

THE MANY FACES OF SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: ANY SILVER LINING AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

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Abstract

Ungoverned spaces foster the growth of violent extremism and crime. Good governance is crucial for addressing these challenges, but Nigeria lacks it. This paper sheds light on the causes of insecurity in Nigeria, measures taken to curb the challenge, and some ways to tackle the menace. After reviewing some concepts related to the study, the paper identifies weak security system, poverty, greater awareness of disparities in life chances, ethnicity, and ethnocentrism, religious divide, majority/minority divide, manipulation of diversities and consequences, youth unemployment/underemployment, displaced and out-of-school children, proliferation/influx of small arms and light weapons, impunity, inequity, and repentant terrorists as causes of Security Challenges in Nigeria. The article further documents some active security challenges in Nigeria, such as the Boko haram insurgency and other militancy activities, the farmer-herder conflicts in the north-central states, ethno-religious conflict, conflict over resources, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) saga, banditry and criminality in the northwest, kidnapping, electoral violence, corruption, and gender-based violence. The paper concludes by suggesting the way forward to tackle insecurity, such as advocacy for the practice of politics of difference, recognition of diversities, peacebuilding measures, reform of the democratic system, and tapping the potential of African youth.

Keywords: Security, insecurity menace, faces of security challenges, good governance

Introduction

Nigeria is facing a very challenging time concerning security – from the northeast to the southwest, northwest to southeast, northcentral to south-south, nowhere is spared. Just as there are many locations of insecurity, there are many perpetrators of it. Just pick a newspaper in Nigeria today and you will see several of such dastardly acts perpetrated by agents of darkness. The question is, “Any hope of ending this?”

The paper is divided into four major sections. The first section deals with definition of the terms used in the paper; the second section highlights the causes

of security challenges in Nigeria; the third highlights the active security challenges in the country; the fourth section discusses the way forward. The final section is the conclusion. To proceed with this conversation, there is a need to define some of the concepts that I will use in the paper.

Security: Nwolise (2006) defines security as “an all-encompassing condition which suggests that a territory must be secure by a network of armed forces; that the sovereignty of the state must be guaranteed by a democratic and patriotic government, which in turn must be protected by the military, police and the people themselves; that the people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals such as unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution and socio-economic injustices. It is generally argued, however that security is not the absence of threats or security issues but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise.

National Security: National security refers to the “Aggregation of the security interests of the individuals, political entities, human associations, and ethnic groups, which make up the nation. The security interest includes the safety of life and property, economic, psychological, and mental well-being, and the freedom to pursue the attainment of legitimate objectives without hindrance” (Obasanjo, 2017). Anything that breaches this state of things is a security challenge.

The government must cater for the security and the welfare of the people. According to Section 14(2)(b), “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”. Thus, the very reason for which the state exists is to secure the lives and property of its citizens, failure of which it loses the essence of existence.

Human Security - Human security approach is concerned with lasting peace. So, it looks at the whole range of human existence and all the challenges women, men, girls and boys, and governments face. Human security looks at the following - personal security, food security, health security, economic security, community security, environmental security, political security, etc.

Insecurity: Insecurity is the antithesis of security. Insecurity is defined as “a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection (Beland, 2005); “It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger.”; the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety; a state of vulnerability to harm and loss of life, property or livelihood.

Diversity: Diversity is any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another. It means **understanding that everyone is unique and recognising our differences**. These include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual

orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

Diversity Management: Diversity management is about respecting, appreciating, and valuing each group. It allows for exploring these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment, understanding one another by surpassing simple tolerance to ensure people genuinely value their differences.

Peace: Peace is not just the absence of war/violent conflicts but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short of government”. Peace is a condition in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups can meet their needs, aspirations, and expectations. It is a state of well-being that is characterised by trust, compassion, and justice; a state which encourages all to explore as well as celebrate diversities and search for the good in one another without the concern for personal pain and sacrifice, providing us a chance to look at ourselves and others as part of the human family, part of one world.

Peacebuilding: Peacebuilding is an all-embracing concept that focuses on a broad range of peace activities aimed at capacity building, reconciliation, and conflict transformation (Oyedele, 2019). Peacebuilding is defined as an intervention designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict by creating sustainable peace, address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution, and stabilise the society politically, socially, and economically. It covers a wide range of efforts by diverse government and civil society actors at the community, national and international levels to ensure civilians have freedom from fear, want and humiliation before, during and after violent conflicts. Peacebuilding also involves the “development of constructive personal, group and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national and racial boundaries ... to resolve injustice in non-violent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict”. It addresses such issues as human rights, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and violence. Thus, successful peacebuilding activities create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace; reconcile opponents; prevent the resumption of conflicts; integrate civil society; create rule of law mechanisms; and address underlying structural and societal issues and lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. It includes early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, conflict resolution, peace advocacy, civilian and military peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire agreements, and the establishment of peace.

Causes of Security Challenges in Nigeria

1. **Government’s failure due to lack of institutional capacity:** Igbuzor (2011) observed that the state of insecurity in Nigeria is majorly the governmental

failure or can be linked to governmental failure. This is manifested by the government's incapacity to deliver public services and provide for the basic needs of the masses. The lack of necessities for the people in Nigeria has created a pool of frustrated people who are ignited easily by any event to be violent. Nigeria has the resources to provide for the needs of its people. However, corruption in public offices at all levels has made it impossible for office holders to focus on the provision of basic needs for the people. Nigeria is a paradox: "Poverty in the midst of plenty"; the nation's wealth resides in very few bank accounts, leaving the majority (millions) below poverty line.

2. **Weak security system:** This results from inadequate equipment for the security arm of government, both in weaponry and training. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment. A good example is the complaint of our military in the Northeast, where their weapons are inferior to those of Boko Haram and ISWAP.

3. **Poverty:** Poverty level in Nigeria is very high and pervasive. It is estimated that 70% of Nigerians live below poverty line with women constituting 80% of them (Nigeria has taken over from India as the poorest nation). There is serious hunger in the land; a hungry man is an angry man. Poverty is a result of bad governance, maladministration, exploitation of national resources for personal use, corruption, nepotism, and crass insensitivity to the plight of the ordinary man on the street. People then resort to devising survival strategies with such vulnerable people falling victim of another set of exploiters who may now use the guise of religion or economic prosperity to lure them into criminal activities culminating in security challenges. As a result of the high level of unemployment and poverty among Nigerians, especially the youths, they are adversely attracted to violent crimes. Examples are the Yahoo-yahoo and Yahoo + boys, whose desperation for instant riches has seen them dabble into ritual killings and fear among the citizens. It is argued that Nigeria has the wherewithal to provide for her people, but corruption of public office holders has made this impossible. Nigeria is a 'paradox of plenty,' a prosperous country with impoverished people. With this kind of situation, insecurity of lives and properties is bound to arise/occur (Hazen & Homer, 2007).

4. **Greater awareness of disparities in life chances:** As seen through the various media, this is a major root cause of insecurity in Nigeria. This is a rooted general perception of inequality and unfairness, which has resulted in grievances by many people. This stems from the perception of marginalisation by a section of the people in government's developmental policies and political offices. This has become a primary source of disaffection, resentment, and frustration among many of the Nigerian population, especially the youths.

5. **Ethnicity and ethnocentrism:** Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups. It is no wonder that ethnicity is considered by many as the bane of the country. Most Nigerians identify themselves first and foremost as members of their various ethnic groups rather than identifying themselves as citizens of Nigeria. Ethnicity

is not the problem per se but ethnocentrism, which is the belief that one's ethnic group is much more important than the ethnic groups of others, the concept of ethnic superiority. Ethnocentrism breeds distrust, insecurity and fear among the various ethnic groups and perpetuates inequalities and marginalisation. The fear of domination, inequalities and marginalisation has led to the re-emergence of various ethnic nationalities. Often, accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimisation, discrimination, marginalisation, nepotism and bigotry underlie ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. These fears were there prior to independence and were expressed by minorities but were deliberately ignored by the Willink Commission, leading to the deaths of thousands of Nigerian citizens.

6. **Religious divide:** Nigeria is roughly split in half between Muslims and Christians with a very small minority who practice traditional religion. These religious groups were able to live peacefully respecting one another's religion until the political elites began to use religious sentiments to reap advantages, especially during the electioneering periods or appointments. This has ushered in the concept of religious supremacy and fight for domination in the country, making ethno-religious conflicts a permanent feature of the Nigerian polity. The consequence is that over the past few years, thousands of people have been killed in series of ethno-religious clashes. Sometimes such killings emanate from developments in far-away countries. For example, the Danish cartoon of Prophet Mohammed (PUH) resulted in the killing of thousands of people and the displacement of over 800,000 persons. The flash points for these conflicts have been the NC and NE zones. The introduction of the Shariah law in 2000 in some northern states resulted in the deaths of many Nigerians.

7. **Majority/minority divide:** Hausas, Igbos and Yorubas (in alphabetical order) are considered the majorities; all other ethnic nationalities are considered minorities. Related to this is the dichotomy of indigenes and settlers that has been a major cause of conflicts in some states in the Country.

8. **Manipulation of diversities and consequences:** The mass population of Nigeria is characterised by diversities based on ethnicity, religious beliefs, political inclination, and resource control. Though these diversities portend strength in synergy for peace and social cohesion, they are often conveniently used as veritable platforms for promoting hate and violence. Nigeria's divisive interplay of politics, ethnicity and religion has led to rising nationalism and militancy of various ethnic and religious movements. Many ethnic minorities are crying of exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural domination and violence, political marginalisation and social inequalities, neglect, nepotism, victimisation and bigotry, oppression, discrimination, inequalities in the distribution of power, wealth and status, and the domination by bigger ethnic groups and their collaborators within the smaller groups with attendant consequences.

10. Youth unemployment/underemployment, displaced and out-of-school children:

Nigeria is a young country and will remain so throughout the twenty-first century (Nigeria Next Generation Report, n.d.). The youth unfortunately have been neglected in the scheme of things with dire consequences. Despite the large proportion of young people in Nigerian society, little space is given to accommodate youths in the political arena. Instead, they are increasingly instrumentalised to support political players through political violence. It is important to redefine youth behaviour and roles to enable them to initiate and contribute to positive change in Nigerian society. No wonder Chukuezi (2009) submitted that the choice between success and failure rests on Nigeria's ability to harness the power of its single greatest asset – the youth, not oil. Like women, youth participation in politics and other national issues had been relatively low until the 2015 constitutional amendment ushered in the “Not Too Young to Run” to enhance political participation. Unfortunately, other conditions necessary for actualising this were not put in place.

Unemployment among Nigerian youths makes this group of people a ready pool and willing tools to be used for negative actions such as thuggery, armed robbery, and conflicts. The youth in the various geographical zones are usually at the vanguard of most of the conflicts. Naturally exuberant and creative, they are very dangerous when they choose or are forced by circumstances to apply their mental faculties to negative enterprises. The various crises have led to massive displacement of people, mostly children. Under such circumstances, the traditional family and community networks that normally give comfort and emotional support to children in crisis are broken and destroyed. These are often associated with high levels of violence, alcohol, and substance abuse. Substance abuse makes the youths vulnerable and can easily be recruited/conscripted into the various groups, as in the Boko Haram sect. Another pool for recruitment into the Boko Haram sect is the street children. Since the early 2000, there has been massive intra-country and interstate trafficking of children to Borno State (Maiduguri). Nigeria has 10,193,918 out-of-school children (Minister of State for Education, June 2021). These children are left to fend for themselves on the streets at the mercy of criminally minded characters that use them as cannon fodders during crisis. Some of these street kids were fertile grounds for recruitment into the Boko Haram sect.

11. Proliferation/influx of small arms and light weapons: The porosity of our borders and weak security system have combined to make entry of small arms and light weapons from other countries very easy. Small arms and light weapons proliferation and the availability of these weapons have enabled militant groups and criminal gangs to have easy access to arms (Hazen & Horner, 2007). According to Edeko (2011), Nigeria is estimated to host over 70 percent of about 8 million illegal weapons in West Africa.

12. **Impunity:** Punishment is compromised when criminal elements hide in various government institutions under the guise of immunity. There is a disposition for selective dispensation of sanctions, one for sacred cows, one for the common man. This breeds a veritable ground for protest, which degenerates into outright breach of security.

13. **Inequity:** There is no uniform deployment of developmental programmes with federal resources to many parts of the country with power concentrated at the centre. Resources are deployed to states administered by political parties that rule at the centre. This also is a recipe for objection and discontentment, which results in violent response.

14. **Repentant terrorists:** Repentant terrorists are absorbed and integrated into the country's security apparatus, thus inviting chaos. This is a policy that for all intents and purposes is designed to please a particular constituency. Same as hitherto, politicians once corrupt in other parties become saints when they defect to the ruling party.

Some Active Security Challenges in Nigeria

1. **The Boko haram insurgency and other militancy activities:** Nigeria, especially the Northeast, has been under attack by the Boko Haram insurgents, an Islamic group that is bent on replacing the current secular government in Nigeria with the one that is based on the Sharia law since 2009. Their emergence in northern Nigeria has exacerbated and complicated the conflicts in scope and the sophistication of the weapons being used and internationalisation of the conflicts with links to Al Qaeda and Al Shabban in Somali, the rebels in Mali and Libya. The crisis initially affected the six states but is now contained within the three states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (often referred to as the BAY states). Over 37,000 people have been killed (almost half of them are civilians, and many others are members of the armed forces of Nigeria), over 2.1 million internally displaced and 304,562 Nigerian refugees (January 2020, Round 35). 80% of these are in Borno and 80% are women and children. Many of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in very precarious conditions – overcrowded conditions with makeshift and temporary shelters; 7.9 million people needed humanitarian assistance at the beginning of 2020. That figure is now higher because of the COVID-19 pandemic). The insurgents have been involved in the destruction of public infrastructures, including health facilities (more than 40 percent of health facilities in those three states have been damaged or destroyed). The crisis has had a very significant impact on education. They are adamantly opposed to western education and education is one of the primary targets of the insurgents. According to UNICEF, 952,029 school-age children have been forced to flee the violence in the Northeast, 600 teachers have been killed, 19,000 teachers displaced, 1200 schools have been damaged, resulting in 600,000 children losing access to learning. The means of livelihood of the people have been destroyed, resulting in the drastic decline in socio-economic activities and increased poverty.

The Boko Haram insurgency, which started in the Northeastern part of the country, has spread to the northwest, north central, FCT and eastern part of the country with reprisal attacks of the death of kinsmen in the north.

2. The farmer-herder conflicts in the north-central states: The deadly clash between indigenous farmers and herdsmen in many parts of Nigeria is another security challenge in Nigeria. In Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Ekiti, Katsina, etc., many people have been killed, maimed, raped and many have suffered untold destruction of their properties. Violence has become a pastime between herders and host farmers leading to loss of lives, priorities and displacement of farmers and cattle thefts.

3. Ethno-religious conflicts: Ethno-religious conflict is defined as a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterised by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. Ethnicity and religion are the greatest differences manipulated and exploited by politicians to mobilise support for themselves toward electoral victory. To Nigeria's detriment, ethno-religious conflict is seen as a means of correcting any perceived form of marginalisation, oppression, or domination. The absence of good governance and concrete efforts to forge national integration and economic growth has also increased poverty and unemployment, resulting in the communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts that have now characterised Nigeria. The country's poor and jobless are exploited as mercenary fighters, ready to kill or be killed for a token. As a result, ethno-religious crises usually have large turnouts, including under-aged fighters. According to Hazen and Horner (2007), Salawu (2010) and Igbuzor (2010), ethno-religious conflict is a major source of insecurity in Nigeria. Frequent and persistent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity) present the country with a major security challenge. These have arisen from distrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the country. Frequent and persistent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity) present the country with a major security challenge. In all parts of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts exist. According to Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), these have emerged due to new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious identities.

Conflict of values and beliefs is one of the most difficult crises to resolve. It becomes even more complicated when the government is perceived to support one side. This has often led to the erosion of trust between the government and the people and questions the integrity of members of panels of investigation set up by the government.

4. Conflict over resources: Nigeria is dependent on oil in the south and other resources such as agricultural resources from the north. Here we have the farmer-herder conflicts raging in the north-central zone and extending to the Southeast and Southwest zones; the Southern Kaduna killings, the Agatu Massacre, and the various resource control movements - Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP); Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) (their activities comprise oil bunkering and piracy and kidnapping of oil workers. They sought for the development of oil-producing areas, employment for their youths and amelioration of contaminated farmlands and fishing rivers); Niger Delta Avengers (NDA); Niger Delta Volunteers (NDV) in the Southeast, the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) to IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) to mention some. At the background of these groups are the more mature sectional and ethnic groups in Nigeria: Arewa People's Congress, Arewa Consultative Forum, Oodu'a People's Congress, Afenifere and the Ohaneze Ndigbo, among others.

5. Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB): The Indigenous People of Biafra is a separatist organisation in Nigeria. Its main aim is to restore an independent state of Biafra in the old Eastern region of Nigeria.

6. Banditry and criminality in the northwest: The northwest zone has become a killing field. **Five thousand and sixty-seven (5,067) Nigerians were reported to have been killed in 2021 owing to insecurity;** 14 Nigerians died daily in various violent attacks reported in the news media from January to December 2021. Majority of these were in the northwest.

7. Kidnapping - Almost on a weekly basis, there are reports of kidnapping – on the roads, from the communities, places of worship, etc. Data from Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database shows that in the twelve months to September 2021, Nigeria recorded 20 kidnapping incidents resulting in 2,542 kidnap victims. Four states – Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, and Kaduna – account for 44 percent of the kidnapping incidents and 82 percent of the kidnap victims. Only four states did not report any kidnapping incident in the period under review. With the failure of the state to protect or retrieve the kidnapped, Nigerians have resorted to negotiating and paying the ransom. Unfortunately, this practice has made the crime attractive and increased kidnapping incidents.

8. Electoral violence: Nigeria's democracy is marred by electoral violence. According to Nigeria's Security Tracker (2019), 100 people were killed in election-related violence in 2003 and 300 in 2007. The worst election-related violence occurred three days after the 2011 election, with 700 people killed and 700 in Kaduna alone. Electoral violence constitutes a major obstacle to people's participation, especially women, in electoral processes specifically and political

participation in general, as well as a broader risk to peace and security within the country.

9. Corruption: Corruption is highly pervasive in Nigeria. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which ranks countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people was used to assess 180 countries in 2019. The findings showed that Africa is the lowest-scoring region with an average score of 32/100. Nigeria scored 25/100 and is ranked the 31st most corrupt nation in the world. Corruption has killed more people than Boko Haram and is responsible for the criminality in the country. Every day people go hungry; everyday people die on our roads because monies meant for road construction/rehabilitation have been stolen and taken out of the country. Many are dying of fake drugs and lack of equipment because of corruption.

10. Gender-based violence: This became rampant and pervasive in the country, exacerbated by the various crises so much that in 2021, the Nigerian Governors' Forum declared a state of emergency on GBV. In one workshop my organisation had with adolescent girls and boys, one of the girls defined security this way: "Security means going to school and coming back without being harassed and raped." GBV, such as rape, domestic violence, physical violence, psychological and economic violence increase when there is conflict. The Boko Haram conflict in Northeast Nigeria and the ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Plateau State is a good example of the impact of conflict on the violation of the dignity of women. One of the most traumatic impacts of armed conflicts is the violation of their sexual and reproductive health rights - rapes, sexual abuses, including abduction and sexual slavery, forced marriage and mutilations. Boko Haram insurgents have used rape as a weapon of terror. According to General Patrick Cammeert (2008), "It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflicts." Rape and other forms of sexual violence are often used to shame and humiliate the enemy and to spread terror and weaken morale. During conflicts, women remain vulnerable in their homes, IDP camps, or flights. In Odi (South-south), women were raped in their homes and killed by military personnel. About 67% of respondents in Jos believed that women were raped, beaten and sexually harassed during the Jos conflict.

Way Forward

1. Advocacy for practice of politics of difference: Recognising the diversities: Politics of difference is about acknowledging that every society is made up of groups and recognition of these groups and differences is imperative to ensure that the group dynamics within the nation are not allowed to negatively influence or assist any group to the detriment of another. Nigeria, with over 400 ethnic groups, is laced with many layers of differences – ethnicity, culture,

language, religions, political parties, geopolitical zones, states, majority/minority ethnic groups, settlers/indigenes, gender, age, disability, etc.

2. Nigeria needs peacebuilding

Nigeria is a country with great need for serious and sincere peacebuilding. Peacebuilding that would create a safe space for the divides to be bridged increase social cohesion through human and structural development which are vital to bringing together Nigeria's different groups.

Women should be involved in the peacebuilding processes at all levels. The positive roles of women in other climes under the same circumstances may also assist the Nigerian woman in the determination of her own roles in these challenging times. The international community recognises the importance of women's participation in creating the conditions for permanent peace, thus on 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which acknowledges the critical role women could play in preventing and resolving conflicts, negotiating peace, participating in peacekeeping and in humanitarian response and post-conflict peace-building. Among other things, the resolution calls for women to participate fully in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security.

This process, which has been noted as best practice, involves a wide range of activities that result in women's direct and full participation in ensuring peace and stability before, during, and after elections. It may involve a range of peacebuilding activities, including consultations, training, monitoring, and advocacy, bringing together women, youth, media, electoral stakeholders, professionals, religious and traditional leaders and institutions to ensure a transparent and peaceful electoral process.

Nigeria's Previous Attempts at Peacebuilding: Nigeria has made some attempts at peacebuilding in the past. States have been created to tackle the age-long complaints of oppression, domination, marginalisation, exploitation, and social injustice. The federal character principle is enshrined in the Constitution in acknowledgment of the diversity in the polity and the need for fairness and equity in the distribution of our common patrimony; the many panels of investigation and tribunals; the Justice Oputa Panel – the Truth Commission; National Political Reform Conference (NPRC); Electoral Reform Panel in 2007 headed by retired Chief Justice of Nigeria, Muhammad Uwais to put in place appropriate reform to the electoral system for credible elections and whose report was not implemented despite calls by Nigerians for implementation; the National Conference (CONFAB) 2014; Inter-religious dialogue led by the Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC); the establishment of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

3. Reform of the Democratic System

Nigeria needs to reform her democratic system by making it one that will accommodate all political affiliations, with the goals of peace and security and focus on the citizens; one that will ensure the dividends of democracy and is characterised by good governance— participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. Such system should be based on transparent elections that are also open fair and encourage equal participation and accountability to all citizens. Violent conflict/extremism thrives in ungoverned spaces. There is therefore the need to focus attention on the institutions and agencies of government put in place for the smooth running of elections and governance, such as:

- a. **The constitution** – The 1999 constitution is a contraption of the military and was flawed *ab initio* as it was not consultative and the preamble “We the people” is a gross disservice to the nationalities that make up the country. We have been in the business of amendments of our constitution since 2011 and let us not deceive ourselves; everything we are doing is cosmetic. There is a saying that if the foundation is faulty, what can stand? We need to be bold and sincere, putting the national interest above sectoral interest. This may be in the way of a new constitution, deliberated and debated and adopted by elected representatives of all the nationalities. This constitution should eliminate parochial interests and ensure that religion is separate from state. For example, there is need for the maintenance of the secularity of Nigeria by ensuring that no religion is given more prominence than another in the constitution.
- b. **Establishment of machineries for credible elections** – Elections have been flawed for so long in Nigeria. The 2019 general elections especially were characterised by violence, disenfranchisement of voters and serious abuses. In its report, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room issued a statement condemning the conduct of the elections concluding that the elections did not meet the credibility threshold based on the patterns of abuse of process and consequent lack of integrity observed. There were questions about the role played by the executive arm of government and other state institutions, such as the military and the security services, and their negative effect on the credibility of the elections.” Credible election is one of the building blocks of national peacebuilding and cohesion. For credible elections, there is need for credible census figures (The last census in Nigeria was in 2006). Unfortunately, census has become an anathema to various people and for them the fear of census is the beginning of wisdom for hiding the truth about how many we are in our states; allocations to the states are dependent on the number of LGAs in a state and population of the state. The adoption of electronic voting will go a long way.

d. The federal character principle enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic should be scrupulously observed. A situation where 80-90% of political appointments are from one section of the country is unacceptable because it portends danger for peace and national cohesion.

e. Revisiting the 2008 Uwais Panel Report, which is as relevant today as when it was submitted in 2008. The key points of the report were on separation of power with no interference as the institutions are co-equal under the constitution; political party financing; independent candidacy; election tribunals; participation by women – use of affirmative action and proportional representation to allow more women more access to positions of political power at all levels of government.

4. Implementation of the recommendations of the two past conferences – NPCR and National Confab, especially the issue of power-sharing (which acknowledges ethnic identities and sees them as legitimate); participation of all significant groups (as recommended by the CONFAB (in fact, the full implementation of the 2014 National Conference Report which was scuttled by sectional interest is desirable to move the country forward).

5. Implementation of white papers and reports of tribunals – The reports of past disturbances should be exhumed from the graveyard of history and be implemented. Government must be prepared to prove that there are no specially preferred ethnic groups and that all must be treated equally under the law.

6. The divide-and-rule tactics by politicians should be stopped - This can be done through the education of the electorates to see one another as not the common enemy but the politicians whose interest is not for the good of the Nigerian people, people in government who have stolen the money that should have delivered the dividends of democracy for them. Nigeria was the 146th least corrupt country in 2020. Nigerians must forget about all fault lines and divides and vote out of office all politicians that are not working for their good and the good of the country. If the agencies established to fight corruption refuse to do it, then the people must find non-violent ways of applying pressure to ensure that they do their work.

7. Development of a National Peace Policy – Nigeria needs to put in place a national peace policy. The peace infrastructure should incorporate early warning systems, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, mediation, and preventive diplomacy. The one that started years ago is still in draft form. This shows the seriousness governments have in their desire for peace in Nigeria. The draft policy should be reviewed and finalised and adopted for implementation.

8. **Changing the narratives** –Ethnic narratives from the politicians divide the people along ethnic lines, which in the end spark ethnic conflicts and act as a threat to the nation’s unity economic and political stability. Thus, there is a need to counter this narrative with that of peaceful co-existence, national cohesion, and nationalism. This can emerge through cohesion, unity, tolerance, peace and understanding in promoting regular national dialogues.

9. **Tapping the potentials of African youth** – Sub-Saharan Africa is home to more than one billion people, half of whom will be under 25 years old by 2050. The continent can take advantage of this demographic dividend by investing in quality education, teacher training, technology and innovation, which would boost productivity, create jobs and promote inclusive growth and prosperity. Youth bulge and restiveness must be tackled. Providing opportunities and empowering women and youth as a development goal will be essential. Inclusive policies are an absolute prerequisite for political stability. The youth must be carried along; the ‘Arab Spring’ can happen anywhere in Africa. The “EndSARS” protest is still fresh in our minds. Investment in the youth is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do.

8.0 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that most of Nigeria's security challenges today emanate from governance failure. Violent extremism and criminality thrive in ungoverned spaces. To tackle these challenges, good governance is imperative, which is currently lacking in Nigeria. A country where there is corruption and impunity, where a few have emasculated the wealth of the nation and left the majority leaving in extreme poverty, why government lack the capacity to manage its diversity and resources, where there is a high level of unemployment/underemployment, especially among the youth, is primed for security challenges and that is why we are where we are today. This paper has however suggested some ways forward, which have been elaborated above.

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