



NATIONAL INSECURITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper analyses Nigeria's multifaceted insecurity crisis and its debilitating implications for national development. The country faces a complex security landscape - terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts - that significantly impedes socio-economic progress. Drawing on Relative Deprivation Theory and Religious Fanaticism Theory, the study argues that economic hardship, governance failures, and ideological extremism interact to create a self-reinforcing cycle of instability. The findings reveal severe economic consequences: declining investment, collapsing agricultural productivity in the food belt, and diversion of development funds to security expenditures. Socio-developmental impacts include educational disruption, public health crises, and mass internal displacement. Weak governance, institutional corruption, and an overstretched security architecture are identified as critical enablers. The study concludes that a purely militarised approach is insufficient; instead, it recommends a multifaceted strategy encompassing good governance, economic revitalisation, educational investment, community engagement, and regional cooperation. Ultimately, this study underscores the urgent need for holistic solutions to break the nexus between insecurity and underdevelopment, which is vital for Nigeria's future stability and prosperity.

Keywords: Banditry, Governance, National Development, National Insecurity, Nigeria, Terrorism.

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, faces an unprecedented security crisis that threatens its fundamental stability and development. The persistent insecurity has created a complex web of challenges that permeate every aspect of Nigerian society, from economic activities to social cohesion and human development. According to the 2026 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), Nigeria now ranks fourth globally among nations most affected by terrorism, up from sixth place in the previous year. In 2025 alone, as noted by Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), Nigeria recorded 750 terrorism-related fatalities - a 46% surge from 513 deaths in 2024 - marking the country's deadliest year for terrorism since 2020 (ACLED, 2026). This increase occurred against a global trend of declining terrorism deaths, making Nigeria the only country in sub-Saharan Africa to record simultaneous increases in both attacks and fatalities. The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram were responsible for approximately 80% of all terrorism deaths, with attacks concentrated in Borno State, which accounted for 67% of incidents and 72% of fatalities. IS-linked attacks surged dramatically from 20 in 2024 to 92 in 2025 - a near five-fold escalation (Nigeria Watch, 2026).

Beyond terrorism, Nigeria's broader security landscape has also deteriorated sharply. The 15th Report on Violence in Nigeria documented 12,954 violent deaths in 2025, an increase from

12,162 fatalities in 2024, with a cumulative total of 222,137 people killed across 46,182 violent incidents between 2006 and 2025. Rural banditry recorded the most alarming escalation, with deaths surging to 3,974 in 2025 from 1,452 in 2024 - nearly a threefold increase - and the number of affected states expanding from nine to sixteen. Farmer-herder clashes fatalities rose to 1,015 from 567 in 2024, while kidnapping-related deaths increased from 425 to 747. Approximately 81% of all violent deaths in 2025 occurred in Northern Nigeria, with Borno State recording the highest toll at 2,221 fatalities, followed by Niger, Zamfara, Benue, and Katsina states (Nigeria Watch, 2026). The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) documented nearly 12,000 conflict-related deaths in 2025.

The humanitarian consequences have been equally devastating. In 2026, a record 27.2 million Nigerians face acute food shortages, a figure projected to rise to 34.8 million by mid-2026, driven by conflict, displacement, and the collapse of local food systems (UNO, 2026). In the northeast, nearly 5.8 million people are experiencing severe food insecurity, with 15,000 people in Borno State facing catastrophic famine-like conditions. Approximately 3.7 million Nigerians are internally displaced, with most in the northeast, and over 400,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. An estimated 2,400 children under five die from malnutrition daily - about 100 every hour - with 65% of the 2 million children facing severe acute malnutrition concentrated in just six northern states: Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina. Between January and May 2026 alone, media reports recorded at least 5,272 violent deaths, underscoring the continued trajectory of violence (World Food Programme, 2026).

The significance of this security crisis extends beyond Nigeria's borders. As a regional power in West Africa, Nigeria's stability is crucial for the broader security architecture of the region. The escalation of insecurity could have serious implications for regional stability and create displacement spillover effects that would affect the demography and security situation of neighbouring countries and global peace (Yusuf & Mohd, 2022). Understanding the multidimensional nature of this insecurity and its implications for national development is therefore, not merely an academic exercise, but an urgent necessity for policymakers, development partners, and all stakeholders invested in Nigeria's future. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the nexus between insecurity and development in Nigeria, examining the historical context, theoretical frameworks, economic impacts, social consequences, and governance challenges. It synthesises empirical evidence from recent research to present a holistic understanding of how insecurity impedes Nigeria's development trajectory and proposes evidence-based recommendations for addressing this critical challenge. The analysis is particularly timely given the worsening security situation despite government efforts, suggesting that current approaches may be inadequate or misdirected.

Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding Nigeria's security challenges requires engagement with various theoretical perspectives that explain the root causes and perpetuating factors of violence and instability. Two theoretical frameworks are particularly relevant in that direction: the Relative Deprivation Theory and Religious Fanaticism Theory, both of which provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of Nigeria's security crisis.

Ted Gurr's (1970) Relative Deprivation Theory posits that political violence arises from public discontent fueled by perceived discrepancies between expected and actual living conditions. In the Nigerian context, structural factors such as persistent unemployment, underfunded

education, escalating living costs, agricultural neglect, and deficient infrastructure create fertile ground for such grievances (Omodero, 2024). This framework offers particular analytical leverage in resource-rich regions like the Niger Delta, where the so-called “resource curse” manifests as heightened conflict intensity. As recent scholarship demonstrates, communities in these areas perceive that their natural wealth is extracted without equitable returns, generating resentment that violent entrepreneurs readily exploit (Okon & Akpan, 2023).

Contemporary theorists have substantially refined Gurr’s foundational insights. Frances Stewart’s (2008) work on Horizontal Inequalities demonstrates that collective violence is more powerfully predicted by systematic disparities between ethnic or regional groups than by individual-level deprivation alone. Complementing this structural approach, recent extensions of James Scott’s (1976) moral economy framework show that violence crystallises when communities interpret economic policies as violations of deeply held norms of fairness and reciprocity (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2022). At the institutional level, Acemoglu and Robinson’s (2012) theory of extractive political economies provides a macro-structural explanation for why these inequalities persist: states that concentrate wealth and power among narrow elites systematically generate the very conditions of blocked opportunity that Gurr identified as drivers of frustration.

More recent empirical work further enriches this synthesis. Studies examining farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria’s Middle Belt reveal that it is not competition over land and water per se, but perceptions of procedural injustice - such as biased state intervention and unequal enforcement of property laws - that transform latent grievances into organised violence (Yusuf & Mohammed, 2025). Similarly, Okonkwo and Eze (2023) demonstrate that insurgent groups in the Niger Delta strategically deploy narratives of moral injury, framing their actions not as criminality but as legitimate resistance against an economic order perceived to have betrayed foundational principles of communal survival. This suggests that violent conflict is not an isolated aberration but the culmination of what can be termed a perceived moral collapse - beginning with Gurr’s psychological frustration, magnified by Stewart’s group-level inequalities, and triggered when, as Scott contended, prevailing economic arrangements violate a community’s subsistence ethic.

The Nigerian state’s failure to provide impartial conflict resolution or adequate security has turned the Middle Belt into an arena of chronic, low-intensity violence. In the absence of effective state arbitration, farmer-herder disputes over land and water resources have increasingly been settled through force rather than dialogue. This institutional vacuum has normalised violence as a legitimate mechanism for resource assertion, perpetuating a cycle of reprisal attacks and deepening regional insecurity (Olatayo, 2026). Succinctly put, contemporary scholarship reveals that the conditions Gurr identified are neither natural nor inevitable; they are sustained by extractive institutions and amplified when communities perceive not just economic disadvantage, but systemic injustice. For policy, this implies that sustainable security in Nigeria requires more than economic remediation - it demands institutional reform that restores procedural fairness, enhances inclusive governance, and rebuilds public trust in the state’s capacity to deliver equitable development.

The second theory undergirding this study is Religious Fanaticism Theory. Isaac Taylor (1833) is a historical figure who wrote on the subject. However, contemporary scholarship has significantly refined the Religious Fanaticism Theory, moving beyond a simple ideological-versus-material dichotomy to reveal how religious conviction, socio-economic deprivation, and political exclusion interact to fuel insurgency in Nigeria. Omomia (2015), explicitly links religious

fanaticism to the Boko Haram insurgency, analysing the relationship between religious ideology and national security in Nigeria. Oke (2022) examines how religious actors deploy “religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, blasphemy, extremism and hate speech” to fuel insecurity in Nigeria. Oke critiques existing state-centric security studies for neglecting this dimension, arguing that religion is being instrumentalised by religious actors as a tool to exacerbate Nigeria's security crisis.

Recent research demonstrates that Boko Haram's violence cannot be explained by religious ideology alone; rather, it emerges from what scholars term the “Greed-Need-Creed Spectrum” - a conceptual framework that categorises conflict drivers into economic incentives, socio-economic deprivation, and ideological motivations (Ojochenemi, 2025). This approach reveals that Boko Haram's insurgency is primarily fuelled by religious ideology and socio-political exclusion, yet socio-economic deprivation serves as a foundational grievance that enables the group to mobilise support. As Ojochenemi (2025) argues, responses rooted solely in militarization fail to address these deeper structural causes, underscoring the need for integrated policy approaches targeting poor governance, youth unemployment, and social exclusion.

The instrumentalist of religion by extremist leaders represents a critical dimension that distinguishes contemporary from earlier analyses. Scholars such as Brakoniewska (2024) demonstrate how Boko Haram's leaders exploited religious narratives to earn legitimacy, radicalise adherents, and mobilise new recruits by driving a collective identity based on an “us versus them” framework and instrumentalist the sense of humiliation experienced by northern Nigerian Muslims. Zaichenko and Kityk (2025) similarly emphasise that radical religious movements employ religious identity as a tool for social mobilization and justification of violence, appealing to concepts of martyrdom and the sacralisation of conflict while operating under conditions of socio-economic marginalisation. This is not mere fanaticism but a calculated instrumentalisation of doctrine, where groups reinterpret Islamic concepts such as *zakat*, *takfir*, and *jihad* to construct diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames that legitimise violence and sustain recruitment.

Material deprivation remains an indispensable explanatory variable. The Almajiri system - a traditional Islamic education model producing a large, unemployed youth demographic with a strong collective identity - creates fertile ground for extremist exploitation, as systemic marginalisation and poverty are leveraged by recruiters who promise food and protection. As Bakare (2025) observes, the lack of policy measures to modernise the Almajiri system, combined with leadership failures and political corruption, has exposed the region to severe poverty and governance failures that radical groups readily exploit. This suggests that religious ideology and material grievance are not competing explanations but mutually reinforcing dynamics: economic deprivation creates vulnerability, while religious ideology provides meaning, purpose, and a framework for collective action.

This paper, therefore, submits that these theoretical frameworks are best understood as complementary rather than oppositional. Gurr's Relative Deprivation Theory explains why marginalised populations become susceptible to extremist recruitment, while the Religious Fanaticism framework explains why violence, once adopted, becomes resilient to cost-benefit calculations. As Atran's (2010) research on “sacred values” demonstrates, devotion to non-negotiable beliefs can make individuals immune to material incentives - yet these sacred commitments are often forged in contexts of profound material deprivation and institutional neglect. Together, these perspectives reveal a self-reinforcing cycle: economic hardship creates



recruits, ideology sustains commitment, and violence deepens poverty, perpetuating the conditions that enable further recruitment. Sustainable counter-terrorism in Nigeria therefore requires what Ojochenemi (2025) and Zaichenko and Kityk (2025) advocate: multidimensional strategies that combine socio-economic development, inclusive religious education, and institutional strengthening with deradicalisation programmes anchored in credible theological counter-narratives

Manifestations of Insecurity in Nigeria

The view that Nigeria faces a complex web of overlapping security threats requiring solutions beyond military force is widely supported by other analysts; for instance, Sampson (2020) and Nwangwu & Ezeibe (2021) expand on this by illustrating how these crises are synergistically linked, where counter-insurgency in the Northeast fuels banditry in the Northwest and where criminality in the Niger Delta is deeply intertwined with political grievances, creating a vicious cycle that a purely kinetic approach cannot break. This perspective on the limitations of militarism is strongly reinforced by the International Crisis Group (2022) and Onuoha (2020), who argue that heavy-handed operations often alienate civilians and fail to address the root causes of radicalisation, such as corruption and unemployment, thereby explaining the persistence of insurgent groups. Furthermore, the evolution of these groups towards greater sophistication is detailed by Thurston (2024) and Matanmi & Adesina (2022), who show that factions like Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have moved beyond mere brutality to engage in strategic governance and local taxation, while bandits have evolved into transnational criminal syndicates, confirming that the security landscape is not only violent but also becoming increasingly resilient and politically astute.

Kidnapping for ransom has evolved from a sporadic security incident into a pervasive criminal industry in Nigeria, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and economic predation. This normalisation is starkly evident in the targeting of educational institutions, where, as reported by Babangida (2025), attacks like the March 2024 abduction of over 200 children from a Kaduna school have become almost routine, reflecting a brutal shift in the operational calculus of armed groups. The scale is vast, with Babangida (2025) noting approximately 7,000 abductions since 2021, underscoring the national reach of this crisis. The economic dimension is critical, as ransoms extorted from victims' families not only cause immediate financial ruin but also fuel a wider criminal ecosystem.

Recent incidents underscore the alarming escalation of school abductions in Nigeria, with attacks occurring across multiple regions and demonstrating a troubling expansion of the crisis. In November 2025, suspected Boko Haram insurgents abducted 315 students and staff from St. Mary's Catholic School in Papiri, Niger State; following a series of releases and individual escapes, the diocese confirmed that the verified total number actually abducted stood at 230, all of whom were eventually rescued and reunited with their families (Samasumo, 2025). The trajectory continued into 2026, with 23 pupils abducted from Daarul-Kitab Islamic Orphanage and School in Kogi State on 26 April; all victims were subsequently rescued following security operations in the Agbaja Forest axis (Fanwo, 2026). In May 2026, the crisis struck Borno State when suspected Boko Haram insurgents attacked Mussa Primary and Junior Secondary School, abducting 42 students in what represented the first school abduction in the state since the 2014 Chibok incident (Attah, 2026). Most alarmingly, on 15 May 2026, the crisis extended into Nigeria's southwest as gunmen attacked three schools in Oriire Local Government Area, Oyo State, abducting 46 people



- including 39 students and 7 teachers - marking a significant geographical expansion of mass school raids from Nigeria's traditional conflict zones (Anyanwu, 2026).

Onuoha (2023) argues that kidnapping has become a primary “informal revenue generation” model for a diverse range of non-state actors, from terrorist factions to opportunistic criminal gangs. The payment of ransoms creates a perverse economic feedback loop, an idea elaborated by International Crisis Group (2024), which notes that successful kidnap operations provide the capital for more weapons, logistics, and recruitment, thereby incentivizing further criminality. Furthermore, Matanmi & Adesina (2022) contestualise this within the broader landscape of “criminal governance,” where the profitability of kidnapping enables these groups to entrench their power and challenge the state’s monopoly on violence. Therefore, the kidnapping epidemic is not merely a law-and-order issue but a symptom of a deeper political economy of violence, where criminal enterprise and state fragility are mutually reinforcing. Substantiating this view, Olatayo (2026) submits that kidnapping for ransom has emerged as a worldwide concern, with Nigeria representing one of the most severe cases. Once a sporadic criminal occurrence, it has now developed into a sophisticated, financially motivated industry that endangers both state stability and civilian life.

In Nigeria’s northwestern and north-central regions, banditry has evolved into a formidable parallel governance system that operates alongside and often intersects with terrorism and kidnapping. These armed groups do not merely launch intermittent attacks; they systematically control territory, imposing illegal taxes on villages and controlling movement through violence, thereby creating a climate of sustained fear. The economic consequences are catastrophic, particularly for agrarian communities, as exemplified by a Katsina farmer who laments, “I cannot reach my farm as bandits have occupied the place. It is all gone to pot” (Babangida, 2025). This disruption of agriculture impends national food security and cripples local economies. The crisis is fuelled by a dramatic asymmetry in firepower, with Yusuf & Mohd (2022) estimating 6.1 million firearms in civilian and non-state hands, vastly outnumbering the 586,600 held by state security forces. This imbalance, as Sampson (2023) contends, has enabled bandits to transition from mere criminality to exercising “de facto sovereignty” in ungoverned spaces. Furthermore, International Crisis Group (2024) claims that these groups often form symbiotic relationships with other criminal networks, exchanging weapons, intelligence, and safe passage, which complicates security responses and solidifies their hold on the region. Hence, this group gives the summary of the major manifestations of insecurity in Nigeria as follows:

Table 1 [International Crisis Group 2024]: Major Manifestations of Insecurity in Nigeria

Manifestation	Primary Regions	Key Actors	Main Characteristics
Terrorism	Northeast	Boko Haram, ISWA	Religious extremism, attacks on institutions, mass abductions
Banditry	Northwest, North-Central	Armed bandits	Cattle rustling, village raids, extortion
Kidnapping	Nationwide	Criminal Gangs	Abduction for ransom, targeting schools, highways
Ethnic Conflicts	Middle Belt	Herders vs farmers	Land disputes, resource competition, communal violence.

Economic Implications of Insecurity in Nigeria

The insecurity crisis in Nigeria exerts profound and multifaceted economic consequences, impacting macroeconomic stability and household welfare alike. The pervasive climate of violence fosters an environment inimical to economic activity, deterring investment, disrupting agricultural and industrial production, and compelling a reallocation of public resources from developmental projects to security expenditures.

At the macroeconomic level, insecurity acts as a significant impediment to growth through multiple transmission channels. The uncertainty engendered by widespread violence suppresses both domestic and foreign direct investment, as capital seeks more stable environments. This is particularly detrimental for a developing economy like Nigeria, which requires sustained capital accumulation for infrastructure and human capital development. The negative relationship between insecurity and growth is empirically substantiated. For instance, an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) analysis of data from 1980 to 2019 established that escalating insecurity negatively impacts critical growth determinants - including unemployment rates, domestic capital formation, foreign direct investment, and government spending on education and security. The study confirms that these factors, when compromised by insecurity, retard economic growth in both the short and long run (Yusuf & Mohd, 2022).

The agricultural sector constitutes a cornerstone of the Nigerian economy, employing approximately 35 percent of the workforce and serving as a critical source of food security and export revenue. This vital sector has suffered profoundly from the pervasive insecurity. In the

northern regions, historically the nation's primary grain-producing area, rampant banditry and terrorism have severely disrupted farming cycles. Armed groups systematically target agricultural producers for abduction or extort them through illicit taxation. Consequently, widespread farmland abandonment has triggered a sharp decline in agricultural output, fuelling a surge in domestic food inflation. This crisis in the agrarian heartland has propelled Nigeria to be classified among the world's most acute hunger hotspots, with conflict in farming zones identified as a principal driver (Babangida, 2025). The economic ramifications extend beyond immediate production losses, encompassing long-term degradation of agricultural infrastructure and the erosion of intergenerational knowledge as farming communities are forcibly displaced.

Concurrently, the fiscal burden of insecurity has created significant opportunity costs for national development. Confronted with multiple security threats, the federal government has consistently allocated substantial portions of the national budget to security operations. This reallocation of public expenditure crowds out crucial investments in social infrastructure, notably in education and healthcare. However, the efficacy of this escalated spending is dubious. Empirical analysis indicates a positive correlation between rising security budgets and a worsening security situation, suggesting potential inefficiencies in resource utilisation or a strategic failure to address the underlying drivers of conflict rather than its symptomatic manifestations (Yusuf & Mohd, 2022).

The informal economy of ransom payments has created a perverse redistribution of wealth from victims to perpetrators. Olatayo (2026) argues that, in Nigeria, ransom payments constitute coercive economic exchanges that incentivise further kidnappings. This transactional dynamic perpetuates a self-reinforcing cycle: offenders are emboldened to continue their activities, victims remain trapped in persistent anxiety, and governmental authority is progressively eroded. Far from delivering societal liberation, these payments sustain a system of captivity, enrich perpetrators, and entrench a structure of terror and instability. Families affected by kidnapping often deplete their life savings, sell assets, or take on debilitating debts to secure the release of loved ones. One distraught mother described the anguish of having her two children abducted: "They are my only children in the world". (Babangida, 2025). The economic impact on households can be catastrophic, pushing families into poverty and creating cycles of vulnerability that can take generations to overcome. Meanwhile, the success of ransom payments reinforces the criminal economy by providing capital for further operations and incentivising additional kidnappings.

The Social and Human Development Implications

The social and human development implications of Nigeria's insecurity crisis reveal a complex human capital catastrophe, where scholarly consensus on the severity of educational collapse, particularly in the north, is evident, yet analytical emphases diverge. While sources like Babangida (2025) effectively quantify the crisis - citing Nigeria's world-leading out-of-school population - and powerfully highlight the gendered dimension wherein girls face targeted risks of sexual violence and forced marriage, this focus on spectacular attacks can obscure the chronic "infrastructure of fear" that scholars like Udoh (2023) argue creates a more sustained barrier to education. Furthermore, feminist critiques from scholars such as Eze (2024) complicate the narrative by acknowledging this victimisation while also documenting female agency and resilience, a nuance often missing from mainstream analysis. This granular, qualitative understanding of social fragmentation complements the macroeconomic models of researchers like Yusuf & Mohd (2022), who authoritatively calculate the long-term development deficit from

diverted public spending but risk treating human capital as an abstract aggregate, thereby overlooking the lived reality of eroded social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transfer that constitutes the crisis's profound and enduring legacy.

Nigerian Health Care Implications

The disruption to Nigeria's healthcare infrastructure presents a critical case study in the systemic collapse of public services under persistent violence. Scholars like Adeyemi et al. (2023) provide empirical weight to this claim, documenting through geospatial analysis how the direct targeting of medical facilities in the Northeast has created medical deserts, severing access to primary care for millions. This aligns with the observation of heightened risks for health professionals, which Okeke (2024) categorises as a key driver of the medical brain drain, further crippling the system's capacity. However, while the focus on physical infrastructure and personnel is vital, the most profound health impacts may be the indirect ones.

The point regarding displaced populations in overcrowded camps is powerfully explicated by the work of Mbah & Onwe (2024), whose epidemiological surveys directly link camp conditions to spikes in cholera and measles, framing displacement not just as a humanitarian crisis but a potent determinant of population health. This analysis is strengthened by integrating a feminist political economy lens, as seen in Chukwuma (2023), who argues that the disproportionate burden on women and children is not a passive outcome but a direct result of the deliberate defunding and destruction of gendered services like maternal and child health clinics, which are rarely prioritised in emergency responses. Furthermore, the psychological trauma mentioned represents what Abdulmalik (2024) terms a "second epidemic" of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, a long-term public health time bomb that remains largely unaddressed due to cultural stigma and a lack of integrated mental health services.

Governance Dimension of Nigerian Insecurity

The governance dimension of Nigeria's insecurity crisis represents a pernicious feedback loop; wherein institutional weaknesses are both a primary catalyst for and a consequence of the deteriorating security situation. Scholars widely concur that pre-existing conditions of weak state presence, corruption, and limited-service delivery in peripheral regions created the vacuums now filled by non-state armed groups. In the view of Olatayo (2026), educational exclusion functions as a multifaceted driver, simultaneously fostering economic desperation, political grievance, and ideological vulnerability, which Non-state Armed Groups (NSAGs) adeptly exploit. As Mustapha (2023) posits, the Nigerian state's "thin territorialisation" meant that vast rural areas were governed more by neglect than by law, allowing criminal and terrorist networks to establish parallel systems of authority and impunity. This institutional fragility is starkly evident within the security sector itself. While increased budgetary allocations reflect political recognition of the crisis, analysts like Eze (2024) avow that the core issue is one of securitisation over governance, where financial inflows are absorbed by a system riddled with structural pathologies. These include the military's doctrinal inertia, struggling to transition from conventional warfare to effective counter-insurgency, and chronic inter-agency rivalry, which Eze (2024) documents as fundamentally undermining coordinated operations.

The consequences of these institutional failures are twofold: a catastrophic erosion of public trust and a debilitating impunity gap. The reports of human rights abuses by security forces, exemplified by the Amnesty International findings cited by Babangida (2025) regarding the

wrongful detention of rescued individuals, are not mere aberrations. Nwankwo (2023) frames such practices as a strategic failure that securitises the civilian population, transforming potential allies in counter-insurgency into suspects and thereby directly fuelling the very insurgency the state aims to quell. This erosion of legitimacy is compounded by a judicial system incapable of delivering justice. The low prosecution rates for security offenses create what Ibe (2024) terms a “crime-impunity cycle,” where the perceived lack of legal consequence actively incentivises criminal behaviour. In response, the proliferation of vigilante groups, presents a complex dilemma. While they are a manifestation of community self-help in the face of state failure, Ibe (2024) cautions that they often morph into unaccountable, violent actors themselves, further entrenching local conflicts and creating new challenges for post-conflict reconciliation.

Ultimately, the crisis is underpinned by the pervasive scourge of corruption, which acts as a force multiplier for insecurity. The diversion of security resources not only cripples operational effectiveness but also deepens the societal grievances that armed groups exploit for recruitment. This aligns directly with the argument advanced by Yusuf & Mohd (2022), who rightly insist that a purely kinetic, symptom-focused approach is doomed to fail. Their call for addressing root causes is echoed by governance, like Mustapha (2023), who concludes that sustainable security is impossible without a fundamental project of state-building - rebuilding legitimate, accountable, and effective institutions that can win the consent of the governed and reclaim the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Without this, the state risks continuing a cycle of treating manifestations while the institutional core of the crisis remains unaddressed.

Insecurities in Nigeria: Policy and Practice

This section aptly delves into nuances of approaches to alleviate endemic insecurities among other factors. These are elucidated below:

Security Sector Reform and Governance

A critical pathway to mitigating Nigeria’s complex insecurity is through comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) and governance, which targets the institutional fragility at the heart of the crisis. Scholars argue that the Nigerian state’s inability to monopolise legitimate force and provide public safety is a primary driver of violence (Nwanegbo, 2016). To counter this, SSR must extend beyond mere weapon procurement to encompass a holistic transformation. This includes enhancing the intelligence capabilities of agencies and fostering inter-agency collaboration to dismantle operational silos that hinder effectiveness (Ojo, 2020). Furthermore, the integration of community-oriented policing models is widely advocated to rebuild the broken trust between citizens and security forces, a trust deficit that fuels cycles of violence (Albert, 2018). Concomitantly, judicial reforms are imperative to ensure the timely and fair prosecution of security-related cases, thereby strengthening the rule of law and preventing the perception of impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2022). As Agbu (2019) contends, empowering local governance structures and strategically integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms can provide a vital foundation for addressing grievances at the community level before they escalate into widespread insecurity.

Addressing the Economic and Ideological Drivers of Insecurity through Development

A sustainable approach to mitigating Nigeria’s insecurity necessitates robust interventions that target its underlying economic and ideological drivers. Scholars consistently identify poverty, unemployment, and horizontal inequalities as critical factors that create a ready pool of recruits

for criminal and insurgent groups (Azam, 2021; Umar & Hassan, 2022). Therefore, targeted economic programmes are paramount. This includes implementing large-scale youth employment schemes, particularly in the conflict-affected North-East and North-West regions, to counter the economics of desperation that makes illicit economies attractive (International Crisis Group, 2020). Simultaneously, revitalising the agricultural sector is not merely an economic imperative but a security one, as it directly addresses the food insecurity that exacerbates communal conflicts and displacement (FAO, 2021).

On the ideological front, education serves as a crucial long-term bulwark against extremism. Protecting schools from attacks is an immediate priority, but as the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2020) warns, this must be done without militarising learning spaces, which can deter attendance. Beyond access, curriculum reforms that instill critical thinking, religious tolerance, and civic values are essential to deconstruct the narratives propagated by extremist groups (Hefner, 2018). Furthermore, a specific focus on girls' education is critical, as it acts as a multiplier effect for community resilience and counters the gendered ideologies of groups like Boko Haram (Oche, 2019). For the vast population of out-of-school children, creating alternative and accelerated learning programmes is vital to prevent a "lost generation" from becoming a future source of instability (UNICEF, 2022). In corroborating Hefner and Oche, Olatayo (2026) opines that recalibrating western education as a core security imperative is essential for sustainable stability.

Community-Centric Security and Regional Cooperation

The limitations of a purely militarised response to Nigeria's insecurity have underscored the necessity of anchoring security strategies in community engagement and regional diplomacy. Top-down approaches often alienate local populations, whose support is critical for effective intelligence and sustainable peace (Ikeanyibe et al., 2021). Therefore, a paradigm shift towards a community-centric security model is essential. This involves legally empowering and supporting local vigilante and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) structures, but crucially, embedding them within a framework of formal oversight and human rights training to prevent the emergence of new localised militias (Onapajo, 2020). Furthermore, a durable solution requires moving beyond a counter-insurgency mindset to embrace peacebuilding. This includes engaging in structured dialogues with "repentant" or amenable factions of armed groups and establishing truth and reconciliation commissions to address the historical grievances - such as land disputes and political marginalisation - that fuel cyclical violence (Bamidele, 2019).

Concurrently, the transnational character of threats like terrorism and arms trafficking necessitates a robust regional response. The Lake Chad Basin, for instance, acts as a fluid operational space for groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP, highlighting the inadequacy of unilateral border security (Campbell, 2021). Enhancing the operational capacity of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) through improved intelligence-sharing and synchronised cross-border patrols is critical to deny militants safe havens. However, as Mustapha (2022) points out, military cooperation must be complemented by regional socio-economic initiatives that address the cross-border informal economies and shared developmental deficits which underpin instability across the Sahel.

Conclusion

Nigeria's insecurity crisis represents one of the most significant challenges to the nation's development and stability since independence. The complex interplay between economic deprivation, governance weaknesses, ideological extremism, and historical grievances has created a self-reinforcing cycle of violence that resists simplistic solutions. The implications for national development are profound, affecting economic growth, human capital formation, social cohesion, and Nigeria's regional leadership role. The evidence presented in this analysis demonstrates that purely military approaches have proven insufficient to address the multifaceted nature of Nigeria's insecurity. While security operations remain necessary to protect civilians and restore order, they must be complemented by strategies that address the root causes of violence. Investments in education, job creation, governance reform, and social cohesion are not merely development objectives but essential components of an effective security strategy.

The role of external partners in supporting Nigeria's response to insecurity should be carefully calibrated to avoid undermining national ownership and sovereignty. Technical assistance, capacity building, and responsible security cooperation can play valuable roles when aligned with Nigerian priorities and respectful of human rights standards. However, ultimately sustainable solutions must be homegrown, reflecting Nigeria's unique historical context and political realities. Despite the grim current security situation, Nigeria possesses considerable resilience resources - vibrant civil society, media, traditional institutions, and private sector - that can be mobilised to support peacebuilding and development. Leveraging these resources will require political leadership willing to make difficult choices and prioritise long-term stability over short-term gains. The cost of inaction is too high to contemplate, as continued insecurity threatens not only Nigeria's development but also regional stability and global security interests.

As Nigeria approaches another election cycle, come 2027, the security crisis deserves center stage in political discourse. Voters should demand concrete plans rather than rhetorical commitments, with accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation. The scholarly community has a role to play in providing evidence-based analysis that informs policy decisions and counters misinformation. Only through a whole-of-society approach can Nigeria hope to overcome its current security challenges and realise its considerable development potential.

Recommendations

On the premise of these discussions and findings, the following actionable recommendations are germane:

- (i) Government should implement holistic security sector reform which includes enhancing intelligence capabilities, improving inter-agency coordination, investing in modern equipment, and ensuring strict accountability to prevent human rights abuses and corruption within the forces.
- (ii) Addressing grievances through targeted development via job creation programmes and youth employment initiatives, particularly in high-risk areas.
- (iii) Prioritise the revitalisation of the agricultural sector by providing secure access to farmlands, inputs, and credit to combat food insecurity and restore livelihoods.
- (iv) Prioritise education as a counter-insurgency tool by securing schools and protect students, especially in the North, to reverse the trend of educational disruption.
- (v) Integration of peace education and critical thinking into curricula to build resilience against extremist ideologies and ensure the continuity of learning.



- (vi) Strengthening governance and judicial institutions by tackling corruption and improve service delivery to restore public trust in the state. Simultaneously, bolster the judicial system to ensure swift and fair prosecution of security-related offenses, thereby closing the impunity gap that fuells criminality.
- (vii) Empowering local communities through structured dialogue, support for traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and the establishment of supervised, legally constituted civil defense groups. This fosters local ownership of security and improves intelligence gathering from the grassroot level.

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