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## CITIZENS WITHOUT SECURITY IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC DISPENSATION

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### ABSTRACT

Protection of lives and property is the first and most important responsibility of any government to its citizens. This includes security from both internal and external aggressions. However, this vital aspect of governance has eluded many countries, including Nigeria. There is a global and unprecedented high rate of human insecurity that spans varied demographics. In Nigeria, human security threats have metamorphosed from violations of human rights to terrorist attacks. This paper provides possible connections between human security threats, decadence in governance, and policy formulations. Thus, the Nigerian government must rise to the challenges of protecting the lives and property of Nigerian citizens as security threats metamorphose from human rights violations to terrorism.

**KEYWORDS:** government, security, human rights, terrorism, lives, and property

### INTRODUCTION

The transition from violation of human rights to terrorism has been a commonly known aspect of human insecurity (UNDP, 1994). Terrorism is a huge debate in the changing forms of human security threats in contemporary Nigeria. This paper examines such changing forms of human security threats in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. Furthermore, this paper provides an understanding of the complex changes and trends associated with recent human security threats linked to patterns of governance. Additionally, this paper provides an understanding of the dynamics of more fierce killings and displacement of individuals due to terrorist attacks and related sectarian violence that have rendered Nigerian citizens without security from the government that should protect them.

A citizen is a native or naturalized member of a state and owes allegiance to the government. The responsibilities of a citizen toward her state include but are not limited to the following: (a) obedience to the laws of the state, (b) payment of taxes, (c) honest exercise of the franchise, and (d) tolerance (Irving, 2019). The government in return protects its citizens. Additionally, the Nigerian constitution guarantees Nigerian citizens the following:

- the right to life,
- freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,
- freedom of expression and the press,

- right to peaceful assembly and association, and
- freedom of movement among others.

However, the Nigerian government has failed to protect the lives and property of its citizens. The government has crushed citizens underfoot as government officials accumulate more power and wealth with less accountability.

In Nigeria, human security threats range from civil agitations, job security, hunger, unemployment, human trafficking, child labour, drug abuse, cyber-crime (yahoo-yahoo) to more fierce and life-threatening threats, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, militancy, and terrorism. The dynamics of human security threats including violent and non-violent forms have been of recent scholarly interest (Country of Origin Information Report, 2013). There have also been debates on the collective efforts at institutional apparatus to mitigate human security threats in Nigeria.

### **The Changing Forms of Human Security Threats in Nigeria**

Since the return to democracy in 1999 with the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria has been confronted with major human security threats such as the Niger Delta militants, Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, local bandits, cult groups, and separatist insurgence (Harshe, 2021). With the return to democracy, the expectation of the Nigerian populace was that it would bring an end to human rights violations, which have been curtailed by the previous military regimes (Kiikpoye, 2005). However, Nigerian citizens' expectations were dashed due to the high-handed response of the government to quell crises, including deploying the military and other security forces to end uprisings. Peaceful demonstrations gradually changed to violent attacks on innocent civilians.

Generally, the changing forms of security threat were long foreshadowed in the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) Report of 1994, which indicated that there is a need to move from the "narrow concept of national security to the all-encompassing concept of human security" (UNDP, 1994, 15). The report (UNDP, 1994) also identified two components of human security: security from fear and security from want. Furthermore, the report (UNDP, 1994) identified the changing dimensions of security in rich and poor countries and argued that:

people in rich nations seek security from the threat of crime and drug wars in their streets; the spread of deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS, soil degradation, rising levels of pollution, the fear of losing their jobs, and many other anxieties that emerge as the social fabric disintegrates. (UNDP Report, 1994:16).

However, the citizens of poor nations demand liberation from the continuing threat of hunger, disease, and poverty (UNDP,1994). The report also stated that "human security no longer means carefully constructed safeguards against the threat of a nuclear holocaust; rather human security is increasingly concerned with the means of responding to the threat of global poverty" (UNDP,1994). UNDP (1994)

further stressed that the threat of global poverty affects all human lives irrespective of nationality, and there are no global safeguards against these real threats to human security.

To capture the essence of human rights violations and their transition to terrorism, it is necessary to examine the various ways in which human rights are being violated in Nigeria, particularly by the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies, giving rise to changes in human security threats. Decades of Nigeria's military dictatorship witnessed massive suppression, autocracy, intimidation, and violation of human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Recently, violation of human rights has become more pronounced, violent, widespread, and full-scale, even to the extent of threatening the Nigerian nation-state. In the oil-producing Niger Delta states, for example, violation of human rights is linked to several factors, including protecting the capitalist interest of multinational oil companies by the Nigerian state against the welfare of the oil-producing communities. The injustice of protecting capitalist interest has resulted in agitation, youth restiveness, and volatility in the Niger Delta region (Kiikpoge, 2005). Since crude oil has remained the major foreign exchange earner for the country, it has been a core instrument of elite domination and marginalization of the minority oil-producing areas.

Several incidences of human rights violations in the Niger Delta were in connection with the suppression of protests at oil company activities (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 1997). The reports showed "repeated incidents in which people were brutalized for attempting to raise grievances with the oil companies; in some cases, security forces threatened, beat, and jailed members of community delegations even before they presented their cases" (HRW, 1999). There were related accounts in which oil companies denied knowledge of the violation of human rights and state repression (HRW, 1999). In many cases, even where they did respond to some incidents, companies denied knowledge of government attacks on individuals protesting company action or inaction and sought to justify security forces' measures as appropriate responses to threats to company personnel or property (HRW, 1999).

The persistent human security threats in Nigeria have led to poverty and constrained human development. Various forms of human security threats have been documented in Nigeria, and the threats have continued unabated since the return to democratic rule in 1999 (Harse, 2021). Since the return to democracy, the changing forms of human security have become discernible. A violation of human rights and state injustice have constituted the major strand of human security threats and violations of human rights (Cerny, 2005). The changing forms of human security threats are evident from the well-known violation of human rights and poverty profile in the country which has increased with a low human development index (World Bank, 2015).

### **Niger Delta Crisis**

Niger Delta represents the majority of oil-producing communities in Nigeria comprising the present-day South-South. For years, multinational companies, like Shell, Agip, and Chevron have drilled and exploited the crude oil that lies beneath these communities. Kiikpoye (2005) suggested that the Niger Delta remained the poorest part of the country because of the unfriendly exploration of crude oil and

gas. Additionally, government policies disenfranchised the right of the Niger Delta people to the natural resources in their community (Kiikpoye, 2005). Most of the people of the Niger Delta region still live in poverty. Although some oil companies have provided negligible infrastructure, these could not be compared to the environmental degradation, injustice, and political marginalization done to the Niger Delta people (Zua, 2017).

Thus, the perceived feeling of marginalization in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, the environmental degradation arising from oil spills resulting in water and land pollution, coupled with non-development have led to multi-faceted conflicts in the region (Agbonifo, 2009). When people see the basis of their livelihood eroded such as food and access to potable water, feelings of intolerance could ensue. Consequently, oppression and perceptions of injustice triggered violent protests against authoritarianism, demanding better living conditions in the region (Burd-Sharp, 2006).

Initially, the demand for better living conditions was through peaceful negotiations. Associations such as Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The government's unresponsiveness towards the demand led to youth restiveness (HRW, 1991). There was an increase in crime rates due to unemployment. Consequently, unarmed demonstrators metamorphosed into militants (HRW, 1991). Arms and sophisticated weapons were used to challenge the government, while the militants engaged in bunkering, kidnapping, and hostage-taking (HRW, 1991). The government met such acts with force, resulting in the killing of innocent and unarmed citizens. The government failed to distinguish between militants and civilians who are neither criminals nor activities. Curbing the activities of Niger Delta militants remains a huge challenge to the government of Nigeria.

### **Odi Massacre**

The Odi massacre of 1999 is a well-documented act of repression carried out by the Nigerian military under the democratically elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The military invasion of Odi in the Kolokuma-Opokuma local government area of Bayelsa State was due to agitations for indigenous rights to oil resources and environmental protection of the Niger Delta. In the Niger Delta, the invasion combined to fuel the resurgence of agitation, militia movements, and opposition to the activities of the multinational oil companies in the region on an unprecedented scale. Decades of marginalization and exclusion of the region from direct access and resource control fuelled disgust and resentment of the federal government by the people.

Government unwavering and unresponsiveness to the demands of the people created a fertile ground for conflict. Peaceful negotiation turned to violent demonstrations. Youth became more restive and more vulnerable to indulging in criminal activities due to joblessness. Consequently, unarmed demonstrators metamorphosed into militants. Government met such acts with force as security forces were deployed to quell demonstrations. Security forces ended up killing innocent citizens.

The destruction of Odi by the Nigerian soldiers was attributed to the killing of nine police officers who were deployed to maintain law and order in the community. The policemen were reportedly killed by the youths. The government's response to the killing of the policemen was the deployment of Nigerian soldiers to Odi. The soldiers saw their assignment as a punitive expedition and indiscriminately killed innocent civilians. There were extra-judicial murders. Odi was razed down, women were raped, and properties were either looted or destroyed by the soldiers.

### **Invasion of Zaki-Biam and its Environs**

In 2001, soldiers invaded the villages of Vasae, Anyiin Iorja, Ugba, Sankera, and Zaki-Biam, Benue State (Ahokegh, 2004). Several civilians were killed following the orders of President Obasanjo (HRW, 2001). This was an act that infringed on the fundamental human rights of Nigerians during the repressive democratically elected government of Olusegun Obasanjo. Nigerian soldiers were detached to a punitive expedition to these communities, and it was tagged "Operation No Living Thing" (Ahokegh, 2004). The invasion of these communities has a long history of communal clashes between the Tiv-Jukun/Fulani from Taraba state although, these communities once co-existed peacefully (Ahokegh, 2004). However, several developments like political domination and settler/indigene problems, among others, brought Tiv-Jukun/Fulani into intermittent crisis (Yecho & Ityonzughul, 2019). The violence that ensued in 2001 between the Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen resulted in the death of 19 soldiers, which the traditional ruler of Ukum local government area of Benue State claimed to be Jukun/Fulani militia in military uniform, not Nigeria soldiers (Yecho & Ityonzughul, 2019). The claim that they were fake soldiers could not be ruled out, because in recent times, militia groups, even in the Niger Delta, were often provided with military uniforms, especially on election days (Zua, 2017). However, the Nigerian government maintained that the 19 people killed were Nigerian soldiers and reciprocated with force.

The militiamen were not apprehended, rather there were indiscriminate killings of innocent citizens. There is no moral justification for the deployment of soldiers on a vengeance mission to Zaki-Biam and its environs. The deployment of soldiers to Zaki-Biam demonstrates that the Nigerian government has no respect for the lives of the citizens it is supposed to protect. It also shows the vulnerability of Nigerian citizens to the government that should protect them. The Nigerian government owes this responsibility to every Nigerian, not the indiscriminate killing of unarmed and innocent citizens, especially women and children. If innocent Nigerians are killed by the government through its various armed forces, what then should innocent Nigerians expect from external aggression?

### **Fulani Herdsmen**

Fulani herdsmen are nomads who herd their animals across vast areas looking for fertile grazing ground. They are often armed with sophisticated weapons to protect themselves and their animals (Ajibefun, 2018). Recent changes in human security threat are replicated in the persistent herdsmen killings in several parts of rural Nigeria with poor state response and intervention (Ajibefun, 2018). According to the Global Terrorism Index (2021), more than 1200 people were killed by Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria in 2014. Amnesty International (2018) reported that about 3,641 Nigerians were

killed by Fulani herdsmen between January 2016 to October 2018. Furthermore, the International Crisis Group (2018) disclosed that 1500 persons were killed and 300,000 people were displaced between September 2017 to June 2018. The number of clashes and casualties between farmers and Fulani herdsmen has increased over the years, thereby causing more casualties in 2018 than Boko Haram (Cook, 2011). Minor disputes evolved into carefully planned attacks where militias eradicate villages as well as destroyed sources of livelihood. People are forced to flee their villages, resulting in an increased number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria.

### **Boko Haram**

One of the most compelling security concerns in Nigeria is Boko Haram, an extremist Islamic group from North-Eastern Nigeria. Radical Islam is not a recent occurrence in Nigeria as Nigeria has witnessed some deadly religious riots like Maitatsine in 1980 and the Kano riot in 1982. Thus, Nigeria has a long history of religious violence (Oyebade, 2014). By 1992 the Sharia Penal Code has been adopted in twelve Northern states in the country. Boko Haram began with the aim of spreading Islam beyond the Northern part of the country because the Sharia Penal Code has been adopted in twelve states in the country.

The violence posed by Boko Haram ranged from co-option and conscription of members, destruction of valuables, the massive killing of people, and threat to the state. A recent analysis of contemporary human security threats in Nigeria suggests a link between the terrorist group and state collaborators which has been the ‘principal strategic thought’ underlying the failure of the government in winning the war on terrorism. Thus, while a section of the state has been resilient in winning the war against terrorism, it is not out of place to argue that there are infiltrators within the ranks of the state that continue to undermine genuine efforts to win the war on terrorism. Agbiboa (2013) argued that the membership of Boko Haram cuts across social stratum. It consists of university lecturers, bankers, political elites, unemployed graduates, drug addicts, “almajiris,” and migrants from neighboring countries.

Former President Goodluck Jonathan expressed this concern during his time in office pointing out that there is “Boko Haram in his cabinet” (Jonathan, 2013). Furthermore, President Goodluck Jonathan in his reply to former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s letter to him about the state of the nation titled “Before it is too late” (2013) stated the following:

... at a stage, almost the entire North-East of Nigeria was under siege by insurgents.

Bombings of churches and public buildings in the North and the federal capital became an almost weekly occurrence. Our entire national security apparatus seemed nonplussed and unable to come to grips with the new threat posed by the berthing of terrorism on our shores. (Jonathan, 2013)

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram sect had pledged loyalty to Islamic global terrorist organizations, namely the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Zenn, 2013). Perhaps one of the most daunting concerns has been understanding the underlying causes and principal motives of terrorist violence in Nigeria. This

is riddled with controversies as some arguments are put forward which suggest that the terrorist group seeks for Islamization of Nigeria (Monica, 2012). Other scholars have argued that the sect is informed by the notion of territorial control and occupation (Aro, 2013; Cook, 2011). It has also been argued that Boko Haram is averse to Western education and Westernization as the tagline denotes “Western education is evil” (Suleiman, & Karim, 2015, 1).

Boko Haram movement was started by Muhammad Yusuf in 2002. The sect appears largely motivated by an extreme view of Islamic doctrines or teachings. Suleiman and Karim (2015) argued that the current leader of the sect, Abubakar Shekau, is far less knowledgeable than Muhammad Yusuf, the former leader of the sect. Abubakar Shekau is rather more radical, hence the persistent killings. This latter notion suggests that there are lots of controversies surrounding the real import and purport of the Boko Haram insurgency. Boko Haram’s major base remains the Sambisa Forest, which is at the adjoining border of Nigeria, and the Niger Republic, which is known as the axis and operational base of the sect. Boko Haram remains a terror to Nigerians and the central and dreaded security threat in Nigeria.

Boko Haram has equally become a collective concern that the underlying dynamics of the threat that terrorism represents for both local and international communities are conceived by the citizenry to be fundamentally mediated through and determined by the structure and logic of the state’s system. The Northern oligarchy has been a core factor in exploring the core elements of the terrorism phenomenon. Indeed, both President Goodluck Jonathan and President Mohammadu Buhari’s administrations have prioritized the war against terrorism. However, the results have been minimal (BBC News, 2021). The insurgent group remains strong and resilient.

Terrorism has become a new dimension of contemporary human security threats that have increasingly undermined Nigeria’s national and international image and wreaked havoc on humanity and the entire social system. Thus, Boko Haram terrorism has been, a new security dilemma in Nigeria. A detailed analysis of the complex trajectories of the terrorist group, which is increasingly described as “faceless” remains worrisome. However, broadly speaking, the security dilemma which follows the sect invariably suggests that in its efforts, the state has not been able to successfully deploy an effective counter-terrorist strategy to win the war on terrorism.

Given the plural nature of Nigeria’s society, it remains a growing concern to explore the underlying implications of the changing forms of human security threat in Nigeria. A threat to human security suggests that the safety of the citizens is less guaranteed because the state has not been able to tactically end the insurgency. The increasingly overlapping, complex, and often competing ethnoreligious groups and the intersecting crisis of state legitimacy, tenuous power play, poor institutional capacity, and weak social transformation partly undermine the efforts at mitigation of insecurity. Cerny (2005) reinforced the complexity of the state’s capacity to confront security dilemmas when he stated that the State represents only one level of this power structure. Cerny (2005) further stated that the state is diffused, internally split, and enmeshed in a wider complex web of power. The Nigerian context points

out that state capacity remains increasingly questionable and less responsive to the persistent threats of terrorism. Cerny (2005) added that the new dimensions of the security dilemma had taken in an increasingly changing environment, resulting in fluidity and economic dislocations in arriving at what security means. Cerny (2005) strengthened debates on post-Cold War security dynamics and the destabilizing effect of transitions to democracy; the undermining of traditional cultures, beliefs, and loyalties; and threats to the environmental and public health. Cerny (2005) argued that these trends undoubtedly strengthened the role of the nation-states and the state system as main security providers. However, Cerny (2005) further stated that both the state and the state system have been making the role of security more problematic, stressing that this has given rise to a new security dilemma.

Following Boko Haram terrorism, a new sense of general threat emerged across Nigeria pointing out the poor capacity of the state to mitigate the threat. Some of the critical issues associated with the threat of terrorism in Northern Nigeria appear not to have been adequately investigated. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the humanitarian crisis, vulnerability, and poverty reinforce the basis of scholarly interrogation of the transition to terrorism in Nigeria. Thus, terrorism is characterized by micro-level attacks on defenseless citizens including women and the girl child. Such attacks have been intermittent and increasingly proliferated from one section of the northeast to the other. While some scholars argue that terrorism is not new (Laqueur, 1977; Wilkinson, 1974) in the Nigerian context, terrorism is a new security dilemma and continues to threaten human security, peace, and mutual co-existence. Among the several dilemmas of new security threats beyond massive killings, displacement, and distortion of livelihoods is the seemingly “facelessness” of the sect.

Boko Haram terrorism remains an enigma across Nigeria as the insurgent group appears largely unknown. However, the notion of state complicity often contributes to the complexities in unraveling those behind the sectarian terrorist attacks. The government’s implicit support of Boko Haram is inextricably interconnected with other contradictory aspects of the Nigerian state. Religious bigotry and fundamentalism appear to be the same. For instance, given that the sect is an Islamic terrorist group, religious sentiment has increasingly contributed to the failure of the Nigerian State to fight the sect head-on. These linkages may not fritter away in any accurate analysis of the complexities of the new security dilemma in Nigeria. These connections which cut across the entire Muslim north crystallize in a generalized sense of state pardon by the Nigerian State. For instance, the Nigerian government offered amnesty to the terrorist sect, which initially rejected the offer (Agbibo, 2015). However, subsequent trends suggest that some of the members that relinquished and renounced the sect were granted state pardons.

The largely unknown level of state genuine commitment to prosecute the terrorists and drastically bring an end to terrorism remains a key concern in understanding the nature of contemporary security and insecurity (Berzins & Cullen, 2003; Cerny, 2005). Terrorism reflects deeper and wider structural changes. In this sense, the war on terror certainly cannot be a simple war of armed forces but must be a socio-political process (Cerny, 2005; Douglas, 1999). These are some of the fundamental



considerations that could help the Nigerian state overcome the complexities embedded in the new forms taken by human security in contemporary times.

### **Biafra Insurgency**

The perceived alienation of the Igbos of defunct Biafra since the end of the civil war in 1970 triggered the formation of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) (Oyewo, 2019). MASSOB was founded in 1999 by Ralph Uwazurike and was described as a non-violent separatist movement. Its ideology of peaceful secession was based on Mahatma Ghandi's principle of non-violent (Oyewo, 2019). However, a more radical group known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was founded by Nnamdi Kanu in 2014. Its aim was to restore the independent state of Biafra. Unlike MASSOB, IPOB encouraged violent conflict (Oyewo, 2019). The Nigerian government headed by President Muhammadu Buhari views IPOB as a terrorist group. Subsequently, the government crackdown on IPOB has resulted in several deaths and casualties (Ashley, 2017).

### **Sharia Law Crisis**

Similarly, early human security threats in the aftermath of democracy were evident in the Sharia law crisis in northern Nigeria which recorded a resurgence of chaos and the killing of several anti-Sharia groups (Elaigwu, & Galadima, 2003). The extension of Sharia law from civil to criminal matters in 12 northern states increased inter-communal conflicts as the Sharia Penal Code Law endorses corporal and capital punishment. For example, Safiya Hussaini Tungar Tudu in Sokoto was convicted in a Sharia court and was sentenced to death in 2001 by stoning for committing adultery (Okerecha, 2011). Likewise, Amina Lawal was sentenced to death by stoning by a Sharia court in Katsina for committing adultery in 2002 (HRW, 2002). Punishments under Sharia law, such as amputation, stoning to death, and decapitation are endangered fundamental human rights.

The international community condemned the verdicts, several appeals were made and both women were discharged and acquitted. The verdicts were described as gender biased. Both cases of adultery involved males and females, only the women were convicted. Although both women were discharged and acquitted, such verdicts engender the lives of women and constitute a violation of human rights.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper explored the transition of human security threats from violation of human rights to a more devastating terrorist attack. The argument is that the changing forms of human security threats in Nigeria following the space created by democracy provide the basis from which analysis can draw to address the complex turn terrorism has taken. Thus, studies in human security should recognize the questions centered around persistent terrorist attacks and divergent implications on human security. Furthermore, terrorist attacks provide a rationale for understanding the vulnerability of the ordinary people who are defenseless. Insecurity in Nigeria has caused several innocent citizens to die.

Again, with the transition to terrorism and the increasing killings by both Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen, without direct punitive measures by the federal government particularly, the case of

herdsmen killing becomes more worrisome. It is suggested that the government should be more proactive and devise drastic measures to mitigate terrorism. There is an urgent need to change the security structure and mechanisms in Nigeria. Ideas and actions about counterterrorism should be more strategic and institutionalized with more responsive approaches. New action must be distinguished from the dominant counter-terrorism interventions which can be strengthened by a more collaborative approach through civil/military relationships.

Furthermore, re-emphasizing the question of a transition to terrorism which the paper has raised will help to deepen the understanding of the question of the intensity of human security threats and point to the need to address the question of the relation of human wellbeing and mitigation of human security threats. The emphasis is on how to move human security beyond the problematic frameworks that increasingly adopt state-centric strategies which remain less transformative. The dialogue could be useful to douse the persistent crisis between herdsmen and rural farmers. Cattle ranching should be introduced. Herders could secure such ranches to protect their business and check incessant killings. This will create a peaceful atmosphere for herders and farmers.

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