

Politicisation of Insecurity in Nigeria and its Economic Consequences: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract : *This study examines the politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria and its economic consequences from a historical perspective. It argues that insecurity has increasingly become intertwined with political competition, elite interests, electoral calculations, and governance challenges, thereby undermining effective responses to violent conflicts. Drawing on historical evidence from the Fourth Republic, the study traces the evolution of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, militancy, and communal violence, and assesses their implications for Nigeria's economic development. The paper adopts the historical research method, relying on both primary and secondary sources to analyse the relationship between politics, insecurity, and economic performance. It finds that the politicisation of security challenges has discouraged domestic and foreign investment, disrupted agricultural production, reduced commercial activities, weakened industrial productivity, increased unemployment, and strained public finances through rising security expenditures. Furthermore, the persistence of insecurity has deepened poverty, widened regional inequalities, and undermined sustainable development. The study concludes that depoliticising security management, strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing intelligence coordination, promoting inclusive governance, and implementing people-centred economic policies are essential for restoring national stability and fostering long-term economic growth. It recommends sustained political commitment to transparent security governance and comprehensive economic reforms capable of addressing the structural causes of insecurity in Nigeria.*

Keywords: politicisation of insecurity; Nigeria; economic consequences; economic development; national security; governance.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has experienced persistent insecurity since independence in 1960, but the nature, intensity, and political dimensions of these security challenges have evolved significantly over time. The country has witnessed civil war, communal conflicts, ethno-religious violence, militancy in the Niger Delta, farmer-herder clashes, banditry, kidnapping, separatist agitations, and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East. These challenges have not only threatened national unity and political stability but have also undermined economic development and social cohesion. Although insecurity has often been attributed to poverty, unemployment, weak institutions, and environmental pressures, there is increasing scholarly recognition that political actors have frequently manipulated security issues for electoral advantage, ethnic mobilization, and the pursuit of power. Consequently, insecurity in Nigeria has become both a governance challenge and a political instrument (Adebayo, 2014; Albert, 2012).

The politicisation of insecurity refers to the deliberate use or manipulation of security crises by political elites, governments, opposition parties, or influential interest groups to advance partisan interests rather than pursue genuine national security objectives. Throughout Nigeria's political history, successive administrations have been accused of selectively responding to violent conflicts depending on political calculations, regional interests, or electoral considerations. Political rhetoric has often framed insecurity in ways that deepen ethnic and religious divisions instead of promoting national consensus. Such practices weaken public confidence in state institutions, reduce the legitimacy of security agencies, and complicate efforts to develop sustainable peace-building mechanisms (Mustapha, 2007; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Historically, the roots of the politicisation of insecurity can be traced to Nigeria's colonial experience, where divide-and-rule policies institutionalized ethnic competition and regional inequalities. Following independence, political rivalry among regional elites, military interventions, and contested elections reinforced patterns of political exclusion and identity-based mobilization. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), recurrent electoral violence, and subsequent democratic transitions demonstrated how political competition frequently intersected with security concerns. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, electoral contests have often been accompanied by violence, while governments have sometimes been criticized for inconsistent responses to insecurity across different regions. These historical developments illustrate that insecurity cannot be fully understood without examining the political context within which it occurs (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Suberu, 2001).

The emergence of Boko Haram in 2009 marked a turning point in Nigeria's security landscape and exposed the complex relationship between politics and insecurity. Beyond terrorism, the proliferation of armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and separatist movements has intensified debates regarding the role of political sponsorship, weak governance, corruption, and institutional failures. Several scholars argue that political patronage networks, elite competition, and poor accountability have contributed to the persistence of insecurity by undermining effective law enforcement and intelligence gathering. As insecurity became increasingly politicised, national responses often reflected political interests rather than coordinated security strategies, thereby

prolonging violence and increasing public distrust (Campbell, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2020).

The economic consequences of insecurity have been severe and multidimensional. Persistent violence discourages both domestic and foreign investment, disrupts agricultural production, destroys infrastructure, increases unemployment, and reduces government revenue. Insecurity has particularly affected Nigeria's agricultural sector, where attacks on farming communities have contributed to food shortages and inflation. Similarly, businesses in conflict-prone regions have either relocated or closed operations due to rising operational costs and security risks. Government expenditure has increasingly shifted toward military operations and emergency responses at the expense of education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other productive sectors essential for sustainable development (World Bank, 2023; Central Bank of Nigeria, 2024).

Beyond measurable economic losses, the politicisation of insecurity has weakened investor confidence and distorted development planning. Frequent policy inconsistencies, allegations of political interference in security operations, and inadequate institutional coordination have created uncertainty within the Nigerian economy. Tourism, manufacturing, transportation, and commercial activities have suffered significant setbacks, while millions of internally displaced persons have experienced loss of livelihoods and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. These conditions have widened regional inequalities, increased poverty, and slowed Nigeria's progress toward achieving inclusive economic growth and sustainable national development (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021; African Development Bank, 2023).

Against this background, this study adopts a historical perspective to examine the politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria and its economic consequences. By tracing the historical evolution of political manipulation of security challenges from the colonial period through the post-independence era to contemporary democratic governance, the study seeks to explain how political decisions, institutional weaknesses, and elite interests have shaped the country's security environment and economic trajectory. Understanding these historical dynamics is essential for developing effective policies that prioritize national security, strengthen democratic institutions, promote accountability, and create an enabling environment for sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification of Politicisation, Insecurity, and Economic Consequences

The concept of politicisation refers to the process through which issues that might ordinarily be handled through administrative, legal, or technical means become subjects of political contestation and manipulation. Politicisation often occurs when political actors deliberately frame events or public concerns to advance partisan interests, gain electoral advantage, weaken opponents, or consolidate power. In democratic societies, some degree of politicisation is inevitable because public issues are debated in political arenas. However, excessive politicisation can undermine objective decision-making and weaken public institutions. According to Heywood (2021), politics is fundamentally about "the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general

rules under which they live" (p. 2). When security matters become excessively politicised, policy decisions are often influenced more by political calculations than by national interest.

Within the Nigerian context, politicisation has frequently been associated with ethnic, religious, and regional competition. Political elites have often interpreted or presented security challenges through partisan lenses, thereby deepening social divisions and reducing public confidence in state institutions. Joseph (1987) argues that prebendal politics encourages public office holders to use state resources primarily for sectional and personal interests rather than for national development. This tendency has influenced the management of security crises, with accusations that government responses sometimes reflect political expediency instead of objective security considerations.

The term insecurity generally denotes the absence of safety, stability, and protection from threats to life, property, and human dignity. It encompasses violent conflicts, terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, communal violence, cybercrime, and other conditions that create fear and uncertainty within society. The United Nations Development Programme (1994) defines human security as "freedom from fear and freedom from want" (p. 24), emphasizing that security extends beyond military defence to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. This broader understanding highlights that insecurity is multidimensional and affects every aspect of human existence.

Scholars have further argued that insecurity is not merely the occurrence of violent acts but also the inability of the state to guarantee the protection of its citizens. According to Buzan (1991), security concerns "the pursuit of freedom from threat" (p. 18). Where governments fail to provide effective protection, citizens become vulnerable to criminality, insurgency, and social instability. In Nigeria, insecurity manifests through Boko Haram insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, farmer-herder conflicts, separatist agitations, piracy, and urban criminal violence, all of which have undermined national cohesion and development.

Historically, insecurity in Nigeria has evolved alongside political and socio-economic transformations. While colonial policies contributed to regional inequalities and political tensions, the post-independence era witnessed military coups, the Nigerian Civil War, communal conflicts, militancy in the Niger Delta, terrorism in the North-East, and widespread criminal violence across various regions. These developments demonstrate that insecurity is rooted in historical grievances, governance deficits, unemployment, poverty, corruption, and competition over political and economic resources.

The concept of economic consequences refers to the direct and indirect effects of events or policies on economic activities, production, investment, employment, income, and overall national development. Economic consequences may be either positive or negative depending on prevailing circumstances. Mankiw (2021) observes that economics studies "how society manages its scarce resources" (p. 4). Consequently, persistent insecurity distorts the efficient allocation of resources by diverting government expenditure from productive investments toward security operations and emergency responses.

Insecurity generates severe economic consequences through the destruction of infrastructure, disruption of agricultural production, decline in domestic and foreign investment, reduced tourism, capital flight, inflationary pressures, unemployment, and declining government revenue. The World Bank (2023) notes that conflict and insecurity significantly reduce economic growth by discouraging private-sector investment and weakening productivity. In Nigeria, attacks on farming communities, transportation networks, and commercial centres have contributed to food shortages, rising prices, and declining business confidence across many regions.

The politicisation of insecurity further intensifies these economic consequences because it weakens coordinated policy responses and undermines public trust. When security challenges are interpreted primarily through political or ethnic considerations, governments may struggle to formulate comprehensive strategies that command national support. Instead, policy inconsistency, selective enforcement, and political rivalry often delay effective interventions, thereby prolonging insecurity and increasing its economic costs. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) contend that inclusive institutions promote prosperity, whereas extractive political institutions impede economic development by serving narrow elite interests.

Conceptually, politicisation, insecurity, and economic consequences are closely interconnected. Politicisation can influence the emergence, perception, and management of insecurity, while prolonged insecurity imposes substantial economic costs that hinder sustainable development. From a historical perspective, Nigeria's experience demonstrates that security challenges cannot be separated from political competition, institutional weaknesses, and economic governance. Understanding these concepts provides a strong analytical foundation for examining how the politicisation of insecurity has shaped Nigeria's economic trajectory over time.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Political Economy Theory, which provides a suitable framework for explaining the nexus between politics, insecurity, and economic development in Nigeria. Political Economy Theory examines how political institutions, power relations, and economic structures interact to shape the distribution of resources and influence public policy. The theory argues that political decisions are often driven by competing economic interests, and that the allocation of state resources reflects the priorities of dominant political actors rather than the collective welfare of society. According to Gilpin (2001), political economy is concerned with "the reciprocal and dynamic interaction in international relations of the pursuit of wealth and the pursuit of power" (p. 25). In the Nigerian context, this perspective helps explain how security issues are frequently influenced by political competition and struggles for state power.

The intellectual foundations of Political Economy Theory can be traced to the works of classical scholars such as Karl Marx and later scholars including Robert Gilpin and Susan Strange. Marx (1867/1976) argued that political institutions often serve the interests of dominant economic classes, while Gilpin (2001) emphasized that political authority and economic interests are inseparable in shaping national development. From this perspective, insecurity is not merely a consequence of criminal activities but also a reflection of structural inequalities, weak institutions, and unequal access to political and economic opportunities. Consequently, conflicts may be

sustained when political elites exploit insecurity for electoral advantage, resource control, or ethnic mobilization.

Political Economy Theory is particularly relevant to understanding the politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria because it demonstrates that security challenges often arise from historical patterns of marginalization, poverty, corruption, unemployment, and competition for state resources. Political actors may manipulate insecurity by framing conflicts in ethnic, religious, or regional terms to gain public support or weaken political opponents. Such practices undermine effective governance and reduce public confidence in state institutions. As North (1990) observed, "institutions are the rules of the game in a society" (p. 3), and where institutions are weak, political manipulation is more likely to intensify insecurity and hinder development.

The theory also explains the economic consequences of politicised insecurity. Persistent violence discourages domestic and foreign investment, disrupts agricultural and industrial production, destroys infrastructure, reduces government revenue, and diverts public expenditure toward military and security operations. These outcomes weaken economic growth and increase poverty and unemployment. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that inclusive political and economic institutions promote prosperity, whereas extractive institutions encourage instability and underdevelopment. Nigeria's historical experience illustrates that the politicisation of insecurity has imposed enormous economic costs by limiting productivity, discouraging investment, and constraining long-term national development.

The relevance of Political Economy Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain the historical relationship between political competition, insecurity, and economic performance in Nigeria. It provides a comprehensive framework for analysing how political interests influence security management and how prolonged insecurity affects economic development. By emphasizing the interaction between power, institutions, and economic outcomes, the theory offers a sound basis for examining the historical evolution of insecurity and its economic implications. It therefore serves as an appropriate analytical framework for understanding the politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria and its far-reaching economic consequences.

Historical Evolution of Insecurity in Nigeria

The historical evolution of insecurity in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-colonial period, when political competition, inter-group conflicts, warfare, slave raiding, and struggles over land and economic resources constituted important sources of insecurity. Although pre-colonial Nigerian societies possessed indigenous institutions for conflict management, periods of warfare were also common among kingdoms, emirates, chiefdoms, and smaller communities. The expansion of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the fifteenth century intensified insecurity in several parts of the region, as warfare and slave raiding became connected to commercial networks. Communities were attacked, populations were displaced, and captives were transported to the Atlantic coast for sale. In the nineteenth century, the expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate and other political formations also generated warfare and political realignments in parts of present-day northern Nigeria. Thus, insecurity in Nigeria has deep historical roots and cannot be understood solely as a product of contemporary criminality or terrorism (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Isichei, 1983).

The colonial conquest of Nigeria at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries introduced another important phase in the history of insecurity. British military campaigns against existing political authorities and communities that resisted colonial expansion involved violence, military expeditions, destruction of settlements, and the imposition of colonial authority. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 brought together diverse political and cultural communities under a central colonial administration without completely resolving the tensions created by different systems of governance and economic development. Colonial policies also transformed indigenous political institutions and created new forms of competition over access to administrative positions, land, taxation, and economic opportunities. Consequently, colonial rule did not eliminate insecurity; rather, it reconfigured some existing conflicts while generating new political and socioeconomic grievances (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Mamdani, 1996).

The period immediately before and after independence witnessed further changes in the nature of insecurity. Ethno-regional competition, political crises, electoral violence, and disputes over the distribution of political power contributed to instability in the First Republic. The military coups of 1966, the counter-coup, and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) represented a major turning point. The civil war caused extensive loss of life, displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and economic disruption, particularly in the former Eastern Region. Although the end of the war restored Nigeria's territorial integrity, the conflict left significant political, social, and economic legacies. Post-war instability was subsequently shaped by military authoritarianism, struggles for political power, communal conflicts, and disputes over resource allocation, demonstrating that insecurity in Nigeria evolved alongside the country's changing political structures (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Osaghae, 1998).

From the 1970s through the 1990s, insecurity increasingly acquired economic, environmental, and communal dimensions. The rapid expansion of petroleum production transformed Nigeria's economy but also intensified competition over oil revenues and control of natural resources. In the Niger Delta, environmental degradation, limited access to development benefits, political marginalisation, and grievances against oil companies and the federal government contributed to the emergence of protest movements and, later, armed militancy. In other parts of the country, farmer-herder conflicts, communal disputes, ethnic tensions, religious violence, and urban crime became significant security concerns. The weakening of some state institutions and the proliferation of small arms further complicated the capacity of government to prevent and manage violence. In this period, therefore, insecurity became increasingly connected to questions of resource distribution, environmental justice, citizenship, and socioeconomic inequality (International Crisis Group, 2006; Watts, 2008).

The post-1999 democratic period introduced new dimensions to Nigeria's insecurity challenges. While the return to democratic government created opportunities for constitutional governance and peaceful political participation, political competition was frequently accompanied by electoral violence, communal conflict, militancy, kidnapping, and other forms of criminality. The Niger Delta militancy became particularly prominent in the 2000s, while the emergence and expansion of Boko Haram from the late 2000s transformed the security landscape in northeastern Nigeria.

The insurgency resulted in deaths, displacement, destruction of schools and public infrastructure, disruption of agriculture and trade, and humanitarian crises across affected communities. In addition, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, and separatist-related violence have subsequently expanded the geographical and social dimensions of insecurity. These developments indicate a transition from predominantly conventional political and inter-group conflicts to a more complex security environment involving state and non-state actors (International Crisis Group, 2014; Onuoha, 2014).

Overall, the historical evolution of insecurity in Nigeria demonstrates that contemporary security challenges are rooted in a combination of historical, political, economic, and social factors. From slave raiding and pre-colonial warfare through colonial conquest, the civil war, resource conflicts, militancy, terrorism, banditry, and communal violence, the character of insecurity has changed in response to transformations in Nigeria's political economy and state institutions. Importantly, insecurity has also had serious economic consequences, including the destruction of productive assets, displacement of labour, reduced investment, disruption of agriculture and trade, increased government expenditure on security, and deterioration of infrastructure. Understanding this historical trajectory is therefore essential for examining the politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria, because political actors have often interpreted, mobilised, and responded to security problems within broader struggles over power, resources, identity, and economic interests (Ake, 1996; Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The Politicisation of Insecurity in Nigeria: Historical Trajectory

The politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria has a long historical trajectory rooted in the interaction between political competition, state formation, ethnic and regional interests, and struggles over access to resources. During the colonial period, the British administration frequently interpreted resistance to colonial expansion as a security problem, thereby using military force to establish and consolidate political authority. Colonial administrative arrangements also encouraged political divisions and unequal access to state resources, which later became important sources of political competition. As Falola and Heaton (2008) observed, Nigeria's colonial experience created a political structure in which regional and ethnic interests became closely connected to struggles for power. In this context, insecurity was not merely a question of physical violence but was increasingly connected to the contest over who controlled the institutions and resources of the emerging Nigerian state. As Ake (1996) succinctly argued, "the state in Africa is the major instrument for the appropriation of resources," making control of political power particularly consequential.

At independence, the politicisation of insecurity became more pronounced as political parties increasingly mobilised around regional, ethnic, and ideological interests. Electoral competition in the First Republic was accompanied by political violence, intimidation, and communal tensions, particularly during the Western Region crisis of the early 1960s. The military coups of 1966 and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War further demonstrated how political disagreements could become securitised and transformed into violent confrontations. The civil war, fought between 1967 and 1970, was itself deeply connected to questions of political authority, regional autonomy,

resource control, and national identity. Osaghae (1998) notes that the crisis of the First Republic exposed the fragility of Nigeria's political order and the difficulty of managing competing interests within the federation. Consequently, insecurity became increasingly incorporated into political calculations, with political actors sometimes presenting security threats in ways that strengthened their claims to power or weakened those of their opponents.

The return to civilian rule in 1979 and subsequent political developments did not eliminate the politicisation of insecurity. Rather, military rule and later democratic politics produced new forms of security-related competition. The oil boom transformed the political economy of Nigeria and made control over petroleum revenues a central element of political power. In the Niger Delta, grievances concerning environmental degradation, inadequate development, resource control, and political marginalisation eventually contributed to militancy. The emergence of militant groups demonstrated how economic grievances could be transformed into political and security demands. Watts (2008) describes the Niger Delta crisis as a form of “petro-insurgency,” highlighting the relationship between oil, political authority, violence, and struggles over resources. Thus, insecurity increasingly became embedded in debates about federalism, resource allocation, citizenship, and the legitimacy of the Nigerian state.

The democratic era since 1999 has further intensified debates concerning the politicisation of insecurity. Electoral violence, communal conflicts, terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, and farmer-herder conflicts have frequently become subjects of partisan contestation. The Boko Haram insurgency, particularly from 2009 onward, provides a significant example of how insecurity can acquire political meaning beyond the immediate activities of violent groups. Political actors have at different times accused opponents of exploiting insecurity for electoral advantage, while governments have faced criticism over their responses to attacks. The 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' abduction, for example, became both a national security tragedy and a major issue of political debate concerning governmental competence and responsibility. More recently, public discussions have continued to raise concerns about the use of insecurity in partisan political narratives. Contemporary Nigerian commentary has described the problem as the “instrumentalisation of insecurity for partisan political ends,” illustrating the growing concern that security crises can become tools in political competition.

Premium Times Nigeria

Historically, therefore, the politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria has evolved from colonial coercion and regional political competition to contemporary struggles involving elections, terrorism, resource control, ethnic identity, religion, and governance. Politicisation occurs when security threats are selectively interpreted, exaggerated, minimised, or strategically employed to advance particular political interests. This does not mean that Nigeria's insecurity is entirely manufactured by politicians; terrorism, criminality, communal conflict, and socioeconomic grievances have genuine structural causes. Rather, the historical problem lies in the manner in which political actors may frame these threats and use them to legitimise government actions, discredit opponents, mobilise identity groups, or influence public opinion. As Ake (1996) maintained, Nigerian political development cannot be separated from the struggle over state power

and resources. The historical trajectory consequently suggests that addressing insecurity requires not only military and policing measures but also stronger institutions, accountable political leadership, equitable resource distribution, and the reduction of incentives for the political exploitation of insecurity.

Forms of Politicised Insecurity in Nigeria

Politicised insecurity in Nigeria takes several forms, reflecting the ways in which security challenges become connected to political competition, struggles for power, resource control, identity, and governance. Politicisation occurs when political actors exploit existing grievances or security threats to achieve political objectives, influence public opinion, weaken opponents, or strengthen their control over state institutions. This phenomenon has historical roots in Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial political development, where ethnic, regional, religious, and economic interests frequently intersected with struggles for political authority. As Okolie and Ugwueze (2015) observe, insecurity in Nigeria has become associated with the “securitization of politics,” whereby security concerns are increasingly incorporated into political calculations. The major forms include electoral violence, ethnic and communal conflicts, religiously motivated violence, militancy and resource conflicts, terrorism, banditry and kidnapping, and the political manipulation of security institutions.

Electoral and Political Violence: One of the most prominent forms of politicised insecurity in Nigeria is electoral violence. Since the colonial period, competition for political power has sometimes been accompanied by intimidation, assault, destruction of property, political assassinations, and clashes between supporters of rival parties. Political elites may employ or sponsor violent groups to intimidate opponents, influence voters, disrupt electoral processes, or protect political interests. According to Human Rights Watch (2007), political violence surrounding the 2007 elections resulted in “hundreds of people” being killed, demonstrating the destructive relationship between electoral competition and insecurity. Electoral violence is therefore not simply spontaneous conflict between political supporters; it can reflect deliberate strategies by political actors seeking electoral advantage. Its consequences include voter apathy, displacement, destruction of electoral materials, weakening of democratic institutions, and declining public confidence in elections.

Ethnic and Communal Politicisation of Insecurity: Ethnic and communal conflicts constitute another important form of politicised insecurity. Nigeria's ethnic diversity has historically been accompanied by competition over political representation, land, employment, local authority, and access to state resources. Political actors may exploit ethnic identities by presenting themselves as defenders of particular communities while portraying political opponents as threats to group interests. Such mobilisation can transform ordinary political disagreements into violent communal confrontations. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) note that ethnic conflict in Nigeria is closely associated with struggles over “access to political power and economic resources.” This form of politicisation is particularly evident during elections and periods of political transition, when politicians may employ ethnic rhetoric to mobilise support. Consequently, ethnic insecurity can reinforce political divisions and undermine national integration.

Religious Politicisation of Insecurity: Religious violence represents another significant form of politicised insecurity in Nigeria. Political competition has at different times intersected with religious identities, particularly in areas where Christian and Muslim communities coexist. Religious differences may be exploited by political actors to mobilise constituencies, legitimise political positions, or portray opponents as threats to religious communities. The politicisation of religion became particularly visible in debates surrounding the implementation of Sharia in several northern states from 1999 and in the emergence of Boko Haram. Maiangwa (2014) argues that “religious politicization” is important in understanding the Boko Haram crisis. The political use of religious identity can deepen mistrust, encourage communal mobilisation, and make peaceful resolution of political disputes more difficult. It also risks transforming socioeconomic grievances into religious conflicts, thereby widening the scale and intensity of insecurity.

Militancy, Resource Conflict and the Politicisation of the Niger Delta: The Niger Delta provides a major example of how economic grievances and political interests can generate politicised insecurity. Petroleum production has made control over oil resources central to Nigeria's political economy, while oil-producing communities have complained about environmental degradation, inadequate development, unemployment, and limited participation in decisions concerning petroleum resources. The emergence of militant organisations in the Niger Delta transformed these grievances into armed resistance. Orogun (2010) argues that the Niger Delta question is fundamentally connected to “resource control, revenue allocation and petroleum politics.” Political actors have sometimes supported, negotiated with, or sought to manipulate militant groups for political purposes, particularly during elections. The conflict therefore demonstrates how insecurity can become a bargaining instrument through which communities and political actors seek concessions, political recognition, or access to economic resources.

Terrorism and Insurgency as Politicised Insecurity: The Boko Haram insurgency represents one of the most complex forms of politicised insecurity in contemporary Nigeria. The movement emerged from a combination of ideological, socioeconomic, political, and governance-related grievances and subsequently developed into a major terrorist threat. The insurgency has resulted in deaths, displacement, destruction of infrastructure, disruption of agriculture and commerce, and increased government expenditure on security. However, the political interpretation of Boko Haram has also generated controversies concerning responsibility, governmental failure, regional interests, and political manipulation. Okolie and Ugwueze (2015) argue that the Boko Haram experience illustrates how “insecurity in Nigeria” has become deeply connected with political processes. Consequently, terrorism is not only a security problem but also a political issue that can influence elections, public policy, federal-state relations, and perceptions of governmental legitimacy.

Banditry, Kidnapping and Farmer-Herder Conflicts: More recently, banditry, kidnapping, and farmer-herder conflicts have become increasingly politicised forms of insecurity. Criminal networks involved in kidnapping and banditry have exploited weak security structures, rural poverty, porous borders, and limited state presence in some communities. Similarly, farmer-herder conflicts have been influenced by competition over land, water, grazing routes, environmental change, and local political authority. Political actors sometimes frame these conflicts according to

ethnic or regional narratives, which can make negotiations and peaceful resolution more difficult. International Crisis Group (2017) observes that farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has increasingly involved “competition over land and water,” while political and identity considerations can intensify existing disputes. When politicians selectively interpret these conflicts to mobilise ethnic or regional support, insecurity becomes politicised and the possibility of objective security policymaking is weakened.

Politicisation of Security Institutions and State Responses: A final and particularly important form is the politicisation of security institutions themselves. The police, military, intelligence agencies, and other security organisations are constitutionally expected to protect citizens and maintain public order without partisan bias. However, where security agencies are perceived as serving political interests, their legitimacy and effectiveness may decline. Political interference can affect decisions concerning arrests, deployment of security personnel, protection of political actors, responses to protests, and the management of elections. Ake (1996) argues that the struggle for political power in African states has often involved the control of state institutions and resources. In Nigeria, the politicisation of security institutions can therefore create a vicious cycle: political competition produces insecurity, insecurity encourages greater reliance on coercive institutions, and the perceived partisan use of those institutions further deepens political mistrust. Addressing politicised insecurity consequently requires professional security institutions, accountable governance, credible elections, equitable resource distribution, and mechanisms capable of addressing the historical grievances that sustain violent conflict.

Drivers of Politicised Insecurity in Nigeria

The politicisation of insecurity in Nigeria is driven fundamentally by the struggle for political power and control over state resources. Since independence, political competition has frequently been characterised by intense rivalry among political elites, particularly where access to government is associated with control over public resources and patronage networks. Elections have therefore sometimes become periods of heightened insecurity, as political actors mobilise supporters along ethnic, religious, regional and other identity lines. As Richard Joseph (1987) argues through the concept of “prebendalism,” public offices can become instruments for distributing state resources to political constituencies. This political environment creates incentives for the manipulation of insecurity for electoral advantage, including the sponsorship of political thuggery, intimidation and violence. Consequently, insecurity becomes not merely a security problem but also a political instrument through which competing elites seek to acquire or retain power.

A second major driver is ethnic and regional politics. Nigeria's colonial history brought together diverse ethnic communities within a single political territory, while the postcolonial political system has continued to encourage competition among groups for representation and access to national resources. Political elites may exploit ethnic identities to mobilise electoral support or portray rival groups as threats to their interests. Donald L. Horowitz (1985) observes that ethnic competition becomes particularly dangerous when political power and economic opportunities are distributed along communal lines. In Nigeria, this dynamic has contributed to political violence,

communal conflicts and distrust among different groups. The manipulation of ethnic sentiments during elections and political crises can consequently transform existing grievances into violent confrontations, making insecurity an instrument of political mobilisation rather than simply an unintended consequence of social tensions.

Economic inequality, poverty and unemployment also constitute important drivers of politicised insecurity. Large sections of the Nigerian population, particularly young people, experience limited employment opportunities and economic insecurity. These conditions provide a pool of vulnerable individuals who can be recruited by political actors as thugs, militants or agents of intimidation. As Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) argue, the availability of unemployed young people can increase the feasibility of organised violence when political or economic incentives exist. In Nigeria, political entrepreneurs have at different periods exploited socioeconomic grievances by providing money, weapons or other incentives to young people to participate in violent activities. Thus, poverty does not automatically produce political violence; rather, it creates conditions that political actors can exploit to transform socioeconomic frustrations into organised insecurity.

Another significant driver is weak governance and institutional failure. The effectiveness of democratic institutions, security agencies, courts and electoral bodies is crucial to preventing political disputes from becoming violent. Where citizens perceive institutions as biased, ineffective or incapable of protecting their rights, confidence in peaceful conflict resolution declines. United Nations Development Programme (2009) notes that weak institutions and deficits in governance can contribute to conditions in which violence becomes more likely. In Nigeria, allegations of electoral malpractice, corruption, selective law enforcement and inadequate accountability have periodically weakened public confidence in state institutions. Political actors may consequently exploit institutional weaknesses to manipulate security threats, protect political allies or intimidate opponents. The inability to consistently sanction perpetrators reinforces a culture of impunity and encourages the continued politicisation of insecurity.

The manipulation of religion and identity politics is another important factor. Religious differences, particularly between Christian and Muslim communities, have occasionally been exploited by political actors seeking to consolidate political constituencies. Although religious conflicts in Nigeria cannot be reduced entirely to political manipulation, political competition can deepen religious polarisation by framing elections and public policies as struggles between competing religious interests. Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2004) cautions against treating Nigerian conflicts as purely ethnic or religious because such interpretations can obscure the political and socioeconomic interests underlying them. Political exploitation of religious identities can nevertheless intensify insecurity by generating fear, suspicion and mobilisation along religious lines. In this context, identity becomes a political resource that can be activated during elections, leadership contests and struggles over access to state power.

Finally, corruption, patronage politics and the struggle over natural resources constitute important drivers of politicised insecurity in Nigeria. Control over oil revenues and other valuable resources has historically provided enormous economic benefits to political elites and competing interest

groups. In resource-rich regions, especially the Niger Delta, perceptions of exclusion, environmental degradation and inequitable distribution of oil wealth have contributed to militancy and conflict. Michael L. Ross (2001) argues that natural-resource wealth can create conditions that encourage corruption and weaken institutions. Similarly, Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner (2001) associate heavy dependence on natural resources with institutional and developmental challenges. In Nigeria, the competition for control of resources can therefore transform economic grievances into political conflicts, while politicians may exploit such conflicts to strengthen patronage networks or weaken opponents. Overall, the politicisation of insecurity is sustained by the interaction of political competition, identity mobilisation, socioeconomic inequality, institutional weakness, corruption and resource struggles.

Economic Consequences of Politicised Insecurity in Nigeria

Politicised insecurity in Nigeria has significant consequences for economic growth and development because it disrupts the stability required for productive economic activities. When political actors manipulate insecurity for electoral, ethnic, religious or sectional purposes, violence can spread beyond the immediate political arena into communities, markets and workplaces. Conflict destroys productive assets, interrupts transportation and discourages private economic activity. According to the World Bank (2011), “conflict and violence are major obstacles to economic development,” particularly in societies where institutions are unable to provide effective security and justice. In Nigeria, recurring political violence, communal conflicts, insurgency, banditry and militancy have therefore contributed to an uncertain economic environment. The resulting insecurity increases the cost of doing business and reduces the capacity of both government and private actors to make long-term investments.

One of the major economic consequences of politicised insecurity is the destruction of physical infrastructure and productive assets. Violent conflicts frequently result in the destruction of roads, bridges, schools, health facilities, markets, farms, electricity infrastructure and private businesses. Such destruction reduces the productive capacity of affected communities and imposes substantial reconstruction costs on governments. In areas affected by insurgency and communal violence, businesses may be abandoned or destroyed, while agricultural facilities and storage systems may also be damaged. Collier et al. (2003) observe that civil conflict can produce substantial economic losses through the destruction of physical and human capital. Consequently, public resources that could have been directed towards education, healthcare, infrastructure and industrial development are diverted towards rebuilding damaged facilities and responding to security emergencies.

Politicised insecurity also discourages domestic and foreign investment. Investors generally require political stability, predictable institutions and reasonable assurance that their assets and personnel will be protected. Persistent insecurity creates uncertainty about future profits and increases the risks associated with establishing or expanding businesses. Nigeria's experience demonstrates that insecurity in areas affected by insurgency, militancy, communal conflicts and kidnapping can influence investment decisions. As Aisen and Veiga (2013) explain, political instability can negatively affect economic growth partly because it reduces investment and weakens economic confidence. Insecurity therefore increases the risk premium associated with

investment in affected regions and may encourage both domestic entrepreneurs and foreign investors to relocate their capital to safer environments. Over time, this can reduce employment opportunities, government revenue and technological transfer.

Another important consequence is the disruption of agricultural production and food security. Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to insecurity because farmers depend on access to land, livestock, markets and transportation networks. Armed attacks, kidnappings, communal conflicts and political violence may force farmers to abandon their farms or reduce the amount of land they cultivate. Displacement also separates agricultural workers from their productive assets and interrupts traditional farming cycles. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017), “conflict and food insecurity are closely linked,” with conflict often undermining agricultural livelihoods and access to food. In Nigeria, prolonged insecurity in several agricultural communities has contributed to reduced production, displacement of farming populations and increased food prices. The resulting food shortages place additional pressure on household incomes and can deepen poverty.

Unemployment and poverty are also intensified by politicised insecurity. When businesses close, investment declines and agricultural activities are disrupted, employment opportunities diminish. Young people are particularly affected because they often constitute a large proportion of the economically active population. Prolonged unemployment can create conditions that make vulnerable youths susceptible to recruitment into political thuggery, armed groups, militancy, banditry and other forms of violent activity. This creates a vicious cycle in which insecurity produces unemployment, while unemployment provides a pool of individuals who may be mobilised for further insecurity. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that economic opportunities and the availability of potential recruits can influence the feasibility of organised violence. Thus, politicised insecurity can simultaneously destroy existing livelihoods and undermine the creation of new employment opportunities.

Politicised insecurity also imposes a heavy fiscal burden on the Nigerian government. Significant public resources are devoted to defence, policing, intelligence, military operations, compensation, internally displaced persons and reconstruction. While expenditure on national security is necessary, excessive spending on conflict management can reduce the resources available for productive development. The opportunity cost is particularly important in a developing economy where public investment is needed in infrastructure, education, healthcare and social protection. The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2023) emphasises the importance of fiscal space for financing development priorities in emerging and developing economies. Where insecurity continually requires emergency expenditure, governments may face greater fiscal pressures and reduced capacity to finance long-term development programmes.

Another consequence is the disruption of trade, transportation and regional economic integration. Insecurity can make roads, markets and commercial centres unsafe, increasing transportation costs and reducing the movement of goods and people. Traders may avoid particular routes or markets because of kidnapping, armed robbery or communal violence. Businesses consequently incur higher expenditure on security personnel, insurance, alternative transportation routes and

protective measures. These costs are eventually transferred to consumers through higher prices. The World Bank (2011) notes that repeated cycles of violence can create “violence traps” in which insecurity and weak economic opportunities reinforce one another. In Nigeria, the disruption of commercial activities in conflict-affected areas can therefore produce economic consequences extending beyond the immediate locations of violence by affecting supply chains, food distribution and interregional commerce.

Politicised insecurity contributes to macroeconomic instability and long-term underdevelopment. Persistent insecurity can reduce economic growth, weaken government revenue, increase public expenditure and undermine confidence in the national economy. Where oil-producing areas or major commercial centres are affected by insecurity, disruptions can have particularly significant consequences for government revenue and foreign exchange earnings. Insecurity also contributes to population displacement, loss of human capital and deterioration in social services. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) stresses that insecurity and human development are closely interconnected because violence undermines livelihoods, institutions and access to essential services. Ultimately, the economic consequences of politicised insecurity extend beyond immediate material losses: they weaken investment, employment, agricultural production, public finances, trade and human capital, thereby constraining Nigeria's capacity to achieve sustainable economic development.

Government Responses and Policy Interventions

The Nigerian government's response to politicised insecurity has largely centred on strengthening national security institutions, expanding military and police operations, and developing policies aimed at preventing and managing violent conflicts. Successive administrations have recognised that insecurity poses not only a threat to lives and property but also to economic development, political stability and national cohesion. Government responses have therefore included counter-insurgency operations, community policing initiatives, intelligence gathering, border security and inter-agency cooperation. The National Security Strategy identifies terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, communal conflict and other emerging threats as major challenges requiring coordinated national responses (Office of the National Security Adviser [ONSA], 2019). However, the effectiveness of these interventions has sometimes been constrained by inadequate institutional coordination, limited resources, corruption and weak accountability. As the World Bank (2011) observes, “institutions matter” in determining whether societies can successfully escape cycles of conflict and insecurity.

A major government intervention has been the strengthening of the military and other security agencies to confront insurgency, terrorism, banditry and other forms of violent insecurity. The Nigerian Armed Forces have undertaken several operations, particularly in the North-East, North-West and other conflict-affected areas. The government has also increased defence and security allocations and introduced measures to improve military equipment, intelligence and operational capacity. These efforts have contributed to the weakening of some insurgent networks and the recovery of certain territories previously controlled by armed groups. Nevertheless, military responses alone have not eliminated the structural causes of insecurity. According to the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022), contemporary insecurity requires responses that address both immediate threats and the underlying socioeconomic conditions that make communities vulnerable to violence. Consequently, military operations need to be complemented by development-oriented interventions and effective civilian institutions.

The government has also implemented counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency policies aimed at disrupting organised violent groups. Legislative measures such as the Terrorism (Prevention) Act and subsequent amendments have provided legal frameworks for prosecuting terrorism and financing terrorist activities. Nigeria has equally strengthened cooperation with international and regional organisations in combating terrorism and transnational crime. Regional initiatives through the Lake Chad Basin have supported collective efforts against Boko Haram and related groups. The Multinational Joint Task Force, involving Nigeria and neighbouring countries, has become an important mechanism for regional counter-terrorism cooperation. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023), effective responses to terrorism require not only security operations but also strong legal institutions, international cooperation and measures addressing the conditions that facilitate recruitment into violent groups.

Another important policy response has been the promotion of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and dialogue. Government agencies, traditional institutions and civil society organisations have increasingly been involved in mediation and reconciliation efforts aimed at addressing communal disputes and preventing the escalation of local conflicts. The establishment and activities of institutions such as the National Orientation Agency, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, and various state-level peacebuilding mechanisms reflect attempts to complement military responses with non-military approaches. The National Peace Policy Framework also emphasises dialogue, mediation, reconciliation and social cohesion as components of sustainable peacebuilding (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution [IPCR], 2021). These interventions are particularly important because politicised insecurity often involves grievances relating to identity, land, political representation and resource distribution that cannot be resolved through force alone.

The government has further introduced socioeconomic development programmes and youth empowerment initiatives to address some of the conditions that facilitate insecurity. Programmes such as the National Social Investment Programme, N-Power and other employment and poverty-reduction initiatives have sought to improve livelihoods and provide opportunities for vulnerable groups. The rationale behind such interventions is that poverty, unemployment and social exclusion can increase vulnerability to recruitment by violent groups and political entrepreneurs. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that socioeconomic conditions can influence the incentives and opportunities associated with organised violence. However, the effectiveness of these programmes depends on transparency, adequate funding, effective implementation and equitable distribution. Where development programmes are perceived as politicised or inaccessible to vulnerable populations, they may fail to address the grievances that contribute to insecurity.

Security-sector reform and community-oriented policing have also featured prominently in government policy interventions. Recognising the limitations of purely military approaches, the

government has promoted reforms aimed at improving police effectiveness, accountability and relations between security agencies and local communities. The Nigeria Police Act 2020 provides a legal framework for modernising policing and improving police-community relations. Community policing has also been promoted as a strategy for improving local intelligence and strengthening cooperation between citizens and law-enforcement agencies. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) emphasises that effective policing depends significantly on public trust, accountability and cooperation between law-enforcement institutions and communities. In Nigeria, however, challenges including inadequate personnel, logistical limitations, corruption and public distrust continue to constrain the effectiveness of policing reforms.

The government has increasingly recognised the need for integrated security and development strategies to address the political and economic dimensions of insecurity. The National Development Plan 2021–2025 identifies peace, security, economic diversification, employment creation and institutional strengthening as interconnected development priorities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). This approach reflects an understanding that sustainable security cannot be achieved through coercive measures alone. Addressing unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, political exclusion and weak institutions is essential to reducing the incentives for political manipulation of insecurity. As the World Bank (2011) argues, breaking cycles of conflict requires legitimate institutions capable of providing security, justice and economic opportunity. Therefore, Nigeria's policy response should increasingly combine effective security operations with accountable governance, inclusive economic development, conflict prevention, electoral reform and stronger institutions capable of preventing the politicisation of insecurity.

Challenges of Addressing Politicised Insecurity in Nigeria

One of the major challenges confronting efforts to address politicised insecurity in Nigeria is weak institutional capacity and poor governance. Security institutions, courts, electoral bodies and other state agencies often face inadequate funding, limited personnel, corruption and weak accountability mechanisms. These weaknesses reduce the state's capacity to prevent violence, investigate offenders and ensure that perpetrators are appropriately sanctioned. The politicisation of public institutions can further undermine their neutrality, particularly when security agencies are perceived as favouring particular political interests. As the World Bank (2011) argues, “institutions capable of providing citizens with justice, security, and economic opportunities” are essential for breaking cycles of violence. Where such institutions remain weak, insecurity can become entrenched and political actors may continue to exploit institutional weaknesses for partisan purposes.

A second challenge is political interference and the manipulation of insecurity for electoral advantage. Political competition in Nigeria has sometimes encouraged the mobilisation of ethnic, religious and regional identities, while armed groups and political thugs may be employed to intimidate opponents or influence electoral outcomes. This creates a difficult environment for security agencies because efforts to enforce law and order can themselves become politically

controversial. Electoral violence also undermines citizens' confidence in democratic institutions and may encourage political actors to regard violence as a legitimate means of achieving political objectives. International Crisis Group (2018) notes that electoral competition in Nigeria has historically been associated with localised violence and mobilisation around communal identities. Consequently, preventing politicised insecurity requires not only stronger security institutions but also political commitment to fair competition, credible elections and respect for the rule of law.

Another major challenge is poverty, unemployment and socioeconomic inequality. Large numbers of unemployed and economically vulnerable young people can be susceptible to recruitment by political entrepreneurs, criminal organisations and armed groups. Economic hardship can also intensify grievances concerning exclusion, inequality and unequal access to state resources. Although poverty does not automatically cause insecurity, it can create conditions in which violence becomes easier to organise and sustain. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that the availability of recruits and economic opportunities can influence the feasibility of organised violence. Similarly, the World Bank (2011) maintains that exclusion from economic and political opportunities can increase the risk of conflict. Nigeria therefore faces the challenge of simultaneously addressing immediate security threats and the deeper socioeconomic conditions that allow politicised insecurity to persist.

Ethnic, religious and regional divisions present another significant challenge. Nigeria's considerable diversity can become a source of political mobilisation when elites frame political competition in terms of group identity. Disputes over land, political representation, resource allocation and citizenship can consequently acquire ethnic or religious dimensions. Once insecurity becomes associated with particular identities, reconciliation becomes more difficult because communities may perceive security interventions through the lens of group interests. Donald L. Horowitz (1985) observes that ethnic conflict can become particularly intense when political competition is closely connected to group identity and access to state power. In Nigeria, addressing this challenge requires inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, intercommunal dialogue and political leadership that discourages identity-based mobilisation.

A further challenge is inadequate coordination among security agencies and the persistence of corruption. Nigeria's security architecture involves the military, police, intelligence agencies, civil defence organisations and other institutions, but overlapping responsibilities and insufficient information sharing can weaken operational effectiveness. Corruption may further undermine security by facilitating the diversion of resources, compromising investigations and enabling criminal networks to operate with relative impunity. According to Transparency International (2023), corruption can weaken state institutions and undermine citizens' trust in government. When citizens do not trust security agencies, they may be reluctant to provide intelligence or cooperate with investigations. This creates a cycle in which weak institutional performance reinforces public distrust, while distrust makes effective security provision more difficult.

Finally, limited resources, displacement and the humanitarian consequences of insecurity constitute serious obstacles to sustainable intervention. Military and security operations require substantial financial resources, while communities affected by insurgency, banditry and communal

violence require humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Large-scale displacement can place additional pressure on host communities and government social services. At the same time, resources devoted to emergency security responses may reduce funds available for education, healthcare, infrastructure and economic development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) emphasises that contemporary human security requires attention to both protection from violence and access to sustainable livelihoods and basic services. Thus, Nigeria's central challenge is not simply how to defeat armed groups, but how to create political, economic and institutional conditions in which insecurity can no longer be easily manipulated for political purposes.

Recommendations

First, the Nigerian government should strengthen democratic institutions and reduce the politicisation of security agencies. Security institutions, electoral bodies, the judiciary and other relevant state institutions should operate with greater independence, professionalism and accountability. Political interference in the deployment of security agencies should be minimised, while officers found to have participated in partisan violence or abuse of authority should be appropriately sanctioned. Credible elections are particularly important because electoral disputes can provide opportunities for political actors to mobilise violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should therefore strengthen electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms, voter protection and monitoring of campaign-related violence. As the World Bank (2011) argues, “legitimate institutions” are central to breaking cycles of violence and establishing sustainable peace. Strengthening institutions would consequently reduce the opportunities for political elites to manipulate insecurity for electoral and partisan purposes.

Second, Nigeria should adopt a comprehensive socioeconomic development strategy focused on poverty reduction, employment creation and youth empowerment. Government programmes should prioritise skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, agricultural development, vocational education and access to affordable finance, particularly in communities experiencing persistent insecurity. Young people should be provided with legitimate economic opportunities that reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by political thugs, criminal networks and armed groups. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) demonstrate the importance of economic opportunities in understanding the conditions that facilitate organised violence. Consequently, employment policies should not be treated merely as economic interventions but also as important components of national security and peacebuilding. Such programmes must also be transparently implemented to ensure that economic opportunities are distributed equitably rather than used as instruments of political patronage.

Third, the government should strengthen community-based conflict prevention, dialogue and reconciliation mechanisms. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, women's organisations, youth groups, civil society organisations and local communities should be systematically involved in identifying early warning signs and resolving conflicts before they escalate into violence. Particular attention should be given to disputes involving land, grazing rights, political representation, ethnicity, religion and access to natural resources. The United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) emphasises the importance of strengthening social cohesion and addressing the structural factors that generate insecurity. Community-based approaches are especially important because local actors often possess information about emerging conflicts that may not be readily available to central security institutions. Government should therefore establish effective early-warning and rapid-response mechanisms at federal, state and local levels.

Fourth, Nigeria should improve accountability, transparency and coordination within the security sector. Adequate funding and modern equipment should be accompanied by effective financial controls to prevent corruption and diversion of security resources. Security agencies should improve intelligence sharing and operational coordination, while mechanisms for investigating allegations of human-rights violations should be strengthened. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021), effective policing depends significantly on accountability, integrity and public trust. The government should therefore strengthen police-community relations, professionalise recruitment and training, and ensure that security personnel operate within the framework of the law. Greater accountability would improve public confidence and encourage citizens to cooperate with security agencies through the provision of relevant intelligence.

Finally, Nigeria should pursue an integrated security and development framework that combines military responses with political, economic and social interventions. Military operations remain necessary against terrorism, banditry and organised armed groups, but they should be accompanied by rehabilitation, reconstruction, education, healthcare, livelihood support and reintegration programmes in affected communities. The World Bank (2011) stresses that sustainable peace requires addressing the institutional and socioeconomic conditions that allow violence to recur. Government should therefore develop long-term strategies that address corruption, inequality, unemployment, political exclusion and weak governance alongside immediate security threats. Such an integrated approach would help Nigeria move from a predominantly reactive security strategy towards prevention, resilience and sustainable peace, thereby reducing both the incidence and political manipulation of insecurity.

CONCLUSION

Politicised insecurity in Nigeria represents a complex historical and contemporary challenge in which violence, political competition, socioeconomic grievances and institutional weaknesses interact. The discussion has established that insecurity cannot be understood solely as a security problem because political actors may exploit ethnic, religious, regional and socioeconomic divisions to advance political interests. From electoral violence and political thuggery to insurgency, communal conflicts, banditry and militancy, insecurity has increasingly intersected with struggles over power and resources. As the World Bank (2011) observes, “conflict and violence are development issues,” because they undermine the institutions and conditions necessary for sustainable development.

The economic consequences of politicised insecurity have been particularly significant. Persistent insecurity discourages domestic and foreign investment, disrupts agricultural production and trade,

destroys infrastructure and productive assets, increases unemployment and poverty, and places considerable pressure on government expenditure. Resources that could have been directed towards education, healthcare, infrastructure and industrial development are frequently redirected towards security operations and reconstruction. Collier et al. (2003) argue that conflict can generate substantial economic costs through the destruction of physical and human capital. In Nigeria, these effects have contributed to weakened livelihoods, displacement and reduced economic opportunities in several conflict-affected communities.

The government's responses, including military operations, counter-terrorism measures, policing reforms, socioeconomic programmes, peacebuilding initiatives and regional security cooperation, demonstrate efforts to contain insecurity. However, significant challenges remain, including institutional weaknesses, corruption, political interference, inadequate coordination among security agencies, poverty, unemployment and identity-based mobilisation. Consequently, security operations alone cannot provide a sustainable solution. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) emphasises that sustainable human security requires addressing both immediate threats and the broader political, social and economic conditions that expose communities to insecurity.

Addressing politicised insecurity requires a long-term, integrated and accountable approach that combines effective security provision with democratic governance, economic inclusion, institutional reform and conflict prevention. The Nigerian government should strengthen electoral and judicial institutions, professionalise security agencies, create employment opportunities, improve accountability and promote inclusive political participation. Equally important is the development of community-based mechanisms for dialogue, reconciliation and early conflict prevention. As Collier and Hoeffler (2004) demonstrate, reducing the incentives and opportunities for organised violence is essential for sustainable peace. Nigeria's ability to transform insecurity from a political instrument into a manageable national challenge will ultimately depend on the strength of its institutions, the inclusiveness of its economy and the commitment of political leaders to democratic and peaceful governance.

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