

HISTORICAL DRIVERS OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA AND ITS BEARING ON TODAY'S SECURITY CHALLENGES

Philip Mary Emenike Ayika, PhD

Department of Religious & Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

&

Brian Chinedu Onwurah

Institute for Peace, Conflict, Security and Development Studies

ESUT Business School, Enugu

Abstract

This paper explores the deep-rooted historical antecedents that have shaped Nigeria's contemporary security landscape. Tracing the origins of insecurity to colonial amalgamation, British administrative policies, and ethno-religious divisions, the study highlights how colonialism entrenched regional disparities, political fragmentation, and socio-economic imbalances. Post-independence, Nigeria's history of political instability, prolonged military rule, and economic mismanagement further compounded these issues. The paper examines how economic marginalization and underdevelopment—especially in the oil-rich but impoverished Niger Delta and the neglected North-East—have fueled militancy, insurgency, and religious extremism, exemplified by the rise of Boko Haram. Additionally, it addresses how colonial land policies and weak governance continue to drive farmer-herder conflicts, banditry, and secessionist movements. By linking historical events to current threats, the paper underscores the need for inclusive governance, equitable development, and historical reconciliation to achieve lasting security in Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has long grappled with complex security challenges. These challenges have evolved over decades, rooted in historical, socio-political, economic, and ethnic dynamics that predate its independence in 1960. Understanding the historical antecedents of insecurity is crucial to grasp the multifaceted and evolving nature of contemporary threats such as terrorism, banditry, communal clashes, and secessionist agitations. This paper explores the historical drivers of insecurity in Nigeria and how these factors have shaped the nation's current security landscape. For aggregation, it identifies colonial legacy and ethno-religious divisions, post-independence political instability and military rule, economic marginalization and Underdevelopment,

and religious extremism and the rise of Boko Haram as background to the contemporary security challenges.

Nigeria's contemporary insecurity, characterized by insurgencies, communal violence, and resource conflicts, is deeply rooted in its colonial history and ethno-religious divisions. The British colonial administration (1884–1960) established political, economic, and social structures that exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions, which persist in Nigeria's post-independence governance. Colonial legacies and politicized ethno-religious identities continue to drive instability. One of the fundamental historical contributors to insecurity in Nigeria is the colonial amalgamation of diverse ethnic and cultural groups into a single political entity. The British colonial administration's decision in 1914 to amalgamate the Northern and Southern Protectorates was largely administrative and failed to account for the deep ethnic, cultural, and religious differences among Nigeria's over 250 ethnic groups (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This artificial union laid the groundwork for persistent ethno-religious tensions. The policy of indirect rule also contributed to unequal development and regional disparities, particularly between the North and South, fostering mistrust and competition for political dominance post-independence (Osaghae, 1998). The long-standing mistrust among ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo has periodically manifested in violent conflicts, including the Biafran War (1967–1970), and continues to fuel contemporary secessionist agitations like those of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

In the latter history, the Nigeria's post-independence era has been characterized by frequent political upheavals, military coups, and a general lack of political continuity. These disruptions significantly hindered democratic consolidation, undermined institutional development, and contributed to a legacy of insecurity. Military regimes, which dominated Nigerian politics for nearly three decades, not only eroded civil liberties but also institutionalized corruption and weakened state authority—conditions that continue to fuel insecurity today. This paper explores how political instability and prolonged military rule after independence have driven insecurity in Nigeria.

Economic marginalization and underdevelopment are central to understanding the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Despite being one of Africa's largest economies and a major oil producer, Nigeria is plagued by high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. These socio-economic challenges have contributed significantly to widespread insecurity, fueling insurgency, militancy, banditry, and communal violence. This paper in effect, also examines how economic marginalization and underdevelopment—especially regional imbalances and the mismanagement of natural resources—have contributed to Nigeria's security challenges.

Religious extremism of late is the most significant threats to Nigeria's national security. Among the most potent expressions of this threat is the rise of Boko Haram, a jihadist terrorist organization that has wreaked havoc across northeastern Nigeria and neighboring regions. The group's violent ideology, attacks on civilians, and confrontation with the Nigerian state have destabilized large swathes of the country. the historical and socio-economic conditions that led to the emergence of Boko Haram, and how religious extremism fuels its operations, and the broader implications for insecurity in Nigeria. This has festered from insurgency and terrorism in the North-East, to banditry in the North-West, herder-farmer conflicts in the Middle Belt, and separatist agitations in the South-East, insecurity has become a defining feature of contemporary Nigeria. However, these threats are not isolated developments; they are deeply rooted in the nation's historical trajectory. Understanding Nigeria's current security crises requires a critical look at the political, economic, and social foundations laid during the colonial and post-independence periods.

The rest of the paper expounds the foregoing historic drivers. It is organized as follows: Section 2 expands more on the colonial legacy and ethno-religious division, Section 3 discusses post-independence and the role of the military, Section 4 discusses economic marginalization and underdevelopment, Section 5 discusses religious intolerance and the rise of Boko Haram. These drivers interplay to culminate in the current spate of insecurity in Nigeria which has included banditry and kidnapping, genocide and ethnic cleansing of the citizens of the middle-belt regions of Nigeria.

Colonial Legacy and Ethno-Religious Divisions as a Driver of Insecurity in Nigeria

The colonial legacy of Nigeria has played a central role in shaping the country's persistent ethno-religious tensions, which have evolved into a key driver of insecurity in contemporary times. The British colonial administration amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 without regard for the cultural, religious, and ethnic distinctions of the indigenous peoples. This artificial unification laid the groundwork for a deeply divided and often antagonistic society (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Prior to colonization, the various regions that make up modern-day Nigeria operated autonomously with distinct political systems, social institutions, and religious practices. The North was predominantly Muslim, influenced by the Sokoto Caliphate, while the South was largely composed of Christianized and traditional religious communities. The British colonial administration's indirect rule system allowed Islamic emirs in the North to maintain significant control while Christian missionary activity was restricted there, intensifying the religious divide (Osaghae, 1998).

The administrative and economic policies of the colonial government also deepened regional disparities. For example, Western education and infrastructural development were more prevalent in the South, particularly in the Yoruba and Igbo regions, whereas the North lagged behind due to restrictions on Western education and missionary activities. These imbalances laid the foundation for post-independence political struggles and mutual suspicion among ethnic and religious groups (Akinyele, 2001). The lack of a shared national identity, fostered by colonial favoritism and divide-and-rule tactics, has resulted in persistent competition among ethnic and religious groups for access to political power and economic resources. This rivalry frequently manifests in violent clashes, especially during elections or resource disputes. For example, tensions between Muslim Hausa-Fulani communities and Christian ethnic minorities in the Middle Belt have fueled long-standing communal violence in states like Plateau, Benue, and Kaduna (Suberu, 2001).

Moreover, post-independence governance structures inherited from colonialism have struggled to manage Nigeria's diversity effectively. The failure to establish inclusive institutions that promote equitable representation has continued to exacerbate insecurity. Ethno-religious militias, such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and Arewa People's Congress, have emerged in response to real or perceived marginalization, contributing to further instability (Ibeanu, 2005). In effect, the colonial legacy of amalgamation without integration, coupled with policies that entrenched ethnic and religious cleavages, continues to shape Nigeria's insecurity landscape. Addressing these historical injustices through national reconciliation, inclusive governance, and equitable development is critical to achieving sustainable peace.

Colonial legacy can further be espoused by considering how it has fragmented the polity, exploited the economy, and divided the society. The British amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, merging disparate ethnic and religious groups under a centralized but fractious administration. Indirect Rule, applied asymmetrically, entrenched pre-existing hierarchies in the Muslim North while marginalizing minority groups in the South and Middle Belt (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This created a bifurcated governance system, fostering distrust between regions (Mamdani, 1996). Post-independence, these structures centralized power among elites, perpetuating exclusion and competition (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

In terms of economic exploitation, colonial emphasis on cash crops (e.g., palm oil, cocoa) and mineral extraction entrenched a resource-dependent economy. Infrastructure investments were concentrated in the South, exacerbating regional disparities. Post-independence, oil wealth in the Niger Delta became a source of conflict, as colonial-era

neglect of local governance allowed environmental degradation and marginalization to fuel militancy (Obi, 2009).

Colonial "divide-and-rule" tactics politicized identity. Missionary education in the South contrasted with the North's Islamic conservatism, deepening religious divides (Mustapha, 2014). The 1954 constitution institutionalized regionalism, embedding competition for federal resources along ethnic lines (Nolte, 2007). Post-independence leaders weaponized colonial-era divisions. The federal character principle, intended to ensure equitable representation, instead incentivized patronage politics along ethnic lines (Osaghae, 1998). Religious identity became a political tool; for example, the 1999 Sharia crisis in Northern states reignited sectarian tensions (International Crisis Group, 2010). Competition over land, jobs, and political representation often manifests as violence between Muslim herders and Christian farmers, or separatist movements like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

The following illustrate the issues and challenges occasioned by the foregoing. The Boko Haram Insurgency. The group's rise reflects Northern marginalization stemming from colonial-era underdevelopment and post-independence corruption. Poverty and lack of education—legacies of Indirect Rule—create fertile ground for radicalization (Higazi, 2016). The Farmer-Herder Conflicts more recently, is another case in point. Colonial land policies disrupted traditional pastoralist routes, while post-independence population growth and climate change intensified competition. Over 60% of conflict deaths in Nigeria (2015–2020) stemmed from these clashes (Mercy Corps, 2020). And the last one is the Niger Delta Militancy. Colonial extractive economies laid the groundwork for environmental harm and economic neglect. Militant groups like MEND emerged from grievances over oil revenue sharing, echoing colonial resource exploitation (Collier, 2007). These matters will be expanded in Section 6.

Post-Independence Political Instability and Military Rule

The post-independence era in Nigeria was marked by political instability, military coups, and civil war. The first military coup in 1966 and the subsequent counter-coup intensified ethnic animosity, particularly between the North and South. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) left deep scars and unresolved grievances, especially among the Igbo people (Madiebo, 1980). Military rule, which spanned almost three decades, further entrenched corruption, weakened democratic institutions, and politicized the security apparatus (Agbese, 2001). The lack of accountability and impunity during this era eroded public trust in the state and laid the foundation for criminality and lawlessness, which continue to plague Nigeria today.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country experienced a brief democratic experiment that was quickly derailed by ethnic rivalries, electoral violence, and systemic corruption. The First Republic (1963–1966) was marred by allegations of electoral fraud, especially during the 1964 general elections and the 1965 Western Region elections, which led to widespread unrest and ultimately the first military coup in January 1966 (Joseph, 1987). The coup, carried out predominantly by Igbo officers, heightened ethnic tensions, particularly in the North, leading to a counter-coup and the massacre of thousands of Igbo civilians in the North (Uche, 2008). This sequence of events directly triggered the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), a brutal conflict that caused over a million deaths and left deep scars in the Nigerian socio-political fabric. The war entrenched mutual suspicion between ethnic groups and established a precedent for violent responses to political grievances.

Military Rule and Its Impact on Security

From 1966 to 1999, Nigeria was governed by military regimes for all but four years. These regimes centralized power, suspended democratic processes, and weakened institutional checks and balances. Though some military governments pursued infrastructural development, most were marked by authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and mismanagement (Agbese, 2001). One significant consequence of military rule was the politicization of the armed forces. Rather than being professional and apolitical institutions, the military became enmeshed in governance and patronage networks. This compromised their effectiveness and legitimacy in addressing internal security threats (Ihonvbere, 1991). Additionally, military regimes failed to invest adequately in police reform and local governance structures, creating a vacuum in internal security management that persists to this day. Moreover, military governments frequently suppressed dissent through violence. For example, the regime of General Sani Abacha (1993–1998) is infamous for its brutal crackdown on opposition groups and civil society activists, including the execution of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. These repressive tactics eroded public trust in the state and normalized the use of violence to settle disputes (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Legacy of Political Instability and Insecurity

The consequences of prolonged military rule have endured well into Nigeria's current democratic era. Fragile institutions, endemic corruption, and a lack of public accountability have undermined governance and service delivery, especially in conflict-prone areas. Groups such as Boko Haram in the North-East and various secessionist and militant movements across the country have emerged partly as a response to decades of

marginalization, poor governance, and state violence—conditions rooted in Nigeria’s authoritarian past (Adesoji, 2010). Furthermore, military regimes exacerbated Nigeria’s “winner-takes-all” political culture, where access to state power is equated with access to wealth and privilege. This zero-sum mindset fuels violent electoral competition and ethnic polarization, both of which continue to be major drivers of insecurity during democratic transitions (Suberu, 2001). The poor military accountability occasioned

Economic Marginalization and Underdevelopment

The mismanagement of Nigeria’s oil wealth has also been a significant driver of insecurity. The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in the late 1950s created an economic monoculture that marginalized other sectors, particularly agriculture, which had been the backbone of regional economies. Despite being the source of national revenue, the Niger Delta remained underdeveloped, with high poverty and unemployment rates (Watts, 2004). This economic injustice spurred militancy in the region, exemplified by the rise of groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the early 2000s. The group's activities included pipeline vandalism, kidnapping of oil workers, and attacks on security forces. Although an amnesty program in 2009 curtailed some of the violence, underlying grievances remain unresolved.

The Nature of Economic Marginalization in Nigeria

Economic marginalization in Nigeria is largely regional and ethnic in character. Since independence, developmental policies and resource allocations have disproportionately favored certain areas, often dictated by political power rather than equitable planning. The northern region, despite its political dominance at different times, lags behind in educational attainment, healthcare, and infrastructure, while the oil-rich Niger Delta remains environmentally degraded and underdeveloped despite generating the majority of national revenue (Watts, 2008). Marginalized communities often perceive the central government as exploitative and unresponsive to their needs. This perception is particularly strong in the Niger Delta, where communities suffer the environmental consequences of oil extraction—polluted rivers, farmlands, and air—without commensurate benefits (Okonta& Douglas, 2001). Such economic exclusion has led to resentment, protests, and, eventually, violent militancy.

Underdevelopment and the Rise of Militancy and Criminality

The combination of poverty and lack of opportunities has made marginalized regions breeding grounds for criminality and violence. In the Niger Delta, the rise of groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta

Avengers was directly linked to the frustration over environmental degradation, unemployment, and lack of development (Ikelegbe, 2005). These groups engaged in pipeline vandalism, kidnapping of oil workers, and armed confrontations with the state. Similarly, the North-East region of Nigeria, which suffers from the highest poverty and illiteracy rates in the country, became fertile ground for the emergence of Boko Haram. The insurgent group gained traction by exploiting local grievances against perceived neglect and poverty, offering both ideological and material incentives to unemployed and disillusioned youth (Adesoji, 2010). The resulting violence has devastated the region, displaced millions and further worsening the economic situation. In the North-West, banditry and rural violence are linked to the failure of the state to address poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. Criminal groups operate freely in many ungoverned spaces, attacking villages, abducting schoolchildren, and looting communities (International Crisis Group, 2020). These criminal activities are often economically motivated, and are a direct consequence of state neglect and socio-economic decay.

Government Policies and Economic Inequities

Successive Nigerian governments have launched numerous development initiatives, such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). However, these efforts have been largely undermined by corruption, lack of transparency, and poor implementation (Ibaba, 2008). Rather than alleviating poverty or addressing grievances, many of these programs have become sources of elite capture and further marginalization. The failure to diversify the economy has also exacerbated underdevelopment. Over-reliance on oil has neglected other sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, which historically provided employment and economic stability. This mono-economic structure leaves the country vulnerable to oil price shocks and contributes to regional economic disparities, especially in non-oil-producing regions (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013).

Linking Economic Injustice to Insecurity

There is a clear linkage between economic exclusion and insecurity. Marginalized communities, feeling alienated from the state, are more susceptible to insurgent ideologies and criminal enterprise. The lack of state presence in many rural and economically backward areas has created power vacuums filled by non-state actors—militias, insurgents, and criminal gangs—who provide alternative governance through violence, intimidation, or provision of services. Moreover, economic grievances are increasingly being framed in ethno-regional and religious terms, thereby compounding Nigeria's

already fragile national cohesion. As economic inequality intersects with identity politics, the risk of violent conflict escalates.

Religious Extremism and the Rise of Boko Haram

The emergence of Boko Haram in the early 2000s marked a new and deadly phase of insecurity in Nigeria. Rooted in the socio-economic disenfranchisement of northern Nigeria, the group capitalized on widespread poverty, youth unemployment, and distrust of state institutions to recruit followers (Adesoji, 2010). Boko Haram's campaign of terror, including bombings, assassinations, and mass abductions, has claimed thousands of lives and displaced millions. The Nigerian state's initial underestimation of the group, coupled with inadequate military response and allegations of human rights abuses by security forces, allowed the insurgency to fester. Today, Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), remain significant threats, with operations extending into neighboring countries.

Origins and Ideological Foundations of Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, was founded in the early 2000s by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State. The group opposes Western education, secular governance, and democratic institutions, which it views as corrupting Islamic values. The term "Boko Haram" loosely translates to "Western education is forbidden" (Adesoji, 2010). The ideological roots of Boko Haram lie in Salafist-jihadist interpretations of Islam that advocate for a return to a puritanical form of Islamic governance. Yusuf attracted many followers, especially disenfranchised youth in the North-East, by preaching against state corruption, poverty, and social injustice—all framed within a religious narrative (Walker, 2012). His ability to mix religious rhetoric with populist grievances made Boko Haram more than just a religious movement—it became a socio-political insurgency.

Factors behind the Rise of Religious Extremism

Several interrelated factors enabled religious extremism to flourish in northeastern Nigeria. The region has historically lagged in terms of education, healthcare, and infrastructure. High levels of poverty and youth unemployment created a large pool of vulnerable individuals susceptible to radicalization (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014). The state's failure to provide basic services and effective governance allowed extremist ideologies to fill the void. Additionally, the heavy-handed response of Nigerian security forces to Boko Haram's early activities escalated the situation. The extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf in police custody in 2009 and the massacre of many of his followers

further radicalized the group, transforming it from a fringe religious sect into a full-blown terrorist insurgency (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Impact on National Security

Since its transformation into an armed insurgency, Boko Haram has been responsible for tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of over two million people. The group's activities have included mass abductions (e.g., the 2014 kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls), suicide bombings, village raids, and attacks on religious and government institutions (Zenn, 2014). Boko Haram's insurgency has severely strained Nigeria's security apparatus. The group's operations have also spilled across borders into Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, necessitating a regional military response under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Despite military efforts, Boko Haram continues to pose a threat through its offshoots, particularly the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which remains active and even more strategically organized.

Religious Division and Social Polarization

Beyond physical violence, Boko Haram has exacerbated religious polarization in Nigeria. Nigeria is roughly evenly divided between Muslims in the North and Christians in the South. The insurgency has fueled mutual suspicion between religious communities, especially in mixed regions like the Middle Belt. Attacks on churches, mosques, and religious leaders by Boko Haram have deepened sectarian tensions, sometimes provoking retaliatory violence (Onapajo & Usman, 2015). Furthermore, the group has undermined moderate Islamic institutions and leaders, who are often targeted for assassination. This has created a chilling effect, silencing voices that might otherwise counter extremist narratives.

Contemporary Security Challenges and Their Historical Roots

Today's security challenges in Nigeria are multifaceted and complex but deeply intertwined with or rather caused by the forementioned historical drivers. The ongoing farmer-herder conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt, are exacerbated by climate change, land pressure, and ethnic tensions—a continuation of historical competition over land and resources (International Crisis Group, 2017). Similarly, the rise in banditry and kidnapping, especially in the Northwest, reflects decades of state neglect, poor policing, and proliferation of arms. These issues are not new but are symptoms of a weakened state apparatus and failure to address the root causes of violence. Moreover, secessionist movements in the South-East and renewed calls for restructuring of the federation are

driven by long-standing feelings of marginalization and the unaddressed consequences of past conflicts.

Boko Haram and the Legacy of Religious and Economic Marginalization

Today, the rise of Boko Haram in the North-East is perhaps the most internationally recognized security threat in Nigeria. The group's violent insurgency, which began in 2009, has caused over 30,000 deaths and displaced more than 2 million people (International Crisis Group, 2016). The group emerged in Borno State, a region historically underdeveloped and neglected by both colonial and post-independence governments. Colonial-era policies limited Western education and economic investment in the Muslim North, fearing it would disrupt Islamic traditions and established emirate systems (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Post-independence governments continued to prioritize resource-rich or politically dominant regions, leading to entrenched economic inequality. This marginalization created fertile ground for radical ideologies, especially among unemployed and disenfranchised youth (Adesoji, 2010).

Banditry and Rural Insecurity in the North-West

Banditry in Nigeria's North-West has become a major concern in recent years, with armed groups kidnapping civilians, looting villages, and confronting security forces. While often portrayed as criminal in nature, this violence has deep historical roots. The collapse of traditional pastoral economies, proliferation of small arms, and erosion of customary conflict resolution systems have created lawless zones. Historically, colonial indirect rule reinforced Hausa-Fulani dominance while marginalizing nomadic Fulani herders. Climate change and desertification have further exacerbated these tensions, leading to violent clashes over land and resources (International Crisis Group, 2020). The failure of state institutions to provide security or economic opportunity has allowed criminal networks to flourish.

Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Colonial Land Policies

The Middle Belt region has become a hotspot for violent clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. These conflicts are often presented as purely ethnic or religious but are rooted in colonial and postcolonial land tenure systems. British colonial authorities introduced formal land ownership systems that undermined indigenous land-use arrangements and exacerbated competition for arable land (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Post-independence land reforms failed to accommodate the mobility needs of pastoralists, further aggravating disputes. The absence of an effective conflict resolution mechanism

has allowed these local disputes to escalate into deadly conflicts, often framed along ethnic or religious lines.

Secessionist Movements and the Legacy of Civil War

The resurgence of separatist sentiments, particularly in the South-East through groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), is another key dimension of Nigeria's contemporary security challenges. These movements are fueled by perceived political and economic marginalization and have historical roots in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The war, which followed the attempted secession of Biafra, resulted in over a million deaths and left deep scars, especially among the Igbo people. Many grievances, including lack of political representation, uneven infrastructure development, and targeted violence, remain unresolved (Madiebo, 1980; Suberu, 2001). The state's militarized response to peaceful protests and agitation often exacerbates tensions, pushing groups further toward radicalization.

Militancy in the Niger Delta and the Resource Control Debate

Militant activities in the oil-rich Niger Delta stem from decades of environmental degradation, poverty, and economic exploitation. Despite contributing the majority of Nigeria's export earnings, the region suffers from extreme underdevelopment and pollution due to unchecked oil extraction (Watts, 2008). The colonial discovery of oil shifted the country's economic focus to the Delta, but without investing in the welfare of its inhabitants. Post-independence regimes centralized control of oil revenues, stripping local communities of resource rights. This exclusion laid the groundwork for violent militancy in the 1990s and early 2000s, with groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) engaging in sabotage and kidnapping (Ikelegbe, 2005). Although the 2009 amnesty program reduced hostilities, the underlying issues remain.

Conclusion

This paper concerns identifying historic drivers of current spate of insecurity in Nigeria. The insecurity Nigeria faces today cannot be understood in isolation from its historical context. The colonial legacy, political instability, economic marginalization, and religious extremism are deeply embedded in the country's past and continue to influence its present. Addressing Nigeria's security challenges requires not only tactical and military solutions but also political, economic, and social reforms aimed at healing historical wounds and promoting inclusive development. Nigeria's insecurity in terms of legacy of colonial institutions that prioritized control over cohesion and entrenched ethno-religious

divisions; addressing these issues requires decentralizing power, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive governance. Reforms must confront colonial-era frameworks to foster national integration. The trajectory of Nigeria's post-independence political development reveals a strong correlation between political instability, military rule, and contemporary insecurity. Military regimes weakened democratic institutions, politicized the security sector, and sowed seeds of distrust among the populace. Even in the current democratic dispensation, the legacy of these regimes persists in the form of weak governance structures, an overstretched security apparatus, and unresolved ethno-political grievances. Addressing Nigeria's security challenges requires a deliberate effort to strengthen democratic institutions, depoliticize the military, and rebuild public trust in the state.

Economic marginalization and underdevelopment as potent drivers of insecurity in Nigeria fuel grievances, foster alienation, and create environments conducive to violence, militancy, and insurgency. Addressing these challenges requires more than security crackdowns; it demands inclusive economic policies, equitable resource distribution, infrastructure development, job creation, and anti-corruption reforms. A secure Nigeria cannot be achieved without tackling the structural economic imbalances that continue to alienate large segments of its population. Economic marginalization has been manifest since the 1966 coups and countercoups. Not too long ago, the rise of Boko Haram underscores how religious extremism, when combined with socio-economic deprivation and state failure, can produce profound insecurity. The group's violent insurgency has claimed thousands of lives, destabilized the North-East region, and damaged Nigeria's international reputation. A comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy must go beyond military force to include de-radicalization, poverty alleviation, education, and religious dialogue. Combating religious extremism in Nigeria requires addressing the root causes of radicalization and rebuilding trust between communities and the state.

In effect, Nigeria's contemporary security challenges are deeply intertwined with its historical evolution. Colonial legacies, political exclusion, economic marginalization, and unresolved ethno-regional tensions have all contributed to the complex insecurity landscape seen today. Addressing these challenges requires not just tactical military solutions, but comprehensive reforms aimed at promoting inclusive governance, equitable development, historical reconciliation, and the restoration of public trust in state institutions.

References

- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why Nations Fail*. Crown Business.
- Adesoji, A. (2010). The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria. *Africa Spectrum*, 45(2), 95–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971004500205>
- Agbese, D. (2001). *Nigeria: The Report Card of the Military Rule*. Newswatch Books.
- Akinyele, R. T. (2001). *Ethnic Militancy and National Stability in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Oodua People's Congress*. *African Affairs*, 100(401), 623–640.
- Collier, P. (2007). *The Bottom Billion*. Oxford University Press.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.
- Higazi, A. (2016). Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts in Nigeria. *African Affairs*.
- Human Rights Watch. (1999). *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Communities*. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/nigeria/>
- Human Rights Watch. (2010). *Nigeria: Police Killings of Boko Haram Members*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/07/27/nigeria-police-killings-boko-haram-members>
- Ibaba, S. I. (2008). *Alienation and Militancy in the Niger Delta: Hostage Taking and the Dilemma of the Nigerian State*. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 8(2), 11–34.
- Ibeanu, O. (2005). *Civil Society and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta*. *Journal of Civil Society*, 1(1), 21–42.
- Ihonvbere, J. O. (1991). *The Military and Nigerian Society: A Political Economy of Civil-Military Relations, 1966–1990*. In *The Military and the Crisis of Democratization in Africa*.
- Ikelegbe, A. (2005). *The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria*. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(2), 208–234.
- Ikelegbe, A. (2005). The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(2), 208–234.
- International Crisis Group. (2010). *Nigeria: Seizing the Moment*.
- International Crisis Group. (2016). *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/boko-haram-back-foot>
- International Crisis Group. (2017). *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict>
- International Crisis Group. (2020). *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>
- International Crisis Group. (2020). *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>

- Joseph, R. (1987). *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Madiebo, A. (1980). *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Fourth Dimension Publishing.
- Madiebo, A. (1980). *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Fourth Dimension Publishing.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton University Press.
- Mustapha, A. R. (2014). *Beyond the Religious–Secular Binary*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nolte, I. (2007). Ethnicity and the Future of Nigeria. *Journal of African History*.
- Obi, C. (2009). Oil and Conflict in Nigeria. CODESRIA.
- Okoli, A. C., & Atelhe, G. A. (2014). Nomads Against Natives: A Political Ecology of Herder/Farmer Conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(2), 76–88.
- Okonta, I., & Douglas, O. (2001). *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club Books.
- Onapajo, H., & Usman, A. (2015). Fuelling the Flames: Boko Haram and Deteriorating Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 35(1), 106–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2015.1007667>
- Osaghae, E. E. (1998). *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*. Indiana University Press.
- Pérouse de Montclos, M. A. (2014). *Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency? Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis*. Chatham House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20140901BokoHaramPerousededeMontclos.pdf
- Sala-i-Martin, X., & Subramanian, A. (2013). *Addressing the Natural Resource Curse: An Illustration from Nigeria*. *Journal of African Economies*, 22(4), 570–615.
- Suberu, R. T. (2001). *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Uche, C. (2008). *Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War*. *The Journal of African History*, 49(1), 111–135.
- Walker, A. (2012). *What is Boko Haram?* United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/05/what-boko-haram>
- Watts, M. (2004). *Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria*. *Geopolitics*, 9(1), 50–80.
- Watts, M. (2008). *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*. PowerHouse Books.
- Zenn, J. (2014). Boko Haram: Recruitment, Financing, and Arms Trafficking in the Lake Chad Region. *CTC Sentinel*, 7(10), 5–9.