

RELIGIOUS CONCERN ON THE JAPA SYNDROME IN NIGERIA: ASSESSMENT OF ITS DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Benjamin Chukwunonso Nwokocha & Emmanuel Ikechukwu Ajakor
Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

This paper explored how religion vis-à-vis the church should show concern on the issue that borders on the Japa syndrome in Nigeria. The principal findings of the study observed how governance and non-governance indicators have a bearing on the japa syndrome in Nigeria using annual data from the World Bank, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) from 1996 to 2021. Having found the variables to be free from unit root problems using the Augmented Dickey-Fuller Test and bounds test for long run relationship, both the short run and long run relationships were estimated using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag modeling approach. Variables of interest were Net Migration as a proxy for japa which is a dependent variable and the explanatory variables were population of Nigeria, youth unemployment rate, inflation rate, political stability and absence of violence terrorism index and government effectiveness index. The short run model revealed that the lag values of net migration have positive significant influence on the current levels of japa. Equally, inflation was found as a significant predictor of japa in the short run. In the long run, it was found that, all the explanatory variables constitute serious push factors for japa in Nigeria except for political stability index which has a negative and significant influence on japa. The study, however, recommends that, religion vis-à-vis the church should be concerned on the matter and should collaborate with the government by doubling its efforts towards controlling inflation, and youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Keywords: Japa; Syndrome; Assessment; Determinants; Consequences

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a surge in a phenomenon colloquially known as “Japa Syndrome.” The term “Japa” derives from Nigerian slang, meaning to escape or flee, often to seek a perceived better life abroad. While migration is a natural part of human history, the scale and implications of this modern exodus are worth examining. This article delves into the far-reaching effects of the Japa Syndrome on work and family situations in Nigeria.

There has been a massive migration in the number of persons desperately leaving Nigeria to seek for greener pastures abroad. This movement has met some indelible consequences one of which being a brain drain and loss of talents in the country. Due to the poor conditions of living in the country, it has been observed that many Nigerians have tended to seek better conditions of living in the developed countries. This trend has made popular the cliché known as 'japa'. Etymologically, Japa is a slang Yoruba word commonly used by the Nigerian youths to mean fleeing or escaping from the Nigerian shores. The quest to leave Nigeria by all means and anyhow may not be unconnected with the issues of high level of unemployment, high cost of living and poor quality of governance in Nigeria. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2017) reported that the labour force in Nigeria expands beyond 2.6 million every year. Consequently, unemployment rate has remained in double digits for over a decade with an average unemployment rate of 18.15% from

2000 to 2019 (NBS, 2020). At the end of 2020, Nigeria's unemployment rate of 27.1% surpassed the global and the African rates by over 20% thereby casting some doubts on the performance of the various job creation programmes of successive Nigerian governments over the years (Asue, 2022). However, the high cost of living in Nigeria is also increasingly causing a high level of inflation in the country. Statistics show that for over two decades, Nigeria's inflation rates have mostly remained in double digits. For instance, it was 13.72% in 2010 and did not go below 8% only to rise more than twice the value of 9.02% in 2015 to 18.55% in 2016 (NBS, 2017). In 2017, Nigeria's inflation rate slid to 16.5% and kept a downward turn in 2018 and 2019 to remain at 12.09% and 11.4% respectively. In 2020 Nigeria's inflation rate rose back to 12.88% thereby forcing the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) to be retained at 13.5% since the single inflation targets of 6% to 9% were consistently not met (Emefiele, 2020). By August 2023, Nigeria's inflation rate stood at 25.80% based on all items year on change (CBN, 2023); incidentally, combined effects of high unemployment and inflation (as a proxy for cost of living may be tamed by good public policies of the government. This can be attributed to poor governance in Nigeria which is visibly marked with un-implementable government policies. (Ikyator, 2022). For World Bank (2021), Nigeria ranks so low on all the six good governance indicators which range between -2.25 (low) to 2.25 (high). These indicators include control of corruption index, government effectiveness index, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism index, regulatory quality index, rule of law index and voice and accountability index. Unfortunately, Nigeria has scored far below zero over time in all of these indicators of good governance thereby clearly depicting the country as suffering from poor governance.

In further assessment of the determinants to Japa syndrome in Nigeria, the issue of poverty and poor human development has sparked serious research interest with its negative effects on the country's economy. For instance, Offor, Egbulonu, Ikwuemezie, and Njoku (2022) employed autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) model approach to study the relationship between unemployment and human capital flight in Nigeria between 1990 and 2020 with particular interest on recruitment of Nigerian medical doctors by the government of Saudi Arabia. The findings underscores that even though Nigerian medical doctors hardly suffer problems of unemployment, they are, however, poorly remunerated as compared with their counterparts in the developed nations. This can as well be attributed to poor governance associated with poor human and material development. Thus this study used an autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) model approach with a dynamic model to assess the short and long run implications of poor governance, high level of unemployment and high cost of living in Nigeria as major determinants on the japa syndrome.

Research Methodology

The data employed for this study were annual time series on Nigeria population (POP), Net Migration (NTM), Political Stability Index (PSI), Youth Unemployment Rate (YUN), Inflation Rate (INF) and Government Effectiveness Index (GEI), Inflation (INF), and youth unemployment rates (YUN) were sourced from the World Bank (2023) and while inflation was used as proxy for cost of living and it was measured as consumer price index; youth unemployment rate was measured as a percentage of total labour force and used as proxy for a push factor for persons to look for employment outside Nigeria. PSI and GEI were used as proxies for governance. This is because these two indices are more closely related to serving as stay or push factors for emigrants. Once the political atmosphere is not stable and prone to crisis, people will tend to flee just as when government policies are not effective. These two were measured as indices ranging from -2.25 to +2.25 where -2.25 indicates the least performance and -2.25 indicates the highest performance and they were also sourced from the World Bank. All the data sets were measured from 1996 to 2021 based on data availability.

Theoretical Review

Migration is primarily necessitated with economic reasons. Most migration occurs over short distances with longer or shorter journeys, often from agricultural to industrial areas. Ravenstein's Laws of Migration and Everett Lee's "Push-Pull Theory" both significantly contributed to the understanding of migration patterns and dynamics within population studies. Ravenstein's Laws, proposed in the late 19th century, provided a foundational framework for understanding migration patterns. Abacho, Doki and Ikyeator (2024) holds that cities tend to grow more due to migration rather than natural population increase. Studies have shown that migration increases in correlation with industrial, commercial, and transport development. Each migration stream generates a counter flow or return migration. Females exhibit more migratory behavior over short distances, while males dominate international migration. Economic causes are fundamental drivers of migration. Ravenstein's laws paved the way for comprehensive studies on various factors influencing migration, including industrialization, gender, race, education, labor force dynamics, and more. However, studies often focused on migrant characteristics are given for such reasons as the upward movement of migrants to a better and more promising destination. In contrast, Everett Lee's Push-Pull Theory, introduced in the mid-20th century, sought to formalize a theoretical framework explaining the volume of migration between origin and destination based on sociological principles. In summary, Lee identified certain categories of factors influencing migration decisions. These reasons could be reasons that push individuals away from an area and can equally constitute factors that attract individuals to a specific area at a given time.

Empirical Studies on the Determinants of the Japa syndrome of Nigerians

Considering the endeavours of greater percentage Nigerian citizens who exit daily from their country's border are quite alarming, it would take a great deal of patriotism for one not to succumb to the temptation of following suit, with the hope of a better life, once the opportunity presents itself (Ajakor and Nwokocha, 2024). In the relatively recent past, the Nigerian Monetary Highest Point Gathering projected the joblessness rate in Nigeria to increase to 37 percent in 2023 while the United Kingdom is offering a decent yearly compensation to Nigerians able to relocate there and work as educators. The immediate consequence is the significant depletion of skilled and semi-skilled labour from various sectors in Nigeria. Industries in healthcare, engineering, information technology, and education are the hardest hit, with the mass exodus of some of the best skilled professionals. Such critical industries have been left to grapple with personnel shortages, hindering progress and development in the quantity and quality of productivity, due to the brain drain impacts.

According to Okunade and Awosusi (2023), many Nigerians have found their way into foreign lands through the study channel. Over the years, many have used educational platform to japa from Nigeria. Notably, since the process allows and accommodates immediate family members as dependents, many Nigerians have found it a more effective pathway and escape route to overcome poverty, under/unemployment, security threats and other challenges facing an average Nigerian. Bashorun (2023) researched migration trajectories in Nigeria with a case study on high-skilled youth. He aimed to understand why young Nigerian citizens are emigrating from the country. Using the qualitative approach through a structured interview method, it was revealed that education and employment are the primary reasons youths migrate. Other factors such as political freedom, adequate living and exposure are the secondary factors in emigration. The study also showed that although these youths are aware of the consequences that come with emigration and the issue of immigration policies, they still choose to embark in emigration despite all odds. Duru (2021) examined the leading causes and consequences of international migration in Nigeria. In the opinions of 100 respondents selected through the purposive sampling technique revealed that the

principal causes and consequences of International migration in Nigeria are necessitated by unemployment, poor working conditions, insecurity, and poor remunerations; these foremost causes of International migration in Nigeria was primarily due to economic factors. Furthermore, the findings showed that the effects of international migration in Nigeria had negative consequences such as brain drain and loss of talents. These consequences range from economic, social to political conditions. Consequently, Popogbe and Adeosun (2020) carried out an empirical analysis of the human and capital development as determining factors for Japa syndrome in Nigeria. Using secondary data from 1990 to 2019, they looked at the relationship between human and capital development as indicators for international emigration. Other variables such as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, population growth rate and Nigeria's unemployment rate are also considered. The auto-regressive lag model (ARDL) was adopted to estimate the empirical relationship among these variables. The results suggested a positive relationship exists between population growth and migration rates. A negative relationship was, however, observed between life expectancy and migration rate. The study also found that an increase in the infant mortality rate negatively impacted migration significantly. Therefore, an increase in the infant mortality rate lowered the migration rate. Finally, an increase in the unemployment rate increased migration; however, insignificantly.

Assessing the impact of migration on the economy of Nigeria, Adedokun and Karzanova (2019) examined recent trends in migration and opined that Underdevelopment is a symptom and a cause of migration not only in Nigeria but also in many developing countries across the globe. For Nigeria to drastically discourage its citizens from moving out of the country it should, first and foremost, solve the problems or issues that make people migrate. This could be done by proportionately translating the country's economic growth to developmental projects, such as providing infrastructural facilities, ensuring the security of lives and properties, providing better jobs and equal chances to the youths, promoting gender equality and reducing high population growth rates through family planning or other birth control measures (Asue, 2022). Omonijo, Obiajulu, Nnedum and Ezeokana (2011) delved into understanding the escalation of brain drain in Nigeria from a poor leadership point of view. The objective of the study was to find out if there was a relationship between poor leadership in Nigeria and the escalation of brain drain. Primary data were used. Simple percentages and ranking methods were used to analyze the data. Chi-square was used to test its hypothesis, and the result indicated that there is a relationship between poor leadership of the country and brain drain. It revealed that students were interested in travelling out of the country to developed societies after their studies. The findings of the study further identified some causes of brain drain, which included mass unemployment, poor salaries and poor conditions of service, mass poverty, and religious and communal crises. The study also identified some effects of brain drain on the nation's economy, including loss of human capital assets to manage various institutions in the country and loss of tax of migrated workforce to foreign countries. Solutions proffered included good leadership, improved worker salary structure, and good service conditions. Dimkpa (2019) used a qualitative research design, four migrants from Nigeria who had travelled to Europe through the Libya-Mediterranean route and the Push and Pull methodological framework developed by Everett Lee to investigate the migration account of Nigerians that went to Europe through the Libya-Mediterranean route and stopped in Sweden. Based on the Push and Pull model of Everett Lee, this study specified the reasons why migrants from Nigeria travel to Europe through the Libya-Mediterranean route, how they ended up in Sweden, and their decision to seek asylum in Sweden rather than other economies in Europe. The findings revealed that insecurity, political instability, terrorism, and economic crisis are the factors that could motivate Nigerians to travel to Europe for a better life through the Libya-Mediterranean route. Relying on public opinion and focus group data obtained in West Africa through a descriptive research design, Kirwin and Anderson (2018) investigated the factors that cause West Africans to migrate. The study directed attention to Nigeria,

the country of origin for twenty-five per cent of all migrants from Africa travelling through the Central Mediterranean route. Respondents were drawn from six West African countries of Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. Economic factors were identified as the rationale for migration. However, family and patriotism were observed as reasons for respondents to desire to remain in their own countries. Evidence from the survey revealed that 50 per cent, 27 per cent and 27 per cent of Nigerians, Ivoirians and Senegalese, respectively, were interested in departing their countries of origin if given the opportunity. However, the number of Malians and Burkinabe that were also interested in emigrating if given the opportunity was less compared to Nigerians, Ivoirians and Senegalese. Furthermore, the findings showed that the class of Nigerians that were very likely to travel abroad were the urban and highly educated ones. From the role of religion in migration, Nigerian Muslims are less expected to desire to migrate abroad. In addition, the economic position did not exert a meaningful influence on the desire of Nigerians to migrate. Instead, the views of individuals on the strength of democracy in Nigeria are very strongly related to the desire of Nigerians to migrate abroad, followed by inadequate trust in indigenous security.

Challenges and Consequences of Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

The prevalence of the Japa Syndrome fosters an “exodus mentality” among Nigerian youths, whose newfound cherished value is finding greener pastures in the global north. Many grow up with dreams of escaping the perceived limitations of their homeland, seeking better opportunities elsewhere. This mentality often leads to a lack of commitment to local projects, as young talents view them as stepping stones rather than long-term investments (Duru, 2021 and Bashorun, 2023). As individuals depart due to the Japa Syndrome this may have a profound impact on family dynamics. The emotional toll on parents, siblings, and extended family members can be immense. Additionally, families are faced with the challenge of adapting to changes in roles and responsibilities, especially when a primary breadwinner leaves. This can lead to increased stress and strained relationships within the family unit and could also impact mental health significantly due to adjustment and adaptation challenges like loneliness, anxiety and depression. Additionally, there is a rise in empty-nest especially with older parents having to now leave alone with their children in faraway foreign lands. This has reduced the social support and daily interaction for parents and further isolates the already 'isolated nuclear family (Ajakor and Nwokocho, 2024).

While those who have “Japa” may find improved economic opportunities abroad, the financial support they send back home can sometimes foster a culture of dependency. Families left behind may come to rely heavily on remittances, potentially discouraging local economic initiatives and entrepreneurship. This can create a cycle of economic stagnation in communities heavily affected by the “Japa” Syndrome (Ikayaator 2022 and Asue, 2022).

The social and cultural consequences of Japa Syndrome has also brought about shifts in societal norms and values, example is a spouse leaving for foreign opportunities which can strain their relationship due to distance, cultural adjustments, and diverging life paths, leading to divorce or marital breakdown due to communication challenges, emotional distance and unmet expectations. Traditional family structures may be strained, with an increasing number of households headed by single parents or extended family members. Additionally, the loss of skilled professionals can hinder the transmission of cultural practices and indigenous knowledge, potentially eroding the rich tapestry of Nigeria's cultural heritage (Poppgbe and Adeosun, 2023).

Addressing the Japa Syndrome

Haven seen the grave consequences of Japa syndrome, it is necessary that the Nigerian government should take proactive measures to forestall the trend. To mitigate the impact of the Japa Syndrome,

concerted efforts are required at various levels. Government policies should focus on creating an enabling environment that encourages investment, innovation, and job creation. Additionally, there is a need for targeted programs to retain and attract skilled professionals. Providing opportunities for skill development and career advancement can help stem the tide of emigration (Dimkpa, 2019; Ajakor and Nwokocha, 2024). As the nation grapples with this modern exodus, it is imperative to implement comprehensive strategies that address the root causes and provide viable alternatives for the Nigerian youth. By fostering an environment of opportunity and growth, Nigeria can not only retain its valuable talent but also pave the way for a brighter, more prosperous future for all its citizens (Kirwin and Anderson 2018).

Religious concern towards Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

Religion can play a significant role in addressing the Japa syndrome in Nigeria. By taking a holistic approach, religion can play a vital role in addressing the Japa Syndrome and promoting the well-being of Nigerians. Emeghra (2013) is of the view that religious institutions can provide counseling and mentorship programs to help individuals especially the youth cope with the challenges of managing the conditions in Nigeria. Religious leaders can engage with their communities to identify needs and develop solutions, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility (Shin and Greenwood, 2014). There shall be an ad vocation for good governance, transparency, and accountability, which are essential for creating a conducive environment for citizens to thrive (Ajakor and Nwokocha, 2024). It is equally expected of the religious organizations to influence policy decisions that affect the lives of Nigerians, promoting policies that support economic growth, job creation, and social welfare. This can promote national unity, understanding, cooperation, and build a more cohesive and resilient society (Okunade and Awosusu, 2023). Above all, religious organizations can work to address poverty and inequality by providing support to vulnerable populations and advocating for policies that promote economic justice. This can as well be achieved by providing education and healthcare services, which are essential for human development and can help reduce the push factors driving the Japa Syndrome in Nigeria (Abacho, Doki and Ikyeator, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the empirical results, it can be concluded that the Japa syndrome in Nigeria is fast becoming a threat to the domestic economy. This is due to high population growth, high cost of living, high level of youth unemployment, and low levels of government ineffectiveness in engendering sound policies. The anomaly can be addressed if the following policy measures are adapted.

- i. The government at all levels must take deliberate actions towards reducing the level of population growth in Nigeria. This may reduce the pressure on the available resources in Nigeria and may reduce the level of Japa in the country.
- ii. To curtail the level of unemployment in Nigeria, the government and religious institutions in Nigeria should pay closer attention to technical education which enables graduates to venture into self-employment.
- iii. The monetary and fiscal policy authorities in Nigeria should find ways of reducing managing liquidity in the economy in a manner that inflation in Nigeria is reduced to less than double digit target to ease the cost of living.
- iv. The government effectiveness index is generally low and it implies that governance in Nigeria is ineffective and inefficient. Thus, the government must ensure that the laws of the land are obeyed to the letter and that the principle of the rule of law truly prevails in all facets of life in Nigeria.

- v. The government should also execute the war against terrorism and ensure political stability with every sense of commitment and sincerity. This will curtail the level of insecurity in the country that will attract more foreign investment and immigrants and curtail the level of emigration in Nigeria.

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