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# THE POLITICAL-ECONOMY OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL INSECURITY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

By

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Olanrewaju, Ilemobola Peter

## Abstract

National security has always been a major concern of every country in the world. This is why leaders of countries of the world can go to any length to secure life and property of its citizenry as well as the geographical boundaries of their countries. In addition, political leaders across the globe always handle with urgency the domestic violence capable of threatening the national security of their countries. Nigeria has been a theatre of violent conflicts with some of the conflicts and violence threatening the security of the country. Anchored on the political-economy approach, with heavy reliance on secondary data, the study examines the political and economic motivations of perpetrators of insecurity in the country with a particular focus on the Fourth Republic. The study finds that divisive politics among the various ethnic groups in the country, political and economic gains associated with political power as well as joblessness among youths are the major causative factors of insecurity in the country. The study therefore recommends among others: the need to tone down on divisive politics by the various ethnic groups in the country as this has generated conflict, violence with implications for insecurity in the country; that political and economic benefits associated with political offices should be reduced to make them less attractive. Politicians should be re-orientated towards seeing political posts as means of rendering services to the people rather than a means to amass wealth for themselves, their immediate families and other social affiliations they belong. The government should embark on mass youth employment so that they will no longer be willing instruments in the hands of desperate politicians or religious zealots. The aforementioned if tenaciously adhere to will invariably reduce insecurity problems in the country.





**Keyword:** National Security, Insecurity, Political-Economy, Nigeria, Fourth Republic

## **The Political-Economy of Nigeria's National Insecurity: An Examination of the Fourth Republic**

### **Introduction**

The foremost interest of nations freely expressed in their constitution is the issue of security of their citizens and the preservation of their territorial integrity. Individually, the quest for a peaceful nation and a peaceful world has continuously stimulated discussions among political leaders, be it bilaterally or multilaterally. Though threats to national security are a common decimal to states all across the globe, the nature of threat is peculiar to state, depending on the peculiarity of its domestic structure.

Against this background, the nature and dynamics of violence and insecurity in Nigeria, throughout history, have adopted the colouration of its multi-diverse social structure. It is interesting to realise that since the creation of the Nigerian state, its national security has always being threatened by those internal factors that make it up and give it that unique identity it possesses. That is, the same multi-ethnic and multi-religious factors that make it the most diverse black nation of the world are the same factors that threaten its peace and security. However, instrumentalists have explained the inability of primordial factors such as ethnic, culture and religion, to create violence by themselves until they are manipulated by certain political elites for the purpose of achieving their personal agenda, which is mostly economic. Nigeria's Fourth Republic has recorded a long list of insecurity issues due to the lucrativeness of political power.

Thus, this study examines the political-economy dimensions of Nigeria's national insecurity. In other words, the study tries to find out whether there is a linkage between political and economic gains derivable from participating in politics by different individuals and groups in Nigeria and insecurity with a specific focus on the Fourth Republic.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

#### **Conceptualizing National Security**

The term national security seems elusive. Therefore, we will adopt the recommendation of Wolfer (1952: 481) to scrutinize and precisely conceptualise the term to address the thrust of this study. Setting off from here, it is important to form the base that the term has its domain in the

political parlance, referring to unspecific objective of government policies and the exhibition of power (Wolfer, 1952: 483; Onuoha and Ezirim, 2010: 257). Oladeji and Folorunso (2007) see national security as a desirable and essential objective of state, as it guarantees the continuous existence of the system. According to them, it "is a sine qua non for economic growth and development" (p.41). To Petersen (2008), it is of overriding concern to states. In his words, it is "a matter of survival" (p. 178). To this end, the term sheds spotlight on the issues of instability, insecurity and organised violence that go on within a state's territorial space (Fagbohun, 2011: 365; Deudney, 1990: 462).

By the end of World War II, realities in the international system provided new sources of threat to the sovereignty of the state, necessitating a conceptual evolution from a more succinctly militaristic, state-centric and strategic 'national defence' to a more elastic and elaborate non-militaristic 'national security' (Myers, 1989; 38-41; Obi, 1997: 2; Neocleous, 2006: 363-364; Onuoha and Ezirim, 2010: 257).

Inferring from the writings of Sarkesian, Williams and Cimbala (2008: 4), a stereotypical description of national security is given as the "ability of national institutions to prevent adversaries from using force to harm their citizens or national interests and the confidence of citizens in this capacity". They proceeded in the assertion that national security "focuses on security and safety; primarily concerned with actual and potential adversaries and their use of force" (Sarkesian, Williams and Cimbala, 2008: 4). Though it is true to the extent that the term talks about safe-guarding the life and wellbeing of citizens, the description seems somewhat parochial, as it only regards national security as state's 'defence and power question'; it also assumes states to be the only players oscillating in the realm of security, with force as their instrument of terror. This parochialism also reflects in Lippmann's (1943) narrative of "a nation as having security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war" (cited in Fagbohun, 2011: 360). Imobighe (1981) avows it as the defence and survival of the state (cited in Anyadike, 2013: 13). In addressing the notion that states are the only sources of security threat, Liotta (2005: 59) states that national security emphasises the securing of state's sovereignty from external manipulations, which ranges from NGOs to terrorist networks. Being more explicit, Anyadike's (2013: 13) enumeration includes violent non-state actors,





narcotic cartels, multinational corporations, national disasters and factors causing severe environmental damages. This assertion by Anyadike relates more to the realities of post-cold war and the twenty first century security system. To this end, Fagbohun (2011: 360) argues that national security accommodates the overall security of a nation.

In the analysis of Onuoha and Ezirim (2010: 257), national security is been decomposed into physical or state security and human security. Their analysis reveals the elaborate nature of the concept by combining its orthodox understanding with the contemporary meaning. That is, as much as national security emphasises the protection of the state's territorial integrity against external and internal menaces, it also centres on ensuring the wellbeing and welfare of the citizenry through efforts that provide socio-economic development. Therefore, scholars like Buzan (1983), Katzenstein and Okawara (1993), Ostergard (2002) and Onuoha (2008) have portrayed national security to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which could be economic, social, environmental, political, military or epidemiological in nature. This argument, clearly, is a radical departure from a traditional idea that accuses states alone for national insecurity; the military as the defender against such insecurity; force as the only instrument of terror, to a comprehensive idea that considers both state and non-state actors; attending to whatever violates the peace, safety and wellbeing of the citizens as a threat to national security and been handled as such.

However in the Nigerian context, Oladeji and Folorunso (2007: 41) have conceptualised national security as the "protection and enhancement of the country's unity and fostering loyalty among its federating units". That is, the country is secured when its citizens are safe, the entire federating units feel deep sense of belonging to the state, civil rights are respected with equal political freedom for all and when the state itself is able to guarantee non-discriminatory economic opportunities. More importantly, whatever threatens the oneness and the togetherness of the various entities that make up Nigeria is termed a threat to national security. Having seen what national security connotes, it is important to consider political-economy.

In the main, political economy is concerned with the interface between political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth among different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time (DFID, 2009). Political economy as a concept has old history. Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and

Jones (2010) opine that the classical economists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which include Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill and Karl Max all wrote on the subject matter of political economy. In doing this, they borrowed a leaf from Aristotle who contends that government, society and the economy are one. The old political economists were normative in their orientations, prescribing what government should do to promote a just society. As economists tended toward scientific orientation and number-based in the late nineteenth century, they dropped "political" from the name of their discipline and jettisoned analysis tailored towards what "should" or "ought" in favour of prescriptive, empirical, descriptive and predictive mode of analysis ("what is"). The term has recently resuscitated with partisan overtones. Radicals use the term "political economy" which was common with Marxist scholars (which is very difficult to sell nowadays) to criticise capitalism and unfair distribution of wealth among and within countries. On the other hand, conservatives use the term to support the pure market system advocated by Adam Smith. In the context of this paper, the term is used in a close manner with the radicals but with little addition.

In this study, while the term portrays unequal distribution of wealth in the society, it also connotes competition for political power as major causes of insecurity in the country. In fact, people participate either directly or indirectly in conflict, violence, crime and other activities that constitute a threat to security because of envisaged economic gain. It is therefore not a surprise that Justino (2008) posits that many choose to participate in acts of violence and also give support to armed groups not just for opportunistic reason, but to guarantee survival and fulfilment of basic needs through looting and appropriation of valuable assets which create insecurity problem. When the level of poverty is high, it may drive people to participate in conflict as some may gain more as fighters during war time than in peace time. In line with this study, unemployment and poverty mostly among youth leave them with no option but to participate in violence and crimes provided their immediate needs would be met through such means. In addition, politicians conscious of the fact that winning in an election opens the gate for appropriating collective wealth for personal use also engage in some activities that aggravate insecurity like using thugs to terrorise opponents, causing violence during campaigns or mobilising people from their ethnic groups or religious groups against contestants from other ethnic groups or different religious persuasion.



## Insecurity in Nigeria: An Overview

The birth of the Nigerian state in an independence ceremony of October 1, 1960 encountered mixed feelings in the minds of some of the attendees; to the Northerners, the independence came too early, while to their southern counterparts, it came even too late. Though, in the pretence of celebration, no one would have predicted coup, counter coup, massacre, secession attempt, civil war, ethno-religious and political crisis, like a prophet of doom over the newly born country (Oyibo, 1971: 1).

From the period of independence till date, the country has faced quite a number of insecurity problems. Notable among these shortly after independence included the civil war. A critical examination of etiology of insecurity in Nigeria reveals that they have more to do with competition for political power and struggle for economic benefits. For instance, Nigeria experienced a number of skirmishes which brought the country under immense tension like the Census Crisis of 1962, the Federal Election Crisis of 1964 and the Coups and Counter Coups of 1966. The stroke that eventually broke the camel's back was the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of 1967-70 (Omotere, 2011). These tension, hostility and attendant insecurity, according to Lloyd (1970), are as a result of competition among the larger ethnic groups (the Yorubas, Ibos and Hausa-Fulanis) for wealth and power.

Adejumobi (2001: 37) accused post-independence political elites for the political instability that eventually culminated into a civil war. He argued that since amalgamation in 1914, the country has being characterised by ethno-religious differences which became a manipulative tool after independence for elites to achieve their personal ends. He then outlined the factors which led to the civil war as "North-South division and ethnic conflicts, minority group politics, the structural dilemma of the Nigerian army, the census controversy and the Federal election crisis of 1962 and 1965" (Adejumobi, 2001: 37). In the same vain, history did not exempt the military from this horrendous act of conjuring chaos for the purpose of achieving personal ambitions. Most of the military coups in Nigeria were not on justifiable reasons of political intervention but were to satisfy selfish ambitions for power and wealth. According to Goddey (2011: 32), "they see political power as a means of amassing wealth and elevating their social status in the society".

The Second Republic, especially 1983 was equally chaotic due to cut throat political competition that characterised the era. When Babangida took over

from Buhari, the various protests that occasioned the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme were economically inspired protests as they were precipitated by the desire to challenge SAP, which the people felt had impoverished them. SAP, for example failed the majority of Nigerians, particularly it brought mass unemployment and poverty that led to riots (AFRODAD, 2003), thus the popular 'SAP riots'. In Nigeria, recession in the late 1970s caused unemployment and poverty, doubling to more than 20 per cent; this therefore, gave impetus for the Maitatsine riots (Ikejiaku, 2012).

### **Politics, Economic and Insecurity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

The increase in insecurity in the Fourth Republic can be traced among other things to the long period of military rule and the annulment of the June 12, Presidential election in 1993. Long period of military rule has bastardised the psyche of Nigerians leading to the inculcation of culture of violence in the citizenry. General Sani Abacha who sacked the Interim National Government put in place by General Babangia exacerbated the already heightened ethno-regional tension in his bid to transmute to civilian president (Agbaje, 2003). Anyanwu (1993:4) captured the scenario that occasioned the June 12, 1993 presidential election in a way that worth quoting verbatim. Thus he said:

One of the many legacies of June 12 is the heightening of discomfort over the disequilibrium in our body politics. At no time in our history has this awareness been more acute than now. The Ogonis are crying over "neglect". The other oil producing states feel "cheated". The northern minorities feel left out. The west feels "robbed". The core north feels it has only held the titles but real power has been elsewhere. The East says it has always been oppressed and "marginalised".

It was against this background that the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) was formed to defend the interest of the Yoruba race among other things amidst other ethnic groups in the country and to reclaim the June 12 election which was annulled by General Ibrahim Babangida. The orgy of violence unleashed by OPC eventually seems to pay off as the two candidates that were allowed to contest the presidential election in 1999 came from that part of the country. The success of OPC seems to encourage the formation of other identities based organization like the Movement for the Sovereign





State of Biafra (MASSOB), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) to mention just a few. According to Uwazurike (2000) MASSOB was formed to challenge the marginalization of the Igbos who feel excluded from governance of the country. The NDVF and latter Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) fought with oil companies and the Nigeria government on the ground of environmental pollution which latter snowballed to resource war in which the groups demanded the control of their resources. The activities of these organizations most especially the OPC, NDVF and MEND constituted a security nightmare for the country. For instance, Akinwumi (2004) notes that many saw the activities of OPC as dangerous and could destroy the country. The federal government was forced to ban all militia groups in the country. As a result the groups went underground.

Apart from the activities of the OPC, the zone was also plagued with intra-ethnic conflict. Notable among these was the Ife-Modakeke conflict. Although conflict between the two groups has been on for a long time but there was a renewal of the age long conflict in the Fourth Republic. The conflict was brought about by the creation of a new local government council area. The location of the local government headquarters became a matter of controversy between the two groups. At inception, the capital was cited at Enuwa, an Ife settlement. This was greeted with protest by the Modakeke people and later to Oke-Igbo, which was seen as neutral but this still dissatisfied the Modakeke who said the place was not neutral but part of Ife settlement. The crisis left at least 500 people dead, over 100 houses were razed and over 10,000 became refugees (Akinwumi, 2004).

In the South-East, MASSOB canvassing for the sovereign state of Biafra came into head collision course with the government, which banned the organization and also sent many of its leaders into prison (Akinwumi, 2004). Egbesu Boys though different from MASSOB, its activities were also a threat to the security of the country. The group's primary goals were to resist the continual exploitation of the mineral resources (Oil wells) of the Niger Delta by the government of Nigeria and the Multinational Oil explorers on one hand and also check the killings of their members or their people in the South-west by the OPC. It was also observed that the group was not immuned from political manipulation (Asamu, 2005). Another militia group is the Bakkasi Boys. They emerged as a resistance army employed by traders in Aba and Onitsha to check criminal activities of armed robbers and

hoodlums. However, at the tail end of the former governor of Anambra state (between 2002-2003), the group was employed to eliminate party opponents (Asamu, 2005).

The northern part of Nigeria equally has its own share of insecurity in the country in form of communal and religious violence. The Tiv-Jukun in Benue and Taraba states communal unrest is a good example. In short, conflict between the Tiv and Jukun hinges on the struggle between the groups to control Wukari local government. In Jos, Plateau State, the inter-group conflict between the indigenes (Anaguta, Berom and Afizere) and the Hausa-Fulani groups also has political underpinning. In essence, it is basically on the contest between the indigenes and the Hausa-Fulani group to control Jos North local government council (Joshua and Ahmadu, 2014). The death toll that has attended the two cases of communal unrest mentioned above is quite worrisome and that of Jos has taken on religious colouration.

In northern Nigeria, another factor that appears to contribute to insecurity in the country as mentioned before is the manipulation of religion for selfish purposes. Shortly after Chief Olusegun Obasanjo got to power in 1999, he was confronted with the issue of Sharia law. Governor Sani Ahmed, a member of opposition party (All Progressive Party-APP) has adopted Sharia law, which was swiftly followed by other states like Sokoto, Niger, Kano, Kebbi, Jigawa, Yobe and Kaduna. It is important to mention that the implementation of the Islamic code of law- Sharia was greeted with resistance as it was seen as a continuation of the historic Jihad war. The reason for this opposition is not unconnected with the fact that Kaduna is made up of a significant Christian population. Thus, Christians in the state decided to embark on peaceful protest which eventually turned violent as the procession was confronted by some Muslim youths. The death toll after the conflict was over was very high although it is difficult to know the exact number of casualties in the crisis; the President then, Chief Obasanjo described the incident as the worst bloodletting since the civil war (Akinwumi, 2004). In Aba, a south eastern state, many Moslems were also killed in retaliation to the killing of many Igbo Christians in the Kaduna Sharia crisis (Akinwumi, 2004).

The introduction of Sharia in some states in the north is seen as a means to destabilise Obsanjo's regime who failed to dance to the tune of the north that paved the way for his electoral victory in 1999 (Fayemi 2001). It is





therefore not a surprise that Normistsu (2000 cited in Akinwumi, 2004:173) contends that:

Some members of the northern Muslim elite- which ruled Nigeria for most of its history but found its power greatly diminished under Mr. Obasanjo, a Christian- seem to have seized on religion to galvanize their forces and challenge the federal government.

This lends credence to Obasanjo reference to the introduction of Sharia as political.

What appears to be the biggest of all religious motivated violence is that of Boko Haram. The formation of the group dates back to 1995, under the leadership of Abubakar Lawan with the name Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra and its headquarters in Maidiguri, Nigeria (Connel 2012). Its goal at inception was to improve the economic status of the people in the country which made the group to enjoy large followership (Farouk, 2012). Mohammed Yusuf a radical Muslim cleric however took over when Lawan travelled to Medina in Saudi Arabia to further his study. When Yusuf took over, he changed the inclination of the group towards the overthrow of the secular government and the enforcement of anti-Western Sharia law based government. The group targeted churches and government buildings. The arrest and the killing of Yusuf by government security forces have made the group more daring and destructive most especially from 2011 till date (Malachy, 2013). It has been observed that there is a political dimension to Boko Haram insurgency in the north. For instance Malachy (2013:6) put it more pungently that:

In order to secure electoral victory at all cost during the 2011 election, desperate northern politicians recruited members of the sect to rig the 2011 elections in their favour at the state and federal levels, those who won the elections dumped them while those who failed particularly to win the presidential elections further funded and used them to cause havoc. Consequently, they enjoy the full support of major northern political elites and members of the armed forces who want the north to dominantly occupy the seat of the presidency. The failure of the northern political elites to win the presidential ticket during the 2011 elections led to intensified Boko Haram attacks against government, Christians and southern targets in the north.

Insecurity in Nigeria also has social dimension although inexorably linked to economic factor. For example, unemployment in the country especially



among youths is also one of the major drivers of insecurity. The growing gap between the rich and the poor, corruption perpetrated by the political leaders, poor governance all combined to worsen the problem of unemployment in the country as money meant for development are frittered away on personal and family needs of those in position of authority. These have been well captured by Okafor (2011), Ewetan and Urhie (2013). The reason for this is not unconnected with the fact that unemployed youths are easily attracted to various forms of crimes and violent activities provided they open up means to meet their immediate needs. Even those involved in kidnapping for ransom are attracted by the envisaged economic gain from such criminal act.

It is therefore, not a surprise that scholars like Nnoli (1980) and Horowitz (1985) agree that quite a number of conflicts in developing countries, especially in Africa hinge on ethnic divisions and have poverty implications. In fact, competition for scarce resources among ethnic groups orchestrated by poverty is a common source of conflicts in Africa.

Nnoli (1980) has substantiated this position through an empirical study linking socio-economic factors to ethnic conflict in Nigeria, contending that the working of economic forces is responsible for tensions between divergent ethnic groups with competing interests. Thus, the fierce contest for economic and political status by diverse ethnic groupings is the source of conflict (Horowitz 1985). This lend credence to Gurr (1970) relative deprivation theory that conflict is based on ethnic groups' competition and struggle for access to power and economic resources.

Therefore, ethnic conflicts are the result of an attempt by various ethnic segments or tribes to secure power or greater access to the state's scarce resources. These are issues that have generated spiral of insecurity in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The following suggestions are hereby made to mitigate the problems of insecurity in Nigeria. There is need to tow down on divisive politics among the various ethnic groups in the country as this has generated conflict, violence with implications for insecurity in the country. Politicians should be re-orientated towards seeing political posts as means of rendering services to the people and not a means to amass wealth for themselves or their immediate families. If this is done, the contest for political post will no longer be brutal. Whosoever comes to political authority should treat the entire country as his or her own constituency instead of been seen as representing a



particular religion, region or ethnic group. This will reduce inter-group conflict. There is need to devise means through which politics will be an instrument of national integration instead of serving as divisive force. The government should embark on mass youth employment. However, in the interim, there is need to give regular allowance to unemployed youths so as to cushion the effect of poverty that make youth prone to ruthless and violent activities brought about by their joblessness.

### **Conclusion**

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that insecurity in Nigeria is basically linked to political and economic factors. As stated before, the violent activities of the OPC as a result of the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election (alleged to have been won by the late Chief M.K.O Abiola a Yoruba man) culminated in the two presidential slots in 1999 elections been given to the South-West to placate them. In the same vein, violence by the Niger Delta militants eventually fetched the Niger Delta region the position of Vice-President in 2009 presidential elections and eventually presidency after the demise of Yar 'Adua. The North seems to be going the same direction with the Boko Haram insurgency. If presidency is conceded to the north, come 2015, Boko Haram may die a natural death in no long a time. The reason for this is not far-fetched, because political office is seen as a means to economic power. Obasanjo (2002:50-51 cited in Joshua, 2013:330b) asserts that "we fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to the economic kingdom". People also see members of their groups on the corridor of power as a means to benefit the group, hence the easy manipulations of group members by politicians for selfish end.

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