc for hostile purposes. Other forms of threat to security include tourism, subversion, sabotage, insurgency, guerrilla warfare. By and large, state security operatives during the military regimes constituted a security threat to media practitioners because the military is dictatorial in nature and feared that a liberal attitude towards them would bring down their regime. If the media was given a free hand to operate the public could be sensitized about the dictatorial nature of the military and consequent uprising.

Auwal (2015) observes that the situation of partisan and regional press helped in the intensification of old ethnic antagonisms and the atmosphere of political communication seethed with bitter rivalry and enmity. That the press openly supported one political party against another during the Second Republic, and fueled the embers of tribalism, sensationalism, and ethnic chauvinism, all of which culminated in fragmentation and disintegration that again threatened the unity and stability of the Nigerian state. In other words, the political and ethnic class in its greed has employed the mass media as instrument for selfish and sectional loyalties.

Consequently, media reports have greatly heightened tension and created suspicion among the citizens. Thus, it is apparent that in situations where the mass media are used as tools for the promotion of sectional interests, rather than for the promotion of national unity, peace, development and integration, the rate of crimes and insecurity will increase.

Policing in Nigeria

The judiciary is the arm of government charged with the responsibility of interpreting laws and adjudicating disputes between persons or between government and any person in Nigeria. Judicial power is exercisable through the courts and the various courts are empowered to determine all proceedings, be they criminal or civil involving or relating to any penalty, forfeiture, punishment or other liability they may accrue against or in favor of a person or body of persons.[18] In the administration of justice, the relationship between the judiciary and law enforcement agencies is essential if the ends of justice must be ascertained and accomplished (Urubulan, 2015).

However, the output of law enforcement agencies in operations in handling offenders and suspects largely determines the judicial attitude towards policing. Under normal circumstances, where law enforcement agencies act within the rules of engagements allowed by law, judiciary through the courts, will always come to the aid of these agencies. Where on the other hand these agencies act in contravention of the rule of law particularly as it relates to the fundamental rights of citizens the courts are more often ready to cut those excesses (ibid). The Nigerian judicial system has also to an extent been involved in the subversion of Justice, accused of being corrupt, inept and lacking the will power to uphold the law even after swearing to an Oath etc. This study thus acknowledges that by this display of unprofessional conduct, the judiciary has consequently contributed in their own way to the problem of insecurity and lack effective policing in Nigeria by failing to serve as a timely deterrent to criminal offenders.

Notwithstanding, Nigerian courts have at various times condemned the action of law enforcement agencies in disregarding the law, court orders, and operating with impunity with. Some of these excesses by law enforcement agencies in Nigeria have become recurrent themes and have been concisely captured by the group *Amnesty International*. The group has accused Nigeria Law Enforcement Agencies particularly the Military and the Police since independence of torture and other ill-treatment during the interrogation of suspects or detainees and other innocent Nigerians to extract information and confessions. In a recent 409-page 2016/2017 Report it accused these agencies of the following: arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexually exploiting women in Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDPs), lack of accountability, secret executions of crime suspects, manhandling journalist and curtailing freedom of expression, disrupting freedom of assembly, unlawful killings, unexplained disappearance of suspects in custody, torture and ill-treatment, failure to prevent pending communal attacks despite prior-warnings, frustrating freedom of association, forced evictions of people from their homes despite laws on housing rights, discrimination against women, and lackluster attitude in protecting the rights of children (Amnesty International Report, 2017). The Report adds that:

> The military was deployed in 30 out of Nigeria's 36 states and the FCT where they performed routine policing functions including responding to non-violent demonstrations... the military deployment to police public gatherings contributed to the number of extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings (ibid).

Aspects of Amnesty's Report have often been downplayed by the affected law enforcement agencies and the government in general except where the media has been able to provide concrete evidence at the disposal of the public and international community thus putting to rest the phrase 'it's your word against ours'. In other words, this study acknowledges that these problems do exist but the exact extent of such violations beyond personal experience are at times difficult to pinpoint since most of these shameful violations are often carried out in an air of secrecy. However, what is very clear is that these shameful acts where clear signs of unprofessionalism by Nigeria's law enforcement agencies.

State response to threats, or human rights allegations against law enforcement agencies in Nigeria has been that of two sides of the same coin; that is, in either case the response has been unprofessional. For example, in some instances a lackadaisical attitude towards confronting threats is displayed, while in some other instances when security agencies choose to act, they have been found using excessive force which is unprofessional and against the precepts of human rights. Excessive force refers to a force that is above that which is reasonable, and a prudent law enforcement officer would use under normal circumstances. The role of security agencies in conducting major security operations has been reported on several occasions as using excessive force. A popular case in point is the Odi massacre as mentioned above which was characterized by intense and excessive use of force largely by Nigeria's military.

Closely tied to this is that of extra judicial killings, degrading treatment of citizens like rape, arbitrary arrest, and torture by Nigeria's law enforcement officers (Omede, 2012). These officers reportedly extort citizens after intimidating them. It is now common sites for civilians to be seen frog- jumping at check points (ibid). Women and girls are sometimes allegedly raped on a number of occasions whether or not during conflict (ibid).

Nigerians also had their misgivings about the military and police handling of the 2009 Boko Haram case. Many wondered why it took the security and intelligence agencies so long to discover the activities of the Boko Haram sect. Again, questions were raised about the brutal killing of Muhammad Yusuf – the alleged Boko Haram leader who was killed in Police custody after being arrested by the army (ibid). In January of 2013, the Boko Haram group called for a cease fire.

In a reaction the then Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Admiral Ola Sa'ad Ibrahim gave conditions under which the Federal Government would engage in dialogue with the sect.

The Defence Chief (Nigeria: Boko Haram Ceasefire,2013) said:

> We must treat that (ceasefire) with a lot of caution. You should understand that there are certain objective tests that will make sense. Let's assume we can have a long period of about one month where no bomb explodes; where nobody is shot; where nobody is beheaded; where no

church is bombed; where no mosque is threatened. If they can guarantee just one month, then we can begin to talk.

The CDS's comment highlights a view held that the Boko Haram group is faceless and has reportedly made similar calls in the past but had always ended up breaking them through continued bombings and unprovoked attacks etc. In other words, that the faceless nature of the sect has practically made it very difficult for any real and significant form of negotiation to even take place between leaders of the sect and the Federal Government. There have also been calls for an amnesty in some quarters for the sect members, but even this according to some security experts is not feasible because the sect members have refused to show a commitment to integrate fully into the Nigerian society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion threats to national security have impacted on policing in Nigeria since the nation's independence in 1960. Thus, adequate policing has been viciously undermined when we consider the myriads of security issues still confronting the nation. Most emphasis has always been placed on the conduct of law enforcement agencies but not enough is being said about ways in which the media, judiciary, and state response to security challenges have in one way or the other by some of their actions also constituted threats to national security. Again, a careful study of the activities of criminal groups involved in insecurity also shows how vulnerable and unprofessional some of the country's law enforcement agencies have been in some instances over the years in effectively preventing and controlling crime.

However, the heightened consciousness and emphasis by security agencies, the media, and judiciary on the need to collaborate with each other in collectively maintaining law and order is still an ongoing process.

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