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Social Sciences

Non-State Actors and Violence in Nigeria

The Political
and Socioeconomic
Implications



Usman Sambo
Babayo Sule



Advance Praise

As the first book of its kind, this is a pacesetter for a comparative approach to issues and dimensions of insecurity in Nigeria from the perspective of the violent armed groups whose activities threaten to dismantle the Nigerian state. Tracing the historical antecedents of armed groups and violence in Nigeria, the book leaves no stone unturned in providing students and scholars of national and international security with a refreshingly vigorous analysis of the activities of armed groups in Nigeria and Africa.

Professor Noah Echa Attah, *Professor of Environmental History,
Department of African Historical Studies, National
University of Lesotho, Roma Lesotho*

This is an effort that cannot be ignored when it comes to policy practises and implications on uncommon strategies and programmes that can be applied to combat all forms of violence in Nigeria. Above all, by looking at each act of violence from a regional perspective and placing each act of violence in its proper perception, the book presents a unique analysis and an intelligible study of insecurity in Nigeria, with emphasis on how violence affects the country's political and socioeconomic development. If the suggestions made in this study are adequately implemented, Nigeria will return to peace and progress.

Professor Habu Mohammed, *Professor of Political Science, Director,
Malam Aminu Kano Centre for Democratic Studies, Mambayya
House and Director, Bayero University Kano Press,
Bayero University Kano, Kano, Nigeria*

Thanks to its simplicity, concise approach, comprehensive presentation and eloquent, convincing argumentation, even those who know little about the Nigerian state can clearly understand the Nigerian security situation and the dilemma of combating violence in the country. Most importantly, this study proposes a promising strategy for sustainable peacebuilding that engages all actors and enables peaceful negotiation that addresses the grievances of all parties. The book is a model for other similar states like Nigeria with a fragile security architecture that can be utilised for peace and security.

Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, *Professor of Political Science and
International Studies, Deputy Vice Chancellor, International,
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia*

Reading this book is an awakening journey and the thought-provoking conjectures enumerated in the study will make any social science researcher in Nigeria realise that insecurity in Nigeria is double-edged and multi-layered and that it appears to be a Herculean task to accomplish unless all hands are on deck. I therefore recommend this book as a must read for all academics, policy-makers, analysts, activists and other critical actors in the field of security and peace building in Nigeria and beyond.

Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami, *Professor of Cybersecurity, former Director General, National Institute for Technology Development Agency (NITDA), and former Honourable Minister, Federal Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, Abuja, Nigeria*

Any scholar interested in the field of security studies will appreciate this volume as a useful reference source for the study of internal and international security in developing countries. By tracing the deep-rooted historical antecedents of the phenomenon of insecurity in Nigeria and linking them to the present environment of the volatile security situation, this book has done an excellent job of linking the past to the present in a sublime projection of the future of the Nigerian peace process. This study will save Nigeria's policy-makers a lot of trouble if they handle the provisions and recommendations properly.

Professor Muazu Usman Shehu, *Professor of Environmental Sociology, Gombe State University, Principal Personnel Secretary to the Governor of Gombe State, Gombe, Nigeria*

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**Usman Sambo
Babayo Sule**



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Dedication

We wish to give special thanks to Dr. Hamza Sule Wurobokki, the former Managing Director of the Police Pension Fund (NPF); my late father, Alhaji Sule; and my late grandfather, Alhaji Sule Wurobokki, Hajiya Aliyatu Sule Wurobokki. Our special greetings go to our parents, Hajiya Hadiza Sule Wurobokki, Alhaji Aminu Sule Wurobokki, and Malam Ibrahim Zamfara. Fatima Ibrahim Zamfara and Maryam Usman Sambo, and to our children Khadijatu, Rukayyatu, Sulaiman, Hamza, Ummusulaimin, Usman, Aishatu and Ummusalimah Babayo Sule. We would also like to express our gratitude to our family, whose unwavering support and patience during the arduous task of the book project took up much of their time and energy. Thank you to my beloved wife, Aisha Pindar Kwajaffa, and our lovely children Maryam Usman Sambo, Salamatu Usman Sambo, Hassana Usman Sambo, Hamza Usman Sambo, Adnan Usman Sambo, Amina Usman Sambo, and Samha Usman Sambo as well as other family members, friends, and colleagues at Yobe State University Damaturu. Special thanks go to Hajiya Aisha Pindar. We salute all our relatives, friends, well-wishers and colleagues for their support. Finally, we thank Allah SWT for giving us the health and wisdom to succeed in this task. May His peace and blessings be upon His messenger Muhammad SAW.

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Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
ACSRT	African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism
ALSSMON	Association of Licensed Small Scale Mining Operators of Nigeria
AU	African Union
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Maghreb
APC	All Progressives Congress
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASF	African Standby Force
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
AUPSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDC	Bureaux De Change
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BZM	Biafran Zionist Movement
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
CISLAC	Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre
CNN	Cable News Network
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CTC	Counter-Terrorism Committee
CT-COIN	Counter-Terrorism–Counterinsurgency Co-operation
CTED	Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
CVELT	Countering Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism
DNFBPs	Designated Financial Businesses and Professions
DSS	Department of State Security
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECTS	ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Strategy
ESN	Eastern Security Network
FAAC	Federation Account Allocation Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FG	Federal Government
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FNDIC	Federation of Niger Delta Ijaw Communities
FRSC	Federal Road Safety Commission
GBV	Gender-Based Violence

GCND	Great Commonwealth of Niger Delta
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIABA	Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa
GTI	Global Terrorism Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ICIR	International Centre for Investigative Reporting
ICR	International Centre for Reconciliation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IEDs	Improvised Explosive Devices
IGOs	Inter-governmental Organisations
IP	Internet Protocol
IPOB	Independent Peoples of Biafra
IRI	Irish Republican Army
ISI	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State for Iraq and Syria
ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
IYC	Ijaw Youth Council
JA	Jama'atu Ahlul Sunnah Lil Da'awati wal Jihad
JTF	Joint Task Force
KA	Kaiama Declaration
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
LGAs	Local Government Areas
MASSOB	Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MTN	Mobile Telecommunication Network
NAPEP	National Poverty Alleviation Programme
NASS	National Assembly
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NCC	National Communication Commission
NCNC	National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons/National Council for Nigerian Citizens
NCS	Nigerian Customs Service
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
NDLEA	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency
NDSF	Niger Delta Strike Force
NDTAC	Niger Delta Technical Aid Corps
NDV	Niger Delta Vigilance

NDVF	Niger Delta Volunteer Force
NDPVF	Niger Delta People Volunteer Force
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
Nextier	SPD Security, Peace and Development
NEWRM	National Early Warning and Response Management
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NIA	National Intelligence Agency
NIN	National Identification Number
NIS	National Immigration Service
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NPC	Northern Peoples' Congress
NSA	National Security Adviser
NSAs	Non-State Actors
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
NSVAs	Non-State Violent Actors
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPC	Oodua People's Congress
OMPADEC	Oil Minerals and Petroleum Development Commission
ONSA	Office of the National Security Adviser
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSC	Operation Safe Corridor
PAP	Poverty Alleviation Programme
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PIND	Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta
PMSCs	Private Military and Security Companies
POs	Point of Sales
PSC	Peace and Security Council
RENAMO	National Resistance of Mozambique
RIB	Rapid Intervention Battalion
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SPDC	Shell Petroleum Development Company
TI	Transparency International
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UIA	Union of International Associations
UN	United Nations
UN CT	United Nations Counter-Terrorism
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNITA	Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

US	United States
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VNSAs	Violent Non-State Actors
WHO	World Health Organisation
YIO	Yearbook of International Organisations

About the Authors

Babayo Sule is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at University of Namibia. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from the University of Maiduguri Nigeria, a Master of Science in Political Science from Bayero University Kano Nigeria and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Political Science from Universiti Utara Malaysia. His research interests are in the areas of elections and political parties, security studies and African politics. He has published numerous research articles in local and international journals and participated in several local and international conferences. He has supervised numerous undergraduate and postgraduate theses. He currently teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students, conducts research and does community work. He is currently working with the Department of Political Science and Administrative Studies, National University of Lesotho. Babayo Sule has published numerous books, including *Political Party Financing and Electoral Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*; *Presidential Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*; *Deradicalisation and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria: Countering Boko Haram Extremism*; *Nigerian Political Parties in the Fourth Republic: Evolution, Characteristics, and Dynamics of Transformation*; *Election Administration and Reforms in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*; *The Political Economy of Banditry in Nigeria*; and *Nigerian State Governors: Power and Politics in the Fourth Republic*.

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Foreword

The Cold War and post-Cold War eras have left a resounding legacy of security perceptions among key global actors. The gradual but persistent shift from traditional security dimensions to non-traditional/military threats has led to new concerns and strategies for national and international security. The devastating fears that the world experienced at the height of the interwar period and the Cold War have significantly receded, but the world has never recovered from security threats, as non-state actors have gained influential ascendancy as relevant key players in the international system and at the global level. This is the era in which the world is struggling with non-state armed groups that are violent, threatening and cause as much damage as the state apparatus itself.

The resurgence and expansion of the activities of violent armed groups or violent non-state actors, such as terrorists, bandits, secessionists, separatist movements, insurgents, pirates, organised criminal cartels, drug lords, warlords, and other transnational organised criminals, are gaining prominence in many countries and on an international scale because they are responsible for state-sponsored crimes, state oppression of a perceived segment of the population, fragile political arrangements, poor governance and injustice in resource distribution and ideological perceptions. These armed groups pose a great threat to national and international security. As noted by Buzan (1989) and Alagappa (1989), the phenomenon of domestic and international security has shifted from military threats to socioeconomic and political challenges such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, disease, pandemics, corruption, political violence, inequality, climate change and other related factors, such that the threat of violent non-state actors has become a threat to the existence and survival of the globe.

Some states that have failed to implement sound socioeconomic and political policies that have a positive impact become vulnerable to internal threats. Most states in sub-Saharan Africa are facing this challenge. The largest of them, Nigeria, is currently the most vulnerable to internal security threats in the world. The country's history reveals a weak foundation of nationhood with seemingly irreconcilable and diverse heterogeneous entities that were forcibly and involuntarily brought together by British colonial interests. Thus, Nigeria has experienced no or few periods of peace in its entire journey as a nation. Barely six years later, a bloody Civil War (1967–1970) ensued as a result of dissatisfaction with the political arrangement and the conspiracy orchestrated by Igbo officers to eliminate all northern nationalist leaders. This was the first armed violence in Nigeria just six years after political independence.

Since the Civil War (1967–1970), Nigeria has experienced one bout of armed violence or another, especially from non-state armed groups. From the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s, militancy in the Niger Delta, farmer–herdsman conflict, Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and the resurgence of Biafran secessionist groups such as MASSOB and IPOB, Nigeria has continued to grapple with internal conflicts. This book succeeds in charting the course of the vicissitudes of the environmental, political, economic, social and cultural underpinnings of these conflicts and the extent of their impact. The book comprehensively examines all issues relating to the roots, motives, ideologies, manifestations, causes, reactions and effects of the violent armed groups or non-state actors in Nigeria.

The book alerts policy-makers and stakeholders that Nigeria is now held captive by these violent armed groups and is steadily losing legitimacy, sovereignty and

national integrity as well as public support or loyalty of citizens to the state. Most importantly, this is a timely warning that it is not too late to decisively confront the conflicts before the Nigerian state sinks into the sea of crises caused by these armed groups and that the time is now. With a different approach to each conflict in terms of practical suggestions for response strategies, but in a comparative mode that builds on the unified perception and activities of the groups—namely violence—this book presents a unique model for countering all violent non-state actors of various forms and structures, be they religious, secessionist, economic, socio-political or other, not only for Nigeria, Africa, but also for global exemplification.

Bakri Bin Mat

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Preface

Nigeria is currently battling with multiple challenges of internal security threats from various non-state actors. The state has unconsciously drifted to a level of susceptibility to collapse emanating from the devastating scourge of illicit armed groups. The illegal armed groups, differentiated by nomenclature, dissected by geographical divide, and confined to motives and operational procedures, have one impact: national security threats that cascade to socioeconomic and political challenges. The circumstances, motivations, strategies, and levels of effects differ but are mutually symbiotic in collapsing national security in the Nigerian state.

This book carefully observes that despite the massive influx of books and other academic research on the Nigerian insecurity crisis, thus far none of them have paid attention to the perspective of non-state actors and violence in Nigeria. There has been no attempt made to compare the activities and motives of illicit armed groups. In spite of the fact that these groups operate from a parallel geographical distance, they still belong to the same state under the control of the same governmental apparatus, with similar citizens affected. A comparative study enables the actors and stakeholders in security matters in Nigeria, Africa, and beyond to understand the dynamics of the root causes of individual cases, motivations, implications, and strategies to counter them effectively and simultaneously.

By using a qualitative method of data collection and analysis, this book refers to data obtained through more than five years of field research in some of the study areas. Therefore, the study draws on original data and complements this with existing findings from ground-breaking research. The book uses an empirical in-depth analysis to discuss the data obtained and logically present the results of the study. In addition, a comparative approach is used to compare four major armed groups in terms of some selected indicators such as roots, motives, ideology, causes, manifestations, reactions, effects and political consequences.

Four illicit armed groups distinguished themselves among the numerous groups that are threatening national security in Nigeria. The groups studied in this book consist of Niger Delta militants in South-South, Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast, banditry in Northwest, and IPOB Separatist agitators in Southeast Nigeria, which have asserted themselves as the deadliest groups. Although Niger Delta militants dominate South-South, Boko Haram occupies the Northeast, bandits dominate the Northwest, and IPOB influences the Southeast, they all manifest a strong challenge. This book concentrates on these illicit armed groups. The groups have different roots, ideologies, motives, tactical approaches, and impacts on socioeconomic and political aspects of the Nigerian state, but they share similar attributes. They are non-state actors; they claim the freedom to fight in one narrative or another; they isolate and occupy unique contested governed or under-governed spaces; they wield sophisticated weapons that match those of Nigerian security operatives; they inflict terror; and most importantly, they unleash the same havoc in terms of loss of life and economic implications, in addition to social crises of a considerably different magnitude.

Following a detailed study of the selected armed groups, this book presents its findings, which show that Nigeria is losing a significant portion of its geographical territory to the activities of these violent armed groups, affecting national security, legitimacy, integrity and sovereignty. The effects of the actions of these armed groups undermine the national economy and critical infrastructures, devastate and shake

the population and cost the Nigerian state a fortune in political and socioeconomic spheres. Therefore, this study presents different approaches to the armed violence implemented by these groups, as they have been found to have different motives. For the Niger Delta militants, the book suggests combating the criminal aspects of militancy through the state security apparatus and maintaining the amnesty, augmented by another agency, the Niger Delta Infrastructure Development, for the rapid infrastructural development of the oil-producing regions. For Boko Haram, counterinsurgency should be maintained, especially the military response, while the deradicalisation programme should be revised to include especially the Ulama for a peaceful response and peacebuilding. As for the bandits, all forms of their activities need to be tackled, as they seem to be less targeted and marauding. As for IPOB, the secessionist movement from Biafra, it is proposed that it be given the freedom to determine its destiny through dialogue and a possible referendum if it so chooses.

Usman Sambo and Babayo Sule
Authors

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1. Introduction

1.1. General Background

Domestic and global politics and policy decisions are made as a series of activities and programmes pursued by specific actors. These include diplomacy, security issues, economic development and other related agendas. The traditional discourse on the role of actors focuses predominantly on the state as an actor with extended influence over national and international activities and decisions. In the pre-war years (1914 and earlier), states as actors in international relations are seen as untouchable when it comes to determining the direction of the global political economy and collective security. In the interwar years (1914–1918, 1934–1944), states still had dominance and influence over world affairs. This influence extended into the ideological battles of the Cold War (1945–1990), with some changes. Some scholars, such as Morgenthau (1993), Keohane and Nye (2001) and others, have emphasised the unavoidable and unchallenged role of states on the international stage.

The reasons given for the dominance of state actors are the possession and use of coercive monopolies, the determination of the direction of economic policy, the instruments of diplomacy and the total control of the internal environment, with some laws that recognised citizens and inhabitants of a given state must observe and obey. Furthermore, no non-state actor is able to increase its influence over state actors, except in later years. Therefore, most studies on international politics, security studies and other related fields are limited to the concept of the state as the most influential and unchallengeable organ of policy-making domestically and on the international stage.

However, the Cold War era has changed the global configuration of power control, especially in the post-Cold War period, where some actors assume an influential role that leads to a diffusion of power. In the heat of the Cold War, it became clear what role some non-state actors and organisations such as terrorist groups, pirates, multinational corporations, civil society and some other similar groups will play in determining the direction of global politics and collective security. In this study, “non-state actors” refers to analytically distinct entities which operate outside formal state authority but are capable of shaping political, economic, or security outcomes, including violent non-state actors such as terrorist groups and pirates, economic non-state actors such as multinational corporations, and civic non-state actors such as civil society organisations; these actors differ in their modes of power, objectives, and relationships with the state. It is even believed (Mamdani 2004) that the Cold War was fought by proxy with the help of state actors such as the CIA, the KGB and the ISI, a Pakistani secret organisation used by the Reagan administration to create Al Qaeda. Thus, Buzan (1987) alerts the world that the international security system has now taken on a new dimension in which several non-traditional security threats and non-state actors play an important role in shaping the global security architecture. Furthermore, Buzan and Hansen (2009) suggest that the global security system must now take into account non-conventional war threats from non-state actors.

The role of non-state actors increased enormously in the later days of the Cold War and in the post-Cold War period. Nye (2009) posits that the hitherto rigid control of power exercised by state actors has now significantly shifted to multiple actors, leading to a “soft power” perspective in the global theatre. Naim (2014) also hypothesises that the power and excessive control of state affairs and politics by state

actors has come to an end in the modern era as more relevant actors, both state and non-state, have emerged. Even among the state actors, there are some influential states with a strategic geographical alliance and influence that are now emerging on a global scale, such as the BRICS countries and many others in Eastern Europe, the Arab oil powers in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Most importantly, Nye (2009) and Naim (2014) focus more on non-state actors (NSAs) and how their role distributes power globally. At present, there are some non-state actors that exert greater strategic influence internationally than many weak states.

The discourse on non-state actors is not a new phenomenon in the study of international politics and global security. Since the interwar period, there have been debates about the primacy of state actors over non-state actors and vice versa. Non-state actors are all entities, agencies, organisations, movements, individuals and groups that are not recognised as nation states in the UN resolution but have the capacity to operate globally (Arts et al. 2001). Their sphere of action can be local or international, but their activities can affect the whole world. A decision taken today by a few non-state actors can terrify the entire globe (Taylor 2019). For example, the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 practically brought the world to its knees for a few days, and the entire global security architecture has changed considerably as a result of the attackers' actions, with the changes enduring to this day (Kruck and Schneiker 2017). This is an attack that was organised and carried out by a few individuals designated by the West as a terrorist group.

Non-state actors can have different names. They can be economic, political, diplomatic, social, cultural, etc. The size, strength, capacity, motives, activities and influence of non-state actors differ depending on what they are trying to achieve (Wagner 2009). United Nations (UN) organisations, for example, may host and mediate on behalf of over 198 member countries, but the organisation itself is a non-state actor that does not have the power that state actors have when it comes to determining global security and other issues. The emergence of multinational corporations has also ushered in an era in which a few companies can influence and determine the political direction of several states around the world. The explosion of the internet, digital space and social media has also given some individuals power that is the envy of several states (Higgott et al. 2000). The major social media platforms can, for example, influence national security and the loyalty of citizens to their state. For instance, following the Nigerian government's suspension of Twitter in 2021 after the platform removed a tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari, many Nigerians circumvented the restriction through virtual private networks (VPNs) and continued to use the platform to express political opinions and mobilise public discourse (Iyora 2021).

Non-state actors can be peaceful, violent or in between. Attitude and motive determine which category non-state actors belong to. While there are many, such as civil societies, international donor organisations, humanitarian aid agencies, multinational corporations, influential individuals and many others who co-operate with states, there are also many who are hostile to states and use violence (Chenoweth and Lawrence 2010). The focus of this book is on non-state armed groups. The non-state armed groups (NSAs) themselves are categorised and perceived differently depending on their sympathies or the hostility that a state or a part of the world harbours against them. Non-state armed groups include pirates, warlords, terrorists, secessionists, militants, religious extremist groups and liberation movements (Norwitz 2009). Moreover, NSAs operate in different environments,

depending on their strengths, objectives and capabilities. Some operate within a sub-region in a state, others nationwide; others operate in sub-regions and others conduct their activities internationally (Norwitz 2009). Moreover, the non-state violent actors (NSVAs) have different motives and ideologies. Some fight to break away from a state to establish their own independent state; some are liberation fighters against colonial exploiters; others are religiously motivated to achieve a religious goal; some emphasise economic goals and others are political. However, one thing is clear about all NSVAs: they use one method, namely violence (Norwitz 2009).

NSVAs take on various dimensions and ramifications. Classification, sympathy, labelling and perception also vary. For example, while it is undeniable that some bandits, such as the mediaeval Balkans, the Uskoks of Senj, Bengal, West Java, Corsica and some others, are generally accepted as violent non-state armed groups, terrorist organisations—as designated by their states, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Red Brigade in Italy, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and many other religious terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria and neighbouring countries—are subject to interpretations and perceptions (Attah and Sule 2024). The US, Israel and other Western allies have labelled Hamas, Houthi and Hezbollah as terrorist groups, while in many parts of the world they are seen as heroes of the liberation movement against unjust oppression. Moreover, the categorisation of a group as violent or terrorist is a matter of political and economic considerations. In some cases, states downplay the ugly activities of violent groups around the world to avoid being discredited, which could scare away foreign investors and other donors (Best 2021).

The geographical spread of the NSVAs is also an important point to consider. As Buzan and Hansen (2009) noted, the new threats of NSVAs and socioeconomic and political challenges emerged after the cooling of the Cold War. Almost all countries that are economically and politically unstable face one form or another of violence emanating from disaffected groups within the states. Some groups have used violence to fight for political freedom, such as the Mau Mau revolutionaries in Kenya and the guerrilla movements in Algeria, Congo, Mozambique and Angola. Others are rebels against the government, such as the secessionists in South Sudan and the Biafra movement during the Nigerian civil war. Still others, like the recent terror groups, are ideological, with some economic motives, as is the case for the Niger Delta militants in Nigeria.

The NSVAs are known to employ a unique style of activities; guerrilla warfare and sabotage, to press home their demands. In some cases, they hit the economic mainstay of the state they are targeting and are becoming more sophisticated with the revolution on the internet and social media where they can easily recruit and carry out their activities in anonymity without being recognised. Sometimes the activities of these NSVAs spill over into transnational criminal cartels that span many national borders. This is found in more fragile states than in stable states where some economic prosperity is achieved, although even such economically prosperous countries may have incurred the wrath of external NSVAs such as the US, UK and other powerful states worldwide in the course of their rogue activities (Blum 2000; Chomsky 2000).

Africa is one of the sub-regions that is incessantly confronted with NSVAs from all directions, including bandits, pirates, warlords, terrorists, secessionist agitators, separatist movements, communal clashes and political violence by militias (Varin and Abubakar 2017). The violence manifested itself mainly in Central and West

Africa, where the colonialists destroyed the tranquillity of the territories, plundered their resources and forced them into uncomfortable marriages through arbitrary territorial demarcations that were incompatible with the history, culture and heritage of the region (Brehm et al. 2023). Some states suffer more than others. Nigeria, for example, is one of the few states that has faced multiple challenges from NSVAs for over four decades. The British dealt badly with the nationalists, a battered and fragile entity with a shaky foundation. Even political independence was fought for in different ways due to British divide-and-rule tactics. The populous north was politically strengthened by the British even when the region entered active colonial politics after more than three decades of active politics in the south. On the other hand, the South was equipped with Western education and administrative skills to govern in the event of political freedom. Thus, from the inception of militant nationalism in the 1940s, nationalists decided to pursue political freedom individually rather than collectively (Coleman 1960).

Not long after Nigeria gained political independence just three years ago in 1962, there was a political uproar in the West that led to the creation of the Midwest Region in 1963, an act that the Yoruba West saw as an attempt to polarise the region's political power. The ensuing bloody coup d'état on 1 January 1966 by Igbo officers against selected Hausa–Fulani nationalists triggered a counter-coup that led to a protracted Civil War (1967–1970). Nigeria has not settled down since achieving political independence, but has experienced one chaos after another (Bourne 2015). The discovery of oil in a commercial quantity in the Niger Delta in the 1970s laid the foundation for militant activities due to oil leakages, environmental degradation, pollution and perceived unfair revenue sharing by the people of the zone. This was the first NSVA in Nigeria with a well-organised movement, sophisticated weapons and influence over the Nigerian economy. The explosion and vandalization of pipelines, kidnapping of foreigners, bunkering of oil and various acts of sabotage by the major groups in the region affect the economic stability of Nigeria, especially as oil remains the mainstay of the economy (Asuni 2009a).

The other NSVA group that followed the oil saboteurs is the Maitatsine group that terrorised some cities in northern Nigeria such as Bauchi, Gombe, Jimeta, Kaduna and Kano in the 1980s. The group's main goal, according to its own statements, is the establishment of an Islamic state that is purely Qur'anic (Hiskett 1987). The major targets of the Maitatsine are fellow Muslims in the north, who are labelled as infidels or apostates (Isichei 1987). In addition to the Niger Delta and Maitatsine groups, Nigeria has faced numerous challenges from bandits and robbery across the country since the 1970s. New violent actors have emerged, such as the Boko Haram groups, the bandits in Northwest Nigeria and the ongoing Biafran secessionist aspirations of the Independent Movement for Biafra (IPOB). All these groups are violent, killing, raping, torturing, maiming, disfiguring, kidnapping and blocking economic activities (Sule et al. 2022).

While numerous studies have presented interesting findings and multiple dimensions of these groups individually, this study found a major vacuum unfilled, namely the comparative approach to analysing the activities of the NSVAs in Nigeria. The study therefore concentrates on a few selected actors who can be categorised as having similar activities and effects. Even if the origin, motive, goal and activities of the groups differ greatly, the modus operandi is one and the same: they use violence to achieve their goal. In the case of the Niger Delta militant groups, for example, which are the oldest of the NSVAs identified in this study, the main motivation for

the fighting is of an economic and ecological nature. In the case of Boko Haram, it is mainly an ideological goal to establish an Islamic state, according to the sect. In the case of IPOB, their struggles have been known since 1967, when the civil war broke out, even though the movement may not be as formidable as those from the civil war period. Meanwhile, the bandits have only one motive: to terrorise the inhabitants of the area in order to earn easy money through kidnappings, abduction and threat. This study will examine all of these selected groups in different ways and then compare the motives and effects of their activities, particularly in the economic, political and social spheres. These groups are graphically illustrated in Figure 1 to make them easier to grasp, especially for a person who is not fully familiar with the Nigerian terrain.



Figure 1. Map showing geographical distributions of violent non-state actors in Nigeria. Source: Figure by authors.

1.2. Aims

This book has many objectives. Firstly, a comprehensive study of the environment of non-state armed groups (NSAs) in Nigeria is important. In this study, an attempt is made to critically examine the NSVAs environment, especially in terms of geographical spread and from different perspectives. This emphasises the purpose of the comparative because the various causal structural factors may be different. For example, the economic exploitation of the Niger Delta by both multinational oil companies and the Nigerian government, environmental degradation and mismanagement by local politicians in the region have triggered the militants' response. The economic environment is of central importance in this case. In the case of Boko Haram, religious sensitivity, uncontrolled activities of religious groups and an extremist ideology, and the exploitation of religion by politicians have created an environment that fuels the group's violence. However, the case of IPOB agitators is different because it is more of a political environment, as the agitators push for

political freedom while preferring to remain in the Union. It is a political movement. Banditry in the Northwest is influenced by the competition for resource sharing between farmers and herdsmen and the mismanagement caused by the inability to meet the basic needs of the rural dwellers. However, a major environmental cause that unites all phenomena of violence by non-state actors is the poor governance, injustice and corruption of the ruling class in all regions. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to understand the various environmental causes of violence.

Another goal of this book is to analyse the motivation behind the violence of the NSVAs in Nigeria. The motivation behind the violent actions of the groups is different, even if the strategies are to some extent the same. The Niger Delta militants claim economic sabotage and injustice for their reactions. Boko Haram claims the formation of an Islamic state with an Islamic ideology, even though the case of Boko Haram is questionable. Firstly, classical scholars and respected jurists in Islam hold that all Islamic injunctions prohibit the use of violence against Muslims and non-Muslims in a peaceful environment to feign state formation or government where a government or state exists. The arguments that extremists use to justify their violent motives were debunked by Al-Qaradawi (1991) and Maihula (2020) as unfounded, unjustified and baseless by Islamic standards according to all sources of law. The case of the Niger Delta can be justified when one considers that oil has been spilled, the environment has been degraded and the rulers in the region have misgoverned, followed by an incalculable excess of oil companies in the region. But in the case of IPOB, it is an illegal fight against a state. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution states unequivocally that "Nigeria is an indivisible entity". Any struggle for secession must be conducted through a constitutional process by amending this section of the Constitution. The Biafrans decided to take up arms to secede in 1967–1970 but were crushed by the Nigerian government after a long civil war. Later, the fighting refused to die. This means that the status of Nigerian federalism needs to be reconsidered to minimise the incessant violence. The bandits are the strangest of all the NSVAs. They used to claim that they were wronged because their cattle were stolen, but they themselves are involved in the raids and have unnecessarily crossed the red line with kidnappings, abductions and rampant massacres. Investigating the motives of the violent groups will therefore help the Nigerian state to model a future political order.

Furthermore, this study will focus on identifying the strategies these groups use to realise their goals. It can be assumed that all four major groups analysed in this book are violent and use sophisticated weapons to achieve their goals. But their methods are different. For example, the Niger Delta militants, Boko Haram and bandits are known for kidnapping to generate income and press their demands. Meanwhile, among the IPOB, kidnappings are not widespread, or rather, rare. Furthermore, Niger Delta militants and Boko Haram insurgents are notorious for using explosives and ambushing their enemies. All four groups used sophisticated small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in their operations. The Boko Haram group is unique in that it uses a different method to hit its targets through suicide attacks. The other three groups do not use this strategy. In addition, Boko Haram and the bandits have shot indiscriminately and carried out brutal massacres, sometimes affecting many villages with thousands of victims. The Niger Delta and IPOB do not use this technique. Boko Haram and IPOB display a similar character in their attempt to establish their own state separate from the Nigerian federation. All these strategies, which sometimes converge and sometimes diverge, are the main issues that this book presents to readers.

The book presents the effects of the main groups analysed based on the political and socioeconomic situation of the Nigerian state. To what extent and at what cost are the activities of these groups in financial terms, in terms of political impact, in terms of social issues such as food security, forced migration, internally displaced persons and other critical issues? All these issues are discussed and analysed in detail in this book, especially in Chapter 9. For example, the activities of the Niger Delta militants have caused enormous economic damage to the Nigerian state, which relies on oil as its main export. This affects the supply of infrastructure and deepens Nigeria's debt crisis. Boko Haram's activities also affect trade and commercial activities in the Lake Chad Basin, affecting four countries including Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and the Republic of Niger. They also cause food insecurity and forced cross-border migration, and humanitarian crises. In the case of IPOB, the sit-at-home syndrome, a policy introduced by the group in the Southeastern states to force people to stay at home on Mondays weekly, has so far inflicted a loss estimated at over one trillion naira on traders and other economic activities, in addition to the loss of lives and vandalization of public property. Banditry in the Northwest has led to the desertification of farmlands in this geographical region, which is commonly known as an important agricultural area. In addition, banditry leads to illegal mining and forced migration, as well as unnecessary loss of life.

Finally, the book aims to examine the various responses of the Nigerian government to these groups. Are the responses the same or do they differ, and to what extent? And what are the parameters for labelling the groups as different, even if they almost exclusively use violence as their operational strategy? Thus, despite their economic sabotage, the Niger Delta militants are considered activists and never labelled terrorists because the Nigerian state considers some of their struggles genuine. This prompted the Yar'adua regime to initiate an amnesty programme in 2007 to pardon the militants, rehabilitate them and create mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of their grievances. The Boko Haram were repeatedly appeased by the Nigerian state and asked to surrender for negotiations after earlier military action failed to overcome the insurgency, but they rejected all offers of peace from the government. After the Nigerian government was heavily criticised by the international community and America and other countries refused to sell arms due to human rights violations, the group was declared a terrorist group in 2013. A process of deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration was later initiated. In the case of the IPOB, policy-makers insist that there will never be a compromise on the unity and indivisibility of the Nigerian state, whatever the cost. After the Civil War (1967–1970), some measures were taken to allay the fears of the minority groups and guarantee the autonomy of all regions through the creation of states, the formation of local governments and other measures, but all these measures failed to convince the secessionists. The bandits is currently the most notorious group, looking like a gang of murderers with nothing but killing in mind. They are currently the cruellest of all the violent groups and the government has not yet found any viable means of dealing with their violence.

1.3. Methodology

This study utilised a multiple-process data collection design. The availability of data on different armed groups motivates this study because the authors consider the data useful for a comprehensive study of this nature. The authors have conducted various analyses at different points in time on the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry

in the Northwest, IPOB secessionist aspirations and militancy in the Niger Delta. After compiling a large amount of data from both existing documented sources and fieldwork, the idea of summarising the data in a monograph emerged.

The main methods used during the years of data collection for the areas and topics analysed in this book are in-depth personal interviews, key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Many relevant stakeholders were interviewed, including academics, policy-makers, members of civil society, members of host communities, traditional rulers, religious scholars, violent actors and security forces. Some were interviewed freely and willingly, while others were interviewed confidentially and under confidentiality. Some were interviewed on the spot, and others via WhatsApp calls with end-to-end encryption, email messages and other communication channels such as direct mobile phone calls. Unstructured questionnaires were designed separately for each segment of data collection for the purpose of this in-process research.

Collecting data on research dealing with security issues is difficult in the Nigerian context due to the complexity of security matters, national security and the suspicions associated with it. The authorities and security apparatuses to be interviewed are always reluctant and uncooperative when it comes to disclosing important information. Other stakeholders are also reluctant to disclose sensitive information, with the exception of academics, who in this study proved to be willing, free and ready to provide all necessary information. This is perhaps due to the orientation and structure of the academic environment, where the search for truth and its disclosure has become an established norm and tradition. Also, given the geographical expanse, size and population of the country, data collection in Nigeria comes at a high financial cost. The analysed NSVAs are evenly distributed throughout the country. The only drawback in this respect is that the time frame for collecting the data is long. In some cases, informal methods are used because official means have proved impossible.

In addition to the primary data collected, existing documents were also consulted. In the book, a thorough systematic literature search was carried out on the subject under investigation. Each of the NSVAs examined in this book has been studied extensively, and all major authors and experts on the subject have been reviewed accordingly. However, not all views are fully accepted. In some cases, as part of its contribution, this study rejects some statements of some studies, accepts some, modifies some and summarises others. This is because the issue of objectivity is crucial, and by the very assumption of this work, some of the works are good enough to be consulted but not objective enough to represent reality. The reason for this is that some authors are emotional. For example, this study discovers a case where the same authors writing about Niger Delta militants or IPOB justify the struggles as socioeconomic reactions while condemning banditry or the violence of Boko Haram as unjustified terrorism. Such authors may know the terrain of the Niger Delta or the Southeast well, but they know nothing about the actions of Boko Haram or bandits. Misrepresentation of facts is unacceptable in a sound academic work, which is the justification for the change in this work.

In our study, the data is presented in two ways: Firstly, informants are quoted verbatim when the information is sensitive and important to the argument. In other cases, where the information provided by the informants is generally known and has already been substantiated by previous studies, it is mentioned but not quoted verbatim in order to save space, as this would be tantamount to repetition. Finally, in the overall presentation of the book, a comparative approach has been

used as the main contribution of this book, especially in Chapter 9, where the emergence, the causes, motives, ideology, manifestations and effects of the main groups studied are analysed comparatively, with each group showing points of convergence and divergence.

1.4. Structure of the Book

The book is organised into ten chapters, each dealing with a specific problem. Chapter 1 presents the background of the study, which consists of a general introduction, the aims of the book, the methodology and a description of the organisation or structure of the book. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive but succinct analysis of the basic conceptualisations of the main issues addressed in this book, in order to save readers the tedious task of revisiting earlier pages to grasp the meaning of some terms. Terms such as non-state actors (NSAs), non-state violent actors (NSVAs), violence, militancy, insurgency, banditry, secession and armed groups are discussed. Chapter 3 examines the theorisation of non-state actors and violence in Nigeria, in which some hypotheses or theories that explain the activities of the NSVAs are explained, including the Routine Activity Theory, the Broken Windows Theory and Ungoverned, Contested/Under-Governed Spaces.

Chapter 4 analyses the security environment in Nigeria to better understand how and why it is easier for NSVAs to form and operate within the state. Some of the issues discussed are the national security architecture, the factors behind the emergence of non-state armed groups and violence, and the state response, including the categorisation and designation of non-state armed groups. Chapter 5 examines the militant groups in the Niger Delta under this theme or group. The major issues examined are Niger Delta militancy in southern Nigeria, the motivation behind Niger Delta militancy, the categories of Niger Delta militants, the activities of Niger Delta militants, and the impact of Niger Delta militancy on the Nigerian economy. Chapter 6 analyses the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This includes the Boko Haram movement in Northeastern Nigeria, causes, manifestations, ideology, recruitment strategies, sources of funding, weapons, logistics and international co-operation; the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency; the Nigerian government's counterinsurgency strategies; local community responses; and the international response.

Chapter 7 presents the dimensions of banditry in Northwest Nigeria. It explains the main aspects of banditry, such as its roots, drivers, manifestations, sources of funding, weapons, logistics, strategies, effects and the Nigerian government's response. Chapter 8 discusses the considerations of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), focusing on their origins, motives, strategies, manifestations, impacts and responses. Chapter 9 compares the socioeconomic and political impact of violence by Boko Haram, bandits, IPOB and Niger Delta militants in terms of killing of innocent citizens, oil bunkering, pipeline explosions and vandalism, forcible displacement, loss of farmlands, illegal mining, setbacks to commercial activities, school abductions and kidnappings for ransom, Sit-at-Home Syndrome, economic losses, ungoverned/contested or under-governed spaces, threats to national security and undermining of national sovereignty and political legitimacy. Chapter 10 lists the conclusions and implications of the study, including the need for a new strategy for dealing with militant groups in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram and the need for an alternative approach, banditry and a model for repression, and IPOB: a proposal for a peaceful settlement.

2. Conceptualisations

This book uses some highly technical hegemonic terms that are mainly used by social scientists in the fields of Political Science, International Relations and especially Strategic and Criminological Studies. However, the study targets an audience of different categories, including non-social scientists such as practitioners, students, policy-makers and anyone interested in domestic and global security worldwide. In order to tackle this Herculean task, this chapter introduces some important concepts and terms that the reader might encounter frequently while reading the book. Terms such as non-state actors (NSAs), non-state violent actors (NSVAs) or violent non-state actors (VNSAs), armed groups, violence, militancy, insurgency, banditry and secession are explained briefly but comprehensively in this section so that the reader can easily follow the flow of the analysis without necessarily returning to the introduction or resorting to indices and other sources to clarify the meaning.

2.1. *Non-State Actors*

One of the key actors that play a central role in national and international security, diplomacy, global trade, economic development, political processes and other activities are non-state actors (NSAs). Currently, NSAs make as many as or even more headlines worldwide than state actors. This is because they influence both state and international policy and decision-making. Non-state actors include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but also multinational corporations (MNCs), private military organisations, media, terrorist groups, organised ethnic groups, academic institutions, lobby groups, influential personalities, social media owners, technology experts and specialists, mobile phone operators, criminal organisations, international humanitarian organisations and donors, trade unions or social movements and others. The groups mentioned above have different forms of power. Some contribute positively to security and stability, while others actively undermine them. Others contribute either positively or negatively to global good governance, democratisation, economic policy, intellectual development, socio-cultural harmony and development (Wijninga et al. 2014). Sellheim and Ryan Menezes (2022) suggest that there are nine categories of NSAs, including: (1) finance; (2) domestic firms; (3) industry; (4) institutions; (5) inter-governmental organisations; (6) NGOs; (7) research; (8) universities; and (9) others. However, Kruck and Schneiker (2017) emphasise that non-state actors also include rebel groups, warlords, militias, terrorists, criminal groups, Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), local self-defence forces, business enterprises and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and that they are of increasing concern to both practitioners and scholars of Political Science and International Relations.

Non-state actors are characterised by the fact that they exercise informal power, as only state actors are identified as exercising formal power. NSAs may have formal membership but no formal control over the state apparatus, coercion and enforcement of decisions except through lobbying or force. Non-state actors do not formally control a territory like their state counterparts. But non-state actors have had a certain degree of autonomy to act, decide and operate, especially those that are recognised as peaceful and harmonious (Wijninga et al. 2014). Non-state actors are perceived differently by different groups, depending on the motive of

the interpreter. For some, NSAs are heroes of global politics who champion global civil society, oppose state despotism and have contributed significantly to global economic growth and development. For others, however, NSAs are villains who are used by both states and groups to commit negative acts such as espionage, violence and clandestine transnational organised crime (Josselin and Wallace 2001).

Regardless of how one perceives the NSAs, Josselin and Wallace (2001) conclude that the shifts in power between state and non-state actors over the last 30–40 years are undeniable and palpable. Furthermore, Josselin and Wallace (2001) argue that the definition of the term “non-state actors” is itself ambiguous, as any attempt to distinguish between states and non-state actors in terms of opposing entities is misleading. This is because some non-state actors will never be successful without a closer connection to the state, such as multinational corporations, banks and other related organisations. Even international organisations and other non-governmental organisations are semi-autonomous in many ways. For NSAs to thrive, they need a peaceful environment both domestically and internationally. Reinalda (2016) distinguishes three types of non-state actors: non-governmental organisations (NGOs), inter-governmental organisations (IGOs), and Transnational Corporations (TNCs), all of which play a role alongside nation states. Sometimes NGOs and IGOs are established by the state as its agents, but the role and influence of these NSAs goes beyond that of a state agent, as Reinalda (2016) notes.

Currently, the world is witnessing a steady and explosive rise in non-state actors and their increasing influence on the global political economy and socio-cultural activities. The explosion of non-state actors around the world has several causes. The diffusion of power in a multipolar world order contributes to the emergence of NSAs. Similarly, the emergence of more NSAs contributes immensely to the expansion of the multipolar world order as more influential actors emerge. Added to the above factors is globalisation, during which the world has witnessed the rise of larger corporations and influential individuals influencing policy and decision-making (Wijninga et al. 2014). A third reason for the spread of NSAs is what Huntington (2000) called the “third wave of democratisation”, in which more people, groups, organisations and individuals have more say because the new, democratising states tolerate their freedom of speech. Another factor favouring the increasing growth of NSAs worldwide is the discovery of the internet, improvements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the rapid development of social media. Non-state actors can easily recruit, mobilise and conduct activities in the digital space (Wijninga et al. 2014).

The explosion of the NSA is attributed to the Cold War period in the modern era. Beyond the modern era, the global events of the 19th century motivated the proliferation of NSAs. Particularly in Western Europe and North America, global governance saw the growth in the number and power of international interest groups working on global issues. It is possible to trace their roots. Go back to much older organisations, such as the English Society Against Slavery, which campaigned in the 1800s. These advocacy organisations have mostly focused on environmental, human rights, humanitarian relief and disarmament causes. Since that time, NSAs have established themselves as an indispensable part of global governance. For example, the Global Compact for Migration was sealed under pressure from NSAs and adopted by global communities (Schweiger 2023).

NSAs are also playing a greater role in environmental standards and climate change mitigation and adaptation, which is globally accepted as a major endeavour

(Schaper 2009). Similarly, Marchetti (2016) claims that current global governance is a dual task of state and non-state actors because of the increasing role of business groups, transnational civil society and multinational corporations, and international agencies and institutions made them indispensable for consultation and co-operation in the formulation of global policies and their implementation. In essence, Loja (2022) argues that the powers of NSAs at the international level have reached a certain level such that some international agreements between non-state actors are now considered a source of international law globally. Loja (2022) further argues that the identification of agreements is based on legality, suggesting that international agreements involving oil agencies and corporations are a source of clearly defined rules. Noortmann et al. (2015) note that NSAs have added a new dimension of complexity to the study of international law as their legal status is contested due to their increasing role in international politics.

For all the freedom, support and comfortable environment that non-state actors enjoy, they face numerous challenges worldwide. The lack of a formal mandate made their freedom and perceived legitimacy shaky. Funding is also a challenge that can limit the activity and expansion of non-state actors. This is because they do not have ownership rights to natural resources and other legal sources of revenue such as taxes, as is the case with state actors. Moreover, it can be difficult for non-state actors to recruit and mobilise members when the state is strong and confident of the patriotism of citizens, who may find it difficult to accept an appeal from a non-state perspective (Wijninga et al. 2014).

In essence, non-state actors have contributed to changing the global pattern of politics, economics, diplomacy and socio-cultural phenomena. A multi-level configuration of power has emerged. For example, the United Nations can initiate policies and programmes and make decisions that can affect both states and individuals. For example, any attempt by Mark Zuckerberg, as a single non-state actor, to shut down Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Threads in several states can lead to a social unrest that threats of military attacks in these states and among the citizens cannot trigger. In addition, the NSAs have greatly minimised the power and authority of states, even those as powerful as the US, UK and others. Decisions and policies are made and implemented under the influence of NSAs, who closely monitor progress and contribute to the process (Charountaki 2022).

In addition, NSAs have taken a lead in the role of standard setters in both national and global governance and policy (Peters et al. 2009). Both local and regional NSAs play an important role in public policy in Africa (Neubert 2009), and NSAs are central to the promotion of democratic good governance because their legitimacy is recognised by states as a partner in the promotion of democracy through the control of political decision-makers (Wheatley 2009). The power of non-state actors manifests itself in their ability to influence global politics at the highest level by intervening and playing a key role in United Nations policy and decision-making. Ludert (2023) posits that non-state actors used the umbrella of the United Nations to challenge state sovereignty through the participation of groups, organisations, movements and other bodies in General Assemblies and other United Nations bodies to challenge injustice, seek secession, report genocide attempts and be dissatisfied with the political and economic arrangements in a particular state. Increasing pressure from the national liberation movement against colonial brutality and exploitation led to the UN accepting and adopting the right to self-determination in the UN Charter (Ludert 2023). Furthermore, indigenous peoples used their access to the United

Nations to enforce conditions for access and participation in their politics, just as states such as South Africa used the UN platform to fight apartheid (Ludert 2023).

An important type of organisation, religious or Faith-Based Organisations, influence international development policy and play the role of non-state political and moral actors at the international level. Religions nurture culturally and spiritually minded individuals and societies worldwide; they mobilise and encourage citizens' voices in national and international politics, set agendas and strategies for pursuing the interests of their followers, engage in national and international politics, engage in advocacy, and actively participate in the process of global governance policies, such as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate adaptation and mitigation (Nelson 2021). In addition, NSAs, or what Takahashi (2019) refers to as "sub-state actors", play the role of complementing national security by providing community policing, complementary security equipment and peaceful initiatives. Non-state actors sometimes represent governments by exercising their authority in policy and development, but states must be accountable to non-state actors, e.g., through application control, regulations and international customs (Mackenzie-Gray Scott 2022).

When researching data on non-state actors, some reliable sources are crucial. These include the Union of International Associations (UIAs) and the United Nations (UN), as well as excellent local-level data on a variety of topics and types of organisations, and more national data on the non-profit sector, according to Bloodgood (2016). The *Yearbook of International Organisations* (YIO) was published by L'Institut International de la Paix (L'Annuaire de la Vie Internationale, 1905–1907). The Union of International Associations (UIA) published the second series of *L'Annuaire de la Vie Internationale* (1908–1909, 1910–1911) in collaboration with l'Institut International de la Paix and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The League of Nations published similar sourcebooks in French and English under the title *Répertoire des Organisations/Yearbook of International Organisations* from 1921 to 1939 (Bloodgood 2016). The UIA resumed publication of the *Yearbook of International Organisations/L'Annuaire des Organisations* in 1948 and published the volumes every six months between 1950 and 1980, then annually from 1981 onwards. In the early years, the *Yearbook* was published by the UIA under an agreement with the United Nations ECOSOC until 1981, when it was co-published with the International Chamber of Commerce (Bloodgood 2016).

The 2009–2010 publication (46th edition) comprises six volumes with descriptions of international organisations (Volume 1) organised by areas of activity (directories of international organisations by country in Volume 2), activities (Volume 3) and publications (Volume 4 with bibliographies and resources), statistics and network visualisations (Volume 5) and who's who (Volume 6). Volume 2, "*Country Directory*" and Volume 3, "*Subject Directory*", are available from 1983, while Volume 4, "*Bibliographic Information*", dates from 1996, Volume 5, "*Statistics and Patterns*", from 2001 and Volume 6, "*Who's Who*", from 2007. Earlier versions of "*Who's Who in International Organisations*" were published by the UIA independently of the *Yearbook* (e.g., 1963–1964). The online version "contains all the data published in the printed *Yearbook of International Organisations*", with search functions and hyperlinks, since 2000; the CD-ROM version has been available since 1995 (Bloodgood 2016, p. 17).

2.2. Violent Non-State Actors/Armed Groups

Violent non-state actors (VNSAs) are categorised as non-state actors (NSAs) at both national and international levels. NSAs can themselves take on different

dimensions, operational methods, goals, nomenclature, ideology and activities. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed the proliferation and explosion of NSAs arising from the multicomplex nature of politics, economic competition, cultural conflicts and identity struggles, and hidden motives of some states and actors. The term “violent” refers to those NSAs that use brute force and terror to advance their cause. States as actors in international relations are recognised as entities with the legitimacy of coercion, and this cultural domain was generally accepted until after the Second World War, when the outbreak of the Cold War led to what Buzan (1987) termed “non-traditional” (non-military) threats involving non-state actors with numerous movements and patterns of operations. Although terrorist groups, bandits, pirates, secessionists, militants, guerrilla groups, rebels and other armed groups existed before the post-World War II period and were ancient, the world order in the interwar period was dominated by state actors and their actions. It was only during the Cold War that these VNSAs reasserted their influence on domestic and global security.

Violent conflicts between individual NSAs and between NSAs and state actors have gradually moved to the centre of the dominant interstate wars of the 20th century (Armborst 2017). According to Armborst (2017, p. 17), NSAs include “private militias, rebels, defecting battalions, pirates, warlords, organised criminal gangs, cartels, insurgents, bandits, self-proclaimed states, and pro-this or anti-that groups”. These actors use violence for various political and other purposes. As VNSAs are not collective state endeavours, their motives are diverse; the use of violence can also vary, as can the scale and objectives. Armborst (2017, p. 18) also notes that the motives of different VNSAs border on “a wide range of interests, including commercial, ideological, political, religious, ethnic, racial, sexual, narcissistic, egotistical, megalomaniacal, nepotistic or tribal and often a combination of these”. Therefore, the type of violence perpetrated by VNSAs cannot be equated with state actors, as states have created a legal basis for coercive monopoly, especially at the national level, and have been granted legitimate status for defence and aggression by international law where appropriate. Most VNSAs do not have this legal competence. However, some VNSAs are state-sponsored groups with an exceptional objective, such as Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi in Yemen, liberation movements which are speculated to have been sponsored by Iran to deter Israel from its aggression, occupation and genocide in Gaza and the Middle East.

In a comprehensive study of pirates, terrorists, rebels, warlords and other VNSAs published by Norwitz (2009) as a volume, most of the existing violent armed groups are identified, including the driving forces behind the movements and the psychology and ideology behind each movement, in addition to the extent of the economic and political damage caused by the actions of the armed groups. One of the authors of the volume, Underwood (2009), for example, deals in detail with the pirates, Vikings and Teutonic Knights. Underwood (2009) attributes the rise of pirates, particularly in the Mediterranean, to the activities of state rivalry in the region, where support from Rome made pirate groups stronger to challenge Rome itself. Piracy in the Mediterranean continued during the reign of Barbarossa, a Muslim navigator, and the threat of piracy persists worldwide, particularly in the Gulf of Aden, which is threatened by Somali pirates, and in the Gulf of Guinea on the coast of West Africa.

Norwitz (2009) traces other VNSAs operating within a state, including the Italian Red Brigade, which is primarily a political revolution, and the Fretilin guerrillas in East Timor, the Irish Republican Army, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, Action Directe

in France, the Greek Revolutionary Organisation of 17 November, the German Red Army, such as Ordine Nuovo in Italy, and the National Socialist Underground. Even today, some violent armed groups continue to affect the security of nations, such as armed street gangs in America, which are estimated to number over 700,000 members. A large group of these street gangs are the neo-Nazi gangs, a conglomerate of smaller armed groups including the White Aryan Resistance Group, the National Alliance, the Church of the Creator, the New Order and others. Currently, the most dangerous gang in the Americas is the MS-13, which consists mainly of Salvadorans and other Central Americans. Norwitz (2009) also recognises that there are VNSAs or armed groups that are religiously motivated, such as Al Qaeda in the Middle East and Africa, Al Shabab in Somalia, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria and other West African states, ISIS, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), the American Christian Apocalypse Group, the Virginia Paintball Jihad Cell and various other groups claiming Jihad around the world. Overall, Norwitz (2009) concludes that these groups pose a problem for international security while continuing to destabilise domestic peace and security.

Bandits, rebels, secessionists and militants are other categories of VNSAs that are just as threatening as the terrorist groups mentioned above. Banditry is perpetrated by criminal groups that loot, rape, torture, murder, burn and destroy wealth and agricultural produce. Such groups in the Middle Ages and in the present, such as in the mediaeval Balkans in 800, the Uskoks of Senj in 1526, Bengal in 1757, West Java in 1869, Corsica in the 19th century, Janjaweed in Sudan, bandits in Northern Nigeria, and numerous others, destabilise national security and transfer their influence to international security threats (Attah and Sule 2024). Rebels have been around since ancient and mediaeval times. Rome suffered so much from the rebels that Caesar himself was brutally murdered by the rebel movement. During Ottoman Turkish rule, rebels caused the sultanate a lot of trouble both internally and externally. Rebels were and still are active in many states, whether for reasons of political self-determination, economic gain, cultural conflict or other motives (Yeşiltaş and Kardaş 2018). The cases in Colombia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Angola, Rwanda, Sudan and Nigeria have shown that rebels are still very dangerous in the 21st century (Medina and Hepner 2013). But not all rebels are perceived as VNSAs with only a violent motive. Some are liberation movements against violent colonialism and land theft, such as the Algerian guerrillas and the South African anti-apartheid movement, the Congolese movement against Belgian massacres and brutality, the Kenyan uprising against British colonialism and other similar movements. Militant groups, sometimes perceived as rebels, have also been identified as notorious armed groups which cause significant damage to national and international security (Sluglett 2019). The Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, the Seleka and Anti-Balaka in Central Africa, the South Sudanese groups and the current Sudanese conflicts, and the Niger Delta militants in southern Nigeria demonstrate how militant armed groups as non-state actors have caused internal security crises in states (Chenoweth and Lawrence 2010).

There are several factors behind the proliferation of VNSAs. Politics, global politics, according to Ezrow (2017), is an important factor, especially in the Cold War and post-Cold War era. This is attributed to the decline of bipolarity and globalisation. Ezrow (2017, p. 101) underlines that “global factors have influenced the organisational structure, strategy, behaviour of violent non-state actors, coherence, and longevity. Global factors have made non-state armed groups more efficient and harmful”. It had been expected that the effects of Cold War competition,

which prompted or favoured the Reagan administration to establish and promote al-Qaeda terrorism to deal with the Soviet Union, would subside in the post-Cold War era. However, the brutal and dictatorial actions of the US and its allies, who arrogantly sought to impose a unified global political economy, forced these armed groups to respond, leading to a manifestation of new security threats from the VNSA (Ezrow 2017). Thomas and Kiser (2002) believe that VNSAs are caused by deep-rooted problems, competition for resources, demographic pressures, organised crime and corruption, mismanagement, socioeconomic deprivation and identity divisions that gave rise to warlords, transnational criminal organisations, militant religious movements, ethno-political groups, eco-warriors and bandits. Sometimes a gap in governance, as in the case of ISIS in the Middle East, has allowed VNSAs to emerge and develop unchecked (Aydinli 2016).

Factionalisation is a key issue in VNSAs. As the rebels have taken up arms for different motives and ideologies, they could easily form many armed groups or factions due to numerous factors. This complicates the fight against such groups because even if they are coordinated, they are not organised. This explains why IRA, Tamil Tigers, Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabbab, ISIS, Boko Haram and some other groups have splinter groups, because in the course of their violence alone, motives can change and affiliation can change (Varin and Abubakar 2017). A simple case is that of freedom fighters transforming into a Jihadist or secessionist group or vice versa (Mironova 2019; Last 2021).

Research by Clarke (2011) shows that in many societies there is a link between VNSA and crime and terror. In some cases, they are used by state actors as proxies for interstate conflicts. One example of this is Kashmir, where India and China's VNSAs fought on behalf of their respected sponsors (Clarke 2011). In another case, Mandel (2013) argues that some VNSAs have usurped state powers and destabilised internal security and state functioning in some affected states such as Ireland, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Iraq, Nigeria, Mali and other Sahel states. Moreover, VNSAs are predicted to be the future of global war dominance, linked to transnational organised crime (Galeotti 2003), drugs, cartels, street gangs and warlords (Sullivan and Bunker 2003) and private military companies, the mercenaries of the 21st century.

A major difficulty with VNSAs is the legal question. If a violent armed group has attacked state security forces in a conflict, what local and, more importantly, international standards apply to their detention and trial? In this regard, existing international norms can be used to address the situation, but most importantly, stakeholders need to draft policies that define the status and response to such groups. Rose and Oswald (2016) suggest that certain norms need to be considered. Firstly, these armed groups are criminals and have perpetrated violence against the state, against innocent citizens and against the legal apparatus of coercion, the state security agencies. Secondly, categorisation matters when dealing with them, as some are classified as terrorist groups while others are simply violent armed groups, and the motive and circumstances that prompted their action must also be considered (Grygiel 2018). The conditions of human rights must also be taken into account, without compromising punitive measures of deterrence to demotivate such actions in the future.

One legal basis that justifies an attack on the VNSA is the concept of self-defence, which according to Lubell (2010) can even allow extraterritorial measures. While international law may prohibit the excessive use of force against violent armed groups, self-defence by a territorial state is guaranteed if the violent armed groups

are responsible for an attack (Gal-Or et al. 2015). The parameters of self-defence that states can apply against VNSAs include necessity, the scale of the initial attack, pre-emptive or anticipatory self-defence and the proportionality of the measures taken in self-defence. Such self-defence may consist of countermeasures and stalking, while some of the human rights that violent armed groups may enjoy during state responses consist of the prevention of torture, killings, ill-treatment, abductions and exemptions (Lubell 2010).

Using just war theory, E. E. Smith (2020) justifies that some VNSAs are covered by some genuine pretexts for the use of force. The Israeli occupation of Gaza and the constant attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon are not justifications for war, but the response of Hamas and Hezbollah is a just war because it is perceived as a defence against excessive foreign aggression that justifies war. Similarly, the Al-Qaeda–Taliban action against the US is another just war, where the US and its allies justified the attacks on Afghanistan in 2000 as retaliation for the terrorist attacks that the US believes Al-Qaeda carried out on American soil in September 2001.

VNSAs survived through a strategy that relied on resources inside or outside a state, which relied on ethnic and community sentiment, on intelligence, on buying off host communities, and alliances between them, even if ideology and interests are different, to face a common enemy; an adaptation strategy using guerrilla methods and evading conventional combat with the state security apparatus; and by using innocent civilians as shields against airstrikes or direct attacks while being ambushed themselves (Mazzei 2017).

2.3. Violence

Violence is a broad term that encompasses many interpretations, perspectives, types, dimensions and even interpretations and circumstances. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees explains violence as follows: “violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person that either results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in, injury, death or psychological harm”. Although most survivors of violence are girls and women, boys and men can also be affected by violence (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2024). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2024) categorises violence into physical and sexual violence, emotional or psychological violence, socioeconomic violence and domestic violence.

Violence can be either targeted or indiscriminate; it can be motivated by specific objectives, including those that are political, religious, social, economic, ethnic, racial, gender-based or unintentional; and it can be initiated with the aim of directly or indirectly inflicting harm, injury or death (Krug et al. 2002). Both armed and unarmed forms of violence can occur in both conflict and non-conflict situations. Violence has been explicitly identified as a major public health problem (Rutherford et al. 2007). The World Health Organisation (WHO) categorises violence as self-inflicted, interpersonal or collective violence. All three categories of violence can have a direct or indirect impact on society (The World Health Organisation 2024). Violence can also be direct, structural and cultural (Galtung 1996).

Violence occurs in a variety of forms and typologies. These are described here on the basis of the intentions, aims and methods of violence. Acts of hostility, aggression or violence driven by political goals or the desire to directly or indirectly influence political or governmental change are referred to as political violence. Political violence is a phenomenon that encompasses a variety of acts of violence by state

and non-state actors, such as pogroms, ethnic cleansing and genocide, as well as large-scale protests, riots, coups, rebellions, insurrections and terrorism. Electoral violence is a form of political violence that is described here. Electoral violence is one of the most important forms of violence, affecting global peace and security, but above all the democratisation process and good governance. It is a phenomenon that is reported worldwide, but the emerging democracies exclusively exhibit more features of violence during the electoral process (Birch et al. 2020). In all geopolitical zones of the world, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, multiple instances of violence are recorded in most countries in each electoral cycle. The nature, pattern, scale and manifestations of electoral violence vary from one state to another, but this does not change the fact that it is intentional. Most perpetrators of electoral violence aim to intimidate and undermine the process in order to gain an undue advantage over their opponents in the campaign (United States Institute for Peace 2020).

Radical violence is another form of violence. Although frequently used in the discourse on terrorism, radicalisation, radicalism and violent extremism are still not well defined or understood. Radicalisation is often seen as a precursor and precondition for violence, even though violent extremism is usually associated with terrorism. Although radicalisation by definition does not involve the use of violence, it is often a multi-layered, complicated and protracted process in which people are exposed to extreme ideals that inspire them to oppose and resist the status quo. As a result, violence is often used. "The willingness to use or support violence" or terror as an appropriate means to achieve spiritual, social or political goals is referred to as violent extremism (Sambo and Sule 2025).

The term "religious violence" describes violent crimes motivated by religious beliefs, ideologies or convictions and perpetrated by state or non-state actors. Religious violence, which includes acts such as incitement to violence against particular religious groups, discrimination or segregation of particular religious groups, persecution, genocide, indiscriminate physical aggression, gang or mob violence, and verbal abuse or violence that is defamatory or harmful, is closely associated with radicalism and religious extremism (Sambo and Sule 2025). Violence between different groups of people motivated by cultural, religious or linguistic differences, as well as differences in ethnicity, is referred to as ethnic or racial violence. Genocide, ethnic cleansing, pogroms, civil wars, violent separatist movements and racial segregation are just a few examples of the different types of violent crime that can be attributed to racial or ethnic differences (Petersen 2002).

Social violence, also known as societal violence, is any form of violence that utilises aggressive physical or emotional actions by an individual or group of individuals with the intention of causing significant physical or emotional harm to a group of people or to society as a whole. These acts can be direct or indirect and can take many different forms in different countries, such as gang violence, physical attacks, terrorism, segregation and targeted social prejudice. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) lists a number of gender-based discriminatory practises that can "hinder or frustrate the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women" of their fundamental human rights (Fox and Hoelscher 2012).

Sexual violence is a criminal offence that takes place in the mind and is reflected in thoughts and actions. It includes the evil intentions and actions of sexual sadists, sexual slavery, serial killers, revenge killers and manslaughter. Sexual violence is an

offence against humanity, a conflict-related attack and a terrorist intimidation of the weak. Non-combatants are often subjected to different forms of violence by armed groups, including sexual assault such as rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Sexual violence, which is used synonymously with Gender-Based Violence (GBV), is any hostile act that occurs against a person's will and is based on the socially established gender distinction between men and women. GBV affects both men and women, but the female gender is the most affected due to gender inequalities. Sexual violence is any involuntary sexual assault, any threat, any fear, or the attempt to induce or coerce someone to perform a sexual act against their will. These acts are considered violent offences when force, violence, threats and coercion are used. Sexual violence is a criminal habit associated with psychologically constructed mechanisms for psychological imbalance towards suffering humanity. This attitude can be combated by psychoanalysing the criminals. Sexual violence is sometimes interpreted as rape, but it goes beyond that. It also consists of assault, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, slavery and working with minors. Sometimes sexual violence can be carried out within the law. A good example of this is domestic violence perpetrated by husbands against their wives (Sule and Sambo 2021).

A critical point about violence that should be mentioned here is Arendt's discourse on the classical nature of violence in society. Arendt (1970), for example, argues that violence is defined as action without language. She believed that violence perpetuates conflict and that it negates the individual and their ability to act and his freedom. Violence is instrumental, a means to an end, and is justified by the immediate end it serves. Arendt (1970) also assumes that violence is anti-political: a form of brute force that destroys the bonds between people. Furthermore, Arendt (1970) believes that violence is not capable of creating power, but can only destroy power. Moreover, violence is preceded by threatened power, because violence arises when power is threatened, but it ends when power disappears. Moreover, violence is not legitimate: violence can be justified, but it is never legitimate. And finally, violence is dependent on social organisation, because any effective use of violence requires an appropriate social organisation. Theoretically, Arendt's views on violence are better suited to discourses on intellectual expansion, but this is not the place for that. It is only appropriate to mention them here because her views will reappear in the later part of this book when it comes to justifying or debunking the actions of violent armed groups.

2.4. Militancy

The term militancy is an antagonistic way of pursuing an interest or rejecting a policy or condition, depending on the situation. In ancient times, militancy was the provocative and radical speech in favour of or against an issue such as women's suffrage in Britain or black freedom in the USA. In modern times, it is an action that often goes beyond the target, including protest, physical attacks or even vandalism to emphasise the demands of interest groups (Laura 2000). Militancy can be equated with radicalism based on mobilisation against a perceived threat and demands that could not normally be met without excessive pressure. A good example is industrial workers who achieve their goals such as wage increases, additional vacation days, higher bonuses and better working conditions through protests, strikes, the partial or complete suspension of services and sometimes even violence (Gall 2003).

A militia is a group of armed fighters, often representing specific political parties, ethnic groups, tribes, religions or clans. Militias may work autonomously or directly

for the government to commit criminal acts, fight against other militias or rebel groups, or support an insurgency (Sales et al. 2018). Militancy is the perception of pursuing an objective by extraordinary means. Some individuals and groups who have expressed their displeasure and have not been heard by governments or other concerned bodies may resort to violence. In this respect, Arendt's (1970) assumption that violence is not just a means to an end, but a broader goal to achieve political, economic, social and cultural interests is justified, as Heath-Kelly (2013) states. Militancy is a milder or softer word than other terms directed at other groups who may take up arms against individuals, other groups and even state actors. Some militants can be as violent as terror groups or even more violent in the pursuit of their goals. They kill, torture, kidnap, rape, maim and even plant bombs if they deem it possible. But the militants' propensity for violence indicates that there are grievances or dissatisfaction that need to be addressed urgently, even if not everyone can always be truly satisfied. In other words, if the militants can be listened to amicably, they may not erupt into violence (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001). Militant groups have motives, ideologies, circumstances and strategies for their actions. There are even interpretations by different actors. Hamas and Hezbollah, for example, may be classified as militant organisations by the CIA, a label that many states and international as well as local groups will dismiss as hypocrisy and double standards because they want to liberate themselves from the Israeli occupation in Palestine, a crime that no one denies (Sambo and Sule 2025).

Militant groups can be politically motivated, such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Ireland, the Red Brigade in Italy and some others, such as the Sudan Liberation Army in the Darfur region, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in Angola and the National Resistance of Mozambique (RENAMO) in Mozambique, the Biafra movement in Nigeria and others (Peterson 2018). Some militant groups may be economic in nature, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, such as the armed groups in Misrata, Zawiya and Zintan, which generate revenue through the capture of mines and oil wells in their operations and against the state apparatus, making it difficult to secure states such as Congo and Nigeria (Chatham House 2024).

In several cases, the term militant groups is used synonymously with terrorist groups, foreign terrorist fighters and other violent armed groups of different categories. However, as Best (2021) suggests, states, organisations and international agencies label the groups differently—some as terrorists, others as militant, while others are ignored altogether due to religious, cultural and economic factors. One important group to consider here is the Niger Delta militants. The Niger Delta activists are one of the oldest militant groups that, according to their leaders, have fought against environmental and economic injustice. This group operates in the riverine areas of southern Nigeria, vandalising oil pipelines and disrupting oil exploration in the region, with a general impact on the Nigerian economy and economic production (Okonta and Douglas 2001). The Niger Delta is prioritised here because it is one of the major cases or groups examined in this book. Issues and factors affecting the environment and activities of the groups are discussed in detail in the upcoming chapters.

2.5. *Insurgency*

An insurgency is a prolonged politico-military conflict that aims to overthrow, replace, or take power from a legitimate government and control all or part of its resources in a region by using irregular military forces and illegal political organisations. Most rebel groups have one thing in common: their goal of gaining control over a population or a specific territory, including its assets. This goal distinguishes rebel organisations from purely terrorist organisations. It is important to remember that recognising a movement as an insurgency does not express a normative assessment of the legitimacy of the movement or its cause; the term insurgency is merely a description of the nature of the conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Jones and Johnston (2013) refer to insurgencies as long-term politico-military efforts aimed at destroying or overthrowing the legitimacy of a legitimate government and appropriating all or part of a country's resources, using in particular irregular military forces and illegal political organisations.

Although the main purpose of insurrections is political rivalry for legitimacy, the existence of insurrections is usually indicated by the violent nature of the conflict. One of the characteristics of insurgent warfare is the absence of front lines. Campaigns or series of battles; a protracted plan, often lasting more than ten years; and non-traditional military strategies such as guerrilla tactics, ethnic cleansing, terrorism or conflict. The distinction between civilians and combatants is blurred in insurgencies and often results in a relatively larger number of civilian casualties than in traditional conflicts (Merari 1993).

What drives the increasing activities of insurgents worldwide is the political rivalry and economic interest of powerful states that act as sponsors of insurgencies when their interests are at stake. Insurgent groups will continue to use the internet and social media platforms to communicate, spread propaganda and recruit people. In 2015, Internet Protocol (IP) traffic from wireless and mobile devices surpassed traffic from wired devices, with the largest increases occurring in Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, all areas of potential instability. These developments, along with open source and commercial encryption technologies, will likely continue to influence the tactics of insurgent groups. Groups will take less time to perfect IEDs and other asymmetric tactics that have allowed insurgent groups to continue to operate on a large scale against powerful mechanised counterinsurgency units such as the U.S. military (Jones and Johnston 2013).

Economic factors are a driving force behind insurgent activity worldwide. Insurgents often capitalise on economic opportunities through the extortion of natural resources and primary commodity exports, including food, agricultural products, oil, and other capturable goods. There is a widespread opinion that very different civilisations are particularly prone to civil wars and uprisings due to tensions (Metz 1993). It is argued that the bonds between ethnic and religious groups are more robust, inflexible and durable than the bonds within typical social or political organisations. The atrocities or rhetoric of extremists can solidify identities to such an extent that requests for conciliation are unlikely to be made and acted upon. As a result, restoring civilian politics in many war-torn states is a challenge, as the conflict itself can undermine potential co-operation. Another factor leading to insurgency is governance and state capacity, which is understood as an index of characteristics that includes measures of government effectiveness, corruption, rule of law, as well as GDP, and is associated with the possibility of insurgency (Metz 2007).

Insurgents aim to undermine the government's ability to provide public services such as utilities, education and justice, as well as the security of the population. An insurgent organisation might seek to overthrow the government by offering substitute services to the public, or it might be content to portray the government as helpless. Get the public's support, whether active or passive. Not all support has to come, or is likely to come, from genuine sympathisers; fear and intimidation have the power to win over many people. Encourage government misbehaviour that turns impartial citizens against the rebels and strengthens the allegiance of those who support them. Undermine foreign aid to the government and, if possible, gain support for the insurgency or recognition on a global level (Mackinlay 2013).

The aims of insurrections or insurgent groups usually fall into the following categories: revolutionary insurgencies that seek to replace the existing political order, such as the IRA in Ireland and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka; reformist insurgencies that seek to force the government to change its policies or implement political, economic or social reforms, such as Christian Apocalypse and Virginia Paintball Jihad Cell, all in the US; separatist insurgencies that seek political independence or autonomy, such as Biafra in Nigeria and Darfur in Sudan; resistance insurgencies that seek to push back occupying forces to withdraw from an occupied, illegal territory, such as Hamas in Palestine and the Taliban against the US occupation of Afghanistan; and commercial insurgencies that seek to appropriate wealth and are motivated by resources available in the neighbourhood, such as the rebel groups in Congo and Angola (Sambo and Sule 2025).

The organisational structure of the insurgent groups is another indicator that determines the categories and motives of the groups. In this context, it is noted that insurgent groups are divided into politically organised insurgencies, militarily organised insurgencies, traditionally organised insurgencies and urban cellular insurgencies (Beckett 2005). In this section, a critical insurgent group that is lethal according to the Global Terrorism Index (2024) classification is the Boko Haram insurgency in the Sahel, which affects Nigeria, Niger Republic, Cameroon and Chad. As one of the main groups examined in this book, it is sufficient to understand the nature and psychology of insurgency and terrorism in this section. The details of Boko Haram and its activities, as well as the reasons why the group is categorised as a major VNSA in this study, are discussed in Chapter 6.

2.6. *Banditry*

Banditry is an ancient phenomenon with socioeconomic and security consequences that date back to antiquity. Its resurgence in modern times is even more worrying because of the new dimension and complexity it has assumed in the communities concerned (Crummey 1988). It is believed that in some circumstances, banditry is a reaction of some aggrieved members of society to oppression and injustice and that they fight for a share of society's resources. In other cases, it is a crime caused by greed (Mburu 1999). Since the Babylonian Empire, the Assyrians, the Byzantines, the Persians, the Mongols, the Romans and the Egyptian societies, the world has experienced this phenomenon in different dimensions and at different times. It came from one community to another through groups such as pirates, robbers, criminals and other violent groups (Le Van et al. 2018). Banditry has occurred in many societies throughout history, including in the mediaeval Balkans in 800, among the Uskoks of Senj in 1526, in Bengal in 1757, in West Java in 1869, in Corsica in the 19th century and in Britain in the early 19th century, in India and in many

parts of Africa in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries (Attah and Sule 2024; Sambo and Sule 2024).

Banditry usually takes place in rural areas, which has earned it the adjectival connectivity of “rural banditry” in many studies (Hobsbawm 1968). This is obviously due to the nature of the bandits’ modus operandi, which in most cases are guerrilla techniques that are practically inapplicable in urban centres (Butts 2016). In rural areas, bandits find solace, succour and shelter for their hideouts among the rural population. People in rural areas are less cultured and easily vulnerable, and sometimes perceive national security officials with hostility (Holleman et al. 2017). Although there is no meaningful global data, rural banditry is cited as one of the leading causes of violent deaths in 2020, totalling 167,000 (SIPRI Yearbook 2020). Essentially, banditry is a key feature of unstable societies characterised by violence and unrest.

Today, kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle rustling and the exploitation of environmental resources are among the most widespread forms of banditry. These crimes are usually committed by an informal group of rural criminal organisations with weapons (Kelfmann et al. 2024). The explanations for the causes and driving forces of the semi-structured violence wave in the modern era vary, with analyses focusing on organised crime in rural areas, disputes between farmers and herders over land use, and factors exacerbated by climate change, among others, violence between competing groups and the absence of labour.

Historically, rural banditry is not a new phenomenon, as it was already observed in the ancient Greek city-states, in mediaeval Rome and in ancient China (Butts 2016). In the 18th and 19th centuries, rural banditry or armed violence also occurred in the satellite regions of Central and Eastern Europe and in the Balkans. The expanding economy in Latin America allowed banditry to flourish for several decades, even in the 21st century (Cassia 2019). In Africa, rural banditry is palpable and violent in many countries, especially in West Africa, where countries like Nigeria have seen some devastating cases in the last decade. Banditry and armed violence are on the rise, especially in Northwest Nigeria, one of the geopolitical zones with the greatest insecurity in the last decade. Armed banditry is currently challenging Nigeria’s statehood and is in the process of expanding the threshold of ungoverned spaces. A phenomenon that started in the form of cattle rustling and retaliatory attacks by herdsmen on perceived hostilities by farmers gradually morphed into full-blown banditry with various types of crimes including kidnapping for ransom, robbery and other forms of atrocities inflicted on humanity. The pattern of banditry, which has taken a new dimension in recent years, is more evident in the Northwest of Nigeria than in any other region of the country.

Mismanagement, corruption, injustice, pervasive inequality, poverty, displacement and dispossession in the case of herdsmen, politicisation of insecurity, ethnic and religious tensions, and weak democratic institutions or weak governance structures are cited as drivers of rural banditry in Nigeria (Cassia 2019). The threat of banditry has further exacerbated the crisis of insecurity in the Nigerian state and has led to a variety of humanitarian crises, including forced migration, loss of lives, destruction of property, obstruction of agriculture leading to food insecurity, displacement, deprivation of commercial activities and other severe humanitarian suffering in the Northwest of Nigeria. The Nigerian government attempted to combat armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria, but the effectiveness and challenges of this approach allowed the phenomenon to persist (Sambo and Sule 2024).

2.7. Secession

Secession, the creation of a state by force without the consent of the previous sovereign state, has existed since ancient times. There were secessionist movements after the First and Second World Wars and during and after the Cold War. Examples of such movements, which take place when a territory secedes from an existing state even though the breakaway entity has no legal justification for doing so, are Ethiopia and Eritrea as well as Sudan and South Sudan. This is because the United Nations (UN) Charter, which grants colonised peoples or peoples under foreign rule the right to establish their own state, forms the legal basis for statehood. However, in several post-independence African states, separatist movements are commonplace, leading to civil wars and other violent conflicts (Adunimay 2022).

The act whereby a territory and its inhabitants leave the authority of an existing state and establish a new, independent state with sovereignty over that territory and its inhabitants is known as secession. Secession is an unusual phenomenon. Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Pakistan–Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sudan and Ethiopia–Eritrea are just some of the nations that have experienced officially recognised secession since the end of the Second World War. A look at the development of secessionism around the world shows that different nations have responded to secessionists with different approaches and outcomes. In Western Europe and North America, secessionist movements form political parties and run for office (Griffiths and Muro 2021). While some of these nations, such as France, Spain and Italy, have declared their continued indivisibility, others, such as Canada and the UK, have conceded that secession is theoretically negotiable. Interestingly, most democracies outside the developed West have continuously banned separatist parties. Notable examples are the Philippines, India, Turkey and Papua New Guinea. However, Ethiopia accepted the secession, which made Eritrea's independence possible (Sorens 2012).

Very small parties and movements dedicated to peculiar causes such as secessionism are common in well-developed democracies with low barriers to political engagement. Even though secessionist movements are widespread in developed democracies, very few of them have majority support in their home countries. Mass protests and secessionist violence are rare in developed democracies. In developed democracies, secessionists mobilise primarily through elections by forming political parties and running for office. However, not all democracies in which separatist parties can run for office have the same stance on secession (Sorens 2012). Sorens (2012) hypothesises that latent secessionism often leads to active mobilisation, and occasionally to revolts when the central government is overthrown. Second, governments that are disparate and relatively weak are more likely to prohibit secession than governments that are obviously powerful or weak, because they are more willing to incur the costs of violence to prevent genuine secession, and ethnic communities that have organisations advocating secession or irredentism are more likely to rebel against the government that is not ruled by a central government of their own ethnic origin.

Disgruntled minorities have been trying to secede from political communities for as long as they have existed. As early as 479 BC, the Ionians asked Greece for help to flee from the Persians (Coggins 2016). They made an attempt, although they were by no means the first. People often perceive themselves as different from their rulers, as destined to suffer the same fate as others with similar ascetic or socio-cultural characteristics, and as members of groups that would benefit more

from self-government than from foreign rule due to bad experiences of government (Griffiths 2016). Demands for self-determination can take many different forms, such as calls for confederal arrangements, local autonomy, condominiums, suzerainty, or improved civil and cultural rights. A tiny percentage of these movements seek full independence because they conclude that their governors are unable or more willing to accommodate their autonomy aspirations. Since the emergence of the modern state, secessionism, the attempt by a nationalist movement to formally leave an existing state in order to establish a new one, has been an expression of these aspirations for full territorial and political independence (Coggins 2016).

One of the main reasons for separatist movements in Africa is the inherited colonial borders of the continent, which have remained permeable as they have not been properly demarcated and constituted. Social and economic inequality and political oppression or lack of autonomy are other factors that motivate the secessionist movement (Siroky and Abbasov 2021). Most importantly, economic deprivation or exploitation triggers the secession movement. Some groups, especially in societies with unbalanced resource distribution, believe that they are inherently endowed with resources in their localities, but the larger or central government deprives them of the benefits and leaves them impoverished (Collier and Hoeffler 2006). A major secessionist group with a violent approach and motive for secessionism is the Biafra group that was active in Eastern Nigeria in the 1970s and is currently operating in Southeastern Nigeria under the secessionist movement IPOB. The IPOB group is one of the VNSAs analysed in this group. What they are, who they are and what they are trying to achieve is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

3. Theorising Non-State Actors and Violence in Nigeria

3.1. *Theorising Non-State Actors and Violence in Nigeria*

This chapter discusses some theoretical underpinnings bordering on some assumptions and empirical evidence aimed at justifying how and why violent non-state actors (VNSAs) proliferated and continued their activities without being countered. Instead, armed groups have continued to emerge and manifest themselves in various ramifications with different motives, ideologies, operations and activities. There are numerous theories that can explain such circumstances exclusively in the Nigerian setting. However, this study, after a thorough search and wider theoretical and literary enquiry, has found that three theories—the Routine Activity Theory, the Broken Windows Theory and Ungoverned, Contested/Under-Governed Spaces—can scientifically, logically and convincingly explain the content and contexts of the emergence and activities of armed groups in Nigeria as well as the implications presented in this book.

3.2. *Routine Activity Theory*

One of the most frequently mentioned and important theoretical frameworks in criminology and crime research in general is routine activity theory, which was originally developed by Marcus Felson and Lawrence E. Cohen in 1979. Routine activity focuses on the study of crime as an event, emphasising its ecological nature and impact and its relationship to space and time, in contrast to theories of crime that emphasise the figure of the criminal and the psychological, biological or social factors that trigger the criminal act. In their original formulation, Cohen and Felson hypothesised that the rise in crime after the Second World War could be explained by changes in the organisation of people's everyday activities in cities (Eck 1995). This was supported by prominent researchers at the time. They theorised that postmodernity made it easier to commit crimes in the absence of qualified supervisors to assemble in time and space with the intention of committing crimes against vulnerable targets (Madero-Hernandez and Fisher 2012). From this, they derived two seemingly simple concepts with important implications: first, that the likelihood of committing a crime may depend on a combination of unique (but not separate) characteristics of the attacker or criminal; second, a corollary of the first, that the presence of the third element (capable guards) or the absence of the first two (attacker and target) alone would be sufficient to prevent a potential criminal incident.

Routine Activity Theory states that crime or illegal activity occurs within a state or environment where crime has the opportunity to flourish. Without a strong response and a discouraging sanction, criminals will continue to carry out their mischief, especially in a situation where they know they can escape unhindered. Cohen and Felson (1979) grounded the theory in three (3) basic assumptions: the existence of criminals who are ready and willing to commit crimes if they succeed and can escape, the availability of the target of the crime, and the absence of a strong response or policy to counteract or sanction the criminals, giving them the audacity to commit crimes with impunity. Bottoms and Wiles (1997) are of the opinion that most petty crimes such as local gang activity, sea piracy, criminal theft and major crimes including armed groups such as insurgents, terrorists and

other related crimes occur because they have either been neglected by policy or in some environments have been insurmountable due to the weakness of the state and the inability to respond adequately. Bottoms and Wiles (1997) further noted that some other criminal activities also have significant implications for national and international security; these include illegal migration and illegal cross-border movement of people, weapons, illegal drug trafficking and human trafficking. They are all consequences of the state's weakness and inadequate response, which have given criminals the impetus to operate successfully.

In summary, routine activity theory aims to explain shifts in crime trends by identifying illegal behaviours and their patterns at a macro level (Cohen and Felson 1979). This provides a framework for concrete and customised crime analysis and facilitates the implementation of concrete policies and practises aimed at changing the conditions that enable crime to occur, thereby preventing it, because it is based on criminal events, on the distribution and grouping in space and time of the minimal elements that make them up, rather than on the tracking of offenders' motivations (Miró 2014). In contrast to the previous assumption that routine activity theory focuses on criminology and the study of criminals who physically attack their targets, Leukfeldt and Yar (2016) extend the concept to cybercrime activities, where similar scenarios exist with vulnerable targets, criminals ready to commit crimes and a lack of sanctioning authorities due to the neutrality and anonymity of cyberspace.

The theory is essentially based on three hypotheses: the potential culprit, the suitable target and the lack of a competent guardian. The theory assumes that all three of the above classifications must materialise before a crime occurs (Miller 2013). "Routine" can basically be explained as a circumstance where the criminal has a daily practise of persistently reviewing their appropriate targets to ensure that there is no discouragement or obstacle that prevents them from committing any wrongdoing. The hypothesis also assumes that the crooks are rational in their practises and decisions, as they ensure that they carry out their deeds where they can be successful and where they can escape without any problems (Kleemans et al. 2012). These assumptions are presented in Figure 2 below for easy viewing.

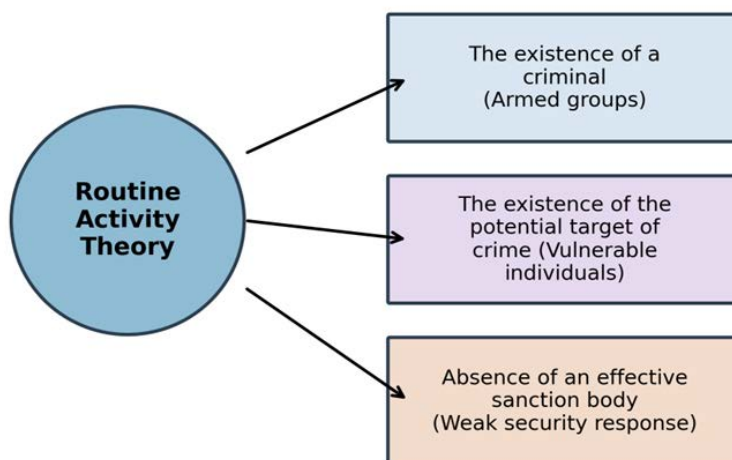


Figure 2. The hypothesis of the trio of routine activity theory for criminal activities. Source: Figure by authors.

The above assumptions can clearly explain the problematic nature of the activities of VNSAs in Nigeria. In the Nigerian context, the socioeconomic situation, weak legal framework, sanctions and the response to them, coupled with poor governance, have made criminals readily available and ready to commit criminal activities in all parts of the country. When the SALW became widely available in the country through external sources and internal production, the criminals saw this development as an opportunity to commit their crimes. The second assumption that there is a prime target for crime before the occurrence of crime is justified in this study because the armed groups that kill in the name of Boko Haram, Niger Delta militant activities, banditry, secessionist movement, kidnapping, farmers and herdsman clashes and kidnappers of schoolchildren in Northern Nigeria could easily and accurately identify their vulnerable targets.

The third conjecture is practically applicable. It presupposes that the weakness or absence of a sanctioning authority is responsible for criminal groups being able to carry out their crimes with impunity, which is the case in the Nigerian context. The armed groups that procure small arms and light weapons possess them and use them for criminal activities; they are not prevented, arrested and punished accordingly. Most of the armed groups identified in Nigeria, the study area, are a group of opportunists who see crime as a relief of the failure of the state because there are unprotected, vulnerable targets for crime and, most importantly, because they can carry out their crimes with impunity without serious sanctions being imposed on them. The Boko Haram and bandits, for example, not only attack the vulnerable, but they have had the audacity to confront the security forces, which gives the group the boldness to attack with impunity, all because of a conducive environment that favours crime going undetected, unchecked and unpunished.

3.3. Broken Windows Theory

This theory was established in 1982 by George Kelling and James K. Wilson to highlight a connection between broken windows and social order (Alford 2012). According to them, if one window in a building is broken and not repaired, all other windows will soon be broken as well. From this observation, the authors developed the “broken windows theory” of social order. Broken windows are unrepaired community controls that break down, and serious crimes have the opportunity to flourish. The “broken windows” theory of social order suggests that communities should pay attention to the smallest violations of the law. A well-kept neighbourhood takes care of petty crimes and creates a bond of social order that deters serious criminal elements. In contrast, disorderly behaviour creates fear in the local community that urban decline and decay will ultimately follow on the heels of unbridled order (Alford 2012).

So how is a broken window relevant for the perception or explanation of revolts? On the one hand, it is simply a metaphor for the idea that the government’s diligence in prosecuting petty crime is a sign that it is concerned with more serious matters of the common good. But it is more than that. Much like broken windows in community affairs, a similar phenomenon applies to the gradual proliferation of armed groups. There is a link between the relatively minor offence of petty crimes that are tolerated and ignored in the long term, and the greater impact that such actions have on a strong signal of social disorder, which means that the government is not to be trusted (Alford 2012).

In his legal discourse, Harcourt (1998) argues that there is a strong causal link between disorder and serious crime. Maintaining order requires understanding criminal behaviour and policing and tackling petty crime before it turns into major, uncontrollable crime. Like Harcourt (1998), Ren et al. (2019) argue that citizen participation in government processes, perceptions of crime and other relative engagement are crucial for crime prevention in society. This is an important means of preventing petty crime from escalating into armed violence in societies. However, Ren et al. (2019) explain that there are some important factors that discourage the public from voluntarily participating in public safety and security measures. Starting with the fact that indifference to small crimes in the neighbourhood leads to such crimes gradually becoming larger crimes, and this transition often goes unnoticed. In this regard, in a neighbourhood with a high prevalence of petty crime, the best safety measure taken by community members is to withdraw from community life and isolate themselves (Ren et al. 2019).

Disorder is harmful, especially social disorder such as street prostitution, public drinking and urinating and gambling. When these activities occur in a community, they usually reinforce a sense of disorder among the locals and suggest that the neighbourhood could become dangerous in the future if disorder is not tackled. The locals adopt such views and are often afraid of being victimised. The hypothesis states that people's fear of crime is mainly the result of their own perception of disorder, which is caused by external signs and mitigated by neighbourly social relations. The relationship between disorder and fear causes residents to feel less effective as a group and gradually alienate themselves from others in their immediate neighbourhood. As a result of this subjective perception of the outside world, citizens will naturally curtail their community-oriented activities, the very actions that promote neighbourhood civility and collective efficacy. In such a situation, it is easier to break the order, and this is the point at which criminals and those inclined to commit crimes find a convenient mechanism to commit their crimes. And if they are not monitored and tackled at this stage, the crime turns into a large criminal cartel that takes up arms against members of the community, making the response a bigger problem.

It has been argued that ignoring disorderly conditions in some places can lead to an increase in serious crime in these impoverished communities or neighbourhoods. Essentially, it is believed that "even a single instance of disorder (the metaphorical "broken window") can set off a chain reaction of community decay if not addressed immediately. This logic applies to everything from vandalism to obnoxious teenagers to intrusive panhandlers and even armed groups leading to violence and terrorism" (Gau and Pratt 2010). This hypothesis is due to the fact that the broken windows perspective assumes that uncontrolled instability in a community indicates to potential offenders that the area is ready to be victimised, thereby increasing the number of more serious crimes (Maskaly and Boggess 2014). One advantage of the broken windows theory is that it combines theory and policy in its approach. The theory states that if small crimes in community neighbourhoods are perceived to be at the root of larger crimes and communities are appropriately involved in tackling and preventing smaller crimes, the emergence of larger crimes will be prevented. This is the theory that has been presented to policy-makers as a measure to combat crime. This was also observed by Welsh et al. (2015). A major weakness of this theory identified in this study is the way it justifies crime without paying much attention to prevention and control in formidable measures.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that this theory can be applied to explain corruption and insurgency in the context of the Nigerian state in the sense that the entire socio-political and economic system in Nigeria is compromised in a “broken windows” style, in which minor offences and crimes are tolerated. This led to some insurgents attempting to secede in the 1970s, with others becoming militant in the Niger Delta, and some launching insurgency in the Northeast of Nigeria, which led to the collapse of the security order in the Northeast, while others introduced banditry. The government lacks the trust of the public; the public could not trust the government even during elections, leading to the rigging and manipulation of elections as a way to retain power. This process leads to the escalation of corruption as the Nigerian people favour corruption by not questioning their political leaders, but instead appreciating and honouring them because they are rich and corrupt. The phenomenon of corruption opened the door for a rebellion in which some disgruntled members of society decided to take up arms against the established order.

A good example of how minor offences were turned into armed violence by many groups in Nigeria is the fact that Ken Saro Wiwa’s protest against environmental injustice in the Niger Delta in the 1990s was downplayed and considered a crime against the state (Nixon 1996), which led to devastating economic losses running into billions of dollars through pipeline vandalism, pipeline explosions, oil bunkering, kidnappings and disruption of oil company operations in the areas as well as various repercussions that eventually led to environmental disasters (Courson 2009) and a humanitarian crisis (Asuni 2009b). Even if a response to environmental injustice by the Nigerian state and oil companies is perceived as a crime by the government, it should be handled professionally and with care.

One of the armed groups, the Boko Haram, is the most critical case where alleged crimes are neglected to later become a major crime that goes beyond criminality and develops into an insurgency. In 2000, the leader, Muhammad Yusuf, began his mission to turn critically against the established order by labelling the Nigerian government as infidels. He turned against “Boko”, Western education and all forms of public service. The security agencies underestimated the future implications of such hostile utterances in the name of religion, as they were carried out by Muhammad Yusuf under the guise of Islamic preaching. The policy-makers overlooked this, as religion is extremely sensitive in the Nigerian environment. Politicians refrain from interfering so as not to jeopardise their election chances. Only religious scholars, as reported by Sule and Sambo (2020) and Sambo and Sule (2025), have paid much attention to the future risk of such a movement. In less than a decade, the neglected expressions turned into a full-blown insurgency, and the rest is a story that is uncomfortable today. And the response to the threat was also wrong and led to a further escalation of the conflict (Sule et al. 2019b).

Another case that shows how the broken windows theory manifests itself in the Nigerian environment is the response to the bandit crisis in Northwest and Northcentral Nigeria. Years of resource competition between farmers and sedentary Fulani herdsman, triggered by the erosion of grazing reserves and increasing urbanisation, but also by climate change and above all by the lack of government control, led to deadly fights that turned into cattle raids and other crimes on the land, which today threaten to engulf the entire Northwest and some areas in the centre of the country (Okoli and Ngom 2024). Also, the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), which is a reincarnation of the oldest armed group in Nigeria that has manifested in a new dimension, is dismissed as ridiculous by the Nigerian

government but is getting stronger and causing many problems. For instance, the group is now killing, enforcing a Sit-at-Home Syndrome which is causing billions or even trillions in business losses as shops are forcibly closed on Mondays, and is involved in several crimes (Ugorji 2017). This movement was meant to be suppressed during the civil war of the 1970s, but policy-makers' failure to listen carefully and consider what could lead to a lasting solution, such as considering dissolution or justifying secession, if necessary, means that citizens are treated like criminals in their homeland, while these same citizens now take up sophisticated arms against their fellow citizens who commit heinous crimes and against the state.

Based on the issues examined above, Kelling and Wilson's (1982) hypothesis has proved to be justified as a theoretical or even practical study in the context of the Nigerian setting. Petty neighbourhood crimes that are neglected in different geographical locations manifest themselves with full force as armed group violence. The motive, ideology and modus operandi may differ among the groups studied in this book, but the setting of the study reveals a factual aspect: the crimes were neglected in their early days, which provided the impetus for their sudden rise to violence. This theory will therefore prove useful later in practise when it comes to tracing the roots and the remedies.

3.4. Ungoverned, Contested/Under-Governed Spaces

The discourse on ungoverned space (also referred to as under-governed or ungoverned space due to the contested discourse on the term) is not a new concept in the field of national and international security, but it is becoming increasingly popular due to the rise of violence and insurgent groups in the 21st century. The history of global security shows that ungoverned space is an epistemological phenomenon that has existed since antiquity. Past empires, kingdoms, states and other political organisations have all faced rebellion, resistance attempts, secession efforts and illegal armed groups with different motives and actions. However, the use of the term "ungoverned space" in this study is limited to 21st century ideas.

In the modern era, Clunan and Trinkunas (2010) set the ball rolling by re-examining the nature and views of ungoverned space. Ungoverned space is seen as a key threat to global collective peace and security. Such spaces have often emerged from states that are considered failed states or states with undermined national sovereignty. Prevost and Vanden (2014) refer to ungoverned space as a synonym for failed states. The term ungoverned space, used interchangeably with under-governed, contested governed, misgoverned, disputed physical territories and exploitable non-physical territories, describes a space in which illegal non-state actors plan, mobilise, organise and coordinate the process of recruiting members to pursue a motive independent of state policy or diplomacy (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010). However, Clunan and Trinkunas (2010) present an alternative view that softens the appearance of ungoverned space as a threat to national security. Instead, they argue that modern states are becoming increasingly flexible, softening the grip on power by non-state actors, both malign and benign. Sometimes what is described as dangerous space can be no more harmful to state security than state action itself (P. Williams 2010). Negligence, mismanagement, ill-conceived policies and state repression can justify a response that looks like dangerous actions for the state but not for the survival of the inhabitants of the space, and this may not be a threat, as some states portray the image (P. Williams 2010). A good example of this is the Niger Delta militants, one of the main groups discussed in this book.

Although the term “ungoverned space” is controversial, some classifications and measures can help identify those that can truly be recognised as such. In modern times, a strong state is less likely to have a dangerous space, while failed or weak states that are considered fragile are usually on the list, and, most importantly, terrorism is considered a current ungoverned space. Terrorism is associated with ungoverned space because it provides a safe haven for armed groups to organise and conduct their activities covertly. This relates to the case of Boko Haram as one of the large groups being analysed here. Ungoverned spaces are not necessarily only found in rural areas. In some cases, they may be located in urban centres, depending on the pattern of crisis and fragility of the state in question, as in the case of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria. Ungoverned space is characterised by a number of factors, including lack of state penetration of areas, lack of coercive state monopoly, lack of border control, level of external interference, logistics and level of sophistication (The Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2014). Interestingly, Lenshie (2018) departs from the above views by suggesting that both strong and weak states have ungoverned space and are vulnerable to the crimes of such territories, but the extent and security implications, as well as the integrity of national sovereignty, vary. The strong state exercises control, while the weak state loses control (Lenshie 2018).

There are several reasons for the failure of states. Convulsive internal violence, an unstable political space, a fragile economy, the question of legitimacy and the inability of political decision-makers to create a common good for citizens make states weak, and thus they become failed states (Rotberg 2003). In failed states, there are ethnic, religious, linguistic or other conflicts between communities that have yet to fully degenerate into violence. The continuous decline in infrastructure, the economy, political despotism and falling living standards lead to an escalation of tensions and even armed violence, which results in large areas lying outside the control of a state and becoming an ungoverned space (Rotberg 2003). According to Rotberg (2009) and Chayes (2015), weak states are greatly affected by corruption, and this is directly related to global peace and security, as corruption fuels intra-state conflicts and creates an environment for trafficking in drugs, weapons and illicit profits; allows terrorism to flourish; and criminalises states. This process gave rise to illegal armed groups that threatened national security and sovereignty and led to uncontrolled territories of states.

An important point to note about the characteristics of ungoverned space is the nature of governance and courts. Insurgents, rebels and terrorists who have gained control of an area tend to bypass national laws and create their own (Felbab-Brown 2010). Religious armed groups, especially those that invoke jihad, seek a caliphate and Shari’ah law. They practise jungle justice, tax people, remit to the group, take over commercial activities where they see lucrative opportunities, set up roadblocks and exert control by imposing fines and other levies on host residents, like Boko Haram and other armed groups in Nigeria (Ledwidge 2017).

The World Bank reports that the number of states without effective national sovereignty rose from eleven in 1996 to twenty-six in 2006 (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010). The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office reported that the number of ungoverned territories rose to over forty in 2014. The African Union reported in 2022 that there are more than sixty ungoverned spaces in states worldwide and more than twenty-two of them are in Africa, spread across five regions of the continent (African Union, 2022). Several studies on individual states identify states with ungoverned spaces, including their unique character and patterns of activities. For example, the

Democratic Republic of Congo is considered a good example by Lemarchand (2003), Serra Leone (Reno 2003), Sudan as a successful failed state (Prunier and Gisselquist 2003), Somalia as a completely collapsed state (Clarke and Gosende 2003), Colombia as a lawless state (Kline 2003), Indonesia as an erosion of state capacity (Malley 2003), Sri Lanka as a fragmented state (Jenne 2003), Tajikistan as a state weakened by regional power-sharing (Dadmehr 2003), Fiji as a state weakened by division (Lawson 2003), Haiti as a case of endemic weakness (Gelin-Adams and Malone 2003) and Lebanon as a failed and collapsed state (Barak 2003).

Other studies present areas with a clear case of ungoverned space, including Somalia in the Horn of Africa (Menkhaus and Shapiro 2010), the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (Groh 2010), crime, drugs, gangsterism and trafficking in Mexico, which have created several ungoverned spaces between the United States and the Mexican border (Coronado and Alejo 2014), the security problem at the Mexico-Guatemala border (Solis 2014) and criminal gangs in Colombia (Dugas 2014). Thus, the previous studies analysed above could not be extended and improved by including the new members of failed states and ungoverned spaces such as the West African states of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger, and other areas in the Middle East such as Libya, Iraq and Syria. Sri Lanka is a fragmented state (Jenne 2003), Tajikistan is a state weakened by regional power-sharing (Dadmehr 2003), Fiji is a state weakened by division (Lawson 2003), Haiti is a case of endemic weakness (Gelin-Adams and Malone 2003) and Lebanon is a failed and collapsed state (Barak 2003).

This study makes a theoretical contribution to the epistemology of ungoverned space by presenting Nigeria as part of the game in contemporary times. The Nextier SPD (2022) emphasises that armed conflict has become the norm in many of Nigeria's ungoverned spaces. This statement suggests that there are many ungoverned spaces in Nigeria that are characterised by armed conflicts initiated by illegal groups. Ungoverned spaces provide opportunities for renegades to unleash violence and undermine Nigeria's sovereignty. This, as noted by Rotberg (2003, 2009), is due to state failure, corruption, the marginalisation of vulnerable groups and the inability to adequately manage conflicts (Nextier SPD 2022).

Despite the existence of contested territories and the activities of armed groups that have been ongoing for more than three decades, there have been few efforts to establish a theoretical link between Nigeria and the ungoverned space. In the 1990s, Niger Delta militant groups took control of a significant area in Nigeria's economic centre: the riverine oil production area. The militants bunker oil, kidnap foreigners for ransom, destroy oil pipelines and disrupt the economic activities of oil production. Communal clashes in ethno-religious conflicts, especially in Northcentral Nigeria, created ungoverned spaces that culminated in farmer-herder conflicts in the 2000s and beyond. The most recent emergence of ungoverned spaces is that of Boko Haram terrorism in Northeastern Nigeria and rural banditry in the Northwest. Some studies (Lenshie 2018; Onwuzuruigbo 2021; Igboin 2021; Ejiofor 2022) have attempted to establish theories about the nature of ungoverned space in Nigeria using the four geopolitical zones. For example, Lenshie (2018) links militancy in the Niger Delta to the ungoverned space, Onwuzuruigbo (2021) examines Nigeria's ungoverned space from the perspective of cattle rustling in the Northwest and rural banditry, and Igboin (2021) identifies the ungoverned space or the contested governed space in the Northeast of Nigeria. The under-governed space in Northeast Nigeria is considered from the perspective of Boko Haram terrorism, and Ejiofor (2022) establishes a link between state discrimination against a certain class, banditry and violence in

northern Nigeria. The increasing violence of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) is another dimension of the emergence of an ungoverned space in Nigeria. According to Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2021), IPOB violence manifests through illegal non-state actors in the Southeast and adds to the multitude of ungoverned spaces Nigeria is grappling with.

Of all the ungoverned or contested areas in Nigeria, Boko Haram deserves to be recognised as one of the most violent due to the size of the areas conquered, the activities, the destruction and the effects. Boko Haram controlled about 16 local governments from 2013 to 2017, equivalent to the size of England (De Montclos 2021). Furthermore, Boko Haram insurgents set up roadblocks; levied taxes on commuters; fined residents; confiscated relief and consumer goods, including medicines, food and fuel; and killed more than 40,000 people, in addition to displacing more than 3.5 million people in the Lake Chad area (Mohammed 2021). The activities of Boko Haram insurgents created further uncontrolled spaces in Lake Chad, leading to the near collapse of fishing, agriculture and trade. The lake, which produces about 100,000 tons of fish, has come to a standstill due to the activities of the insurgents. The Nigerian government has lost authority and sovereignty in the area controlled by Boko Haram. Between 2011 and 2017, Boko Haram controlled 16 local governments that are as large or larger than England and larger than many European countries (Sambo and Sule 2025). The army chief of staff reported over 100,000 deaths (Idris 2022) due to the atrocities of Boko Haram instead of the 40,000 mentioned by Mohammed (2021) and a loss of around 3.3 trillion (Idris 2022).

In addition, the takeover and control of territories in Northwestern Nigeria remains a major issue in the current Nigerian security discourse. It is evident that some bandit groups have taken full control of some villages and imposed levies by removing the district heads and appointing new persons that are loyal to them (Umar 2021b). A member of the State House of Assembly representing Sabon Birni in Sokoto reported on 9 November 2021 that his constituents pay taxes to bandits and continue to do so (Umar 2021a). The member added that Sabon Birni residents have to pay taxes before going to their farms or transporting their farm produce home. This applies to many areas in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. Ungoverned/contested governed spaces are emerging, while residents of the affected towns and villages now feel that there is virtually no government. This is an ominous and suicidal development that must be reversed immediately by the authorities concerned.

According to Lenshie (2018), the political nature exhibited by the government has widened the atmosphere for the development and consolidation of ungoverned space in the Niger Delta. The local dissatisfaction of the ethnic groups with the Nigerian government resulted from the social, economic and environmental problems prevalent in the Niger Delta. The youth who were morally supported by the ethnic elites to protest and participate in the local discontent were more inclined to militancy to deny the Nigerian government the credibility it needed, thereby creating a vacuum of governance or a contested governed space in the region (Lenshie 2018). Several militant groups such as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Vigilance (NDV) and others have not only directly confronted the Nigerian troops but have also engaged in pipeline bombings, vandalism, kidnapping and bunkering to express their grievances.

These circumstances made it clear that the Niger Delta has become an uncontrolled territory/contested space that is being exploited because there is no effective Nigerian state security administration in the area (Lenshie 2018).

4. The Security Environment in Nigeria

4.1. *The Security Environment in Nigeria*

The security environment in Nigeria provides an interesting space for discussing security issues and the prevailing insecurity, especially when examining armed groups and violence in the country. Like all other countries in the world, Nigeria has a structure and national security architecture that is solely characterised by compelling security threats that require swift action from security agencies. However, the accumulation of gradually neglected factors observed by the broken windows theory and the routine activity theory culminated in major violent crimes that prompted several non-state actors to take up arms and perpetrate heinous crimes and violence against the state and its citizens. This chapter discusses the major factors and issues surrounding the security environment in Nigeria to pave the way for a classical understanding of the motivation and movement behind the armed groups.

4.2. *National Security Architecture*

National security is the threshold to national integrity and prosperity, because only through an effective, secure environment can nation states thrive. National security is a matter of highly strategic policy and decision-making by security actors and other relevant key players (Wolfers 1964). National security encompasses the process of securing the national territory both internally and externally from all forms of undesirable aggression, illegal armed groups and insurgencies that may threaten national sovereignty or undermine national tranquillity (Leffler 1990). National security has core values that are fundamental to the clear functioning of the security process. Military and non-military threats are considered the most important targets of a national security exercise. All nation states today compete in protecting their national borders through various methods, including the manufacture and procurement of modern firearms, the provision of a favourable environment for the well-being of citizens and the promotion of good governance and individual freedom (Buzan and Hansen 2009).

National security issues affect all stakeholders, such as policy-makers, security agencies and international organisations (Morgenthau 1993). The changing dimension of security is coming into the spotlight globally, from the traditional perspective of security or military threat in the interwar years (1914–1918 and 1934–1944) to the progression of the Cold War (1945–1989) in the 1960s and 1970s (Wolfers 1964). National security encompasses policies, structures and actions specifically designed as a necessary measure to protect national interests from external threats (Devetak et al. 2017). National security provides a comprehensive framework for safeguarding national integrity and for protecting and promoting the foreign policy objectives of a nation (Leffler 1990).

The national security of any state is of central importance for the recognition of fundamental national values, which must not be called into question in any situation if the state wishes to preserve its sovereignty (Walker 2009). The traditional assumptions on security adopted to date have evolved from the earlier notion that only state actors are considered key players in national and international politics. It has moved far beyond this approach (Buzan 1987). The current discourse on security assumes that national and international security are too important to be confined to the traditional realm (Gutner 2017). The concept of security has successfully

transformed in the post-Cold War era into a more complex and integrated dynamic as non-state actors are actively involved as formidable partners in both domestic and international politics (Buzan and Hansen 2009).

The national security of any nation state should successfully detect all imminent internal threats and suppress them accordingly before a state achieves glory in international relations (De Keersmaecker 2016). Some states become embroiled in protracted wars because they are pursuing national interests that are enforced through the use of armed forces (Chomsky and Herman 1979). However, national security issues today go beyond military threats. Other potential threats are just as menacing as military threats. These include climate change leading to environmental hazards, the economic environment, political structure, social conditions and other patterns of co-existence (Kaufman 2013). Nigeria is one such country that is currently facing non-military threats including militant insurgency, Boko Haram, rural banditry, farmer–herder conflicts, climate change, IPOB secessionists, Oduduwa separatists, poverty, hunger, corruption, diseases and pandemics, cyber fraud, illiteracy, poor infrastructure, inequality and injustice and other crimes that overshadow the role of the police in maintaining security. These threats have led to calls for a restructuring of the police towards greater decentralisation, allowing states to develop their own policing systems.

The national security architecture consists of complex, interdependent processes and institutions concerned with securing the national territory (Haider 2016). In an effort to create structures, institutions and processes that ensure reliable security for life, property and the integrity of the national territory, some agencies, organisations, individuals and activities have been initiated by states to achieve these objectives (Buzan 1987). Various countries have successfully developed their own independent national security architecture based on their constitutional mandate and specificities (Walker 2009). In Nigeria, for example, the national security architecture consists of the military-industrial complex, the police, the national defence headquarters, the top decision-making bodies of the executive and legislature and other relevant stakeholders who meet regularly to review and reshape the nature and pattern of security activities. Nigeria is a federal state with a multi-tiered national security architecture and a federal system is considered to have its own unique form of governance (Yakubu 2012).

The Nigerian national security architecture involves the formation of institutions, structures and strategies, as well as programmes for protection and internal and external defence. The institutions involve all the ministries of defence and security, which include various security forces and agencies. The structures are constitutionally embedded in the decision-making powers of the security agencies, with the President of the country being the Commander-in-Chief, and the Chief Security Officer of the country is supported by his cabinet of ministers, the National Security Advisor (NSA) and other advisors. The chiefs of the armed forces consist of the Chief of the Army Staff, the Chief of the Naval Staff, the Chief of the Air Force and the Commander of the Land Forces. The Inspector General of Police and other paramilitary forces such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Department of State Security (DSS), the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the National Immigration Service (NIS), the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies (NDLEA) and several others were responsible for a coordinated operation to maintain internal and external security (Yakubu 2012). There is also the Economic and Financial Crimes

Commission (EFCC) and private security agencies (Ijide 2020). It is constitutionally provided that all matters of defence and security, including their structures, are the exclusive responsibility of the Federal Government. Many analysts are of the opinion that this situation should not exist in a real federation. Security should be decentralised because most security issues are sometimes local in nature and can be better solved by local security forces (Deribe 2023).

Nigeria is currently grappling with many security challenges at all levels. Domestically, the volatile political environment and vulnerable social conditions arising from multi-religious, multi-ethnic and regional politics, in addition to the vast geographical area, porous borders and economic fluctuation, have contributed to security dilemmas or challenges for Nigeria. The dilemma of Anglophone and Francophone dichotomy is another security concern, as the country is located in the neighbourhood of the four major countries of West Africa, all of which were colonised by France, leading to a wide gap in communication, external loyalty and cooperation (Yakubu 2012). Nigeria has established a chain of security councils to shape the country's security policy both internally and externally (Yakubu 2012). With the emergence of Boko Haram terrorists, who hide under the guise of religion to commit heinous crimes against humanity, Nigeria is facing new security threats from terrorists who are wreaking havoc in the northern part of the country, especially in the Northeastern enclave (Sule et al. 2019b).

One of the security challenges facing the national security architecture is the adequacy of security personnel and the security apparatus for deployment. Nigeria has a huge population, which was estimated at 230 million in 2024 according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2024a) based on the 2006 Population Census projection. The country has a relatively large land mass, a large airspace and a maritime environment with extensive, porous borders. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria mandates the Office of the National Security Adviser to coordinate the activities of security institutions, and the National Assembly (NASS) exercises legislative oversight over all security agencies and institutions (Ijide 2020). The Nigerian Army is responsible for land defence, the Navy for the surveillance of Nigeria's water space, the Air Force for the defence of Nigeria's airspace and the Nigerian Police Force for the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime.

According to the World Bank Group (2024) report, Nigeria has a total of 223,000 armed forces (100,000 army; 20,000 navy/coast guard; 15,000 air force) in 2024 (CIA 2024). The police force in 2024 is about 370,000, which is a ratio of 1 to 600 (1:600), which is below the United Nations recommended ratio of 1 to 450 (1:450) (Home Office 2024) and about 80,000 Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) (CIA 2024). Former Minister of Defence Bashir Magashi said in 2023 that the Nigerian Armed Forces were overstretched due to insufficient manpower and that there was an urgent need to recruit at least 12,000 soldiers per year (Home Office 2024). Similarly, the former Acting Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, suggests that Nigeria needs to increase or double the number of its police recruits at least 20,000 annually to meet the UN-recommended quota (Home Office 2024). The army is present in each of the 36 federal states. In regions such as the Northeast, Southeast, South-South, Northcentral and Northwest, where conflict and bloodshed are frequent, the armed forces are deployed for internal security. According to sources, there are isolated areas in the Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and South-South that are de facto ruled by armed gangs or extremist organisations where the state security services have

limited or no reach (Home Office 2024). According to the Home Office (2024), 31,912 people were arrested nationwide by the Nigerian police over the course of a year for crimes such as kidnapping, murder and armed robbery. This corresponds to 0.14 arrested suspects per 1000 people. In contrast, comparable figures for Wales and England, which are based on the number of arrests rather than the number of suspects (who can be arrested repeatedly), show that there are 11.2 arrests per 1000 people annually by March 2023.

The military's inventory consists of a variety of imported weapons systems of Chinese, European, Middle Eastern, Russian (including Soviet) and US origin. The military is undergoing a modernisation programme and has received equipment from a number of suppliers in recent years, including Brazil, China, France, Italy, Russia, Turkey and the US; Nigeria is also developing capacities in the defence industry, including small arms, armoured vehicles and a small naval production (CIA 2024). Nigeria is currently the largest importer of military equipment in sub-Saharan Africa (Ellmer 2021).

The share of Nigeria's defence budget in its capital expenditure increased significantly between 2015 (9.8%) and 2019 (26.6%). In 2019, 0.5% of Nigeria's GDP was spent on military expenditure, putting Nigeria in 149th place in the world. In 2020, 16.8% of Nigeria's total budget was spent on security (Ellmer 2021). Nigeria imported in 2022 \$17.6 million worth of military weapons, making it the 24th largest importer of military weapons in the world. At the same time, military weapons were the 365th most imported product in Nigeria. Nigeria imports military weapons mainly from the United States (\$5.65 million), France (\$2.28 million), Pakistan (\$2.2 million), Czech Republic (\$2.13 million) and Azerbaijan (\$1.86 million). The fastest growing import markets for military weapons for Nigeria between 2021 and 2022 were the United States (\$4.81 million), France (\$2.28 million) and Pakistan (\$2.2 million) (The Observatory of Economic Complexity 2024). The military budget for Nigeria in 2024 is \$5.13 billion (N3.85 trillion), an increase of 37.99% from 2023. This budget accounts for 13.38% of the total 2024 budget of \$36.7 billion. The Nigerian military is one of the largest uniformed forces in Africa, with over 230,000 active soldiers. It is the fourth strongest military in Africa and the 35th in the world. In 2023, Nigeria was the largest military spender in sub-Saharan Africa, spending 3.2 billion dollars (Francis 2024).

4.3. Factors Behind the Emergence of Non-State Armed Groups and Violence

Mismanagement and socioeconomic problems have been the main causes of the emergence of VNSAs in Nigeria for many decades. Corruption, poverty and unemployment are seen as the major factors behind the mismanagement of Nigeria's economy, leading to petty crimes that later escalate into violent armed conflicts in the various geopolitical zones of the country. Corruption is a major social problem in Nigeria and one of the major causes of the activities of armed groups in Nigeria. Nigeria is one of the countries that score poorly in surveys on various forms of corruption (D. J. Smith 2008). The country has earned a notorious reputation for corruption scandals emanating from both those in power and citizens (Oluyitan 2016). Several reports (National Bureau of Statistics/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes 2019; Transparency International 2020) describe an alarming rate at which corruption has eaten deep into the fabric and garments of the country. The reports show that public institutions are embroiled in corruption scandals that score higher on a point scale in the perception of Nigerians. According to the

2020 NBS and UNODC report, the security forces, judiciary, political office holders, bureaucrats, civil servants and the public are implicated in bribery and graft. The African Union reported in 2018 that over \$600 billion has been stolen from the Nigerian treasury by the ruling class since political independence was achieved in 1960 (Sambo and Sule 2021b).

Worryingly, the country is performing far worse today than it did in the 1990s and 2000s. The CPI uses a scale of 0–100 by conducting a survey of a selected section of society every year. The 2019 report shows that Nigeria scored a disappointing 26/100. In Nigeria, the survey, which started in the 1990s, has shown that Nigeria was among the worst performing countries as of 2020 (Transparency International 2020). In the Nigerian security sector, the defence sector and police corruption are destabilising and exacerbating the security situation in conflict areas such as the Lake Chad Basin, the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta. A 2017 report by the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) and Transparency International UK revealed that former Nigerian army chiefs stole up to \$15 billion (N25,409,850,000,000.00 trillion) through fraudulent arms procurement deals (Sambo and Sule 2021b).

Chayes (2015) argues that thieves of the state or corrupt state officials are responsible for global security threats in Nigeria. With this, Suleiman and Aminul Karim (2015) reason that the emergence of Boko Haram in the Northeast of Nigeria is an example of bad governance and corruption. Corruption is becoming an increasingly serious threat to national stability and peace, weakening public confidence in society and fuelling violence and non-state armed groups (Wawro 2020). Wawro (2020) adds that there is growing evidence that corruption is linked to conflict in Nigeria. Wawro (2020, p. 31) notes that “systemic economic and political problems, including exploitative, exclusive governance arrangements and high-level corruption and abuse by state institutions, entail humiliation, provoke anger, and create a sense of injustice and powerlessness that can lead individuals to seek alternative, even violent, remedies” This, according to Wawro (2020), explains the escalating security threats in the Niger Delta and the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in the Northeast and Northwest.

The burning and pervasive poverty has been a major cause of armed group activities in Nigeria for many decades. Available data show that the poverty rate in Nigeria has risen from 28% in 1980 to about 70% in 2003 and the country’s per capita income has fallen from \$698 in 1980 to \$290 in 2003, and the country’s rank on the Human Development Index (HDI) was 158 in 2003, dropping from 129 in 1990 among 177 countries (Yahaya et al. 2021). Nigeria has generated huge oil revenue of N77.348 trillion (\$45,660,245,934.44 billion) from the oil industry alone within sixteen years, from 1999 to 2016, but the Nigerian government has not been able to utilise the funds to improve the lives of its citizens or develop the economy. This is one of the explanations why poverty has increased in the country from 1999 to 2017 in contrast to the increase in revenue (Central Bank of Nigeria 2017). Essentially, the revenue generated from the oil sector from 1999 to 2017 is estimated at \$800 billion (N1,355,192,000,000,000,00 quadrillion) (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). The Nigerian budget has also increased steadily and at a reasonable rate from 1999 to 2017. For example, in 1999, Nigeria budgeted \$13.6 billion, while it budgeted \$14.7 billion in 2006, \$18.7 billion in 2007, \$21.1 billion in 2008, \$2.8 billion in 2009, \$29.3 billion in 2010, \$31.8 billion in 2011 and \$31.9 billion in 2016. This increase in the national budget has not led to a reduction in poverty, despite the existence of policies such as the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) 2000, the National Poverty

Eradication Programme (NAPEP) 2001 and the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (2003).

In the first quarter of 2024, the unemployment rate was 5.3%, marking the third consecutive quarter of increase since the second quarter of 2023. However, the underemployment rate in 2024 Q1 was 10.6 percent, down from 12.3 percent in 2023 Q3. As expected, the unemployment rate was higher in urban areas than in rural areas. As a result, the Nigerian misery index, which is calculated by adding the unemployment and inflation rates, rose from 30.5 percent in 2023 Q3 to 36.9 percent in 2024 Q1. Due to the high cost of living and declining purchasing power as a result of rising inflation, Nigeria has one of the highest poverty indices in the world (The Nigerian Economic Summit Group 2024). Historically, the unemployment rate in Nigeria has fluctuated since 1991, but continues to rise. For example, the rate was 3.74% in 1991, 3.83% in 2001 and 5.39% in 2021 (Macrotrends 2024). This trend shows that the pattern is continuously increasing after each decade. This leads to poor governance and weak policies, coupled with corruption and escalating poverty.

The colonial legacy is seen as the main reason for some VNSAs in Nigeria. The British colonial exploiters haphazardly and deliberately fused irreconcilable and seemingly non-unifying elements into a large nation that may not work. Apart from the fact that they merged one of the huge kingdoms in northern Nigeria into a Northern Protectorate, they also merged the southern kingdoms and organisations into southern protectorates. This was not enough for the British colonial and future interests; they merged the northern and southern protectorates into a Nigerian colony. This colonial arbitrariness led to fierce ethnic rivalries between the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, as noted by Nnoli (1988). It was the seeds of ethnic rivalry that led the Igbo ethnic group to carry out a massacre of the northern nationalists. After they succeeded in the bloody coup d'état, they attempted to take complete control of the Nigerian state, which the North fiercely resisted (Awoyokun 2020). The attempt to prevent the Igbos from controlling the entire federation, which the coup plotters wanted to transform into a unified structure, displeased the Igbo, who were insatiable for power and announced a secession as Biafra. The Biafra movement resulted in civil war (1967–1970) (Kirk-Green 1975; Baxter 2015). Even after the failed secession of Biafra, there were aspirations that led to some movements such as the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which is less violent. The IPOB, which wants to continue the struggle for secession, becomes violent and takes up arms against the innocent citizens of the Southeast and the Nigerian state (Dent 2014).

Weak and unbalanced federalism has also led to the activities of violent armed groups. Resource control and competition between the elites and ethnic groups caused by dissatisfaction with the past and existing revenue-sharing formula are fuelling the embers of armed violence (Faga and Ngwoke 2021). The various groups in the Niger Delta and South-South are demanding control of resources, increased allocation and a quest for environmental justice that is not being met by the Federal Government and oil companies. This has necessitated a struggle against the oil companies and the Nigerian state, which has erupted into armed conflict (Mateos 2021). The mishandling of this phenomenon led to a further escalation of armed violence and the spread of armed factions in the region. Even after President Yar'adua's amnesty programme, militancy continues in the south, partly through agitation for resources, sometimes through political activities and in other cases through criminal gang activities (Imobighe 2004).

A major reason for the emergence of violence by armed groups is the issue of censorship. The government has failed to set a minimum standard for the regulation and censorship of religious activities, which has triggered the Boko Haram rebellion. Nigeria is described as a secular state in the 1999 Constitution, but this is an outright lie because Sharia law and customary courts at local and state levels are recognised and enshrined in the Constitution. The Nigerian government bypasses the activities of religion for political reasons. No decisive control or regulation is allowed. This freedom and absolute liberty of religious actors has meant that some extremists have been able to hide under the guise of Jihad and has supported other egregious causes, such as the rejection of all sources of law except the Glorious Quran by Maitatsine in the 1980s and the bizarre Boko is Haram, or cases in which Western values are forbidden, leading to insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria (Sambo and Sule 2025).

As described in the previous section, the security forces have been unable to respond to the rampant and diverse security problems in the country due to inadequate security personnel and obsolete equipment coupled with poor remuneration and poor state of services. With a total number of 223,000 armed forces and 370,000 police forces and only 80,000 NSCDC (civil defence), the myriads of security crises cannot be properly addressed. As reported by Sule et al. (2019b), some of the major obstacles to the ongoing insurgency in the Northeast of Nigeria and banditry in the Northwest, the main reasons for the lack of security, communal clashes and other violent armed groups throughout the country are inadequate security personnel, outdated weapons, weak intelligence and a lack of security coordination between the Sahel states concerned.

An important factor that favours the emergence and spread of VNSAs in Nigeria is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria occurred in two phases. The first phase was smuggling from external sources in the 1990s. In August 1999, Nigerian customs intercepted six West African nationals on board a ship in Lagos with 75,000 rounds of ammunition and several bags of rifles. In 2001, about 10,000 magazines were seized by smugglers in Ikeja, Lagos. About 25,000 cartridges were seized from illegal hands in Alabata, Ogun State, hidden in 106 unsuspected boxes. Several cartridges and other dangerous firearms were recovered from smugglers and criminals at Warri harbour in Rivers State in the 2000s (Sambo et al. 2020). In January 2017, 661 pump-action rifles that had already been cleared at Lagos harbour were later intercepted by the NCS. A further 440 different firearms were seized at the same port in May of the same year and 470 pump-action rifles were also seized just four months later (Sule et al. 2024). In mid-December 2020, Nigerian customs intercepted a container loaded with firearms and ammunition at the Tin Can port in Lagos. The Nigerian police seized at least 1889 weapons and 52,577 rounds of live ammunition between January and December 2021 (Ani 2021; Adepegba et al. 2022).

In northern Nigeria, the proliferation of weapons peaked in the 2000s when the Libyan state was deliberately made unstable by NATO and its allies. The opening of the Libyan route facilitated the free movement of weapons into the Sahel, from where the majority of these weapons travelled to northern Nigeria via Mali, the Niger Republic, Cameroon, and Chad (Sule et al. 2024). These weapons fall into the hands of criminals and have been linked to the emergence of insurgency, terrorism and banditry in northern Nigeria, among other factors (Nowak and Gsell 2018). A report by SB Morgen Intelligence (2020) on SALW in Nigeria shows that there are about 6,145,000 SALW in circulation in Nigeria in the hands of non-state actors, while

586,600 are controlled or used by security personnel. This means that about 91% of SALW in circulation in Nigeria are in the hands of illegal groups and only 9% are managed by security personnel. The armed groups have therefore eclipsed the security agencies, which explains the inability of the state to control the violence of the armed groups.

This is also linked to the porous borders. Nigeria's borders are wide and porous, allowing illegal goods and contraband to pass undetected. Nigeria, for example, has a 770-kilometre land border with the Republic of Benin, the two countries share around 1500 kilometres with the Republic of Niger, 1700 kilometres with Cameroon and 90 kilometres with Chad. Nigeria also has an 850-kilometre-long maritime border in the Atlantic Ocean. Officially, the northern part of Nigeria borders the Republic of Niger by about 1497 kilometres, the Northeast by about 87 kilometres with Chad, the eastern part by about 1600 kilometres with Cameroon and the western part by about 773 kilometres with the Republic of Benin (Abdullahi and Gawi 2021). Most of these borders are not monitored by the Nigerian security authorities. Inadequate security personnel, outdated equipment and poor logistics have contributed to the ease with which lethal weapons can enter the country and be seized by illegal groups. The Controller General of Immigration in Nigeria is reported to have admitted that there are numerous illegal porous borders in Nigeria. He disclosed that in 2014, there were over 1400 illegal routes, while only 84 land border posts were officially recognised and approved (Ajaja 2021). He further stated that "in the over 4000 square kilometres that Nigeria covers, a large proportion of the illegal routes are unoccupied" (Ajaja 2021). The bandits from the Northwest take advantage of these security gaps to commit their heinous crimes.

The globalisation of terror is the major international factor behind the emergence and resurgence of the VNSA in Nigeria. Cold War competition has led some powerful states like the United States not only to produce terror but also to export it globally. Chomsky (2000), Blum (2000, 2023) and Mamdani (2004) emphasise that the height of the Cold War between the US and the USSR and their surrounding allies led to proxy wars between the two camps, which ended horribly in the formation of terrorist groups, particularly sponsored by the Reagan administration, Al-Qaeda, a religious terrorist group that developed terrorism out of Islam and paved the way for the emergence of other Islamic terrorist groups such as Al-Shabbab, Jihadist groups in Asia and Africa, Boko Haram, ISIS, ISIL, AQIM and many others. The arming of these groups led to a rapid proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of illegal armed groups. Despite the disappearance of the Cold War fighting, these terrorist groups are increasingly appearing and developing tactical manoeuvres to evade the reactions of states and international cooperation. This explains the reason for some armed groups in Nigeria such as the Niger Delta militants, Boko Haram, IPOB and bandits.

4.4. State Response: Classification and Naming of Non-State Armed Groups

The Nigerian government always reacts to VNSAs in the same static way. They are seen as a threat to national security and they sabotage the economy. Secondly, they are to be suppressed with military crackdown. When this approach did not work, the government initiated peaceful measures such as amnesty and rehabilitation, but not before a great deal of damage was done. All armed groups have the same characteristics: Guerrilla warfare strategies and the use of violence/terror. However,

the motives of the armed groups differ considerably, which is why they are named and treated differently.

As Best (2021) has correctly noted, armed groups are labelled by different governments and international organisations and agencies, as well as researchers, taking into account politics, economic motives and other factors. A terrorist group perceived by one state or organisation may not be the same as another from the same state. Similarly, some governments may downplay the horrific activities of terrorist groups and even try to ignore or conceal them so as not to scare away foreign investors and avoid other economic benefits such as the provision of grants and aid. The atrocity of the crimes committed also determines how policy-makers perceive them and what label they give them. Above all, it is the motive and appearance that determine how the groups are labelled.

For example, the Niger Delta militants, one of the oldest armed groups in Nigeria, are called this because they are not only armed groups but also political, economic and social movements. Moreover, not all groups or movements are violent. Some, like the Ogoni people or the movement led by Ken Saro Wiwa, had no intention of becoming violent until they realised that the government and oil exploration companies were not willing to listen to them and address their genuine grievances (Nixon 1996; M. Campbell 2002). Thus, the militants are perceived as a group of armed gangsters who do not want to terrorise Nigeria, occupy any territory or establish any order, but seek economic and environmental justice. This is the reason why the government is so cautious in naming the groups. It does not forget that it is not a single coordinated movement, but different groups that have appeared at different times with different leaderships, names and even activities, but with the same agenda and pursuing a similar strategy: Vandalising and exploding pipelines, kidnapping oil company employees, oil bunkering and other crimes. Sometimes the groups hit each other (Ebienfa 2011). Essentially, the ideology of activists in the Niger Delta is that of an intensified struggle for a perceived share of the natural resources around them and for environmental justice.

In the case of Boko Haram, the group has given itself several names from an official perspective. The group itself does not recognise the label "Boko Haram" without regard to further usability. Instead, the group called itself "Jama'atu Ahlul Sunnah Lil Da'awati wal Jihad" (People Dedicated to Striving for the Sake of Allah), or JAS for short. The group never called itself Boko Haram. The overbearing and excessive condemnation of Western education popularly called "Boko" earned the group its nickname "Boko Haram". In the early days of its movement, the Nigerian government considered the group an insurgent group (Bukarti 2022). However, when the Nigerian government realised that the group had carried out several terrorist attacks and the unprofessional response of the Nigerian security forces led to harsh criticism from the international community for human rights violations, the possibility of classifying the group as a terrorist group was considered. In 2013, the group was then classified as a terrorist group. The motive is to enable the Nigerian state to use conventional military techniques and sophisticated weapons to combat the threat. Boko Haram's motive also qualified the group for classification as a terrorist group. They have unequivocally declared that they want to establish an Islamic state by denouncing the authority of the Nigerian state and labelling all Muslims who oppose their movement as infidels (Sambo and Sule 2025).

The other group examined in this paper, the bandits, naturally acquired the title of banditry by the nature of their activities. They are uncoordinated looters who

hide in different groups and communities. Through their acts of looting, stealing, cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, school abduction, warmongering, taxing the agricultural produce of the locals, torture, maiming, massacre and rape, in most cases in rural areas, they fit the name “bandits” because such armed groups have historically been identified based on a clear definition and symbols of recognition (Sambo and Sule 2024). Although the activities of bandits or banditry in Northwest Nigeria, like other violent armed groups, starting from a less sophisticated movement of reprisal attacks by the alleged Fulani herdsmen against the Hausa farmers or rural dwellers who are said to have looted the Fulanis’ cattle and impoverished them economically, the phenomenon has expanded into an organised crime committed by the bandits, who are mostly Fulanis in different enclaves and in different groups and categories led by different warlords (Rufa’I 2021). Of all the armed groups studied, this group is the most disorganised, having neither motive nor ideology, but only looting and killing and kidnapping for ransom, which justifies calling them bandits.

In the case of the IPOB secessionist movement, which is seen as an offshoot of the Biafra movement of the 1960s that led to the civil war (1967–1971), IPOB’s demands and movement seem new, but they share the same ideology as the former Biafra movement in the 1960s (Ugorji 2017). The leader of the IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu, who has since been declared wanted by the Nigerian state, has been arraigned and is on trial in Nigeria. However, it is suspected that the leaders of Ohanaeze-Ndigbo, a pan-Igbo cultural group, who are pressurising the Nigerian government to release Kanu despite distancing themselves from his secessionist aspirations, are pursuing a political motive in addition to the secessionist goal (Nwangwu 2023). The objective of IPOB is clear and has raised a fundamental question of the “national question in Nigeria”. Is Nigeria truly federal and can the British-enforced Nigerian union survive as a unit in the long run? Until now, Nigerian leaders have always insisted that the Nigerian constitution leaves no room for secession and declares Nigeria an indivisible, indissoluble entity. But the manner in which the unrest of the 1960s did not abate or subside is critical and needs to be reconsidered for the future of Nigeria.

5. The Niger Delta Militants

5.1. *The Niger Delta Militants*

This chapter deals with one of the most important armed groups analysed in this thesis. In Nigeria, there are numerous violent non-state actors spread across all geopolitical zones of the country with varying degrees of crimes, motives and operations. Specifically, Boko Haram and ISWAP operate predominantly in the Northeast; bandit groups are prevalent in the Northwest and parts of the North-Central; IPOB and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), are active in the Southeast; Niger Delta militant groups operate in the South-South; while cult gangs and armed criminal networks are notable in parts of the Southwest. These examples underscore the nationwide spread and diversity of violent non-state actors in Nigeria, which this chapter further interrogates. The criteria for selecting a group to be used as a case study here are outlined in the introduction to this book in Chapter 1. It is not necessary to take up a lot of space repeating the same themes. In short, the groups must occupy at least one of the six geopolitical zones of the country, they must carry and use small arms and light weapons to achieve their objective, they must have a motive and they must have a large number of members. All these requirements are met by the four selected groups. The Niger Delta fighters, the oldest of the four selected groups, are analysed here. The causes of the movement, the ideology and aim, the activities and the different groups that emerged—because it was not one and the same group, but several groups that emerged at a distance in time and space—and the effects of their activities in economic and political terms are critically analysed. The chapter shows that the Niger Delta militants are not a coordinated group of insurgents but are fragmented and face internal conflicts between groups because criminality has hijacked the motive of liberation struggle for environmental injustice in most of their current activities.

5.2. *Niger Delta Militancy in South-South Nigeria*

The Niger Delta (now known as the South-South geopolitical zone) is one of the largest wetlands in the world and is located in the Gulf of Guinea (see Figure 3). The region, which once harboured several ancient city-states, most notably the kingdom of Benin, is now part of the Niger Delta. In addition to these, the Niger Delta has other regions that were formerly ruled by various tribal and ethnic groups. The area has an estimated crude oil reserve capacity of 36 billion barrels of crude oil, which was discovered in commercial quantities in the 1950s in Oloibiri in what is now Bayelsa State (Okonta and Douglas 2001). The geopolitical zone consists of six states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. About 39 million people live in the Niger Delta according to 2006 census projections, and there are more than 40 ethnic groups including the major Ijaw, Ogoni, Urhobo, Ibibio, Efik, Itsekiri, Isoko, Ukuwani, Annag, Oron, Bini, Abua, Esan, Kalabari, Okrika, Obolo and several others (Ekeh 2007).

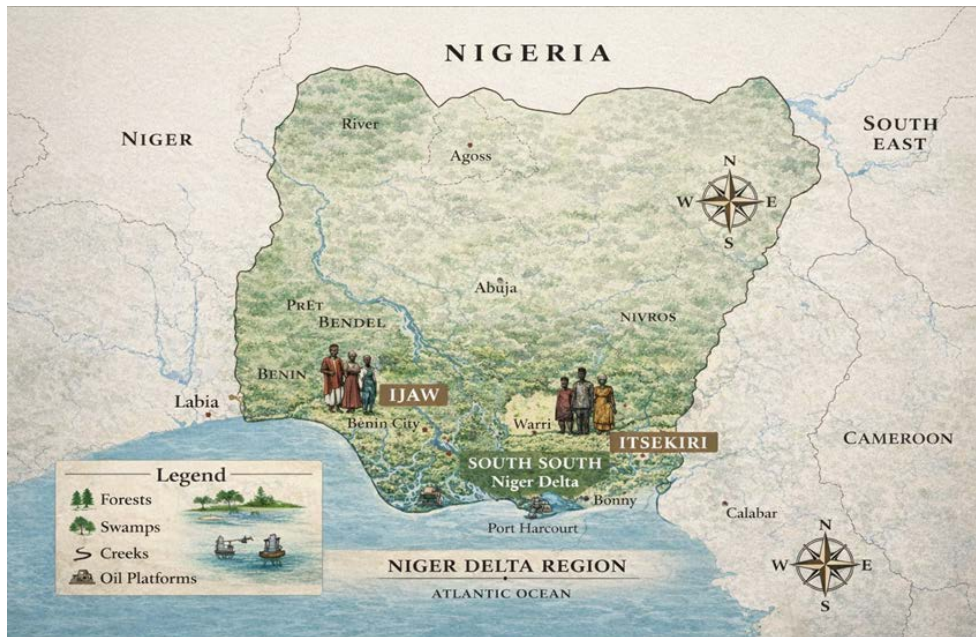


Figure 3. Map showing Niger Delta areas, emphasizing both ecological richness and the region’s economic significance. Natural resources such as crude oil and natural gas fields are prominently indicated. Source: Figure by the authors.

Historically, the people of the Niger Delta have lived in this region for thousands of years. The societies in this area are acephalous societies without a centralised or organised political system, but rather a council of elders who normally meet to make decisions based hierarchically on the system of elders. The eldest in the house prevailed at family gatherings. Similarly, the elder in the village community presided over decisions and the elders’ representatives at the town level represent the communities in decision-making (Dike 1966). The economic mainstay of the Niger Delta is palm oil production, fishing, agriculture, crafts and trade within the region and beyond with Igboland, Yorubaland and Igala land. The region came into contact with European explorers as early as the 15th century when the Dutch and Portuguese visited the place, paving the way for slavery and the slave trade. Later, legal trade replaced the slave trade before formal colonisation occurred in the 18th century, which eventually led to the formation of present-day Nigeria, which was unbidden by the various entities that made up the geography (Alagoa and Derefaka 2002).

The conflict in the Niger Delta is a conflict over oil resources, as in other countries such as Libya, Angola, Sierra Leone, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia and Somalia. Beyond the African coast, countries such as Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile in Latin America and Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran in the Arab world are worth mentioning (Lenshie 2018). To understand the reasons or circumstances behind the oil conflict in the Niger Delta, it is important to understand the changes. Agriculture and trade dominated Nigeria’s economy and foreign exchange during the pre-colonial, colonial and early post-colonial periods. In the 1950s, agriculture contributed to over 63% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the 1970s, just before the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, it contributed about 60%. Today, the oil sector accounts

for about 60% of Nigeria's GDP and 60% of foreign exchange. The discovery of oil quickly led to a massive neglect of the agricultural and commercial sectors, transforming Nigeria into a monotonous economy that is heavily dependent on oil for its economic sustainability. However, oil production has led to pollution, environmental degradation, erosion and various environmental hazards that have robbed the people of the Niger Delta of their sources of economic reliability, and the oil resources have not fully translated into gigantic economic benefits for the people there, except for the elites. At the national level, there are two major challenges. Oil is the financial basis of state and federal authorities and economic development. It accounts for more than 80% of official revenues and 90% of export earnings (Obi and Rustad 2011).

Excluding community disputes over fishing, the resource war in the region can be traced further back historically to interactions with European explorers and traders in the sixteenth century over land and rights before the arrival of the Europeans. With the help of the region's extensive canals, Europeans were able to settle there and integrate the area into the capitalist global economy, which was then fuelled by trade in food, exotic spices and eventually slaves (Anugwom 2019). Eventually, conflicts arose between various trading houses and their city-states over control of profitable trade routes and monopolies for certain goods. These conflicts resulted in clashes between the various city-states, which also defined the niche of the Niger Delta peoples. The Ijaws in particular were warlike seafarers who did not shy away from occasional conflicts over resources. There was constant conflict between British trading interests and the Niger Delta traders, who served as intermediaries in the palm oil trade between the British and the hinterland producers, even after the very profitable slave trade ended, the British became the main European influence in the region, and legal trade was introduced (Okonta and Douglas 2001). The dispute arose from the British aiming to deal directly with the farmers in the hinterland, bypassing the middlemen or trading houses in the Niger Delta, and the desire of these trading houses to resist this British will and retain control of the trade that was essential to their livelihood. As a result of the conflict, the British deployed so-called gunboat diplomacy in the region from 1850 (Okonta and Douglas 2001).

Protests, uprisings and militancy against the government and multinational oil companies were the result of the discovery and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta. By using violence to quell the unrest in the Niger Delta to ensure the security of oil production and to protect the new pillar of the Nigerian economy, the government increased militancy in the Niger Delta, adding to the instability and fragility of oil security, governance and the vulnerability of international oil companies to the unpredictable brutality of militants in the Niger Delta, operating in the Gulf of Guinea and in Nigeria's waterways (Lenschie 2018). The Land Use Act 1978 was enacted to legitimise oil exploration and suppress the opposition of the people who own resources on Nigerian territory. With the implementation of the Land Use Act of 1978, the government deprived the people of their customary land tenure rights and transferred all land ownership and rights to the Nigerian government. The confluence of factors such as location, ethnic tensions, economic underdevelopment and the existence of an industry that offers few direct benefits but numerous disadvantages to the local population has made the environment ideal for conflict (Asuni 2009b).

In the Niger Delta, the government's actions have led to anger against the Nigerian state and a sense of marginalisation among the many ethnic minorities

across the country. They made their discontent clear through kidnappings, vandalism, bomb attacks on pipelines and bunkering, and by the direct confrontational regimes of the military. Circumstances have made it clear that the Niger Delta has become an uncontrolled area that is being abused because there is no effective Nigerian security administration in the area, which raises the issue of ungoverned/under-governed/contested governed space as theorised in the earlier part of this study. Azuzuama, Gbekenegbene, Ezetu, Agge, Kurutiye, Forupa, Okubie, Olugbobiri and Okiegbene/Ebrigbene (Ikebiri 1 and 2) are among the camps where the militants have established an unofficial government. Ken's Camp in Odi, Robert Creek and Cawthorne Channel in Nembe as well as Korokorosei and Southern Ijaw Camps are all located in Bayelsa State. In addition to the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Forces in Akuku-Tori, the Niger Delta Vigilante in Okirika, the Icelanders/Outlaws in Borokiri, Port Harcourt, Okirika and the Yeghe camps in Bori and Ogoni in Rivers State, there are also Camps, Okerenkoko and Opuraza camps in Warri South, as well as the Egbema, Ubefem and Berger camps in Warri, Delta State (Asuni 2009b). Since these camps are located in difficult terrain, it is a challenge for the military to re-establish government control over the region and effectively combat militancy and piracy in the region.

Oil production and exploration began in 1965 with 1.68 million barrels and increased to 558.9 million barrels by 1971. Since then, the region's onshore and offshore oil fields have gradually been exploited more intensively. The discovery of oil, which today provides Nigeria with annual revenues of \$40 billion, has led to a miserable, unruly, decaying and corrupt kind of "petro-capitalism" After fifty years of oil production, Nigeria's per capita income stands at \$290 per year, even though nearly \$300 billion in oil revenues flow directly into the national treasury (and perhaps another \$50 billion flows out immediately, only to "disappear" into private pockets). Living conditions for most Nigerians have not improved since the country achieved independence in 1960 (Douglas et al. 2004). The increasing violence between communities since 12 March 2003 is at least responsible for the decline in oil production in the Niger Delta. All major oil companies have cut production by more than 750,000 barrels per day, withdrawn staff and suspended operations in response to the 50 deaths and the levelling of eight communities in and around the Warri oilfield complex as unsafe (Douglas et al. 2004).

5.3. Motivation Behind Niger Delta Militancy

Environmental degradation and resource abuse are a major cause of militancy in the Niger Delta. People's rights in the Niger Delta are regularly violated and barely respected. Living conditions are very poor for many inhabitants of the region. This injustice is perpetuated by the "resource curse", also known as the "paradox of plenty". It is the result of the wealth of oil and gas deposits in the region combined with the poverty of the population in combination with bad governance. Natural resource wealth and poor governance mean that the oil and gas sector operates below international standards and that people in political and other positions of power benefit disproportionately from oil revenues. Numerous oil spills in the past have never been cleaned up. This has serious negative impacts on the living conditions and health of the local people, as the oil poisons crops and fishing areas. In addition, the region has been exploited by the oil industry for decades, which has also contaminated the river environment and destroyed traditional livelihoods in agriculture and fishing, while creating few jobs. The oil industry is struggling to

come to terms with the scale and complexity of the situation. It vacillates between supporting various development projects and taking more limited measures to protect its immediate assets. This is due to a lack of social responsibility and significant production losses. Furthermore, the inaccessibility of the region and the inhospitable topography hindered the few attempts at infrastructural development. Since the construction of roads in the Niger Delta is four times more expensive than on the mainland, motorboats and canoes remain the most important means of transport (Asuni 2009a).

Oil spillages, which are part of the environmental degradation described above, are a cause of conflict or militancy in the Niger Delta. It is estimated that between 1986 and 1991 there were almost 2500 oil spills in Ogoniland alone. Although oil companies admit that oil spills can occur, they often blame local communities for sabotage. Shell, for example, admitted that there were 87 oil spills in Ogoniland between 1985 and 1993, but claimed that 60 of them were due to sabotage by the local people. Until 1999, when the country's first liquefied natural gas plant was commissioned, Nigeria was considered to have the largest gas reserves in the world. In 1982, about 280,000 barrels of crude oil were flared every day. In 1991, 72% more petrol was flared in Nigeria than the global average. Seventy-six percent of Nigeria's gas production was flared that year. Comparing OPEC and the global average of 4% with an average of 18%, it is easiest to understand the extent of the monetary loss and environmental damage to the country's oil-producing cities. The oil companies have always maintained that they have carried out some development programmes in the communities where they operate and have also fulfilled their obligations under contracts signed with the Federal Government. Statistics on the millions of dollars allocated to regional community projects are often always available (Imobighe 2004).

The low level of infrastructure is another factor responsible for militancy in the Niger Delta. This region is still incredibly underdeveloped, despite the enormous amounts of resources that have been extracted there. The master plan for the regional development of the Niger Delta states that the infrastructure for water transport is so poor that transporting people and goods by water is generally more expensive than transporting them by road and also takes longer. Nevertheless, 40% of the paved roads in the region are in poor condition and most wetlands are inaccessible due to the lack of roads. The region has a very inadequate housing stock, no rail transport and more than 36% of families there have no access to electricity and more than 60% have no access to drinking water; only about 10% do have full access. The national postal system serves only one percent of the area and they are among the fewest telephone subscribers per 100 people in the world (Obi and Rustad 2011). A significant and growing percentage of the young population now sees violence as the solution to its problems, as poverty in the Niger Delta is comparatively high despite the enormous oil wealth. The immediate promise of extremely lucrative work in the aforementioned violent underground economy attracts many unemployed youths to the militias that overrun the area. The oil towns of the delta have long harboured hostility towards the government and international oil companies, exacerbated by the strange irony that despite enormous oil and gas reserves, they live predominantly in poverty, misery, severe unemployment and poor health. In the 1990s, the conflicts inevitably began to smoulder and intensify. They were fuelled by broken promises, increasing marginalisation and dissatisfaction that non-violent initiatives at community level to raise awareness of their plight had achieved little or nothing (Obi and Rustad 2011).

As a result, leaders at all levels are often unable to answer to the people they are supposed to be serving. The Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole have not benefited much from their wealth of natural resources, namely oil and gas reserves, and many areas of government and public services are poorly or inefficiently run. Political patronage, which uses violence and money to gain and retain power, threatens the democratic system. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why there was so much violence and fraud in the Niger Delta elections. There is a high level of criminal activity in the Niger Delta, ongoing environmental damage from oil spills and gas flaring or burning as a by-product of oil production, and violence by individuals vying for political power and control of resources, even between election cycles (Obi and Rustad 2011).

With outbreaks of conflict between the Itsekiris and the Urhobos or between the Itsekiris and the Ijaws, Warri has repeatedly been the scene of inter-ethnic friction over the past four decades. However, Delta State is not the only place where communal violence occurs. The desire to manage gas or oil facilities has led to conflict in the region, largely caused by disputed boundaries. To the east, Rivers State has seen conflict between the Elemes, who are associated with the Ogonis, and the Okrikans, who are ethnically part of the Ijaw. Bayelsa State is not exempt from this either. Like some other nearby states, the old kingdom of Nembe was torn apart by resource-related power struggles (Asuni 2009a). Despite the Niger Delta's strong ethnic divisions, the people there are united by a common sense of grief over the exploitation and neglect of the region. In the 1990s, the Federal Government largely neglected the Niger Delta and left development to the oil companies at a time when corporate social responsibility was not very important. In 1979, local ownership and control of the oil resources were cancelled when the Federal Government designated them as a national asset as noted by Lenshie (2018).

Originally founded to fight inter-ethnic conflicts, armed groups often ended up in the service of criminals. Some acted as mercenaries committing acts of political violence for powerful authorities, while others served as security forces for gangs bunkering oil. In the 2007 gubernatorial elections, for example, armed Ijaw groups crossed state borders to engage in political violence in Bayelsa State, while ethnic armed groups intervened in a contest between Itsekiri and Urhobo candidates in Delta State. Inter-ethnic conflicts occasionally served as a convenient pretext for illegal activities. To fuel racial conflict and create a chaotic environment that diverted attention from their business, the bunkerers formed armed groups. According to a young Itsekiri leader, the people in his village were used to instigate a conflict with the Ijaws after being exploited in this way (Asuni 2009a).

The government's treatment of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta and its response to their demands to address the legitimate concerns of the various groups in the area have contributed to the conflict turning violent. The anger and the fact that the profits from the oil produced in their land went to the elites of other ethnic groups, to the detriment of the Ogoni elites who felt marginalised, made them angry and implicitly other oil producing communities in the Niger Delta (Anugwom 2019). However, this statement may not be the actual cause of the violent militancy. As Asuni (2009b) noted, greed, criminal tendencies and the support of indigenous elites and their refusal to provide for the basic amenities of life escalated the conflict.

The militants are believed to have the support of community leaders and political elites, which is fuelling their activities. As a result, villages in the Niger Delta have regularly supported militant organisations by harbouring their leaders and

hiding their equipment, weapons and prisoners. In addition, most communities have amassed their own armies, the result of constant inter-ethnic warfare, and have often been willing to lend or lease them to armed organisations. With the money earmarked for development projects, some community leaders have also provided financial assistance to their struggling youth. While the armed groups have supporters, they too rely mostly on intimidation and extortion to keep the communities in which they hide docile. The disintegration of the traditional social structure of the Niger Delta has made it easy for the militants to infiltrate their host communities where chiefs and elders are degraded to nonentities. Once they have established themselves, they are difficult to get rid of. For many years, Ateke was able to move freely in his community of Okochiri in Okrika without fear of being captured by the authorities. At one point, the Governor of Rivers State ordered the people to extradite him, but they refused, presumably because they knew that betraying Ateke would have worse consequences for them than anything the military could achieve. Because of the close ties between the people of the Niger Delta and the militant groups, it is very difficult for the authorities to capture the armed individuals without causing a lot of damage and casualties. For example, because Farah Dagogo's camp is so close to the civilian population of Kula, the military was unable to carry out an operation against one of the MEND leaders. The results were disastrous when it did take action. When troops were sent in November 1999 to dislodge militias believed to be hiding among them, the towns of Odi and Odiana in Bayelsa State were almost completely destroyed (Asuni 2009a).

The Nigerian military, which is paid to fight and defeat the armed groups in the Niger Delta, has often supported their operations, either directly by engaging in their illegal activities or indirectly by pressurising regular communities to join the militants through their repressive tactics, excessive presence in the Delta and heinous acts of violence and devastation. When he took office in August 2008, the new Chief of Army Staff, Major General Abdurahman Dambazau, admitted that some officers had become accustomed to illegal duties and "involvement in criminal activities". Many prominent rebel commanders have military informants. Asari was reportedly informed in advance of upcoming military operations against his group, according to people close to him. Ateke has also hired the security forces as informants. Military personnel are actively involved in bunkering and accepting a share of the proceeds in order to ignore the oil theft.

5.4. Classification of Niger Delta Militants

Several groups have emerged in the Niger Delta to oppose the activities of oil exploration and production companies and the perceived injustice of the Nigerian state in relation to the equitable distribution of resources. Some of the movements are anti-colonial resistance movements, others are peaceful or non-violent, while others are violent and armed struggle groups. While some organisations, such as MOSOP, attempted to address these economic, social, political and environmental inequalities through dialogue, others opted for violent conflict. One obvious target was the oil installations and the labourers who worked there. Until around 2004, there were sporadic attacks by armed groups. The armed groups often quickly lost sight of their mission to promote social justice and self-determination and used criminal behaviour to increase their own financial gain. Within a very short time, influential outsiders joined these illegal activities. A rich drug trade centred on the oil bunkering trade has led to unprecedented levels of violence and an influx of sophisticated weaponry,

while providing enormous wealth, eventually overshadowed Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State (Asuni 2009a). They were often linked to demands for further benefits from the oil companies. Since then, attacks have become more frequent and intense, with more intelligence and planning. Kidnappings have spread like wildfire.

Asuni (2009b, p. 7) identifies the categories and characteristics of militant group members as follows: “males aged twenty to thirty-nine; single but with family members; unemployed; from broken homes, with no role models; drug users and often dealers; economically powerless and therefore totally dependent on their leaders for financial and social support, food and shelter; and/or barely educated, although their leaders often had secondary or even tertiary education.” Asuni (2009b, p. 7) also cites the following as the motivation for the activities of the armed groups in the Niger Delta: “the desire to protest against the political objectives of the government and the oil companies, the political and economic marginalisation of their communities, regions and ethnic groups; the fear for their personal safety as a result of threats from members of other armed groups or state security agencies; the fact that they are hired by politicians to help manipulate elections, intimidate voters and attack opponents; the desire to make money through criminal activities. For some fighters, armed groups represented the only available source of income; others saw the opportunity to supplement an existing income through crime, peer pressure and/or low self-esteem, which led impressionable young men to seek power and influence in armed groups.” Greed triggered by a heightened awareness of the riches to be gained through kidnapping; a desire to avenge the deaths of friends or family members; and a vague desire for the prestige gained by posing as a freedom fighter and protector of one’s people against “the establishment and/or coercion by existing members of armed groups” are additional factors that were discovered by Asuni (2009a).

5.4.1. The Colonial Resistance Movement

The protests and resistance against external forces and socioeconomic and political injustice in the Niger Delta are not new phenomena, as they predate the creation of the Nigerian state itself. During the colonial conquest, there was fierce resistance from the kinsman Jaja of Opobo and King Nana of Itshekiri, who mobilised their people and resisted colonial rule but were overpowered by the British colonialists and consequently deposed (Ikime 1972; Rotimi and Ogen 2008). The story of King Jaja of Opobo and his epic struggle against the British merchants in recent decades during the nineteenth century (Okonta and Douglas 2001) is the best example of the prolonged struggle the Niger Delta peoples have experienced in defence of their environment and natural resources against the grip of the European merchants and their patrons in London, Paris, Hamburg and Amsterdam.

Jaja, a former Igbo slave in Bonny, controlled politics in the Niger Delta for 20 years. He rose quickly and took over the leadership of the royal house from Anna Pepple through diligence and a demonstration of financial acumen. Jaja and his followers fled to Andoni land in the hinterland after a dispute over kingship in the city led to civil war in 1869. They named their new settlement Opobo and declared it independent of the Bonny rulers. Thanks to its favourable location near the oil markets in the hinterland, Opobo quickly rose to become the most important port in the Niger Delta, attracting European traders from all along the coast and even overtaking Bonny in terms of wealth and political influence (Okonta and Douglas 2001). However, King Jaja did not agree with the British merchants on the coast. He

had declared at the outset that they could only buy palm oil through his agents and that he would not grant them direct access to the oil markets in the hinterland of Opobo. Jaja made it clear that he and his people should have control over trade with the palm oil farmers in the Delta hinterland, as the British traders had a monopoly on trade with the trading houses in Liverpool (Okonta and Douglas 2001).

To persuade kings and other regional authorities to allow British traders to trade at will in their territories, the British used questionable treaties, enticements and offers of protection. Those who resisted British entreaties or were dissidents were either forced to destroy their kingdoms, exiled or killed. The popular King Jaja of Opobo, who was banished for rejecting British entreaties and enticements, was one of the leaders who faced the wrath of the British in this regard. Due to the dominance of the British military, gunboat diplomacy succeeded in driving out the middlemen in the Niger Delta and removed the trading houses' control over the palm oil trade, replacing it with a highly repressive British monopoly in the Taubman Goldie-led Royal Niger Company, initiating the official British colonial push into the country that would eventually become known as Nigeria (Anugwom 2019).

5.4.2. Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF)

In 1966, under the leadership of Major Adaka Boro, the force set up camp at Tarloy Creek. A former Delta policeman named Isaac Adaka Boro organised, armed and trained members for the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (Oyewo 2016). A 12-day liberation movement followed Boro's proclamation of an independent Niger Delta People's Republic in March 1966, during which pipeline facilities were blown up and pipelines vandalised. After their arrest, trial and conviction, Adaka Boro and his supporters Samuel Timipre Owonaru and Nottingham Dick were charged with high treason and sentenced to death by the Nigerian government. But the military government of General Yakubu Gowon eventually pardoned them with a kind of amnesty. Boro was engaged by the government and a number of his requests were honoured. The Federal Government ended his rebellion within days, but his demands for more autonomy for the local population served as inspiration for later activists such as Ken Saro-Wiwa and "Mujahid" Dokubo-Asari (Asuni 2009a). This was enough to raise awareness among the population.

5.4.3. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)

Until the 1990s, further attempts to exert pressure for control of resources were mainly political in nature. The elite interacted with the Federal Government almost exclusively through demands from state-building, ethno-cultural movements and socio-political movements. The struggle took a new turn in 1990 when MOSOP entered the resource control debate (Obi and Rustad 2011).

In 1992, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his kinsmen led the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which initially took a non-violent approach, but over time turned into violence, vandalism, bunkering and explosions, in order to negotiate human rights with the Nigerian government; this was seen as economic sabotage by the Nigerian state. Saro-Wiwa emphasised the under-representation of the people of the Niger Delta, particularly the Ogonis, and drew attention to the environmental damage caused by the oil sector. He was a founding member of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which published an Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990 (Asuni 2009a). The human rights and environmental activist Ken

Saro-Wiwa used this forum to demand compensation for environmental damage in the Niger Delta and a fair share of the revenues from oil production. He coordinated demonstrations in the Ogoni region and took part in a number of international conferences to inform the global community about the uprising of the Ogoni people. The military government of the late General Sani Abacha was concerned about the development (Oyewo 2016).

Saro-Wiwa's interpretation of the importance of global discourses and transnational networks as a means of combating economic injustice, environmental degradation and political marginalisation based on the right to self-determination of ethnic minorities served as an important foundation for the MOSOP campaign. Saro-Wiwa further capitalised on this conversation by placing the Ogoni issue in the context of the environmental problems Shell had caused in a nearby Nigerian village (Obi and Rustad 2011). As a non-state actor working with international non-governmental organisations, rights groups and the media, MOSOP became a powerful counter-hegemonic actor in "Nigeria's" foreign relations by accusing Shell, the country's largest oil producer, of conspiring with the state to exploit Ogoni resources and violate human rights and the environmental rights of its citizens. Apart from this, Shell and the state suffered from MOSOP's demonstrations and global campaign, with the latter facing internal and external challenges. Initially, the government did not pay attention to MOSOP (Obi and Oriola 2018).

The late General Sani Abacha killed them. A special military court found Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others guilty of the murder of four Ogoni chiefs and they were hanged on 10 November 1995 (Oyewo 2016). The murder of Saro-Wiwa heightened ethnic awareness and paved the way for the Kaiama Declaration (KD) of 1998 and the Aleibiri demonstration of 1997. Since then, the Ogoni people have continued to protest against the existence of multinational oil companies and the theft of revenue from oil exploration. The arrest and murder of Saro-Wiwa and eight of his comrades-in-arms by the Abacha regime in 1995 sparked outrage and highlighted the suffering of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, attracting the world's attention for the first time (Asuni 2009b). The behaviour sparked international outrage and several international organisations sanctioned Nigeria and suspended it from the Commonwealth of Nations.

5.4.4. Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV)

The Niger Delta Vigilante, or NDV, was founded by Ateke Tom. The group's main goal is to dominate the region's rich oil resources. Its members are mainly ethnic Ijaws from the Port Harcourt area. The Niger Delta Vigilante, also called Ijaws, was formed by the local government of Rivers after the 2003 local government elections to fight the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, which opposed the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Suspected political opponents were persecuted and killed by the militia (Surhone et al. 2010). The security situation in Rivers State deteriorated as a result of the violence against citizens. Many indigenes of Rivers State were forced to flee their homes due to the conflicts between the Niger Delta Vigilante and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force. The police and other regular security forces did not intervene to prevent an escalation of violence in 2003, even though the situation was becoming increasingly unstable. In order to improve the security situation, the security forces began their operations against the militias in 2004 (Human Rights Watch 2005).

The larger organisation Niger Delta Vigilante includes smaller groups such as the “Germans” and “Icelanders”. These smaller groups had already existed since the 1990s and joined the NDV in 2003/2004 in order to increase their influence. In addition to weapons bought with illegal oil revenues, the militia also received weapons from a local Okrika chief (Human Rights Watch 2005).

5.4.5. Federation of Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDICs)

The Federation of Niger Delta Ijaw Communities emerged in the 1990s in response to the oil pollution and environmental degradation they experienced from the oil companies in their communities and the unsatisfactory response of the Nigerian state. The FNDIC declared the Federal Government and oil companies to their opponents and discussed the self-determination of the Ijaw in the Warri region. The Itsekiris were seen by the Ijaws at the time as the main recipients of contracts and jobs from the government and the oil companies, having exploited their advantageous position during the colonial period. Chief Dr. Oboko Bello, president and political spokesman of the FNDIC, and Chief Government Ekpemupolo, its mobilisation officer, were among its founders. The intellectual engine of the movement was Ekpemupolo, better known as Tom Polo, who later became the leader of the largest militia in the Delta. The oil companies were partly responsible for Tom Polo’s success and influence. He had started his career organising labour contracts and other construction and engineering services for Shell and Chevron in a legal capacity. Because he provided access to jobs in the oil industry, locals saw him as an important source of patronage. However, he soon began to get involved in other illegal businesses, such as the bunker trade. To ensure that the oil company’s activities were not disrupted, he was compensated with protection money (Asuni 2009b).

Tom Polo used his newly acquired wealth to support the activities of the FNDICs, which quickly became a platform for youth and community grievances across the region and the main voice for the social and economic liberation of the Ijaw people in their conflict with the Itsekiris. Tom Polo was the military leader of the political struggle, while Oboko Bello served as its public face. He established a state-of-the-art and heavily defended quasi-military complex in the creeks, where he recruited new members for the struggle and trained the local youth in arms. By 2005, a total of 3000 armed youth were living in his camps, effectively running his bunker operations (Asuni 2009b).

5.4.6. The Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF)

The Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) was founded in 2004 by Mujahid Dokubo Asari after a long bitter rivalry for control of the Port Harcourt axis of militancy between Ateke Tom and Asari, who both ran and controlled criminal organisations and networks specialising in oil bunkering, kidnapping oil workers for ransom and mercenaries for political violence during elections. Asari espoused intellectual goals and saw himself as a freedom fighter opposed to the establishment, while Ateke prided himself on his youth as a criminal thug (Isumonah 2013). Initially, he attempted to do this through the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), a political group that was formed in the late 1990s to represent the interests of the people of the Niger Delta. However, through his more radical actions, Asari distanced himself from the mainstream of the IYC and felt increasingly vulnerable due to the support of his political allies, Governor Odili and Abiye Sekibo, he began to form his own private

militia, which became the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) in 2004. Other armed groups joined the NDPVF, which soon included components of the KKK and Greenlanders under its aegis, as well as independent commanders such as Farah Dagogo (Inokoba and Imbua 2010).

The NDPVF advocated for more local authority over politics and natural resources but also became embroiled in conflicts with Ateke and his NDV army over bunkering. As violence between the two factions increased to dangerous levels, Asari's NDPVF raised the issue in September 2004 (Oluwaniyi 2010). In its statement, the NDPVF called on all oil companies operating in the Niger Delta to cease operations by 1 October 2004 and threatened a large-scale guerrilla operation, known as "Operation Locust Festival", if its demands were not met (Tantua and Kamruzzaman 2016). The global oil markets panicked after Asari's announcement; crude oil prices rose to 50 dollars per barrel, setting a new record. Nigeria is a major crude oil exporter and member of OPEC. When militant attacks, sabotage, oil theft or infrastructure disruptions occur in the Niger Delta, Nigeria often fails to meet its OPEC production quotas, which reduces the total global oil supply relative to expectations (Asuni 2009b). This also caused panic in Abuja, prompting President Obasanjo to act quickly. In the capital, Asari, Ateke and their various groups of supporters were summoned to a series of meetings to discuss the issues. They stopped their violent campaign because they felt that the federal and state governments would take care of some of the fundamental problems of the Niger Delta. The two men's militias were to disarm and disband under an agreement reached in October (Ebienfa 2011).

Unfortunately, despite the excitement generated by the peace agreement in October 2004, the disarmament of fighters who had agreed was short-lived. The lack of sincerity of the initial signatories led to the agreement being reversed, and politicians took control of it to promote their own agenda by manipulating the demobilisation process. They realise that the jobs and benefits they receive have in fact been granted to the politicians' clientele. Many members were also bitter towards their former leaders, who had seemingly benefited from the peace process but then immediately reverted to their old behaviour (Taft and Haken 2015). As a result, the armed organisations in Rivers State fragmented rapidly in the months following the collapse of the 2004 peace agreement, while violence also increased. Soboma George, Ateke's angry number two, founded the Outlaws, an armed gang of his own. Asari also lost many of his supporters, such as Farah Dagogo, who rose to fame as the leader of the Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF) and the Eastern MEND (F. Allen 2009).

The problem was at its worst in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, where the scattered, humid terrain made it easy for terrorists to hide. Perhaps the most notorious leader of the Bayelsa fighters was Boyloaf (Victor Ben). He had fought with the NDPVF and was a successful oil bunkerer. And then he decided to set up his own camp and utilise his fighting and networking skills. His devotion to Henry Okah, a well-known arms dealer from Bayelsa State, contributed to his rise (Omeje 2005).

5.4.7. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is seen as a major step forward in the unity of the warring factions of Niger Delta activists and an attempt to join forces to confront the common enemy, namely the Nigerian government and the oil exploration companies in the region. Around 2005, there were signs of communication between the main militia leaders. For example, Asari

had sought refuge in Delta State on Tompolo's offer after Ateke had harassed him (Höök 2011). However, three high-profile arrests formally united the parties. The first arrest was of Chief DSP Alamiyeseigha, the governor of Bayelsa State, who is suspected of corruption. The fervently pro-Ijaw militia in Bayelsa, Nigeria, saw his imprisonment as a serious offence, as it is the only Ijaw-majority state in the country. The suspicion that Chief Alamiyeseigha's detention was politically motivated was reinforced by the fact that he was associated with President Obasanjo's opponents (Courson 2009).

Asari, the second prominent political figure to be detained, was arrested in September 2005 on charges of treason for speaking out in favour of the dissolution of the Nigerian state. The arrests of Alamiyeseigha and himself served as a centre of attraction for all Niger Delta militias and were perceived as a flagrant provocation of the government. In November 2005, Olo, a clan leader, was taken into custody by government officials in Rivers State, marking his third arrest. Farah Dagogo and Boyloaf left Rivers for the perceived safety of Delta State. This also contributed to a growing sense of insecurity among other militant commanders (Courson 2011). In late 2005, at the invitation of Tompolo and other prominent activists, a series of meetings were convened in Delta State, ostensibly to discuss the imprisonment of Alamiyeseigha and Asari. Representatives of the FNDIC and the NDPVF were present, as were militants from sectarian organisations such as the Greenlanders and the KK Klan. As a result of these talks, a new organisation called MEND was founded. The decision was made to attack the oil production sites with military force. Sophisticated heavy weaponry was acquired and bunkering syndicates were formed (Olabode 2018).

In December 2005, MEND launched its first attack, which was a low-profile operation. An attack on an oil facility in Andoni, Rivers State, was repelled. But a few weeks later, on 11 January 2006, four foreign oil workers were kidnapped in Bayelsa State and the organisation made a spectacular statement. There was a protracted dispute over what to do with the hostages after Farah and Boyloaf took them to Tompolo's camp. Six days later, a hastily compiled list of demands was published. It demanded that the oil wealth of the Niger Delta be controlled locally, that Shell pay Bayelsa State 1.5 billion dollars to compensate for years of environmental damage, and that Asari and Chief Alamiyeseigha be released. The hostages were released on 30 January when the Bayelsa State government paid the ransom. By February, when the second round of kidnappings took place, the demands had dropped. Instead of the 100 percent demanded in the first ultimatum, the Niger Delta region was now to receive 50 percent of the oil profits. In a statement issued by MEND on 1 March, four main demands were made of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta: greater political participation, greater involvement in the oil and gas sector, socioeconomic development and less militarisation of the area (Zelinka 2008).

Like the other groups analysed above, MEND was not a coherent and coordinated group or movement; it had its share of internal conflicts due to power struggles, greed, and the derailment of the goal from the fight against environmental injustice to the personal accumulation of wealth. Various groups joined together to carry out specific actions before splitting again. MEND began to fall apart almost immediately after its founding. Within a few months, the term was essentially meaningless, as three different branches of the group emerged one after another: Western Rivers MEND in Delta State, Eastern MEND in Rivers State and the Central MEND in Bayelsa State. Although it appeared that Tompolo in Delta State was the driving

force behind the formation of the unified organisation in late 2005, rivals emerged almost immediately (Osaghae 2008).

Personal rivalry and greed were important factors. Tompolo quickly parted ways with the original militant leaders, Farah and Boyloaf, who were disgruntled at not receiving a sufficient share of the ransoms, and relocated to Rivers in March 2006 to expand their already growing kidnapping enterprise. Their supporters quickly recognised the money-making potential of this new illegal business. Soboma, the leader of the Outlaws, became Farah's business partner and the two formed a strong team. Farah, who is now the official leader of Eastern MEND, controlled the nearby waterways, while Soboma controlled Port Harcourt (Waddington 2013a). With the entire Rivers State now in the kidnappers' sights, the operation quickly expanded. Soon, the hostage negotiators joined the government and accepted part of the ransom in return for their help in freeing the captives. The security services and the administration had little interest in ending the hostage-taking. The Rivers State Governor's security officer was not arrested even when the Delta State Director of Security Services accused him of helping the hostage-takers. No one was interested in stopping the kidnappings when the stakes were so high. Basically, Eastern MEND had turned into a kidnapping franchise (D. U. Williams 2016).

Boyloaf, Farah's first partner, returned to Bayelsa State and tried to increase his influence. He consolidated his image as a vicious criminal by carrying out a series of kidnappings of oil workers and making statements that allegedly came from MEND, though this was often denied by his former allies in Delta and Rivers. Boyloaf's Bayelsa-based MEND faction appears to have had the closest links to Henry Okah, the man the outside world wrongly refers to as the "leader" of MEND. Okah, who was born in Bayelsa State, had in fact lived outside Nigeria for a long time. Most recently, he worked as an arms dealer in South Africa. He had already supplied militants in the Niger Delta with weapons in 2003 and 2004 and continues to do so today for MEND and the various organisations he supports (Omotola 2009). Farah became involved and, even though he had not attended any of the meetings when MEND was founded, he played an important role as liaison officer and quartermaster, mediating disputes between the representatives of the hostage-takers and their victims. Under the alias Jomo Gbomo, Okah is also said to have utilised his connections to Boyloaf to make statements on behalf of the central MEND. Although he was labelled a "master" by some activists, he was never generally accepted as the leader of the group. After his imprisonment and expulsion in 2007, MEND continued to operate (Agbiboa 2013).

This development under MEND justifies the assumptions and applications of all three theories addressed in this study. The emergence of ungoverned/contested governed or under-governed spaces where the authorities of the constituted government are disregarded and challenged by non-state actors and armed groups (Akinola 2011). In the case of the broken windows, the failure of policy-makers and, in particular, the Niger Delta states' authorities and the Federal Government shows how smaller petty criminals who were previously ignored proceeded to commit major crimes that were difficult for the government to contain. The Routine Activity Theory also came into play here as MEND saw a loophole in the targeting of crimes and impunity in the commission of the crime that can help any armed group to operate and flourish (Hanson 2007).

5.4.8. Niger Delta Avengers

In 2015, when the government of President Muhammadu Buhari took power, they again resorted to militancy under the auspices of the Niger Delta Avengers. The Niger Delta Avengers blew up oil pipelines, attacked refineries and sabotaged oil production in the country. The consequences of the militants' activities in the Niger Delta are the economic sabotage of the country and insecurity in the region and the country as a whole (Toyo 2021). In 2016, the Niger Delta Avengers militant organisation found it easier to damage Shell's massive 48-inch subsea export pipeline at the Forcados Export Terminal (Jatto 2024). The Niger Delta Avengers emerged as a political movement after the defeat of President Jonathan by President Buhari. The activists in the Niger Delta warned on the eve of the 2015 Presidential Election that they would make oil production in their areas impossible if President Jonathan was defeated. To make good their threats, they issued a warning immediately after President Buhari assumed office: "This round of attacks will be the deadliest and will target the deep-sea operations of the multinationals which include the Bonga platform, Agbami field, EA field, Britania-U field and Akpo field and others scattered in the deep waters of the Niger Delta region. As for the Egina FPSO, we are advising the operators to leave it where it is as we are tracking its movements. We are serious when we say they (the oil installations) will dance to the sound of the Niger Delta Avengers' wrath. Good thing the ocean is wide enough to hold as many wrecks as possible" (Niger Delta Avengers 2018).

The militant group announced that: "On 15 November 2016 at about 11.45 p.m., our Elite Strike Team 03 attacked the Nembe 1, 2 and 3 lorry lines operated by Agip, Oando and Shell with a supply capacity of 300,000 barrels per day to Bonny export terminal in Bayelsa State. This is in response to the so-called "Operation Sharkbite", an art of terrorism commissioned by the tyranny of the Nigerian naval establishment and orchestrated by some elements of the ruling political class to continuously undermine all efforts by the Nigerian state to meet the legitimate demands of the people of the Niger Delta and also a conspiracy to inflate the bank accounts of some security contractors and conflict merchants within the party structure of the APC" (Niger Delta Avengers 2018).

Nigeria's "new" Niger Delta militant phenomena, known as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), have challenged the military, foreign oil companies and the Nigerian government. They are believed to be primarily responsible for Nigeria's oil production dropping from a theoretical 2.2 million barrels per day in less than three months to about 1.4 million barrels per day at the end of May 2016. They have mainly attacked the pipeline infrastructure of foreign oil companies and the Nigerian government with explosives. The possibility that they are involved in kidnappings and maritime piracy has also been raised (Steffen 2016).

5.5. *Activities of the Niger Delta Militants*

The assassination of nine employees of the giant Italian energy company Eni S.p.A. in 2006 was a sign that the activities of the Niger Delta militants were becoming more tense. The group subsequently carried out a series of high-level attacks and bombings between 2006 and 2010, in particular, the attack on the Shell Bonga offshore oil field on 20 June 2008, which brought about 10% of Nigeria's oil production capacity to an abrupt halt, and the bombing and burning of Atlas Cove in Tarkwa Bay Lagos, an important oil centre in Nigeria, changed the course of the violence.

The militants are involved in various violent activities, including a complex web of criminal activities (such as robbery, piracy and kidnapping), cult and gang violence, electoral violence, ethnic and communal violence and land conflicts, all of which contribute to and are exacerbated by militancy in the Niger Delta. Membership in cults often overlaps with membership in political organisations, youth associations, ethnic militias and criminal syndicates. Depending on the financial patron, these gangs, which occasionally support political patrons and sometimes ethno-nationalist interests, often come into conflict with each other. In addition to militancy, inter-sectarian fighting has also increased in intensity. The confusion of the political establishment is partly responsible for this. The favour of politicians allows sectarian organisations to work as unofficial security guards or to threaten, attack or murder opponents (The Fund for Peace 2017).

Furthermore, the interplay of resource competition, cults, criminality, political patronage and electoral violence currently playing out across the Niger Delta has significant implications for long-term stability in the region. For example, many cult groups are either centred on charismatic personalities who are believed to wield immense political, economic and supernatural power, or are community-based and use them as unifying factors. Prominent personalities in the region who have formed cult groups around their strong personalities include Ateke Tom, Asari Dokubo, Sobomabo Jackrich (Egberi Papa), Farah Doggo and the late Soboma George. These cult and extremist leaders often garner enough political support to run for office or receive large cash rewards from lawmakers who rely on their support to push them into political office, often using violence and other coercive tactics (The Fund for Peace 2017).

5.6. Responses of Government

The declaration urges improving the conditions of the Niger Delta through institutional and policy measures, such as derivation in revenue allocation, the Ecology Fund, and the establishment of specialised development agencies or commissions for the area, such as the now defunct Oil Minerals and Petroleum Development Commission (OMPADEC) and the current Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which was established in 2000. As will be shown later, all these efforts by the Federal Government did not satisfy the militants and were perceived by the people of the region as inadequate to solve the numerous and complex social and environmental problems that oil exploration brought with it (Omotola 2007).

The Joint Military Task Force (JTF), codenamed Operation Restore Hope, was formed by Olusegun Obasanjo Administration (1999–2007) as a result of this systematic recourse to violence. In attempting to fully restore peace, ensure the security of oil facilities and workers in the region, and combat the escalating youth violence in the region, the JTF essentially became an army of occupation. However, it is important to note that in 1994, the Nigerian state began to use a lot of force or occupy the area militarily in response to the demands of the Niger Delta residents (Ayoyo and Oriola 2018). In this case, the military can be perceived as exacerbating the conflict and as an expression of the government's refusal to address the real needs of the local population. The presence of the military, which has ironically encouraged the organisation of young people into violent anti-state gangs, is responsible for the well-known inhumane massacre in Odi, Bayelsa State, and the rape in Choba, Rivers State, which epitomise the excessive and repressive use of military power by the Nigerian state. This approach led to an escalation of militant conflict in the region

(Joab-Peterside et al. 2012). Similarly, the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria is another violent armed group that was mishandled by the military in its early days. The excessive actions of the military allowed the Boko Haram sect to relocate to the Sambisa Forest and employ guerrilla strategies, while the host communities, which were tortured and brutalised by the military, were denied cooperation in intelligence sharing and counterinsurgency operations. From this, it can be deduced that the early approach in the cases of the Niger Delta militants and the Boko Haram insurgents is similar, showing that the Nigerian government failed to learn a lesson from the Niger Delta failure (Watts 2007).

It is therefore clear why OMPADEC's 3% share of the Federation Account, which was increased to 6% in 1995 after its establishment in 1992, had no significant impact on the environment and the living conditions of the people in the Niger Delta. The funds were used to maintain the Commission's overburdened bureaucracy and to pay emergency service providers and consultants. The people of the Niger Delta region continued to live in poverty and in a state of underdevelopment, while the commissioners of OMPADEC and individual contractors profited greatly from the organisation's business. In essence, corruption played a major role in sabotaging OMPADEC and thwarting the objectives of establishing the Commission. This is also applicable to the recent case of the Niger Delta Development Commission, as seen below. There are numerous allegations of abandoned projects, multiple contract awards and rigged constituency projects by legislators in the region, as well as non-execution of contracts (Roberts 1998).

The 1999 Constitution also established the 13 percent derivation formula for revenue sharing and allocation. The 13 percent derivation fund is disbursed from the revenue of the Federation to the oil producing communities through the state governments as enshrined in Section 162, sub-section 2 of the Nigerian Constitution. Accordingly, Niger Delta state governments, including Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Edo, Abia, Ondo, Imo, Cross River and Bayelsa, have received over N9 trillion as 13 percent derivation funds between 1999 and 2018, in addition to other financial contributions accruing to these states as development funds, in line with this constitutional provision. According to the NBS office, the 13 percent oil derivatives rose to N85 billion in February from about N58 billion distributed in January 2024 (Vanguard 2024).

In addition, the Nigerian government under President Olusegun Obasanjo established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000. So, if the goal of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is to promote the rapid and sustainable transformation of the Niger Delta into a rich and economically regenerative zone, the ultimate goal should be to empower the affected communities socially and politically. This is necessary due to the rising poverty rate in the affected households, which is exacerbated by high unemployment. The Federal Government contributes 15% to the funding of the NDDC, the oil and gas sector contributes 3%, and 50% of the ecological funds are allocated to the member states of the Niger Delta, as well as the proceeds from other assets of the NDDC. Out of the N436 billion budgeted between 2001 and 2009, the Federal Government that established the NDDC has only released a total of N136.234 billion. The amount paid into the federal account by oil does not correspond to the Commission's revenue in a given financial year. For example, the Commission's budget in 2005 was N63.5bn, but only N17 billion came from statutory transfer while N2.902 trillion came from oil revenue. Despite the N2.8 trillion provided by the petroleum sector and donations from the

Commission, only N26 billion was actually allocated out of the N57.418 billion in the 2006 budget estimates. The 2007 budget also adhered to the allocations from the previous budget. Oil accounted for N3.2 trillion or 84 percent of the total budget during this period. However, the Commission only received N24 billion in statutory transfers compared to N26 billion in the 2006 budget (Dokpesi and Ibiezugbe 2012).

However, serious allegations of corruption and scandals neutralised the supposed objectives and benefits of the NDDC. For example, John (2011) reported that the NDDC initiated several projects and programmes that directly touched the lives of residents. One of these projects, according to John (2011), is the NDDC Mass Transit Scheme, where many buses were procured to remove the traffic obstacles in the region. Unfortunately, the contractors procured the wrong buses that did not take into account the nature of Nigerian roads, and also the management of the buses was hijacked by those who managed them, making the programme unsuccessful. Another programme is the multi-billion-naira partnership with Glo Telecommunications which aimed to strengthen the communications sector. Again, the programme is seen as a scam, as a few youths were handpicked and given a starter pack from Alcatel GSM worth only about N6000, an umbrella, two plastic chairs and a table. John (2011) reports that the entire programme was so abused that some of the proposed beneficiaries sold the entire package worth N9000 and consumed alcoholic drinks outside the gates of the events out of frustration.

Another programme is the Niger Delta Technical Aid Corps (NDTAC), a capacity-building programme for graduates. The main component of the programme is computer training for the selected beneficiaries. The main obstacle to the programme is that the participants cannot sustain it on their own. In the 2010 financial year, 28 positions were given to Bayelsa State for bidding—positions under N250 million (Toyo 2021). Unfortunately, 19 out of the 28 positions were awarded by the Commission without the knowledge of the state commissioner, while only nine positions were awarded to the state concerned. Other state commissioners have made similar complaints. Acts of this nature undermine the powers and integrity of the commission (John 2011).

From 2000 to 2022, a total of N6 trillion was allocated to the NDDC. The Nigerian Senate set up a committee to investigate the mismanagement of N40 billion in six (6) months while the House of Representatives Standing Committee on NDDC investigated the allegations. The allegations involved dubious and unbelievable transactions and expenditures that could only be explained or translated as looting bazaars. Some of the allegations involved about 13,777 dubious, non-existent, abandoned, false, and incomplete projects. The interim management of the NDDC claimed to have spent over N2 billion on its staff during the COVID-19 lockdown, even though the sum was not provided for in the Commission's 2020 budget, raising questions of accountability and transparency. The Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee of Inquiry, Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, said that documents revealed before the panel showed that the agency spent N81.5 billion and not N40 billion during the aforementioned period between January and May this year under the leadership of Professor Kemebradikumo Pondei. The professor "fainted" during the proceedings. Thus, in 2017, the Commission awarded a total of 201 emergency contracts worth N100,396,879,001.06; in 2018, a total of 1057 emergency contracts worth N162,688,289,333.05; and just seven months later in 2019, a total of 1921 emergency contracts worth N1,070,249,631,757.70. In seven months in 2019, a total of 1921 emergency contracts worth N1,070,349,631,757.70 were awarded while the

NDDC's unworked budget stood at N350 billion and was still presented before the National Assembly. An incumbent senator has 300 NDDC contracts in his name. Out of the 300 contracts, 120 have been paid in full and for these 120, he has failed to show up on site (Sule 2022).

In September 2008, President Yar'adua's government set up the Niger Delta Technical Committee, made up of forty-five knowledgeable men and women and chaired by former MOSOP leader Ledum Mitee, to find a long-term solution to the situation. The committee was tasked with compiling historical data on the Niger Delta problem and providing guidance to the Federal Government. More than 400 reports, memoranda and other documents from regional, national and global stakeholders were collected and reviewed by the committee. These included oil companies in the Delta, several communities in the Niger Delta as well as associations and organisations, governments and government agencies of the Niger Delta states and other stakeholders across the country (Ajayi and Adesote 2013).

After a thorough investigation, the Committee divided its findings into three sections. The first contained an agreement with Niger Delta stakeholders, while the second section outlined general issues and roles for those involved in a regional transformation. The third section of the agenda proposed that the Federal Government establish institutions and procedures to implement the Compact and other medium-term procedures. The highlight of the report is the recommendation of an amnesty for militants as part of a comprehensive programme of demobilisation, disarmament and rehabilitation, and the negotiated commitment by militant organisations to cease all hostage-taking, kidnappings and attacks on oil installations (Oluwaniyi 2011). The Federal Government announced an unconditional amnesty for all on 25 June 2009 to bring peace and stability to the Niger Delta region and the nation as a whole. Niger Delta activists in the creeks—as well as those charged to court, such as Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo), Tom Ateke and other militant commanders who had been placed on the wanted list by the Niger Delta security forces and the Joint Task Force (JTF), as well as Henry Okah, who was on trial—were pardoned. However, President Yar'adua gave all those who wanted to benefit from the amnesty a deadline of 4 October 2009 to take advantage of the government's generosity (Obi 2014).

Some 26,000 fighters agreed to a ceasefire in 2009, and the government oversaw an amnesty programme offering opportunities and money to former fighters to prevent a resurgence of militancy. The relative calm and the presidential amnesty programme are still in place today, but they are precarious because the original problems that led to militancy have not been adequately resolved. Furthermore, there is no clear exit strategy for this extremely costly programme. All those directly or indirectly involved in militant actions in the Niger Delta were granted amnesty by President Umar Musa Yar'adua on 25 June 2009. The amnesty was necessary to protect the area from the ongoing chaos and destruction caused by the militants' actions, which included direct clashes with government forces, the blowing up of oil installations and the kidnapping of foreigners and Nigerian oil workers. Their discontent stemmed from the government's persistent disregard for social unrest, environmental degradation and increasing poverty (Oyewo 2016).

By the end of the amnesty period in October 2009, 20,192 ex-militants (and non-militants) from the nine Niger Delta states had registered for the amnesty programme and renounced militancy, and 20,049 men and 133 women, respectively, had handed over their weapons to the Presidential Amnesty Committee, including

2760 weapons of various classes and calibres, 287,445 rounds of ammunition, 3155 magazines, 1090 dynamite capsules, 763 explosives and dynamite sticks and 18 gunboats. In the second and third phases of the amnesty programme, 6166 former combatants were added in November 2009 and another 3642 in October 2012, bringing the total number to thirty thousand (30,000) (Davidheiser and Nyiayaana 2011). The acceptance of the amnesty programme marked the beginning of the DDR process. As a result, ex-militants were paid N65,000 per day as well as vocational training and legal contracts for camp commanders, which are linked to the completion of the reintegration programme. In contrast to previous reintegration programmes in other African governments, due to the enormous resources required to set up the programme, the Nigerian government took full responsibility for the entire process. The initiative has cost well over \$1 billion (N1,692,878,640,000.00 trillion) since its inception, with \$405 million (N685,615,849,200.00) spent in 2012 alone (Okonofua 2016).

However, in order to obtain visas for ex-military personnel travelling abroad for educational and vocational training purposes, the government turned to the international community for assistance. The oil companies were also tasked with promoting economic development in the Niger Delta region. The Chairman of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, who also serves as Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta Affairs, is responsible for the organisation and implementation of the amnesty programme. Other relevant government organisations, such as the Ministry of Niger Delta, the National Directorate of Employment and the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), are involved in the programme. The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution and Youth Employment Creation should be mentioned. The Rhode Island Centre for Non-Violence and Peace Studies in Kingston, Rhode Island, USA, and the Herbert Lurtini Non-Violence Centre in South Africa also worked with the government on the reintegration process (Agbibo 2013).

The Presidential Amnesty Office has placed 11,525 of the 30,000 ex-combatants in skills-development programmes in line with the main tenets of the reintegration programme, providing social and economic support through educational assistance and vocational training, acquisition/training facilities and formal education at home and abroad. Of the ex-combatants, 4929 are receiving their education abroad and 6382 are enrolled in Nigerian educational institutions or centres for the acquisition of skills. In 2012, another 6067 ex-military personnel were scheduled for deployments at home and abroad. Overall, 30 out of 150 ex-servicemen who received training at the Proclad Academy were hired, while 113 were helped by the Dubai, United Arab Emirates-based Proclad Group of Companies to find work in the shipping, welding and manufacturing industries. The office helped Century Energy Group to recruit forty apprentices in the shipping industry in Nigeria. The amnesty programme for Niger Delta militants was also reflected in 2013 and 2017 for Boko Haram fighters in the heat of the insurgency in Northeast Nigeria (Ikelegbe and Umukoro 2016).

5.7. Impact of Niger Delta Militancy on the Nigerian Economy

Oil production was so severely affected by militancy in the 2000s that the price of a barrel of oil exceeded USD 100 for the first time in history. The level of insecurity caused by the actions of these militant organisations peaked in 2009, and at this point, the globe began to fear the scale of the catastrophe. Nigeria was producing 700,000 barrels of crude oil per day rather than 2.3 million barrels per day. As of May 2009, Nigeria was losing over N8.7 billion (\$58 million) daily due to the bloody violence in the region (Oyewo 2016). According to Imobighe (2004), the fighting,

which lasted until the end of August 2003, not only cost hundreds of lives, but also led to disruptions in oil production and significant losses in exports of 800,000 barrels of oil per day, equivalent to 40 percent of Nigeria's daily oil production of over 2.2 million barrels.

According to government estimates, the annual financial loss amounts to about \$3.5 billion (N5,925,075,240,000.00 trillion). Considering that Nigeria spends \$2 billion (N3,385,757,280,000,000.00 trillion) annually on external debt servicing, a settlement of the Niger Delta war would earn the nation more than it needs to repay its foreign debts. In fact, the nation would have an additional \$1.5 billion (N2,539,317,960,000.00 trillion) to fund its development initiatives and rapidly transform the Niger Delta. In addition to the financial losses, Jatto (2024) argues that the activities of the militants have led to human insecurity, destruction of infrastructure of both oil companies and public property and loss of energy both nationally and globally, which may affect global oil prices and stability. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation NNPC and about 18 other oil and gas companies lost over 27 million barrels of crude oil between 2006 and 2015 through vandalism, oil theft and illegal refining activities. It is clear that there have been about 227 incidents of vandalism on the Nembe Creek Boot Line 1, 2 and 3, which is the subject of the study, since it was commissioned in 2010 (Jatto 2024). The 2016 NNPC report shows that Nigeria lost over USD 7 billion between January and October 2016, equivalent to more than 30 percent of the national budget. The International Centre for Reconciliation (ICR) estimated the monetary value lost to pipeline vandalism and illegal oil bunkering activities between 2003 and 2008 at over USD 100 billion. Vandalism has significantly affected Nigeria's oil production; one example of this is the decline in Nigeria's oil production that occurred in 2016, which averaged between 1.3 and 1.8 million barrels, below the target of 2.2 million barrels per day (Jatto 2024). According to statistics of International Center for Reconciliation (ICR), the cost of militancy over Nigerian economy as a result of stolen crude oil (bunkering) and disrupted oil production between 2003 and 2008 alone was around 14 trillion naira equivalent to 100 billion dollars (Oluyemi 2020).

The activities of militants in the Niger Delta have caused untold suffering and destruction of wealth, property and lives. At the height of the militancy, there were deaths or injuries, destruction of property, displacement of people and an increase in poverty. Although the militants accused both the Nigerian government and the oil companies of destroying the environment, they themselves are responsible for their actions causing more harm through polluting the water and destroying marine life through explosions, vandalism, setting fires and heavy shooting. The military and police have been called in by the oil companies to guard their equipment and facilities. These operations led to violent clashes in which houses and other property were destroyed and people were killed or injured (Ibaba et al. 2012).

Although militancy has subsided, sectarianism, piracy, dishonest security forces and unstable economic activities are still commonplace in parts of the Niger Delta where daily insecurity persists. Between 2010 and 2017, 20% of families in the Niger Delta were affected by conflict, with 1/20 of families suffering loss due to violence (SDN 2024). The destruction of numerous communities, the ruthless killing of innocent people for crimes ranging from the seizure of boats and oil company employees to the kidnapping of public figures and oil workers, and occasionally the killing of security forces have increased insecurity in many communities in several Niger Delta states (Bassey et al. 2021). Hallmark (2017) argues that the activities of

Niger Delta militants have a similar or even greater impact than those of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and others, but the impact has since been overlooked, either because people have grown tired of repeating the issue, or simply because their targets such as drilling sites, pipelines, tankers and facilities to suppress oil production and cripple the Nigerian government economically are not exclusively aimed at killing innocent people like terrorist groups, but the socioeconomic and political impact is the same. Hallmark (2017) also concludes, “Because crude oil is such a valuable commodity, international oil companies are virtually fearless and impervious to the threats posed by guerrillas, terrorists and insurgents; many of the oil workers are rugged types—“adrenaline junkies” who enjoy the rush of penetrating such areas to extract hydrocarbons from the ground.”

The impact of oil conflict and militancy continues to affect security in the Niger Delta. According to the Niger Delta Annual Conflict Report, there were 416 violent incidents in 2019 with over 1000 documented fatalities. A total of 546 people died in 351 incidents in 2018. Organised crime, political rivalries, community conflicts, “cult conflicts” and land disputes are the main causes of the increase, according to PIND. Cults often have political connections and are quasi-religious and quasi-criminal. According to PIND, communal violence decreased but political violence increased. Rivers, Edo and Delta were the most affected states (J. Campbell 2020). As powerful cult leaders gain prominence in the Niger Delta, their wealth and connections exert an unprecedented pull on large numbers of unemployed and destitute young people, potentially extending their influence and authority to a new generation. Furthermore, the dangerous message that “violence pays” is reinforced as these cult leaders gain notoriety and make democratic processes, legitimate business and the rule of law seem like inadequate alternatives (The Fund for Peace 2017).

6. Perspectives of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

6.1. The Boko Haram Movement in Northeast Nigeria

The Maitatsine militant movement devastated northern Nigeria in the 1980s, and Boko Haram followed in 2000 and continues to do so today. Northeast Nigeria was the cradle of Boko Haram's insurgency, which began in the early 2000s (Sule et al. 2018a). One of Nigeria's geopolitical zones is the Northeast, which is made up of the following six states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. In terms of land area, it makes up just under a third of Nigeria, as shown in Figure 4 (National Bureau of Statistics 2024a). Almost a third (280,419 km²) of Nigeria's total land area (909,890 km²) is located in the geopolitical zone in Northeast Nigeria. As already mentioned, it consists of six states. Based on the 2006 Census and an annual growth projection of 3.2 percent since 2006, the Northeastern states account for 13.5% (30,577,500) of Nigeria's estimated 226,500,000 population in 2024, according to projections by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (National Bureau of Statistics 2024b). The Northeast geopolitical zone borders the Republic of Chad in the Northeast, the Republic of Niger in the north and Cameroon in the east.



Figure 4. Map of Nigeria showing the Northeast geopolitical zone, highlighting the region's strategic location, ecological diversity, and socio-political complexities. Source: Figure by authors.

Although the zone has the poorest socioeconomic conditions in the country, it contributes significantly to the national net food production. With an absolute poverty rate of almost 70 percent, the zone has the highest poverty rate in Nigeria. The region, which has long been considered quiet and tranquil, has recently been grappling with significant security problems (National Bureau of Statistics 2024b).

The region has faced security challenges due to the Maitatsine insurgency in the 1980s and the current Boko Haram insurgency. Our understanding of the topography, culture and geography of the Northeast influences how we interpret the reasons for the success of the Boko Haram insurgency in the geopolitical zone. The militant Islamists that make up Boko Haram officially referred to the group by the Arabic name “Jama’atu Ahlil Sunnah Lil Da’awati Wal Jihad (JAS)” (people dedicated to spreading the teachings of the Prophet and Jihad). People in the Northeastern states of Nigeria, where the movement began, called it “Boko Haram” in the local Hausa language because “Western education is forbidden” (Amao 2023). The organisation claims its goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate in northern Nigeria that functions according to Sharia law, the only accepted branch of Islam (Omenma et al. 2023a). Since the miraculous Quran declares that there is no religious compulsion, this is a misconception and a misguided view that contradicts the good and moral principles of Islam.

The Boko Haram insurgency is a reminder of how some misinformed young people become extremists due to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islamic religious scriptures (Maihula 2020; Sule and Sambo 2020; Umar 2020). The movement is not supported by any scholarly work or reputable academics. None of the group members are sufficiently educated or qualified to be considered scholars. Our awakening came in the early 1990s when we witnessed a group of radical youths resembling Maitatsine from the 1980s denouncing everything without evidence or reliable legal sources (Sambo and Sule 2025). Initially, Boko Haram was a conservative extremist group that rejected Western values (Thurston 2016a), the Nigerian institutions of Western education, politics, economics and society. The sect despises them, especially in places where Muslims predominate (Thurston 2016b). However, the sect later fully transformed into an insurgent group that carried out deadly attacks, destroying property worth billions of naira and killing thousands of people (Zenn 2020).

We cannot be certain of the date upon which Boko Haram was founded. However, it has been mentioned that the sect’s first attacks began in 2002 in Kanamma, Geidem, Yobe State and 2005 in Panshekara, Kano State (F. C. Onuoha 2010). Boko Haram can be classified as a social movement, a religious organisation, a political insurgency or a criminal organisation (Kendhammer and McCain 2018). After the so-called “Taliban” attack in 2002, when it began attacking police stations in individual locations, the group transitioned from insurgency to terrorism (Olofinbiyi 2023). Muhammad Ali, a Hausa from Saudi Arabia who is believed to have been an Al-Qaeda operative dispatched to Nigeria, was the person named as the founder of Boko Haram before Muhammad Yusuf. He worked under the guise of charitable endeavours but with the aim of promoting their faith. Even this claim, as well as the claim that he was linked to Osama bin Laden or had studied in Sudan, could not be confirmed beyond doubt. Some sources even claim that his name is not Ali, but Ahmad. According to more recent reports, Muhammad Ali was the true founder of the Boko Haram movement in the early 2000s and was radicalised outside Nigeria (Bukarti 2022).

After a confrontation with the security unit “Operation Flush” in 2009, the group re-emerged at full strength and armed with dangerous, modern weapons and confronted the Nigerian security forces in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. This conflict was triggered because the members of the group did not wear helmets while riding motorbikes (MacEachern 2018). Muhammad Yusuf, the leader of the group, was extrajudicially killed in the course of the conflict in 2009. Abubakar Shekau

then succeeded Muhammad Yusuf. According to the Harvard Divinity School (2023), Shekau declared full Jihad against the Nigerian government and all its supporters. As the group's attacks increased between 2009 and 2014, the insurgents managed to take control of several local governments in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. The insurgents stormed army barracks and police stations and burnt down schools and bombed churches and mosques, attacking both Muslims and Christians and forcing people to flee to save their lives (CNN Library 2018).

Even after years of operations, the Boko Haram group itself does not behave in a cohesive and coordinated manner. A resentful faction has desecrated the group through a deadly competition that has led to shootings and other horrific conflicts (Omenma et al. 2023b). The group pledged allegiance to the mother Al-Qaeda and ISIS and was led by Abu Mus'ab Al Barnawi, the son of the late Muhammad Yusuf, of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) or Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Omenma et al. 2023a). Essentially, it was a reminder of the fierce competition that led to the assassination of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau by ISWAP in June 2021. However, in September 2021, the Nigerian military also assassinated the ISWAP leader himself (Omirin and Isamotu 2021). Although this latest development is believed to have weakened the insurgents and represents a victory for Nigerian troops, it is by no means good news for the eradication of Boko Haram, as the group is far from being defeated and continues to plan and coordinate attacks with modern weapons, even in the city of Maiduguri.

6.2. Causes

Several reasons for Boko Haram's emergence as an insurgent group have been cited by various groups. The first reason is the one cited by the sect itself: injustice, oppression, inequality and failure to enforce Islamic law in Northern Nigeria due to total alignment with the Western political system are their justifications for the insurgency (Weeraratne 2017). Apart from the above argument, the poor socioeconomic and political conditions, poverty, unemployment and ignorance in Northern Nigeria have favoured the emergence of groups like Boko Haram (Forest 2012). Forest (2012) cited youth unemployment, social inequality, social and economic marginalisation and the lack of adequate censorship of religious activities by the government as the main causes of the Boko Haram insurgency. Sule et al. (2019b) identified poor governance, ethno-religious rivalries, weak political institutions and state failure, as well as abject poverty and social inequality and the legacy of external forces of global terrorism as the main causes of the Boko Haram insurgency. Climate change, which affects the socioeconomic aspects of the inhabitants of Lake Chad, is also a factor that triggered the Boko Haram insurgency (Oriola et al. 2022). Other identified factors that caused the emergence of Boko Haram include massive corruption among security personnel, politicians and bureaucrats in the defence sector, inadequate intelligence by security agencies, unemployment, injustice, religious misperception and intolerance, ignorance, elite rivalry, ethno-religious crises and inequality (Sule et al. 2019a; Olofinbiyi 2023). Al-Qaeda and the global terror network or the globalisation of terror are another reason for the rise of Boko Haram. The attacks carried out on 11 September 2001 were the peak of global terrorism, and this has influenced the rise of other terrorist groups

The youth in Nigeria, estimated to make up almost 60% of the country's total population, is another factor. Incidents of insurgency and reports from various agencies and stakeholders have shown that youths dominate the activities of

insurgents. Cannon and Iyekekpolo (2018) and Iyekekpolo (2019) emphasised that the political elites are responsible for the emergence of Boko Haram. It should be recalled that the National Security Adviser to former President Goodluck Jonathan publicly stated at the 2013 South-South Summit that the struggles and power shifts of the political elites between the North and the South gave birth to Boko Haram (Iyekekpolo 2020). The environment in the Northeast has contributed to the emergence and escalation of the Boko Haram conflict. Culture and mystical beliefs have led the inhabitants of the Northeast, especially in Borno, the epicentre of Boko Haram activities, to fall into this faith. Monguno and Umara (2020) report that there is a feeling that Borno is struck by disaster after every century and that the beginning of Boko Haram's activities in the 2000s coincides with 100 years after the attack of Mahdi from Sudan.

The geography of the Northeast explains the logic behind the movement: It is a large enclave with hundreds of porous, unguarded borders that allow free, undetected entry and exit. This provides the insurgents with an escape route and a terrain for guerrilla warfare. In addition, the most affected states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe are in the neighbourhood of Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of Niger, which facilitates cross-border activities. The Nigerian government's failure to heed the lessons of the Maitatsine movement has contributed significantly to the emergence of Boko Haram. In relation to the latter point, this study notes that the lack of proper and sufficient attention paid to the responses of Islamic clerics in their intellectual countermeasures' efforts against the ideas of Boko Haram in the initial stages led to the group developing into a full-blown insurgency (Sambo and Sule 2025).

6.3. Manifestations and Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency

Northeast Nigeria, Nigeria and West Africa in general have been affected politically, economically, socially and in terms of security by Boko Haram. Almost 30 million people from the Republic of Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and the Republic of Niger live in the Lake Chad Basin, where economic activity has come to a complete standstill (Brechenmacher 2019). The influence of Boko Haram has led to numerous crises in many countries in the region. The internal and external security problems of Nigeria, the most powerful member of ECOWAS, have shaken the economic and political development of the region, and the security co-operation of its member states (Okolo and Akubo 2019). The insurgents' strategy was to carry out irregular, indiscriminate attacks in certain crowded places. Markets, churches, mosques, parks, railway stations, checkpoints and all security posts were overrun by them, and their victims were shot, bombed, mass murdered, kidnapped and looted. According to reports, around 3 million people have been displaced, mostly women and children (Global Conflict Tracker 2020).

According to another report by the Shehu Yar'adua Foundation, between 2009 and 2018, Boko Haram militants carried out 1639 violent attacks in Northeast Nigeria alone, killing 14,436 people, injuring 6051, taking 2063 hostages and forcing more than 2 million people to flee their homes as a result of the crisis (Okolo and Akubo 2019). According to N. Allen (2016), the Boko Haram group carried out more than 4000 deadly attacks between 2011 and 2019, killing around 13,000 people. The CNN Library (2018) reports 75 violent attacks by Boko Haram with over 20,000 victims and more than 6000 injured. In another study, Sule and Gombe (2020) documented more than 200 deadly attacks by Boko Haram fighters in Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and the

Republic of Niger. According to the study by Sule and Gombe (2020), Boko Haram financed itself through membership fees, kidnappings for ransom, external donations from sister organisations, bank looting, and trade and agricultural activities in the conquered areas. They also found that Boko Haram obtained its weapons from both internal and external sources.

However, according to a study by Monguno and Umara (2020), Boko Haram was responsible for more than 258 attacks in 16 local governments in Borno State alone. A recent assessment by the United Nations states that more than 350,000 people have died as a result of the Boko Haram conflict in Northeast Nigeria, with 314,000 of these deaths attributed to indirect insurgency-related factors such as disease, starvation and malnutrition (Sanni 2021). According to Sule and Sambo (2022), the Federal Government itself lamented at a security briefing that over 40 percent of cultivable land in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states was still uncultivated. Nigeria is currently experiencing a food crisis and the resulting food insecurity. Due to their actions, destruction, influence and territorial expansion, Boko Haram is one of the deadliest terrorist organisations in the world. According to Khalid (2021), Boko Haram carried out around 2050 deadly attacks between 2014 and 2021. Due to the atrocities of the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria was ranked the third most terrorised nation in the world in 2018 (Global Terrorism Index 2018) and eighth in 2022 with 65 attacks, 219 fatalities and 118 injuries in 2022 (Global Terrorism Index 2022). ISWAP is the sixth deadliest terrorist organisation in the world according to the Global Terrorism Index (2023). Boko Haram ranks seventh with 64 attacks, 204 fatalities and 51 injuries.

Of the 704,000 inhabitants of the Lake Chad Area, 340,000 are in urgent need of humanitarian aid, according to the FAO. The region is suffering from a worsening water crisis due to the severe consequences of climate change and the actions of Boko Haram in Lake Chad. Insecurity in the region has been exacerbated by persistent water scarcity, which has led to a decline in foliage needed for livestock grazing and increased tensions and rivalries over water (Usigbe 2020). Worse still, the increasing violence and insecurity in the region is linked to the depletion of Lake Chad and climate change. The socioeconomic crisis in the Chad Basin has been exacerbated by Boko Haram's armed warfare (Edmond 2019). Many inhabitants of Lake Chad were forced to leave their homes due to the escalating and spreading rebellion. The resulting migration caused them to stop fishing and farming, which slowed down the replenishment process and thus contributed to the current depletion of the Lake (Frimpong 2020).

Particularly in the three states most affected by the crisis, the humanitarian situation in Northeast Nigeria presents a dangerous scenario that is difficult for a human being to bear. Before the start of the Boko Haram insurgency, UNICEF (2023) counted fewer than 5000 refugees, mainly due to flooding during the rainy season. It is estimated that 7.1 million of the 13.4 million inhabitants of the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe are in need of humanitarian aid. However, only 6.2 million of these people are being reached, while the remaining 900,000 live in areas that are inaccessible due to the deteriorating security situation (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA 2020). A total of 848 million dollars is needed. Despite the fact that 2,700,000 people are in immediate need of food, the intervention has reached 2,144,894 people. According to the breakdown, 971,104 host communities, 366,551 returnees and 820,123 displaced people have been contacted. There are 2,800,000 people in need of food, but only 809,418 out of 2,000,000 people have been successfully reached (United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA 2020). There are 5,200,000 vulnerable people, of which 4,700,000 have been reached and 2,010,504 have not been reached. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA 2020), 583,927 people were actually reached.

In the area of child protection, only 961 of the 43,500 people in need were reached, compared to 27,400 who were intended as a target group. In the health sector, there were 5,300,000 people in need of immediate medical assistance. In 2019, 2,555,171 people were reached, compared to 5,000,000 who received targeted support. In the area of water supply, sanitation and hygiene, 3,600,000 people were in urgent need of support. 1,662,080 people have successfully received assistance and 3,200,000 people have been reached. Only 134,095 of the 1,900,000 people in need of shelter and other relief items were reached out of the 3,500,000 people in need. Additionally, 761,260 people received proper assistance, 1,300,000 people received targeted assistance and 1,300,000 people needed help with camp management and displacement coordination. In the school sector, there are 2,200,000 people who urgently need help; 400,276 people have been adequately provided for and 1,500,000 have received targeted assistance (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA 2020).

West African security and ECOWAS are affected by the Boko Haram conflict. There are a number of reasons for this, including a lack of cooperation and commitment, lack of harmonised legislation between member states and financial constraints, meaning that the area was unable to solve the problems (Akanji 2019). According to other studies by Cannon and Iyekekpolo (2018) and Sule et al. (2019b), the fight against terrorism in West Africa is hindered by eight factors. These include corruption, porous borders, lack of coordination between the affected states, lack of cooperation between security personnel and the authorities of the affected countries, the low motivation of security officials, inadequate logistics and technology, and politicisation of the process and responses. Without a coordinated counter-terrorism strategy, the desired level of regional cooperation cannot be achieved. According to Bala and Tar (2021), the Boko Haram insurgency will prevent ECOWAS members from achieving the desired level of regional cooperation if the affected West African governments do not develop a shared sense of responsibility.

6.4. Ideology

Maitatsine and Boko Haram have similar ideologies. Since militant movements are contagious, northern Nigeria was influenced by the Maitatsine militant movement in the 1980s and subsequently by Boko Haram from 2000 to the present (Isichei 1987). In the 1980s, there was a Maitatsine attack in Gombe, Bauchi, Mubi, Yola and Maiduguri in Northeast Nigeria (Hickey 1984). The first violent insurgencies in northern Nigeria with a religious background took place during the Maitatsine riots, which occurred between 1980 and 1985 and were triggered by militant Islamists (M. A. Ojo 1985). The Maitatsine riots took place in many places in the north in different years, including Bulumkutu in Maiduguri in 1982, Jimeta in 1984 and Kano in 1980, 1982, 1987; Rigasa in Kaduna in 1982, and Gombe in 1985 (Aghedo 2017). Mohammed Marwa founded the Maitatsine movement based on his nickname Maitatsine, which is derived from the expression "Allah Tatsine," which means "May God's curse be upon you" (Kastfelt 1989). Maitatsine, a Hausa name meaning "the one who condemns," refers to his profane public utterances criticising the Nigerian government. He was a controversial preacher in Nigeria (Lubeck 1985). He moved

from Marwa, Cameroon, to Kano, Nigeria, where he presented himself as a prophet (Skuratowicz 2004). After gaining political independence in 1972, he returned from exile imposed by the British colonial power (Hiskett 1987). In the 1980s, riots and attacks on civilians and security forces killed hundreds of people in the north as a result of his surge in support and subsequent confrontation with the government (Kastfelt 1989). One researcher believed that Boko Haram was an outgrowth of Maitatsine (Sule et al. 2018b).

Similarly to Maitatsine, Boko Haram is an Islamic militant group that is mainly active in Northeast Nigeria. According to Danjibo (2010), the nature, emergence and ideology of Boko Haram, and the operative methodology suggest that they are a branch of the Maitatsine. They formed the same movement to take up arms against the government and anyone who disagreed with their beliefs, emerged in the same enclave and professed the same religious philosophy. Thus, the Boko Haram movement began as a non-violent, critical and peaceful preaching movement, as did Maitatsine (Danjibo 2010; Adesoji 2011). Furthermore, Boko Haram and Maitatsine completely hated Western politics and education both culturally and economically, and because Maitatsine despised everything about Boko and the government, and Boko Haram did the same from the beginning, this hostility was the driving force behind their name. Furthermore, Maitatsine declared that all Muslims who did not share their faith were infidels and that it was legal to shed their blood, a belief shared by Boko Haram. Both Boko Haram and the Maitatsine held the view that following the creation of an Islamic state where they could enforce Shari'ah or Islamic law, weapons should be used against the established authorities and through bloodshed (Sule et al. 2019b).

According to the above opinions, Maitatsine and Boko Haram in all their manifestations follow a similar approach, although Boko Haram's movement is better organised and more sophisticated because it has access to better firepower than Maitatsine, which has made it quicker and easier to crush. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the phenomenon of Islamic militarism will continue to surface occasionally if the political, social and theological aspects of the nation are not adequately reorganised. The main philosophy of Boko Haram is to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria. Boko Haram is believed to share the idea of violent Islamic extremism, where even Muslims who disagree with them are considered outlaws and infidels. They held the view that all methods, including the use of force and coercion, must be used to ensure strict adherence to Islamic principles and practises. They also adhere to the philosophy of overthrowing and opposing the established authorities, especially those responsible for the democratic system of government in the West. In all their manifestations, they hate everything Western (Sule et al. 2018b).

According to Al-Qaradawi (1991), Boko Haram also represents an ideology of extreme radicalism and intolerance. Groups such as Boko Haram are categorised as extremist groups according to Al-Qaradawi's (1991) six levels of extremism. "Intolerance and bigotry" is the first stage. The most obvious sign of extremism is bigotry. It causes a person to be stubbornly insistent and rigid about their own beliefs and prejudices, which prevents them from seeing the interests of other people, the aims of Islamic law or the current state of affairs clearly. The second phenomenon is that the public is forced to do things that God has not commanded it to do. This manifests itself in an unwavering devotion to excess. The third indicator of extremism he highlighted is "misplaced rigour", which is when people are forced to do things that are not necessary for them, such as forcing non-Muslims to practise

Islam because they are a minority in a Muslim country. Severity and harshness are the fourth form in which extremism manifests itself. This manifests itself in treating people roughly, approaching them roughly and calling them to Islam in a crude manner, all of which contradicts the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Another type of extremism that needs to be combated is negative thinking about other people, which causes mistrust and suspicion towards them. The step of takfir, labelling fellow Muslims as infidels, comes last.

6.5. Recruitment Strategies

Terrorists use a variety of recruitment techniques and phases. Groups such as Boko Haram, which recruit under the guise of religion, are a good example of this. Based on field research in the Northeast, Sambo and Sule (2025) list some tactics used by Boko Haram to recruit new members. In the early stages, Boko Haram used proselytising to recruit new members. Leader Muhammad Yusuf used the psychology and ignorance of vulnerable young people to convert them to an ideology of rage against Western education between 2000 and 2009. The main message at this stage was propaganda, conveying to followers and recently recruited soldiers that Jihad is necessary to fight infidels and Western stooges who dominate Nigeria's politics and economy.

The second phase, known as incentivisation, took place between 2009 and 2012, when the Boko Haram insurgency was at its worst. Even though the time frame is from 2005 to 2009, the majority of the recruitment took place after the start of the uprising. The majority of recruits were unsuspecting at this time. During this time, the laziness of the youth, unemployment, poverty and dishonesty were exploited. Many of them were lured with financial incentives, either knowingly or unknowingly. Abduction and conscription comprise the third step. It was difficult to recruit new members after the Boko Haram insurgents revealed their true motives and the movement degenerated into violence. As mentioned earlier, the majority of young people who joined the movement believed that it was a genuine revolution against injustice. The number of members dropped when they realised how much damage had already been done. A weak national security infrastructure, a deteriorating security situation and an increase in group attacks were the defining characteristics of the 2011–2015 period, during which time the insurgents were able to capture 16 local governments in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. In order to establish a contested, regulated zone, the insurgents exploited this weakness in state security (Mohammed 2021). The insurgents at this time relied on forced recruitment, including enlistment and abduction.

International recruitment is phase four. Boko Haram members understood during this period that their activities were slowed or stopped by increased pressure and surveillance from Nigerian security forces. They expanded their operations and attracted members from neighbouring West African states. The insurgents' control of key areas in the Northeast, Nigeria's porous borders (of which only 4000 are secured by Nigerian security forces), the country's religious and linguistic homogeneity with its neighbours and ECOWAS' regional integration policy are some of the factors that facilitated recruitment. This phase spanned the years 2012 to 2020 and beyond. Participatory revenge is the sixth phase. This phase covers the years 2015 to present. In the Northeast, some resentful elements voluntarily join insurgency. They have joined forces to retaliate for the suffering they have endured. Members of a group often leave when things are not going well for them. Given the wide range of people

who have been involuntarily recruited, the question arises as to how easy it is to drop out. The Boko Haram uses a variety of tactics such as deception, blockade, threats, kidnapping and assassination to prevent people from leaving the group.

6.6. Sources of Financing, Weapons, Logistics and International Collaboration

Above all, the terrorists need funds for daily needs, the procurement of medical supplies, the recruitment of new members and the purchase of weapons. International charity organisations, the black market, theft, the kidnapping of prominent people for ransom and the help of local citizens are the main ways to raise these funds (Faluyi et al. 2019). The US authorities assumed that criminal activities, particularly kidnappings for ransom, were the source of Boko Haram's funding. According to another US source, Boko Haram militants utilised the porous Nigerian border in West Africa to smuggle significant sums of money into Nigeria (Rock 2016). According to Rock (2016), there are eight main ways in which Boko Haram raises money. The first is microfinance. This is done by providing financial loans to registered members so that they can run small businesses across Nigeria. In recent years, Boko Haram has given out loans ranging from N10,000 (\$7.8) to N1 million (\$750), according to the international charity organisation Mercy Corps.

Membership fees are another source. Muhammad Yusuf, the leader of Boko Haram, demanded N100 (\$0.02) and above in membership fees before 2009. According to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), even after Yusuf's death in 2009, membership fees were still being collected in 2012 (Financial Action Task Force 2016). Boko Haram also received money from sister organisations such as ISIS, Al Qaeda and other insurgent groups. Bank robberies are the fourth source. Over the course of three years, Boko Haram is said to have looted hundreds of banks and taken an estimated 2.4 billion naira (USD 2 million). The fifth source is the extortion of citizens through threats of ransom demands from specific targets via phone calls, text messages or personal visits (Hawthorn and Abbott 2015). Kidnapping, human trafficking and suspicion are other sources.

In addition, the abduction of the Chibok girls in 2013 and Dapchi girls in 2017 has brought enormous wealth to the organisation (Habila 2016; Ibrahim and Hoffman 2017). According to reports, the Nigerian government had to secure the release of some of them by paying billions of naira (Sesay 2023). In Nigeria, in addition to taxes, the terrorists made their money through weak and illegal financial enterprises such as Bureaux De Change (BDCs), remittances, point-of-sale (POS) machines and designated financial businesses and professions (DNFBPs) (NRA Forum 2022). The financing of Boko Haram has been linked to international financial flows. The recent arrest of Boko Haram sponsors in Dubai is a case in point. Six Nigerians have been sentenced to life and ten-year prison terms in the United Arab Emirates for supporting Boko Haram from Dubai, according to the Daily Trust newspaper. After first being arrested in 2017, the criminals received their sentences in November 2020. Saleh Yusuf Adamu and Surajo Abubakar Muhammad were sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in Abu Dhabi. Muhammad Ibrahim Isa, Bashir Ali Yusuf, Abdur Rahman Ado Musa and Ibrahim Ali Alhassan all received ten-year sentences. According to the publication, the defendants made \$782,000 (N1,173,000,000 billion), which was smuggled from Dubai to Nigeria between 2015 and 2016, in support of Boko Haram, as ruled by the court, although their accomplices defended their behaviour and claimed the transaction was legal (Sambo and Sule 2021b).

In December 2023, the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (2023) reported that terrorists in Nigeria are financed in twelve different ways: via points of sale (POS), automated teller machines (ATMs) for large cash withdrawals, online transactions, faith-based organisations, illicit arms deals, large cash movements by non-governmental organisations, kidnapping for ransom, kidnapping for ransom by “Yan Bindiga”, low-level legal activities, the use of proxies to obtain funds in the name of a known terrorist, and the use of subsidiaries for crowdfunding. Furthermore, according to the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (2023), terrorist financing must be adequately addressed in all counter-terrorism and peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria, and steps must be taken to prevent it.

Boko Haram has used many methods to obtain its weapons. Through attacks and raids on military installations in northern Nigeria and other security facilities where weapons arsenals are located, Boko Haram has been able to procure its weapons. In addition to attacks on security forces, Boko Haram groups have also mastered the use of explosives, landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Similarly, in addition to weapons seized from Nigerian security forces, Boko Haram also obtained their weapons through training in the manufacture of explosives and guns (Nowak and Gsell 2018). According to a report by Hawthorn and Abbott (2015), Boko Haram has a wide range of weapons, including mortars, assault rifles, anti-tank grenades, homemade bombs and grenades. In addition, the group has amassed a considerable collection of anti-aircraft weapons, armoured personnel carriers and tanks. The weapons were either purchased, improvised or stolen, the study continues. According to the assessment, most of the firearms were stocks of Eastern European and Russian goods stolen from barracks and police stations. Research claims that weapons purchased from illegal markets in Europe, Libya and West Africa are additional sources (Hawthorn and Abbott 2015).

After the fall of Ghaddafi in Libya, a fierce route for the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) was established in sub-Saharan Africa. This exacerbated the unstable security situation in the region and led to a series of conflicts between armed groups. Armed organisations on the continent have gained access to illicit weapons, which has led to security problems and clashes between armed groups in a number of African states. Thus, the Trans-Saharan route has proven to be the most difficult gap in the fight against the proliferation of small arms in Africa and the flow of weapons. Nigeria is thought to possess around 70% of the estimated 650 million small arms in Africa, 540 of which are believed to be in sub-Saharan Africa (Sule et al. 2020). In Northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram used this route to procure deadly weapons and commit their atrocious crimes against humanity (Sule et al. 2020).

According to another study, Nigerian handicrafts and arms production have increased dramatically since 2000. According to this study, a large number of terrorists have acquired the necessary skills to produce firearms, homemade bombs and various types of ammunition, including bullets (Nowak and Gsell 2018). Local production is the second phase of SALW proliferation in northern Nigeria. According to Sule et al. (2024), this trend increased bloodshed and made the war against armed violence in northern Nigeria, especially in the Northeast, appear unwinnable. The environment, resources and training required to manufacture weapons in large quantities were not available to the armed groups. Several groups were prompted by religious and ethnic conflicts in Northeast and central Nigeria to produce firearms locally (Nowak and Gsell 2018). According to Nowak and Gsell

(2018), locally manufactured firearms include handguns, revolvers, rifles, AK-47s, bazookas, homemade bombs, anti-aircraft guns and other similar weapons.

In Northeast Nigeria, indigenous weapons are mainly manufactured by blacksmiths. More than 60% of the approximately 7000 small arms and light weapons seized from criminal organisations in the northern states between 2016 and 2020 were manufactured locally, according to Conflict Armament Research (Kelvin-Alerechi 2021). A significant proportion of weapons used in northern Nigeria, especially in Northcentral, were illegally manufactured locally, according to the initial findings of the National Small Weaponry and Light Weapons Survey. Locally manufactured weapons were used in more than half of the crimes: 62% in Benue State and 69% in Plateau State. According to SBM, the percentage is 32% in Adamawa State, 48% in Borno State and 42% in Yobe State in the Northeast (Omilana 2020). According to SB Morgen Intelligence's (2020) assessment of small arms in northern Nigeria, a significant percentage of weapons are in use in Northcentral and Northeastern Nigeria.

Boko Haram's funding and intelligence comes from a variety of sources, as do its logistics, which include food, water, medical facilities and transportation between attack sites. The gang uses locals as a source of information and mobility by playing on their psyche and claiming they are supporting the Jihad. They also attack communities to procure food and water, storm hospitals and kidnap doctors and nurses. In addition, Boko Haram procures its logistics through kidnapping, bribery, theft, raids on towns and villages and through stealth by sending some of its members to mingle with the population and meet their demands. According to another report, Boko Haram procured its logistics by brainwashing host communities, paying Nigerian bureaucracy and security forces, as well as through extortion, threats, kidnappings, information gathering, disguises and other tactics (Sambo and Sule 2021b).

The cult collaborates internationally on financing, weapons procurement and logistics. On the global stage, recruits are used for transnationally coordinated attacks, logistics, harbouring and information gathering. Members of Boko Haram themselves acknowledged their membership and connections on an international level when it became known that they were linked to Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) (Thurston 2018). This shows that the organisation not only recruits globally, but also operates globally. The group derived "numerous benefits" from the cooperation. In order to teach foreign recruits on the borders of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, Boko Haram fighters from the Middle East and in distant North Africa worked with several experts in the manufacture of bombs and weapons and in the coordination of attacks. This enabled the group to learn how to manufacture weapons locally and develop evasive combat strategies.

6.7. Counterinsurgency Strategies of the Nigerian Government

Various measures have been taken to restore calm and normality in the region. The military counter-offensive was the first step towards restoring peace in Northeast Nigeria after the 2009 fighting between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces. During the raid, the Nigerian military arrested the leader of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, and handed him over to the police, who executed him without trial. The new leader of the rebel group was Abubakar Shekau. After moving the group to Sambisa Forest, he intensified the attacks (Higazi 2015). The Nigerian government responded with a large-scale military intervention. However, this tactic allowed the rebels to gain strategies for their survival. Guerrilla warfare was integrated into the insurgency. As a result, the military strategy was less successful.

The Nigerian government increased funding for the purchase of state-of-the-art weapons and equipment and consolidated the defence sector to fight the Boko Haram insurgency. As a result, the defence sector received over N968.127 billion (20%) of the total budget of N4.962 trillion in 2014. In addition, President Buhari allocated almost N15 trillion (\$9,333,549,000.00 billion) to the defence budget in the eight years from 2015 to 2023, which accounted for about 15% of the total annual budget during that period (Macrotrends 2024). Operations Restore Order I and II, Operation Boyona, Operation Zaman Lafiya, Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Deep Punch I and II were among the operations the Nigerian military carried out, even though they failed to put a stop to the militants (Mohammed 2021). For counterinsurgency operations, a Joint Task Force (JTF) consisting of various security specialists was subsequently formed (Sambo and Sule 2025).

After several months of failed attacks by the military, the Nigerian government took additional measures. These measures included the imposition of a state of emergency. In December 2011, more troops were sent to the affected areas when President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency for 15 towns in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states (Mohammed 2021). President Jonathan said the country's borders would be temporarily closed in the affected areas as he declared a state of emergency. After communications were disrupted, the militants were forced to relocate to the 160-kilometre Sambisa Forest, a vast forest reserve near Adamawa, Borno and Yobe (Egbejule 2019). The categorisation of the group as "terrorist" by the Nigerian government is an additional measure to combat the rebels. This was implemented after lengthy deliberations on the appropriateness and the implications of classifying the group as a terrorist organisation (Nwankpa 2021). Umoh (2020) claims that the Nigerian government supported troops from Nigeria, Chad, Niger Republic and Cameroon in the formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

The Nigerian government deployed an amnesty programme to combat the counterinsurgency and Boko Haram threat after a number of other tactics failed. This came after the Yar'adua amnesty campaign in 2007 against the militants in the Niger Delta proved successful. In addition to compensating the citizens of oil-producing states who had suffered significant environmental damage, pollution and other risks, the Yar'adua programme aimed at establishing long-term measures to protect oil production and economic productivity (Felbab-Brown 2018). Numerous soldiers involved in national and international programmes, including education, skills development, financial incentives and compensation, training and rehabilitation, were successfully disarmed by the programme. The Yar'adua Amnesty Programme was largely successful in curbing militancy in the Niger Delta (Adebayo and Matsilele 2019). This encouraged President Jonathan's administration to emulate his boss and implement a similar policy. A reward, a state pardon and the assurance of security and a respectable lifestyle were part of the amnesty programme, which also included discourse, disarmament and repentance (Sampson 2016).

After the deployment of various counterinsurgency operations in the Sahel proved less successful than expected, the affected member states decided to support regional and international cooperation. ECOWAS was the first organisation to pursue such a policy (Suzuki 2020). The "ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Strategy" (ECTS) was introduced by ECOWAS in 2013. After several other strategies failed, the Nigerian government launched an amnesty programme to combat the threat of Boko Haram and counterinsurgency. The amnesty programme includes demobilisation,

disarmament and repentance in addition to a prize, a state pardon and guarantees of security and a dignified life (Sampson 2016). In June 2013, a group of young men from Maiduguri in Borno State formed the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), sometimes referred to as “Kato da Gora” or “youth with sticks,” with the aim of dislodging Boko Haram insurgents who had settled in their own “districts” or neighbourhoods (Agbiboa 2020).

After realising that the use of force alone would not be sufficient to eliminate the threat posed by Boko Haram, the Nigerian government, under the direction of the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), opted for a non-military approach. This approach is known as Countering Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism (CVELT). A deradicalisation campaign was renamed Operation Safe Corridor (OSC). The aim of OSC was to rehabilitate and reintegrate Boko Haram rebels who had changed into their community. A number of Boko Haram members were disarmed, demobilised, deradicalised, rehabilitated and reintegrated in the Bulunkutu camp in Borno and the Malam Sidi camp in Gombe (Sambo and Sule 2025).

6.8. The Responses of the Local Communities

The so-called “Civilian JTF” was founded by the local population, especially in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. Known as “Kato da Gora” or “Youth with Sticks”, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was formed in June 2013 by a group of young men from Maiduguri in Borno State who wanted to drive out the Boko Haram extremists who had settled in their own “wards” or neighbourhoods (Centre for Civilians in Conflicts 2020). These young people saw their “comrades-in-arms” as a way to defend themselves against the common threat posed by Boko Haram and government forces. There were two main factors that led to the formation of the CJTF movement: the incompetent tactics of the Nigerian army, which, among other things, tortured and brutalised young people near Boko Haram hideouts, and the incessant attacks by members of Boko Haram, who continued to kill and attack the young people whenever they felt like it. As a result, the youths decided to fight back against the threat of the military and the militancy of Boko Haram (Agbiboa 2020).

In Northeast Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is applying a community-based counterinsurgency strategy. Community members in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states have adopted the strategy of forming local armed organisations to fight Boko Haram terrorism after witnessing the destruction and imminent eradication of host villages by Boko Haram terrorists. When the Boko Haram fighters invaded towns and communities in the Northeast, a group of young people, the CJTF, volunteered to fight them. However, the CJTF also performed a number of additional tasks, including leading the troops to avoid ambushes in a terrain that the CJTF knew better than the military personnel, the search of some suspected insurgent hideouts and the transmission of intelligence reports to the JTF and MNJTF (Kah 2017). Because the CJTF is familiar with the topography of the Northeast and can recognise Boko Haram members masquerading as locals, the Nigerian military occasionally allows them to participate in crucial operations. In counterinsurgency operations, the Nigerian armed forces can also benefit from the useful information provided by the CJTF (Mika’il and Sule 2019).

The Nigerian security forces use the CJTF, a group of armed locals fighting alongside Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, as a recruitment base. Military combat aides, semi-autonomous fighting formations and, most importantly, covert surveillance networks in Northeast Nigeria are just some of the roles that members of

the CJTF have taken on. They have provided some protection and local knowledge to the overstretched and underfunded armed personnel in the region. While the CJTF can be a useful counterinsurgency tool, it is important to address the immediate problems it poses and develop strategies for the long-term transition after the conflict (Bamidele 2017).

The establishment of the CJTF has essentially highlighted the inadequacies of counterinsurgency in Northeastern Nigeria and the inability of the Nigerian government to protect the defenceless population from terrorist attacks by armed groups (Okereke and Ibeh 2020). In an ideal world, civilians would not be allowed to take up arms or help the relevant authorities in armed fighting. This would expose them to the risk and danger of encountering an armed group with weapons comparable to those of the conventional military. However, the young people in Maiduguri and other cities in the Northeast felt compelled to intervene and defend themselves (Centre for Civilians in Conflicts 2020). The formation of the CJTF essentially shows that young people will defend themselves if the official security forces are ineffective. To protect themselves and their families from military attackers who went from house to house to track down young people in host communities and abduct some of them who may not have been Boko Haram members, the CJTF has also taken the decision to actively engage in counterinsurgency. These young people will never return. The soldiers who are supposed to defend the women also like to rape, molest and psychologically traumatise them. The establishment of a task force to support and guide the military in its efforts to track down and stop the activities of Boko Haram is a result of all these circumstances (Agbibo 2021).

The CJTF's deployment was successful because it assisted the military in combat operations, local language translation, topographical reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and identification of Boko Haram fighters in the communities. The effectiveness of the CJTF has been hampered by, among other things, the arrogance and deceit of some members. As a community-based security solution, the CJTF emphasises the importance of citizens as active participants in the war against terrorism and not just as defenceless victims (Ashindorbe et al. 2021). The change in the public's active and passive support for the military was the most important factor in this, as it improved the military's ability to fight, gather operational and strategic intelligence, and take proactive measures to combat terrorism. Therefore, the military and civilian sectors should work together to find a political solution that addresses some of Boko Haram's grievances alongside the use of force (Omenma and Hendricks 2018).

6.9. The International Response

After the Boko Haram insurgency quickly spread to nearby Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, the counterinsurgency grew in northeastern Nigeria and crossed Nigerian borders. As mentioned earlier, the Borno region and the Northeast were chosen by Boko Haram as part of a strategic and tactical plan to create escape routes and facilitate the cross-border flow of people, money and weapons. Nigeria has come to the realisation that a counterinsurgency that is limited to its own borders is untenable. To tackle the cross-border problem of Boko Haram, co-operation is needed (Seiyefa 2023). This explains why the multi-front response model outlined in this study suggests that Boko Haram is more than a radical religious movement, but a multi-criminal transnational cartel across Sahelian borders.

Given that the security framework in the Sahel is disintegrating, the creation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is particularly important for the four most affected states: Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. This force was founded in 2014 to combat the Boko Haram insurgency. The MNJTF, which has its headquarters in N'djamena, Chad, was formed with the help of troops from all the countries of the Lake Chad Basin. The command is located in Mora, Cameroon; Sector 2 is located in the city of Baga-Sola, Chad; Sector 3 is located in Baga, Nigeria; and Sector 4 is located in Diffa, Republic of Niger. However, each state has its headquarters in a specific operational area (Umoh 2020). The African Union (AU) has actively supported the MNJTF since 2016. Thanks to the MNJTF, the Chad Basin is now a militarily well-guarded area. The MNJTF has conducted a series of military operations against Boko Haram under the name "Operation Gama Aiki." These operations have been successful in stopping imminent attacks, preventing ambushes, intercepting illegally smuggled weapons, freeing hostages, bringing defectors under control, neutralising Boko Haram attacks and delivering humanitarian aid to the residents of the Lake Chad Basin who were stranded in extremely dangerous areas (Umoh 2020).

As a regional military counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency co-operation (CT-COIN) force in the Sahel, the MNJTF has achieved great success. The MNJTF brings together veteran soldiers from Chad, financially supported troops from Cameroon through the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and well-funded and experienced forces with significant resources from Nigeria. The LCBC initially supported the operations of the MNJTF by providing all necessary assistance and cooperation. Accordingly, the size of the MNJTF was increased in August 2015 by the Chief of Staff of the LCBC and Benin to about 11,150 troops, with 3750 from Nigeria, 3000 from Chad, 2650 from Cameroon, 1000 from Niger and 750 from Benin (Umoh 2020). Following the conclusion of the Second Regional Security Summit in Abuja, the Nigerian government increased the number of personnel to 8500 in May 2016 (Umoh 2020).

The MNJTF has recorded some notable victories. They freed 4690 hostages held by Boko Haram; killed 675 members of the group; arrested 566 members; destroyed 32 insurgent camps; forced 240 members to surrender in Baga-Sola, Chad; stopped the supply of arms, money and logistics to Boko Haram for cross-border operations; and ended the group's cross-border movements and activities (Umoh 2020). However, by relying too much on bilateral security agreements by collaborating with non-Sahelian nations and asking for too much support from regional organisations such as the AU and the UN, and by providing insufficient logistics, modern equipment and intelligence information for counterinsurgency operations, the members of the MNJTF have undermined the effectiveness of regional forces (Charbonneau 2021). According to Adela (2023), the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have contradictory institutional frameworks that severely limit the MNJTF's capacity and effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations in the Sahel. According to Adela (2023), the MNJTF's institutional capacity to effectively combat terrorism and insurgency in the Sahel is constrained by its sub-regional affiliation with other organisations.

The Lake Chad Basin states and the Republic of Benin have agreed to expand sub-regional security cooperation beyond individual military counter-terrorism operations to promote counterinsurgency in the Sahel. In 2012, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) decided to include counter-terrorism operations in the

mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in addition to the fight against cross-border crime (Dieng 2019). The MNJTF has also joined forces with the so-called “G5 Sahel Joint Force” The G5 member states Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad are all part of the G5 Joint Force; they are all affected by terrorism and cross-border crime. The African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) authorised the force in April 2017, and the UN Security Council (UNSC) strengthened it in June with Resolution 2359 (Cooke et al. 2017).

The MNJTF and the G5 Sahel Joint Force were created specifically to combat terrorism and other threats from violent armed groups in the sub-region and are offensive and counter-offensive forces. According to the Protocol on the Formation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the MNJTF and the G5 Joint Force are ad hoc collaborations, as they were not established by regional organisations or other processes that comprise the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) coalition (Prah 2023).

However, due to the dire security situation in the Sahel, the African Union (AU) PSC has supported the MNJTF and the G5 (Ismail and Kifle 2018). While France supports the G5 Joint Force, the United States is firmly behind the MNJTF. The United States and France have provided training to improve the military response to terrorism as well as financial assistance, capacity-building, and logistical support to the two combined armies. However, the ability of the MNJTF and the G5 Joint Force to conduct counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel was limited due to the lack of support and the fact that the external partners did not take local capacity-building into account (Dieng 2019).

The member states concerned opted for regional and international cooperation after the deployment of various counterinsurgency operations in the Sahel proved to be less successful than expected. The first organisation to implement such a plan was ECOWAS. ECOWAS presented the “ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Strategy” (ECTS) in 2013. The ECTS was adopted after the emergence of militant religious groups in the Sahel countries as the main operational framework for preventing and combating violence by armed groups in West Africa. The framework consists of 38 paragraphs and six sections. The main objective of the strategy is to enhance the operational capabilities of member states to successfully counter regional extremist threats. It provides a common framework for understanding the characteristics, dynamics, weaknesses and underlying causes of militancy in West Africa. The three main components of the plan are reconstruction, countermeasures and prevention. The protocol condemns and prohibits all forms of militancy. The early warning system must be strengthened and utilised, and all elements that contribute to or encourage the acts of militant organisations must be eliminated. Although they must co-operate with other members, each member state is responsible for implementing the plan (Aidoo 2018).

ECOWAS has established a special task force to oversee inter-state monitoring, counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency, and regional peace and security. To fulfil this purpose, a series of workshops, trainings, capacity-building and fundraising events have been conducted under the auspices of the ECTS. In addition, ECOWAS has established close counterinsurgency relations with the UN and the AU (Ateku and Owusu-Mensah 2023). Based on the Five-Year Priority Plan (2010–2015), ECOWAS worked intensively in 2016 on the implementation of the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and their Ammunition and other related materials at national, regional and state levels as part of its unrelenting efforts to promote

international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Through the ECOWAS Co-operation Framework, the National Early Warning and Response instrument (NEWRM), another important instrument, was created in 2016 (Vhumbunu 2023). However, the greatest challenges facing ECOWAS in counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency are the shortcomings of more powerful countries such as Nigeria and Cameroon, which have been severely affected by Boko Haram operations. (Akinyemi and Asiyambi 2023; Lenshie et al. 2023) Apart from the problem of finance, logistics and intelligence challenges, there are also issues of dual loyalty and communication strategy arising from the wide gap between Anglophones and Francophones.

The African Union's involvement in West African counterinsurgency is another example of international co-operation. Under Article 3(f) of the AU Constitution, the organisation is dedicated to counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency (CT-COIN) policies and procedures, which include the promotion of long-term peace, security and stability across the continent. Signed in Algeria in 1999 and ratified by 40 member states in December 2002, the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism formed the legal basis. The African CT-COIN Act was created in 2011 after the AU added an additional CT-COIN Protocol in 2004 to provide a further legal framework. In addition, the AU has created the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the PSC, the APSA, the ACSRT, the African Standby Force (ASF) and other CT-COIN protocols. This is particularly true in view of the increase in violent terrorist organisations in the Republic of Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. However, since some member states have not signed the convention and have largely failed to domesticate some of the frameworks, the African Union has failed to combat terrorism in the Sahel despite all these legal frameworks and efforts to combat terrorism in Africa (Tar and Ibobo-Eze 2022).

The development of a cooperative partnership between the African Union and regional organisations such as ECOWAS is a fundamental element of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Article 16 of the 2002 Protocol on the Establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) outlines this relationship. The 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) expanded and clarified this protocol. Both the AU and the regional entities were committed by the PSC and the 2008 MoU to act on regional disputes at different levels and with different powers, such as mediation, prevention and combat (Suzuki 2020). All regular ECOWAS counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency operations have been authorised by the AU. In addition, all counterinsurgency decisions taken at the special summit of ECOWAS and other regional entities in West Africa were approved by the AU PSC. In the conflict zones of Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Nigeria, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, among other West African nations, the AU contributed to peacebuilding and mediation (Suzuki 2020).

In Africa, the United Nations played a crucial role in the fight against terrorism and insurgency. After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in the United States on 11 September 2001, the United Nations created procedures, guidelines and special units for international counter-terrorism. In addition to the global framework, the UN created a series of preventive and counterinsurgency measures and adopted a regional approach to counter-terrorism. The UN Secretary-General announced his support for international counter-terrorism policy at the 2006 Summit. The four (4) pillars of UN CT operations were introduced and adopted throughout the event, making it a memorable occasion. Measures to combat the factors that contribute to the emergence and spread

of terrorism, counter-terrorism and prevention strategies, mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of Member States to prevent and combat terrorism, as well as measures to ensure the protection of human rights and counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism legislation are some of these pillars (Imade 2021).

Resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1535 (2004), which focused on counter-terrorism and COIN in Africa, paying particular attention to the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), were adopted by the UN Security Council to assist Africa in counter-terrorism. By 2009, the CTC and CTED had made several trips to West Africa as part of their counter-terrorism mission, which were intensified following the outbreak of Boko Haram terrorism in the Sahel region. The trips were organised in cooperation with national and international NGOs, ECOWAS and ACSRT. Strengthening cross-border security through workshops, capacity-building and early warning training is the main objective of the Committee's visit. Protection measures and the fight against persistent terrorism in West Africa, persuading vulnerable groups and concerned individuals not to use terrorism as a substitute for airing their grievances, weakening terrorists so that they do not have the courage to carry out their attacks, deterring other groups and interested parties from supplying terrorist groups with weapons, funds and logistics, building capacity to prevent terrorism, and protecting human rights in the fight against terrorism were the five Ds that formed the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategies in West Africa (Imade 2021).

7. Dimensions of Banditry in Northwest and Northcentral Nigeria

7.1. *The Root*

Banditry now joins the list of problematic non-state armed groups in Nigeria, including the Boko Haram groups, the Niger Delta militants in southern Nigeria and the separatist groups in the Southeast of the country. Banditry in Northwest Nigeria has its roots in the resource conflict between farmers and herdsmen. The conflict between farmers and herdsmen is another dimension of insecurity and has been a socioeconomic and political problem in Nigeria for many decades. The conflict has existed for many years but has become more pronounced in recent years, especially from 2001 to 2018 (Okoli and Abubakar 2021). Nigeria is an agrarian state with an estimated majority of the population living in rural areas and relying on peasant agriculture for sustenance. Nigeria also has a significant number of nomadic pastoralists spread across the different parts of the country. Some of these nomads are indigenous pastoralists who move from one state or region of the country to another in search of grazing land for their animals (Amnesty International 2018). The conflict between farmers and herdsmen is not a new security threat or a new phenomenon in Nigeria's history. In fact, the root of the conflict is believed to have spread since the 1970s when the Nigerian government discovered oil in commercial quantities, leading to a gradual and persistent neglect of agriculture in the country. To curb the anticipated conflict between the farmers and the herdsmen, about 417 grazing areas were made available to the farmers by the Northern Region government in 1965 (Moritz 2006).

Northwest Nigeria is the largest geopolitical zone in terms of population. Geographically, the zone lies almost entirely within the tropical western Sudan savannah ecoregion (see Figure 5). Culturally, most of the zone belongs to Hausaland, where the majority Hausa and Fulani population (mixed with other ethnic minority groups) live. The predominant religion in the region is Islam. The zone has a total population of 49 million people, who make up 23 percent of Nigeria's total population, according to the 2006 Census. Northwest Nigeria comprises seven states, namely Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. The zone occupies a land mass of about 214,395 km and lies between longitude 12°10' North and latitude 6°15' East. The Northwest shares many international borders with the Republic of Niger in the states of Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara (National Bureau of Statistics 2024a). More than 70% of the inhabitants of Northwestern Nigeria are farmers who live off subsistence agriculture. There is a sizable percentage of Fulani herdsmen, both indigenous, originating from the zone and other parts of the country, and foreign nomads who frequently visit Nigeria, especially on the eve of harvest of agricultural produce, in search of greener pastures (Amnesty International 2018). The region has deposits of solid minerals such as gold, zinc, uranium, aluminium and limestone, and coal. Although the region has economic potential, it has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. The school enrolment rate is the lowest in the Northwest; millions of people have no access to basic health care, clean water and vaccinations (International Crisis Group 2020).



Figure 5. Map of Nigeria showing Northwest and Northcentral regions affected by banditry and the major natural resources they offer. Source: Figure by authors.

The conflict between farmers and herders took on a new dimension with the resurgence of democracy, as some politicians politicised the conflict to achieve cheap political goals or secure their power by using the conflict to sell their ideas to voters (Okoli and Ugwu 2020). The conflict became even more pronounced and complicated from 2015 onwards after the successive transition of power from the ruling party to the opposition (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution 2017). The conflict between farmers and herders has become a problem for the Nigerian government that threatens to prevent the country from achieving its sustainable development goals in the near future, in particular the end of hunger and food security for all (Bukari et al. 2018). A 2018 report by Amnesty International showed that there were violent clashes between farmers and herders over access to resources, water and grazing land. The report attributed the crisis to the failure of the Nigerian government to fulfil its responsibility to protect the lives and property of its citizens.

In addition, the conflict, which was hitherto perceived as a resource conflict, has completely turned into banditry in Northwest Nigeria and some parts of Northcentral Nigeria. It is important to note that armed banditry in the zone started as a localised conflict between farmers and herdsmen but escalated into insurmountable violence which now poses a threat to national and regional security in Nigeria and some other West African countries (Moritz 2010). It is also important to note that between 2014 and 2019, rural banditry became so complex that it had serious economic and political consequences in the run-up to the 2019 General elections (Suleiman 2019). Rural banditry is understood as armed violence with the motive of criminal intent to steal, loot and squander the community's resources using either local weapons or sophisticated firearms. Economic factors are considered one of the drivers of banditry in this geopolitical zone (Okoli and Ugwu 2020). The most recent and frequent cases of armed violence and rural banditry are characterised by armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and village raids, as in the cases in Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara. Rural banditry in Northwest Nigeria has recently

reached a disturbing level, as it is very complex and cannot be solved by the military, perhaps because it occurs irregularly in an ungovernable space. These bandits often stay in fortified village environments and forests from which they plan, organise and carry out their criminal activities (Okoli 2019).

The latest story stems from the extrajudicial killing of the leader of a cattle herders' group in Zamfara State in April 2013 by a Hausa-dominated vigilante group accused of harbouring and supporting cattle rustlers. As a result, his supporters mobilised fighters and invited affiliated gangs to retaliate. The gang members grew in number, acquired weapons and expanded their connections in 2013. In 2016, they also attracted members from neighbouring countries such as Niger, Mali and Chad, mostly Tuareg with links to Sahelian rebels. Banditry has gradually evolved from simple and isolated roots to a complex, transnational security threat (Hussein et al. 1999).

Cattle rustling was initially the main crime associated with banditry, until the new dimension superficially linked the business of cattle rustling to opportunities for easy money through illegal mining, kidnapping for ransom, attacks on schools, abduction of schoolchildren for ransom, taxation of villagers and confiscation of food and other basic necessities. The Northwest of Nigeria now faces a criminal cartel comparable to the situation in Kenya, which Chief Justice Willy Mutunga described as a typical reflection of the American Al Capone in the 1920s (Lindijer 2016). It is estimated that there are about 30,000 bandits in Northwest Nigeria, spread across numerous groups, with the number of fighters ranging from 10 to over 1000. Alternatively, they may be loosely organised armed groups, reportedly comprising over 120 factions with between 28 and 2500 members. They are now deadlier than the well-known Boko Haram, which operates in Northeast Nigeria (Buba 2023). Sadiq and Ojewale (2023) emphasise that there are an estimated 30,000 bandits in Northwestern Nigeria, spread across numerous groups ranging in size from 10 to over 1000 fighters. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project, bandit attacks have been on the rise for over a decade in Northwest Nigeria, increasing by 731% between 2018 and 2022 (from 124 to 1031 incidents). Between 2010 and May 2023, there were about 13,485 deaths related to banditry (Sadiq and Ojewale 2023).

7.2. Drivers

There are numerous factors that are blamed for the emergence of conflict between farmers and herders. One of the main reasons for the armed violence in Northwest Nigeria is ungovernability—the remoteness and aridity of some places in the region where there is minimal or no governance. Added to this are the poor socioeconomic conditions in the geopolitical zone, which favour the precarious security situation in the region. Other reasons include ineffective agricultural policies, the low level of infrastructure, politics, socioeconomic conditions in the country, climatic changes, misutilisation of resources and media sentiments (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin 2017). Other factors include the nature of Nigeria's borders, which are porous; excessive concentration of infrastructure in urban centres; ineffective security measures and lack of political will to address the problem; ill-equipped and poorly motivated security personnel; a low level of intelligence gathering; and the alleged invisible hands of powerful supporters (Okoli 2019). An increased influx of foreign herdsmen, population explosion, land grabbing, poverty and economic hardship are the factors that have favoured rural banditry in the Northwest of Nigeria (Momale 2017). In addition, Momale (2017) has cited mismanagement and government failure in the northern states as other factors. He emphasises that the failure to initiate sound

economic and social policies that will have a direct positive impact on the lives of the rural poor in the areas of education, health, bridging income gaps and other areas is linked to the rise in rural banditry.

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen has escalated because the federal and state governments have failed to enact and enforce laws to improve security in the affected areas. The conflict is politicised, with some media houses and sections of the country viewing the matter as an attempt by one ethnic group, the Fulani, to dominate and suppress the other ethnic groups (Turner 2004). Incidentally, since the President himself is a Fulani by tribe, he also belongs to the Miyetti Allah, an association of pastoralist groups in Nigeria. The conflict is perceived as an affair of disguise because there are allegations or perceptions that Boko Haram and other criminals are posing as Fulani herdsmen and attacking local farming communities (Kwaghga 2018). The claim that Fulani herdsmen are attacking farmers cannot be true because the conflict has been going on since the 1980s, as Nwosu (2017) notes, and it has escalated especially since 1999 with the resurgence of democratic rule. Such divisive and ignorant inciting comments, sometimes even coming from so-called pedantic academic writings, distort the facts and fuel the embers of hatred and misjudgement in the Nigerian population.

COVID-19 is a driving force behind the escalating armed banditry in Northwestern Nigeria between 2020 and 2021. According to Salem Maddeb Hamrouni, a United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) rapporteur, the armed groups in Northwestern Nigeria became so active during the COVID-19 restrictions that the region appears to be separate from Nigeria in terms of security administration (Attah et al. 2021). They openly infiltrate communities, mostly on fast motorbikes, carrying AK-47s and other lethal weapons with which they attack their victims unquestioned and unchecked by the Nigerian security architecture. Between April and June 2020, armed bandits carried out more than 50 major attacks in the states of Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto (Akinwotu and Sanyinnawal 2020). In particular, on 26 May 2020, heavily armed bandits on motorbikes attacked the village of Sabon Birni, which caused more than 80 deaths and several injuries in one day (Campbell and McCaslin 2020). In fact, attacks similar to the Sabon Birni attack were reported to have occurred between April and July 2020, killing over 100 people (Akinwotu and Sanyinnawal 2020).

According to a report, over 30,000 refugees crossed the Nigerian border into the Republic of Niger between April and July 2020, most of them women and children. Despite the lockdown of international borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNHCR ensured that the refugees were allowed to enter the Republic of Niger. The refugees were brought to safety and provided with water, food, shelter, access to medical care and other basic amenities (Hamrouni 2020). Also on 30 May, 500 armed bandits on motorbikes with AK-47s attacked several villages in Katsina, killing about 18 villagers, including a traditional chief. They confiscated thousands of livestock, especially cattle. This was just part of their various intensified attacks in Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara while the land was kept under lock and key (Campbell and McCaslin 2020).

Banditry in the Northwest is becoming a profitable endeavour that generates money for the various parties involved in the network. This explains why the problem persists and escalates. Some security forces pass on important information to the bandits and receive part of the ransom in return (Owolabi 2021). In many cases, the security instructions or speeches indicated internal sabotage by some of their members. The bandits are also attacked by the Nigerian security forces,

but sometimes they ambush or counter-attack, allowing them to escape. All these activities are attributed to leaks from insiders in the security sector (SBM 2021). Another dimension of the problem is the connivance of local men and the communities with the bandits. Because of the way the illegal business is monetised, some locals have given up farming and other legal businesses to spy, provide the bandits with information and protect them (Rufa'I 2021).

The scramble for natural resources, especially gold and other mining commodities, has fuelled the banditry crisis in Northwestern Nigeria. Few observers understand that the bandit stronghold in Northwest Nigeria, Zamfara State, is a gold mining reserve. At first glance, the banditry looks like retaliation by the Fulanis in response to the plundering of their cattle. However, a closer look reveals that some armed groups or bandits are competing for control of the mining sites in the state. Illegal mining has been taking place in Zamfara State since 2010, with traditional rulers, politicians, warlords and foreign mining companies benefiting from the proceeds (International Crisis Group 2020). This situation forced the Nigerian government to restrict all mining activities in Zamfara State in 2020. A report funded by the European Union, and pointed out by Ogbonnaya (2021), emphasised that illegal mining in Northwestern Nigeria contributed greatly to the rise in banditry between 2018 and 2021. The report noted that a form of networking between some influential people in the society and foreign mining companies is fuelling criminality in the region. Apart from the gold reserves in Zamfara State, the Northwestern states have untapped mineral resources, including lead, tin, zinc, iron, limestone, coal and gypsum. Unfortunately, about 80% of the mining that takes place in the zone is illegal (Amani 2019).

Banditry has continued to spread and take on new dimensions, leading to its escalation and prolongation. This is due to internal conflicts between the bandit groups. Internal clashes between bandits are one of the new problems emanating from banditry in the Northwest. There are over 90 different splinter groups and bandit camps led by warlords spread across Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states (Rufa'I 2021). It should be noted that the groups are constantly networking and forming alliances. For example, Bello Turji, Dogo Gide, Damina, Baleri and other famous warlords operating in the Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara axis are known for their brutality and are feared by most other camps (Rufa'I 2021). However, as Rufa'I (2021) has observed, there have been internal divisions among the bandits for several years. In some cases, they engage each other in brutal fights in which many people are killed and injured. In other cases, they confiscate stolen livestock, seize kidnapped people after raiding other camps and demarcate an area they control. In one of the internal clashes, Damina, one of the most brutal and feared bandit leaders based in Katsina State, was killed by the Dogo Gide camp. The Daily Trust reports that Damina had a base in Kuyanbana forest in Dansadau emirate in Maru Local Government Area of the state (Umar 2021a). He is said to have once burnt alive a woman in one of the raided villages. Damina was killed in a clash with a rival group of Dogo Gide.

The causes of banditry in the Northwest are linked to the emergence and spread of small arms and light weapons. The ongoing increase in cases of cattle rustling and armed banditry can also be attributed to the problem of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) that have fallen into the hands of non-state actors. Sule et al. (2020) have argued that the proliferation of SALWs is the underlying reason why rural banditry is a sustained attack on the inhabitants of Northwestern Nigeria. In

2016, the United Nations raised the alarm that the stock of SALWs in West Africa has grown to about 500 million and that 350 million of them are in circulation in Nigeria alone. The *Daily Trust* reports that Damina had a base in Kuyanbana forest in Dansadau emirate in the Maru Local Government Area of the state (Umar 2021a). He is said to have once burnt alive a woman in one of the raided villages. Damina was killed in a clash with a rival group of Dogo Gide.

Northern Nigeria is one of the main destinations for illicit small arms and light weapons smuggled across the borders of Lagos, Cameroon, Niger and Chad into the northern parts of the country for illicit activities (Sule et al. 2020). This is the main cause of the spread of protracted conflicts in the north in recent years, including banditry. Banditry has been exacerbated by the rapid accumulation of small arms and light weapons in conflict-affected communities and regions, especially in the African Sahel, which has led to the proliferation of weapons due to the lack of successful disarmament programmes.

7.3. Manifestations

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen is one of the deadliest conflicts that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and property worth billions of naira in Nigeria for decades. For instance, a BBC report claimed that the crisis claimed over 50,000 lives between 2001 and 2004 alone. Of these deaths, over 35,000 were women and children. The economic cost of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in just four states—Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa and Plateau—has been estimated at around 14 billion dollars annually (Nwosu 2017). The struggle for grazing land and scarce resources has led to violent clashes for many years, with such frequency, intensity and geography that Amnesty International reports that 168 people were killed as a result of the conflict in January 2018 alone. The conflict took the form of the displacement of people from their enclaves in the Northcentral states of Nigeria. Farmers lost their lives and agricultural produce worth billions of naira in many states that have been affected by the conflict annually since 2001, when the problem intensified. On the other hand, pastoralists lost their livestock, worth billions of naira, and also their lives (Kenneth et al. 2018; Ajibo et al. 2018).

According to ACAPS Nigeria (2020), banditry in the country has cost 1586 lives and displaced 318,000 people. The current wave of banditry began in 2011 as a mild farmer–herder conflict in the Northwest but has intensified since 2017 with increasing destruction of lives and property. The violence has thus far affected 35 of the 92 local government areas in the four states of the Northwest. Banditry continues to escalate due to the activities of illegal gold mining in the region, which has also turned the armed groups against the Nigerian state. A March 2020 report indicates that more than 210,000 people have been displaced within the country, and more than 35,000 refugees have crossed Nigeria’s communal borders into the Republic of Niger (ACAPS Nigeria 2020). The most affected states are Kaduna, Zamfara and Katsina. Ungovernable areas such as the forests of Kamuku, Birnin Gwari, Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma and Sububu are used by the bandits as hideouts from which they launch attacks on the neighbouring communities (Olaniyan 2024). In the course of the attacks, they often killed livestock, killed people and raped women and children (Suleiman 2019).

More than 6319 people were killed between 2011 and 2018, while 190,340 people were displaced in Zamfara state alone. In Katsina, over 2000 people were killed and 500 communities destroyed, while over 33,000 people were displaced (Kola 2020).

Between January and December 2019 alone, 1058 people were killed in the states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Niger. In addition, more than 10,000 cattle were killed and 2688 hectares of farmland were lost due to displacement and forced migration. In Zamfara State alone, around 10,000 houses were destroyed and over 147,800 vehicles were lost to the bandits (Hamrouni 2020). In addition, 4000 people were displaced and thousands killed in Kaduna State between November 2019 and March 2020 (West Africa Network for Peace Building 2020). According to the data compiled by the ACLED project, bandit attacks were sporadic from 2010 to 2017, peaking in 2014 with 64 incidents. Since 2018, however, the number of robberies has risen steadily, from 124 incidents in 2018 to 1031 incidents in 2022. The ACLED estimate shows that between 2010 and 19 May 2023, a total of 13,485 deaths can be attributed to banditry. And the actual figures could be higher, as the ACLED data is based on information from local groups and media reports (Ojewale 2024a).

Since 2014, when banditry activities in the Northwest escalated significantly, kidnapping for ransom has become a prominent headline in the country's news. This does not even take into account the unreported and unnoticed cases that have occurred across the region. The pattern of kidnapping for ransom is that travellers or identified individuals are selectively chosen by the bandits and disappear after a few hours or days, and then a call is made to their family members demanding a certain amount of money in the millions (Aleyomi and Olajubu 2024). The negotiations take place without the family of the abductee informing the security forces for fear of the consequences from the bandits if they realise the security forces have become involved (Ambi 2021).

Kidnapping for ransom is a thriving criminal business in all parts of Nigeria today, but kidnappings in the Northwest surpass all other incidents (Sakariyau and Bello, 2024). The SB Morgen Intelligence Report shows that between June 2011 and March 2020, there were 767 cases of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. The report shows that an estimated \$18.34 million (N8.98 billion) was paid as ransom (Omotola and Oyewole 2024). There were several kidnapping cases in 2021. Notable kidnapping cases in 2021 were that of Government Secondary School, Kagara, Niger State (although this state is in the Northcentral part of the country, another region plagued by banditry and kidnapping); Government Girls School, Jangebe, Zamfara State; and Federal University of Forestry Mechanisation and Greenfield University, all in Kaduna State. In its report for the first quarter of 2021, the Kaduna State Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs reported that a total of 949 people were abducted between January and March 2021 (Oyewole and Omotola 2024).

One of the worst effects of banditry in the Northwest is the abduction of students from many schools in secondary and tertiary institutions. The breakdown of school abductions in the Northwest of Nigeria from 2020 to date shows that 1409 students and 17 teachers have been abducted and 16 killed since the beginning of the incident, including nine in Kaduna, three in Zamfara, one in Kebbi and three in Niger (a Northcentral state bordering many Northwestern states). At least one ransom of N220 million was paid during this period. The most affected states are Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna and Kebbi (SBM 2021). One informant observed that "school kidnappings are the new source of revenue which is now supporting banditry in Northwest Nigeria. The governments of the affected states pay ransoms that enable the various bandit groups to procure weapons, food and basic necessities and survive. What is reported in the media are only the big events. There are hundreds of cases

of abduction of students in small numbers like 2, 3 and 7 which are not reported by the media”.

The major school abductions in 2020 started with the armed abduction of the Kankara boys on 11 December 2020, when 303 students were abducted by bandits in Kankara Local Government in Katsina State. The Kankara school incident was followed by the abduction of 41 students in Kagara, Niger State, on 17 February 2021. On 26 February 2021, there was an abduction at the Government Girls Science Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State, with 317 victims recorded (Egobiambu 2021). The Voice of America (Obiezu 2021) reported that bandits laid siege to Bethel Baptist School on 4 July 2021 in Kaduna State and kidnapped 140 of 165 students. A similar scenario played out in Kebbi State in June 2021, where the bandits kidnapped 80 students. On 1 September 2021, armed men abducted 73 students from Government Day Secondary School Kaya in Zamfara State. School abductions by armed bandits led to the closure of 600 schools in northern Nigeria, most of them in Northwest Nigeria, a major setback for the already educationally underdeveloped region (Obiezu 2021). It has also deepened criminal activities and turned banditry into a lucrative money-making business for criminals. Between December 2020 and early September 2021, about 1000 school abductions took place.

7.4. Sources of Funding, Weapons, and Logistics

Illegal weapons are widespread in Northwest Nigeria. Bandit gangs control gold mines and use the gold to buy weapons from domestic and international arms dealers. While these factors have shaped the development of banditry, the arms trade and the permeability of borders are the key enabling factors. In general, the permeability of borders in West Africa favours the circulation of small arms and ammunition. The development of banditry is fuelled by unhindered access to illegal weapons in the informal economy. More importantly, the problem of arms trafficking is exacerbated by the permeability of borders, the lack of human and technological capacity for monitoring and the cross-border activities of armed groups (Ejiofor 2024). For example, the 1497 km border between Nigeria and Niger is inadequately monitored by the Nigerian Customs and Immigration Service. The permeability of these borders favours the spread of armed groups from the central Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) to Nigeria. This also coincided with the post-Gaddafi era, when weapons from Libya began to flow into the Sahel, destabilising the entire region (Ojewale 2024b).

A 2022 survey in hard-to-reach communities in Zamfara and Sokoto states found that payments for civil defence are one of the main sources of revenge actions which militias use to finance their operations. Journalists estimated that communities in 13 of Zamfara’s 14 local government areas had paid more than 538 million naira (about US\$711,080) in protection levies in less than a year (Buba 2023). The militias spend the money on more weapons, which are readily available on the region’s illegal arms market and are mainly smuggled in from the Sahel through porous borders. They also use the protection money to pay “informants”—civilian collaborators who go about their daily lives and provide information. When communities refuse to pay additional fees, they attack them with deadly weapons such as assault rifles and submachine guns, often killing many civilians in one attack (Buba 2023).

The weapons are secured by the bandits in the Northwest by using women as front men. Between December 2022 and February 2023, several female arms smugglers were arrested by the police in the Nigerian state of Zamfara for allegedly supplying

weapons and ammunition to bandits. This shows a trend of increasing involvement of women in the arms trade associated with banditry in the Northwestern states of Nigeria (Sadiq and Ojewale 2023). Several news reports on arms trafficking in Northwestern Nigeria between 2021 and 2023 mention women as arms traffickers. In October 2021, a 30-year-old woman who specialised in supplying arms and ammunition to bandits in Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Katsina and Niger states was arrested with 991 rounds of live AK-47 ammunition. She was smuggling the ammunition from the village of Dabagi in Sokoto State to a notorious bandit boss responsible for terror in Zamfara and its neighbouring states. And in March 2022, the Nigerian police arrested a 38-year-old suspect for smuggling arms and ammunition from Plateau State to various bandit camps in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. Eight locally made AK revolver weapons, sub-machine guns and 400 rounds of live AK-47 ammunition were recovered from the suspect (Agara 2024).

7.5. Strategies

Bandits have adopted three main strategies to populate their cells: economic incentives, coercion and social relations. They capitalise on the socioeconomic vulnerability of the rural population and the growing number of young people trapped in unemployment. They recruit new members by offering 5000 naira (just under USD 3) to vulnerable youths. They also place potential recruits under strict surveillance for a certain period of time (Idris et al. 2024).

Bandits also use victimisation of the civilian population, threats and coercion as genuine recruitment strategies. They often resort to violence as a means of recruitment, resource acquisition and control because they have fewer non-coercive strategies to achieve these goals (Uwakwe et al. 2023). By creating a climate of fear, the bandits make it difficult for community members to resist recruitment efforts. Finally, recruitment is aided by the principle of social bonding that governs relationships between community members and criminal groups in the larger society (Ojewale 2024c). Bandits recruit youths with whom they have been living in their local communities for many years. The new members are subjected to a socialisation process that goes against many of the values and norms of the general society. This socially binds them to the groups and alienates them from their home communities. The primary motivations for mass banditry vary and often overlap, fluctuating according to circumstances and conditions. Banditry manifests itself in the use of large-scale violence and is strongly characterised by a criminal economy. The main source of financing is the kidnapping of people for ransom (Ojo et al. 2023).

Bandits also carry out mass attacks to create an atmosphere of fear, as the attacks help the bandits to demonstrate their power and serve as a means of looting resources in vulnerable communities. Mass raids have become a strategy that makes bandits appear ruthless, forces people into constant submission and makes the civilian population more compliant and willing to co-operate with the bandits before, during and after attacks. Mass kidnappings also attract worldwide media coverage, which embarrasses the government and emboldens the bandits. Often, this publicity reveals the ineffectiveness of government capabilities and responses (Akinyetun 2021). Many bandits also believe that they are freedom fighters for the emancipation of the Fulani tribes in Northwest Nigeria. These groups carry out mass attacks as revenge for years of attacks on their relatives. This has its roots in long-standing grievances over land and resources as well as a sense of injustice among some bandits of Fulani origin

who claim that they are retaliating against perceived injustices committed against their tribe by Hausa ethnic groups (Abdullahi and Mukhtar 2022).

The militias sent letters to village heads demanding payment and leaving a phone number to contact them if the villagers were willing to pay. The village leaders called their council and peace committee members together to determine how much each inhabitant should contribute. The system was similar to the way rural communities in pre-colonial Nigeria paid taxes and levies on crops and livestock to traditional leaders. However, unlike normal taxation, the protection payment did not imply support for the militias. Many residents tried to avoid direct involvement while abiding by the terms of the agreement. Nor were the militias motivated by a desire to rule over the communities. Rather than advancing a political or ideological cause, their main goal was to enrich themselves. This strategy led to less violence in the first few months and encouraged more communities to pay the protection levies. Gradually, however, the militias began to demand more payments, and more militia groups (competing with each other) emerged, using violence to demand protection from their attacks. As a result, violence against the civilian population increased, including rising casualties, sexual violence, population displacement, destruction of assets, and economic disruption (Buba 2023).

While many communities initially paid the militias as a self-protection strategy, over time this turned into extortion as the militias became predatory. They now demand more money than originally agreed and engage in criminal behaviour. They forced villagers to pay additional “harvest fees”, buy fertiliser or work on the militias’ farms before they could cultivate their land (Buba 2023).

7.6. Implications

The most vexing problem is the rampant killings by the bandits. It is reported (Ogbonnaya 2021) that between 2011 and 2020, over 3600 people were abducted in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states. The abduction process was violent. For example, 6319 people were killed in Zamfara State alone during the reporting period (2011–2020), including women and children. A similar figure is evident in the states of Kaduna and Katsina, two states where the kidnapping business takes a heavy toll (Ogbonnaya 2021). According to the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database (Nextier SPD 2022), about 2334 people died in 935 bandit attacks in 2021. The reports from 2022 show the escalating situation of banditry in the country. Between January 2021 and August, 1000 schoolchildren were abducted for ransom. From January to March 2022, 269 attacks were reported in which 427 people were killed. The states with a high number of killings are Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna. The increasing cases of banditry are escalating the number of killings and the policy of regional security threats in the country (Sule et al. 2022). A report from the first quarter of 2022, based on regional deaths, shows that the Northwest recorded the highest number of banditry-related killings at 754 (43.26%) of the total of 1743 fatalities. The impact of their actions was devastating; by December 2022, 1,087,875 people in rural communities had been displaced. In addition, some 13,485 deaths were attributed to banditry between 2010 and May 2023 (Ojewale 2024b).

Banditry led to high ransoms being paid for kidnappings. The SBM report (2021) estimates that families and relatives of victims have paid ransoms of between 1000 and 150,000 dollars. It is worrying to note that the kidnappers or bandits escaped with the ransoms, while the security agencies always claimed that the rescue of the victims was achieved without the payment of ransoms. Rufa’I (2021) further stated

that families, friends, enemies and unexpected persons can tip off the bandits on a target or locate a rich man for kidnap for ransom. In some cases, one group collects the ransom after the kidnapping and hands the victim over to another group to renegotiate the ransom. In this context, several ransoms are demanded from one victim. Shockingly, it is not unheard of for someone to be kidnapped and later find out that his or her family members or friends are behind the kidnapping (Rufa'I 2021). Data on the criminal economy of ransom payments in Nigeria reveals a complex challenge. Between 2011 and April 2020, Nigerians lost at least \$18.34 million in payments made to secure the release of their family members from bandits. In April 2021, the Zamfara government announced that bandits collected N970,000,000 as ransoms from victims' families between 2011 and 2019. The figure is likely higher than reported, as ransom payments are negotiated in secret and not every payment is reported (Ogunnubi and Idowu 2024).

In the school kidnappings, some students died in captivity, while others were killed by the gunmen or escaped with fatal wounds (AFP 2021). The school abductions in Northwest Nigeria have further exacerbated the collapsing security architecture in the country and exacerbated the education crisis in a country where one in five children in the world is already out of school. Since December 2021, 10 mass abductions have been reported, with many smaller incidents going unreported. In all cases, parents and governments are blackmailed before students are released (Iwara 2021). UNICEF stated that attacks on schools and abductions deprive children in the Northwest and other parts of the North of their right to education (Kaalu 2021). The school abductions did not stop at primary and secondary schools, but also extended to tertiary institutions. On 20 April 2021, 23 students from Greenfield University in Kaduna State were kidnapped and their parents were asked to pay a ransom of N800 million. The students were later released on 29 May 2021 after a payment of N100 million was made (Akinwotu 2021). Similarly, on 29 November 2020, bandits attacked Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria and abducted one Dr Ibrahim Bako, a lecturer in the Department of Physiology. Before he regained his freedom, a ransom of an undisclosed amount was paid. On 2 November 2021, another kidnapping occurred at a university, this time in the country's capital, at the University of Abuja, where a professor and his three children were kidnapped for ransom (Obiezu 2021).

Illegal mining in the Northwest has contributed to the underdevelopment of the region and Nigeria in general. According to the Minister of Mines and Steel Development, Abubakar Bawa Bwari, Nigeria lost N353 billion (\$900 million) between 2016 and 2018 due to the activities of illegal miners, smuggling syndicates and banditry (Ogbonnaya 2021). Illegal mining is directly linked to the increase in rural banditry in Northwest Nigeria, particularly in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states, where between 2 and 3600 people were kidnapped between 2011 and 2019. In Zamfara State alone, about 6319 people, including women and children, were killed between June 2011 and May 2019, and it was observed that most areas of attacks fall within the enclaves of the mining zone. This trend prompted the Nigerian government to ban all forms of gold mining in Zamfara State in April 2019 (Ogbonnaya 2021).

The loss of arable land remains one of the emerging problems in the Northwestern region, largely as a direct effect of banditry. Consequently, a food security crisis is inevitable, as farmers are unable to grow food on a large scale. The geopolitical zone remains one of the most fertile and extensive grain- and food-growing regions in

the country. Around 80% of the population is involved in agriculture. However, when banditry became pervasive in 2015 and beyond, farmers began to abandon their farmland for fear of being kidnapped or murdered. In the state of Zamfara, over 13,000 hectares of farmland were destroyed or made inaccessible by farmers as a result of bandit attacks (International Crisis Group 2020). In 2019, the Sokoto State Disaster Management Authority reported that 21,316 hectares of farmland in five communities were uncultivated in October of that year and around 80,000 farmers stayed away from farming for fear of bandit attacks (Amani 2019). From 2011 to 2019, around 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were stolen in Zamfara state alone (International Crisis Group 2020). As a result, most farmers in the affected region were forced off their farms, leading to food shortages across Nigeria, driving food prices in the country to astronomical levels never before seen in the country's history and exacerbating malnutrition, especially among children.

The consequences of increased bandit attacks in Northwest Nigeria culminated in the displacement of many people from the affected communities. A joint assessment report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons from September 2019 estimates that over 210,354 people have been displaced from 171 towns and villages in Northwest Nigeria. Of the total number of displaced people during this period, 144,996 were from Zamfara State, 35,941 from Sokoto and 21,497 from Katsina (International Crisis Group 2020). In addition, around 77,000 people crossed the Nigerian border into the Republic of Niger between April 2020 and March 2021 (Hamrouni 2021). In March 2020, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported 105,463 displaced persons in Sokoto State, according to the International Crisis Group (2020). Due to this number, the facilities in the IDP camps were inadequate. As a result, conditions in the IDP camps were characterised by inadequate food, poor shelter, poor health and poor sanitation (Idris 2021). Apart from the conditions in the IDP camps, the displacement is now leading to an international border-crossing crisis that is unprecedented in this zone (Oladipupo 2021).

Rufa'i (2021) claims that bandits have displaced hundreds of towns and villages in Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states, leading to displacement and humanitarian crises. The crisis is now affecting the provision of social amenities for the Northwest geopolitical zone. Resources that were intended for the provision of quality educational facilities and good health care as well as road construction have been diverted to security control. In April 2019, the Zamfara state government reported that "over 2000 kilometres of roads, thousands of classrooms and 716 health centres" built between 2012 and 2019 could not be used "due to insecurity" (International Crisis Group 2020).

Terrorist attacks have increased dramatically in recent years, mainly due to the activities of bandits, particularly in Northwest Nigeria. Amnesty International reports that bandits killed at least 1126 villagers in Northwest Nigeria in 2020 and abducted around 380 (Amnesty International 2021). In October 2021 alone, according to a report by SBM (2021), 636 Nigerians were killed by gunmen, affecting 33 states. The number was lower than in September, when 663 people were killed. Although the report includes those killed by Boko Haram in the Northeast, those killed by bandits in the Northwest and those killed by security forces, 258 (38.91%) of the total 663 were killed in the Northwest. The Kaduna State Government reported that between August and September 2021, about 830 people were killed by bandits, 732

were kidnapped, 1018 cattle were stolen and 77 cases of destruction of farmlands were reported (Idris 2021).

Furthermore, the takeover and control of territories in Northwest Nigeria remain important issues in the current Nigerian security discourse. It is evident that some bandit groups have taken full control of some villages and imposed levies by removing district chiefs and appointing new chiefs who are loyal to them (Umar 2021b). A member of the State House of Assembly representing Sabon Birni in Sokoto reported on 9 November 2021 that his constituents were still paying taxes to bandits (Umar 2021a). The member added that Sabon Birni residents have to pay taxes before going to their farms or transporting their farm produce home. The member disclosed that the bandits collected about N500,000 to N1,000,000 up to N4,000,000 from more than 20 towns in the local governments and about 10 of them had already paid (Idris 2021). In another development, the bandits were involved in the removal and appointment of district heads, who were tasked with collecting taxes for them in Sokoto villages and towns (Hassan-Wuyo 2021). In a similar usurpation of the power of government, Dogo Gide banned the use of drugs and other intoxicants in Dansadaw Emirate in Maru Local Government in Zamfara State (Umar 2021b). In Kaduna State, Baleri declared the Birnin Gwari axis as his domain and area of control and began imposing taxes as he sees fit (Umar 2021b). These warlords and gang leaders are gradually taking over Nigerian authority and undermining the sovereignty and authority of the Nigerian government. Ungoverned spaces are emerging and the inhabitants of the affected towns and villages feel that there is virtually no government anymore. This is an ominous and suicidal development that must be reversed immediately by the authorities concerned.

This escalation has significant implications for Nigeria's cross-border trade and agribusiness with neighbouring countries such as Niger and Benin. The Jibia border, which was known as a vibrant trading centre, has seen a sharp decline in activities. Importers and exporters have completely shunned this area, which has led to a significant drop in border revenue, as reported by the Nigeria Customs Service. This decline can be attributed to the constant attacks by bandits in the border communities. The once thriving agricultural sector in Jibia, with many large-scale farmers exporting their produce to various parts of Africa, including Niger, Mali and Benin, has also been hit hard. Many farmers have abandoned their farms and relocated due to the escalating incidents (Onota et al. 2024). Bandit attacks, which are widely reported in the media, also have a significant political impact. Leading politicians and political parties are judged on how they handle the situation, which affects elections and public approval ratings. A recent Afrobarometer survey confirmed that an overwhelming majority of respondents (84 percent) consider kidnapping to be a serious problem in their country (Shola 2022).

7.7. Nigeria's Government Responses

The Nigerian government has taken some notable measures at various levels, especially at the federal and state levels, to combat banditry in the Northwest of Nigeria. Contrary to reports in the media that no efforts have been made in this direction, there are several approaches with intensified processes that are being implemented to combat the menace. However, the vexing aspect of the phenomenon of banditry in Northwest Nigeria is that it escalated from 2020 to 2021. This raised the question of the effectiveness of the measures and responses. This section of the

book examines the responses and their level of effectiveness, as well as the challenges that make it possible to propose an alternative solution (Sambo and Sule 2024).

One of the main responses is military operations. Since 2011, when rural banditry became pervasive in the Northwest, the Nigerian government has constantly deployed security forces to combat the attacks and restore peace. However, it can be observed that most military operations and offensives have failed to tackle the problem; instead, the operations pose other challenges. In 2019, bandit attacks increased tremendously, prompting the Nigerian security agencies to launch various offensives, including Operation Harbin Kunama, Operation Diran Mikiya and Operation Puff Adder (Adenuga 2024). The aim of these operations is to comb through the forests and the bandits' hideouts. Within a short period of time, the military has reported considerable success in destroying bandit hideouts and enclaves in the forests (Sambo and Sule 2021b). However, insufficient information and a lack of professionalism jeopardised the expected success of the operations. The bandits managed to obtain reliable and secret information about the plan of action of the operations and to clear their hideouts. The offensives only hit a few of the bandits' hideouts, weapons, logistics and people (Rufa'I 2021).

The host communities also reported brutality, torture, hostility and unprofessional and unethical behaviour by security personnel. The locals sometimes complained of rape, extortion, extreme punishment and unfriendly behaviour by the military. The military, in turn, expressed frustration with the locals for hoarding information that could lead to important successes. In some cases, the military pointed to traditional rulers and locals as informants of the bandits who were sabotaging their operations (International Crisis Group 2020). To explore more practical ways to combat banditry, in June 2020, the Nigerian President instructed the country's armed forces chiefs to go to the Northwest themselves to tackle the problem. The presence of the armed forces chiefs helped to curb bandit attacks during this period (Sambo and Sule 2021a).

The Nigerian military responded to the increase in bandit attacks in 2020 with a tactical change due to an air raid. The airstrike was intensified between June and July 2020 and succeeded in killing hundreds of bandits, destroying camps, procuring weapons and disrupting logistics during this period. Over 300 hundred bandits were reportedly killed and more than 20 camps destroyed by the airstrike (Al Jazeera Africa 2020). The main problem with the airstrikes is that the bandits use the abducted people and host communities as shields, so the airstrikes had to be careful with the collateral damage. In some cases where the bandits' hideouts are located, the intelligence reports of the many innocents abducted people that could potentially be victimised deterred the military from acting, which gave the bandits the opportunity to evade the attack for the duration of the operation. In addition, the Nigerian government's hands were tied under the guise of human rights and other alibis, which prevented the military from effectively and decisively ending the operation. The newly acquired Super Tucano jets from the USA arrived with the caveat that they could not be used in the bandit-infested areas in the Northwest, as the bandits were not officially categorised as terrorists until 2022. Fear of the reactions of human rights organisations such as Amnesty International has made the Nigerian government cautious in its air strikes. It is also believed that the raids have driven the bandits out of the conflict areas into peaceful areas where they continue their violence, allowing banditry to spread further (Nextier SPD 2021).

The security sector budget increased significantly from 2013 to 2021 as the nefarious monster of insecurity permeated all parts of the country. The Nigerian

government has since spent trillions of Naira on the security sector to procure firearms, operate logistics, pay allowances and other entitlements of the security forces and other costs associated with the security situation. The Nigerian defence budget has risen sharply in recent years. The *SIPRI Year Book* (2020) reports that Nigerian military expenditure has risen steadily from 2016 to the present day: \$2.07 billion in 2015, \$1.72 billion in 2016, \$1.62 billion in 2017, \$2.04 billion in 2018, \$1.86 billion in 2019, \$2.04 in 2020 and \$2.62 in 2021—the highest since 1960. The above military spending, compared to less than \$1 billion from 2013 to 1960, shows how serious the security situation in the country has become. State governments in the Northwest have also made huge financial commitments in the fight against banditry in the region. For example, the Zamfara State Government alone has spent over N17 billion in the last 5 years to combat insecurity (Suleiman 2019).

In 2017, the Nigerian government introduced the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Other Forms of Terrorism. The programme was introduced under the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) with four main suggestions for collaboration. These include strengthening Nigerian institutions to prevent violent extremism, strengthening the rule of law and human rights, building community engagement and resilience, and integrating strategic communication to prevent violent extremism. The project has secured over 366 convictions and released around 882 alleged victims into amnesty and deradicalisation (Counter Extremism Project 2021). Many bandits surrendered and entered into dialogue, but later returned to their crimes because the Nigerian government had not fulfilled its part of the bargain. Therefore, politics has less impact on the fight against banditry (Ogundipe 2019). Linked to the above policy is the amnesty programme. Following the success of the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta, where fighters were rehabilitated and reintegrated, leading to a calm environment that was previously volatile under the Yar'adua regime, the amnesty programme is being replicated in the Northeast by Boko Haram and banditry in the Northwest (Duerksen 2021). The respective states in the zone, including Zamfara and Katsina, have offered dialogue and amnesty to the bandits with the mediation of the Federal Government. The bandits were promised an incentive to lay down their arms; free education; and a rehabilitation programme to ensure that they can live peacefully in the areas again.

The amnesty programme involved civil societies, community members, watchdogs, traditional rulers, religious clerics and other stakeholders (West Africa Network for Peace Building 2020). The initiative was a great success in its heyday: hundreds of bandits surrendered their weapons and agreed to a ceasefire. The number of attacks fell sharply during this time. However, as the bandit leaders revealed in media interviews, months after the ceasefire was accepted, the governments, both federal and state, failed to fulfil their part of the bargain, resulting in the bandits continuing their attacks in the zone (Brenner 2021). This can be attributed to the government's insincerity and nonchalant attitude when it comes to combating the threat of banditry, as expected. The result is increased attacks by the bandits, with a new dimension of school abductions leading to ransom payments and an unexpected humanitarian crisis during the time in which the government fails to respond (Onyia et al. 2024). But other states see it differently. While Katsina and Zamfara were busy negotiating an amnesty with the bandits, the Kaduna State government has jettisoned all forms of dialogue and amnesty with the bandits and insisted on an all-out crackdown and attack on the criminals.

It was also determined that the Federal Government and Katsina and Zamfara states are paying ransom for the kidnapped citizens. The Kaduna State Government insisted that it will never pay and that resistance to payment will deter the bandits from kidnapping. The state argues that the payment of ransom has not stopped the kidnappings since 2014, and it will never be the solution. Some families of the abductees must sacrifice themselves to dissuade the bandits from kidnapping, according to the state (Oluwafemi 2021). Unfortunately, resistance to ransom payment has resulted in increased bandit attacks, killings, kidnappings and displacements in the state and other neighbouring states in the Northwest, as reported by SBM (2021).

Other strategies introduced by the government included the linking of all mobile SIM cards to the National Identification Number (NIN) introduced by the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy. All Nigerians using mobile SIM cards were instructed to link their SIM cards to the NIN to prevent the activities of criminals in various parts of the country, especially in the Northwest where bandits used mobile phones to communicate with the families of kidnap victims and negotiate ransom (Ogunyemi 2021). Unfortunately, the spate of killings and kidnappings for ransom and the kidnapping of the schools continued unabated despite the blockade of communications. The bandits continue to negotiate with the families of the abductees through other states where they have access to the network, and even in the affected states where the network is down, the network can be accessed from time to time in some places. The bandits also communicate through third parties and other agents to get their ransom (Ogunyemi 2021). The policy is not working because the blockade is inefficient and the Nigerian social and political system is corrupt. In his remarks, the Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Professor Isa Ali Pantami, stated that the introduction of linking NINs to SIM cards has drastically reduced banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest of Nigeria. Earlier, the Minister had pointed out that 9.4 million worth of unregistered SIM cards had been discovered in the country, and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) had been called into action to deactivate all defaulters who have been given a timeframe to register. This has led to the deactivation of millions of SIM cards believed to have been used for fraudulent activities such as terrorism and kidnapping (Ogunyemi 2021).

However, the biggest challenge to the above policy is sabotage and other influencing factors outside the communications sector. For instance, from 2019 to 2021, when the linking of NINs to SIM cards was introduced, banditry in the Northwest increased tremendously, especially in 2021 when the SBM (2021) stated that kidnappings and school abductions in 2021 reached a new high that has not been seen since 2011: more than 1000 abducted students, more than 1000 individual abductions, and about 1000 people killed by the bandits, all in 2021 from January to October alone. This means that the communication policy to combat banditry can only be successful if there is cross-sectoral cooperation. In a similar move by the same ministry in September 2021, a mobile network blackout was imposed in Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states to block all criminal communication by bandits using cell phones for ransom. The disruption of mobile communication had a positive outcome as, within this period, convincing reports indicate that the bandits were successfully dealt with, resulting in the killing of many people and the destruction of several camps (Owolabi 2021).

The Nigerian government's efforts were not limited to domestic measures. International cooperation was developed to counter banditry and other violent armed groups. In April 2018, Nigeria entered into a partnership with the European Union (EU), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Executive Directorate (CTED), which eventually led to the launch of the EU–Nigeria–UNODC–CTED Partnership Project III in support of law enforcement against terrorism and violent extremism in Nigeria. The project served to support the 2017 National Action Plan to Counter Violence in Nigeria. The collaboration between the US and Nigeria was forged in 2013, which subsequently led to the approval of the sale of \$600 million (N964,263,432,000.00 billion) worth of Super Tucano jets to counter violence in Nigeria (Counter Extremism Project 2021). Unfortunately, the condition for the release of the jets is that they will not be used to fight banditry in the Northwest, which became the new Achilles heel of insecurity in Nigerian territory in 2021 when the jets were delivered.

In addition, on 29 August 2018 in Abuja, Nigeria, British Prime Minister Theresa May pledged to support Nigeria with military training and equipment to combat the violence. In April 2020, Nigeria also spearheaded the expansion of regional security cooperation. The country announced that the activities of the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MJTF) are now being extended to banditry within the borders of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad (Counter Extremism Project 2021). As part of security co-operation, foreign governments have provided millions of dollars to the Nigerian government in recent years to combat violence in the country. But the issues of accountability and transparency have discouraged donations, especially considering that violence is on the rise and spreading across the country and in light of the alleged human rights violations that continue to tarnish the reputation of Nigerian security personnel.

The decisive step was taken by the Nigerian government in January 2022 to declare bandits as terrorists, an effort that has been perceived as a huge step towards suppressing their criminal activities. The Nigerian government has been harshly criticised by human rights organisations and other countries around the world, such as the US and the EU, for violating human rights and brutally abusing its security forces. This censorship has made it difficult for the country to tackle terrorists and bandits and other politicised security threats across the country (Sule et al. 2022). While the country can procure weapons, the use of these weapons is strictly prohibited. For example, the Super Tucano aircraft acquired by the US in 2021 were not allowed to be used to fight the bandits and other armed groups, as agreed in the purchase contracts. However, the declaration of the bandits as terrorists now allows the Nigerian government to use the Super Tucano and other weapons. The declaration of the bandits as terrorists helped immensely in the fight against banditry as the Nigerian government utilised these sophisticated weapons. Within the first three weeks, the bandits' enclaves in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Sokoto were destroyed, their weapons burnt and their logistics dispersed (Nextier SPD 2022). This led to a drastic decrease in banditry from 103 attacks in January to 63 attacks in March 2022 and from 841 deaths in January to 475 in February and 427 in March (Akpan 2022). The declaration will help to work with international organisations, nation states and global actors to secure information and support against the bandits.

Another development in the fight against bandits is the announcement of the arming of civilians by the Benue and Zamfara state governments. When the states realised that the attacks were on the increase and there were still casualties occurring

despite all the measures taken, they made the tough decision to allow their people to arm themselves in self-defence. The Zamfara State Government went a step further and indicated its willingness to facilitate the procurement of arms for residents to defend themselves against the bandits. A press statement signed and issued by the state's Information Commissioner, Ibrahim Magaji Dosara, said that the Commissioner of Police had been instructed to issue gun licences to those who were authorised to carry weapons (David et al. 2022). But several legal experts attacked the decision as unconstitutional and a dangerous move that will be worse than banditry if care is not taken. Many security experts and analysts also warned against this act, as it jeopardises and threatens national security. Whether the Zamfara State and Benue State governments will implement this policy or exercise caution is a matter of constitutional interpretation and political will that only time can reveal. Despite all the measures, banditry continues in Nigeria, which means that the aforementioned approaches are inadequate (Alumona and Onwuanabile 2024).

8. Reflections on Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB)

8.1. Genesis

The Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) is a new movement in Nigeria that originated in the Southeast and is reminiscent of the Biafran secessionist efforts that were bitterly fought during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). Biafra’s attempt to secede during the Civil War failed and ended in a fiasco after it was defeated by Nigerian troops. The IPOB movement, which originated in the Southeast, claims to have reactivated its Biafra course in present-day Nigeria. The Southeast, which includes the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, is the smallest of the six geopolitical zones in terms of land mass, population and states. With a population of 36 million people, based on the 2006 census, it occupies a total area of about 29,388 km² (11,347 sq mi). This area accounts for about 8.5% of Nigeria’s total land area, as illustrated in Figure 6. The dominant ethnic group in the Southeast is the Igbo, followed by other minorities such as Ezaa, Idoma, Igala, Ikwo, Izi and Mgbo (National Bureau of Statistics 2024a). The main economic pillar of the Southeast is agriculture, especially palm oil production, cocoa, timber, rubber, kola nuts, commercial activities, fishing, trade and oil production, with some states being labelled as oil producers. The Southeast of Nigeria, closer to the Bay of Bonny and the riverine areas of the delta, has maintained external relations with Europe and other African societies since the 14th century in the wake of early Christian missionaries, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and other commercial activities in the hinterland (Orji 2010).

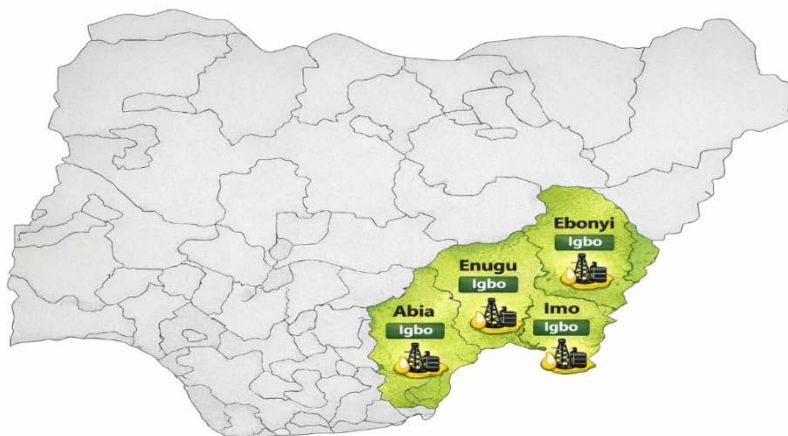


Figure 6. A map of Nigeria showing the Southeast geopolitical zone where the activities of IPOB secessionists are dominant. The map highlights the commercial viability of the zone, its high population density, and its significance in the socioeconomic landscape of Nigeria. Source: Figure by authors.

To place the IPOB movement in its proper context, it is important to understand the background of the Biafran movement in Nigeria and the consequences that are likely to keep the hope of the movement alive more than 50 years after the first

attempt. As mentioned earlier, the Nigerian state was a violent imposition of British colonial interests without taking into account the interests and peculiarities of the amalgamated societies. These heterogeneous and diverse societies brought together by Britain in 1914 were neither consulted nor consented to, nor favoured in any way except for colonial exploitation by Britain (Falola 2014). Thus, the regional nationalists fought for political independence, fragmented and influenced by ethnic, regional and other social antagonisms rather than national interests. Under these circumstances, political independence was fought for and won in a disjointed and fractured unity. After political independence, national leaders prioritised regional development and ethnic politics over national cohesion. Not long after the era of freedom, national leaders failed to forge a consensus of national spirit and unity and instead retreated into ethnic and regional struggles (Miles 1994). However, a key factor fuelling the disunity is the regional and ethnic imbalance. The north is larger than the western or eastern regions in terms of geography, population and power advantage after independence. This showed the dominance as perceived by some parts of the federation immediately after political independence (Nnoli 1988).

One of the disaffected regions is the East, which during political independence comprised the dominant Igbo East and the river delta areas of the Niger Delta people, consisting mainly of Ijaw, Ibibio, Urhobo, Efik and other smaller ethnic groups. In 1944, Governor Sir Arthur Richard introduced regionalism with North, East, West and Lagos Colony. These regions, which later formed the basis for Nigerian federalism, were retained in the First Republic (1960–1966). Initially, however, the north and east of the country did not see eye to eye (Kirk-Green 1975). In the 1959 federal elections that ushered in Nigeria's independence, no party or region managed to form a majority in parliament, which put the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), the dominant party in the north, and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon in charge; later, the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) would form a coalition government. Eventually, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was elected President and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was elected Prime Minister. This signalled the alliance of the Hausa–Fulani Igbo/Niger Delta peoples since the early days of political independence (Jackson 1972).

The political romance organised by the Hausa–Fulani–Igbo/Niger Delta alliance was shattered by a conspiracy perpetuated by Igbo army officers. In the early morning on 15 January 1966, some Igbo army officers in the service of the Nigerian government hatched a plot and conspiracy that ended in a bloody coup d'état (Post 1966). The organisers, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu Kaduna, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Major Adewale Ademoyega, Timothy Onwuatuegwu, Chris Anuforo, Don Okafor, Humphrey Chukwuka and a handful of others ambushed the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, in his office at Dodon Barrack in Lagos; Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Nigeria, in his residence in Kaduna; and other northern politicians and military officers such as Colonel Kur Mohammed, Lieutenant Colonel Largema, Brigadier General Zakari Maimalari, Samuel Ladoke Akintola, the Western Prime Minister, Finance Minister Festus Okotie Eboh, Sir Ahmadu Bello's family and aides, including his wife Hafsat, Ahmed Musa, Zarumi Sardauna, Ahmed Pategi, Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun, Colonel Ralph Shodeinde, Lieutenant Colonel James Pam, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Unegbe and several others, totalling 22 victims. The above-mentioned victims of the coup were cruelly tortured and murdered by the coup plotters (Siollun 2009).

The above incident has highlighted some critical issues that affect the national stability of Nigeria as a country. Firstly, the coup plotters were all Igbo army officers with the exception of Major Adewale Ademoyega. The coup therefore had an ethnic, religious and regional colouration, as more than 90 percent of the coup plotters belonged to one region, religion and ethnic group, and the putschists also had the same characteristics (Garba and Garba 2005). Second is the conundrum of the Igbos' dissatisfaction with the constellation of power. They were well represented, with the President himself originating from their midst, and they were involved in several other key political offices and the civil service. A third puzzle is how all Igbos involved in the Zik/Balewa regime were spared, as only one Igbo army officer was executed in the coup, while others were mercilessly tortured and murdered. A fourth puzzle of the coup was the killing of famous nationalists who were fighting for the political freedom of the country. If the coup plotters have to carry out their coup, is it also necessary to kill all political leaders of other ethnic groups different from their own? It has also been reported firsthand that some of the Hausa–Fulani leaders were tortured and subjected to all forms of atrocities, as described in the British secret files on the bloody coup by the organisers of the coup. For example, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was reportedly forced to drink beer, smoke cigarettes and eat pork while being mercilessly tortured, which he refused to do. The coup plotters decided to disfigure him by hacking him into pieces (Faruk 2014). Similarly, those who killed Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, killed his wife and young child before him and later killed him mercilessly (Faruk 2014). And why did the coup plotters appoint the Igbo officer Major JFU Aguiyi Ironsi as president? Was he the only superior officer fit for the position?

The answers to the above questions are exactly what triggered the Biafran movement, and the IPOB movement is an offshoot of the Biafran movement. Of course, the majors who carried out the coup stated that they feared the domination of the North (Ademoyega 1981). That is why they rushed to prevent it, but that is far from the truth, because the fear of domination alone is not a sufficient reason for such a terrible massacre of important people to take place in a hurry. It could be related to the orchestrated plot to cripple the North by separating it from its pioneering leaders, who have indicated that they are not ready to cede the power and right of the North to any part of the country, according to Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto (Faruk 2014). What exactly happened, then? Immediately after the coup, the North struck back by organising a counter-coup barely six months later. On 28 July 1966, some officers of the Northern Army overthrew the Ironsi government and replaced it with General Yakubu Gowon, who was the highest-ranking officer at the time. The other reaction was insurgency in some places in the North, especially Sabon Gari in Kano and other places where the Igbos were attacked and killed. Also, the Igbos again resisted the counter-coup and demanded that Gowon must sign an agreement to vacate the leadership role. To this end, an agreement, the Aburi Accord, was signed in Ghana; the warring parties agreed that a democratisation process would be initiated immediately and that power would be returned to the civilians in a year's time (Kirk-Green 1975).

However, after the date of the agreement had passed, General Gowon did not honour the Aburi agreement and tensions between the eastern (Igbo) and northern (Hausa–Fulani) groups in the country escalated, while the Yoruba deliberately followed the development of events with great interest. Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu called on all Igbos across Nigeria to move back

to Eastern Nigeria and declare secession. As the leader of the rebels, he organised the movement (G. Williams 1982). In response, the Nigerian state insisted that Nigeria was an indivisible entity and there was no room for separation or secession. The Igbos insisted in the Biafran movement that they should leave and form a Biafran state. Therefore, the Biafrans took a fighting stance, and the Nigerian government engaged them in a confrontation that lasted for over 30 months (1967–1970).

There were various positions, narratives and accounts of the tragedy of Biafra reported by Biafrans themselves, other Nigerians and the world (Falola and Ezekwem 2016). Chinua Achebe, an Igbo professor of literature, for example, holds the controversial view that the Civil War was a pogrom against the Igbos, as the then Minister of Finance, Obafemi Awolowo, advised the Gowon government to adopt a blockade policy against the Biafrans, which led to a famine that killed millions (Achebe 2013). However, Usman Faruk, a former Governor of Maiduguri and Sokoto and a police officer from the North, claims that the North was massacred by the Igbos on the day its leaders were killed. As an officer who actively participated in the Civil War in which the Biafrans were defeated, the Nigerian government was generous and treated the Biafrans as citizens throughout the War, so the issue of genocide is out of the question. Furthermore, immediately after the surrender of the Biafrans, the Nigerian government forgave the perpetrators of the War and granted amnesty to all involved and began to mend fences for nation-building (Faruk 2014). Daly (2020) argues that the Biafran war paved the way for forgery and crime in Nigeria when a young Igbo officer started issuing identity cards to military officers to leave the Biafran barracks for a fee. Saro-Wiwa (1989) argues that the Biafran war was a reminiscence of the mutiny of part of the army of one ethnic group against the other and the subsequent replacement of the political leadership of the attacked ethnic group by a military president loyal to the group of the attackers.

8.2. Movements

The Biafran movement, like the Niger Delta militants, the Boko Haram insurgents and the bandits in the Northwest, is not a unified movement of one body or entity. It is composed of different groups. However, unlike the other three groups mentioned above, the Biafran movement, which started in 1967 and has not died out, is not organised into splinter groups. The movements emerged at different times. There are three groups that have fought for secession within the Biafran movement. These include the Biafran secessionists, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

8.2.1. The Biafra Secessionist Movement

The 1966 bloody coup brought forth agitation for the Republic of Biafra. Five years after Nigeria's independence from Britain, on 15 January 1966, a group of five Nigerian military majors staged a coup to overthrow the civilian government of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and eradicate the corruption that had plagued Nigeria's First Republic. The plotters did not succeed in taking over the government after the coup attempt failed. Major General John Aguiyi-Ironsi became the top surviving military officer after a brief period of struggle. He shared some of the conspirators' goals but had not participated in the coup (Daly 2020). According to Daly (2020), Ironsi's first move was to consolidate authority and overturn the fragile federal structure that governed Nigeria along regional lines. The interests of

the northern political elite were challenged by the devolution of authority from the states to the Federal Government. They were afraid of being left behind if the distant Federal Government in Lagos gained more influence.

Many in the north believed that the coup was an Igbo plot to seize power from the beginning because Ironsi and most of his advisers were Igbo and most of the federal officials and politicians killed in the coup were from the north and west. In retaliation, the Igbos in the north, especially the Sabon Gari in Kano and Jos, were targeted. At least 3000 eastern Nigerians were murdered in this purge, which lasted for several weeks in May and June 1966; however, the exact figures are inevitably imprecise (Baxter 2015). But the reprisals were not limited to the north. According to Abolorunde (2019), the Igbos continued to retaliate against northerners, regardless of their horrific crimes against northern leaders. Achebe also regrets that he was away from his homeland for many years when the Lagosians forced the Igbos to flee to the East (Neogy and Achebe 1997).

Six months after the first coup, on 29 July 1966, Yakubu Gowon, a young Major General, was sworn in as head of state in revenge for the assassination of northern leaders when a group of northern officers attempted a counter-coup. This did not stop the violence in the north, and by the end of 1966 the Igbo death toll had risen. Within three months, hundreds or thousands of Igbos were murdered in northern towns. Outside the north, for example in Lagos, there was sporadic anti-Igbo violence. Because of the group's violence against northern leaders and the graphic killings, which were both provocative and psychologically agonising, Igbos in the north and in some areas of southern Nigeria came under fierce attack. Daly (2020) argues that religious insults were the trigger for the conflict. The majority of the Igbos were Christians, and the towns in the north where they lived were predominantly Muslim. There were rumours that Igbo traders had contaminated the food and drinks they sold to Muslims with pork fat or alcohol, or that an Igbo trader had branded his products with a message denigrating the Prophet Mohammed. He later claimed that the Igbos were responsible for the violence because they "displayed offensive and extremely provocative pictures of the late Sardauna in a drum magazine belonging to their people. which virtually exposed the true inherent insensitivity of the Igbos and their lack of inherent diplomatic approach to highly sensitive issues." He continued, "This is what fuelled and ignited the unrest in the North, or 'Araba'" (Daly 2020).

Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Governor of the Eastern Region, was not happy with the deteriorating security situation in the country, especially when it came to issues affecting the Igbo people in the North. Therefore, in the midst of this political turmoil, he saw himself as the guardian of the rights of the Igbo people throughout the country. According to Ojukwu, the country's apparent lack of togetherness caused a rift between him and Gowon. When Gowon created twelve states in May 1967, the tension between the two leaders further intensified. As a result, Ojukwu was forced to declare the Republic of Biafra a breakaway region on 27 May 1967, triggering Civil War in the nation (Abolorunde 2019).

In the east, Ojukwu confiscated assets and money from the Federal Government. He ensured that the Fokker F27, a national airliner, was hijacked on a planned trip from Benin to Lagos. All these and other signs, as well as a series of intelligence assessments, convinced the military government that Ojukwu was seeking secession. The commander of the Federal Government, Colonel Yakubu Gowon, imposed a complete blockade of the east. Both sides had already begun making preparations for war at this point. Ojukwu then issued the following statement: "Having been

mandated to declare in your name and on your behalf that I, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, the Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, by virtue of the above powers and in accordance with the above principles, do hereby solemnly declare that the territory and region known as Eastern Nigeria, together with its continental shelf and territorial waters, shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state by the name and title of the Republic of Biafra" (Baxter 2015, p. 16).

Nigeria refused to release Biafra. In an attempt to regain control of the east, Gowon launched a police operation that quickly developed into a full-blown conflict between the Republic of Biafra and the Nigerian military government. In response to the long-standing aspirations of the ethnic minorities in the east to have their own state governments, Gowon announced on the day of Biafra's secession that Nigeria would be divided from four to twelve states. The eastern region was divided into three states: the Southeast State (which borders Cameroon and is based in Calabar), the East-Central State (which includes the Igbo-majority areas in the interior of the country) and Rivers State (where the major city of Port Harcourt and the oil industry are located). This was to prevent non-Igbo in the eastern coastal and riverine regions from favouring Biafran independence (Gould 2012).

Civil War broke out in July 1967. The events in Nigeria in the 1960s were the most dramatic in African history, with three and a half years of war, massive casualties and a devastated economy. Modern weapons (heavy artillery and air power), modern means of communication and propaganda were used in the first African conflict of modern times. It was also contemporary in terms of the objectives and philosophies espoused by the two sides (Schabowska and Himmelstrand 1978). The above-mentioned claim that the Biafran War (Civil War) was the first Jowett (2016) confirms that both federal or Nigerian soldiers and Biafran troops were involved in the current conflict in Nigeria. According to Draper (1999), this included the use of the 4th Commando Brigade Division, the navy, the air force, machine guns, artillery, tanks and sophisticated domestically manufactured explosives and grenades. The military power of both sides was limited by a lack of resources, manpower, discipline and knowledge. Although the separatist troops made up a significant portion of the former Nigerian officer corps dominated by the Igbo, the federal army still had superior equipment (Heerten and Moses 2018).

The Nigerian Federal Government decided to impose a blockade on the Biafra that tried to secede. Air- and seaports were blockaded, foreign exchange transactions were banned, incoming mail and telecommunications were restricted, and international business transactions were hindered in order to cut off Biafra's links with the outside world. Because other governments or companies were willing to accept that Lagos took charge of the situation, Nigeria was able to successfully organise a blockade despite its limited resources, without protracted gaps or gaping holes (Heerten and Moses 2018). Furthermore, Gowon's government had no significant problems acquiring arms from foreign markets, as it was a recognised government. The Biafrans, on the other hand, had to acquire weapons on the illegal market due to their "rebel" status. The Nigerian overnight currency changeover in early 1968, which rendered millions of Nigerian pound notes in the Biafran treasury worthless, further hampered secessionist operations (Simpson 2018). By insisting that the movement was a rebellion against the state, which appealed most to the international population, the FG was able to gain sympathy and support through all the propaganda tools used by the Biafrans (Doron 2018).

The dispute also has an international component (Stremlau 1977). The most important actor supporting the Nigerian government in the fight against the Biafrans was Great Britain (K. E. Smith 2018). In contrast, France was more active in supporting the Biafrans to secede from Nigeria in order to further its political and economic interests in West Africa. Israel, which was struggling with a legitimacy crisis at the time and was rejected as a state by many nations worldwide, is another state that publicly supported Biafran secession (Levey 2018). Nonetheless, the Soviet Union, which consisted of more than 30 states, was committed to the survival of the Nigerian state by providing logistical and armament support (Matusevich 2018). West Germany, on the other hand, chose to support the secession of Biafra from the Nigerian government (Hanning 2018), while the United States of America demonstrated its neutrality by providing humanitarian aid to both the Nigerian government and the Biafrans (Farquhanson 2018). With the exception of South Africa and a few other nations, the majority of African nations have fully supported the Nigerian state (Heerten and Moses 2018).

Numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were also active in Nigeria and Biafra at various levels (O’Sullivan 2021). Furthermore, the international dimension of the narratives revealed a verbal battle between Biafra and Nigeria (Stremlau 1977). While the Nigerian government claimed there was no such pogrom, Biafra made a concerted effort to convince the world that they were the victims of genocide (D. Anthony 2018). As both sides continue to hold opposing viewpoints, there is no infallible position on the issue of genocide even now the Biafrans have been crushed and remain in the Nigerian Union (Bird and Ottanelli 2017).

The armed forces of the Nigerian Federal Government overran the rebel territory in January 1970, shattering the dream of an independent Biafran state and forcing the remaining Biafran lead to unconditional surrender. This surrender essentially ended thirty months of fighting over whether or not the oil-rich east of the country should remain part of Nigeria. The event has attracted a lot of attention for some time, which is not surprising. Reports of the war have been documented by activists on both sides of the struggle (Uche 2008).

The aftermath of the Civil War is a controversial claim of a humanitarian crisis and genocide (Heerten 2017). Venter (2018), for example, claims that the war was characterised by widespread starvation, genocide and bloodletting, with the Nigerian government being fully supported by Britain, Russia and the Arab oil-producing countries. According to Baxter (2015), the Nigerian state also has the support of Russia, the UK and the Arab world. Venter, on the other hand, takes a different view. He refuses to acknowledge the role of France and Israel—or rather, he deliberately ignores it—and other nations that actively supported the Biafrans, including the United States, which supported both Nigeria and the Biafrans on both sides. According to Uche (2008), the British government’s support and involvement in Nigeria is related to energy security and oil interests. Similarly, Faruk (2014) refutes Achebe’s (2013) theory that the war was a genocide. However, according to Baxter (2015), the Nigerian Civil War was an unequal conflict with varying degrees of military strength and even international support (Wyss 2023).

8.2.2. Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)

Shortly after the Fourth Republic was returned to civilian control in 1999, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was founded. Five months after Nigeria’s return to civilian control, on 1 November 1999,

a young lawyer in Lagos sent a document to the UN office in New York. “Biafra Bill of Rights” was the title given by 39-year-old Ralph Uwazuruike. According to Okonta (2014), during the early restoration of democracy, the movement was triggered by political rivalry and dissatisfaction with the results of the 1999 General Elections, especially the Presidential Election. It was described as follows:

“We the people of Biafra, that is, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Delta States, with a population of about 40 million, constituting one of the largest tribes in Nigeria and two of the geopolitical zones within the Federal Republic of Nigeria, hereby seek the realisation of the sovereign state of Biafra for the following reasons (Okonta 2014):

1. That Biafra (Igbo) before the advent of British colonialism was a distinct race east of the Niger.
2. That it was for the administrative convenience of the British colonial exploiters that Biafra (Southeast and Southsouth) were merged with other provinces to give rise to the Federation of Nigeria, on 1 January 1914.
3. That the hostility of Nigeria towards Biafra brought about the Civil War of 1967–1970, in which about 2,000,000 lives were lost.
4. That the death of Biafra (Igbo) in the said war brought the Igbo back to Nigeria against their will.
5. That consequent upon their defeat in the said war, the Igbo are regarded as enemies and treated as slaves among other nationalities in Nigeria.”

The letter refers to incidents in which Hausa–Fulani Muslims, the majority ethnic group in the northern region of Nigeria where Igbo traders live in large numbers, kill, injure or otherwise mistreat Igbo people. The Biafra Bill of Rights also alleged that the Federal Government discriminates against Igbo graduates in the workplace and that, as a result, “Nigeria” is not a place where “Biafrans” can realise their goals and dreams.

The campaigns for the independence of the Igbo people, who constitute the majority in Southeastern Nigeria, were triggered by the formation of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in 1999. According to various sources, MASSOB introduced an international passport on 30 June 2009. According to MASSOB leader Uwazuruike, the passports were created in South Africa in response to continued demand from the Biafran diaspora. Uwazuruike also explained that any Biafran who fulfils the conditions for obtaining this passport is free to use it whenever they want (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2009). However, the Nigerian government arrested Uwazuruike and charged him with treason (Idowu 2023).

The Igbo elite, represented in large numbers by Ohaneze Ndigbo (ON), a socio-cultural group, opposed MASSOB, in contrast to the Biafra movement of the 1960s, which triggered the brutal Civil War (1967–1970). Furthermore, “the governors of the five Igbo states and their coalition were publicly opposed to the MASSOB proposal despite their vague statements about a resurgence of the ‘Ndigbo’”. Apart from the Igbo elite, there were other opponents of MASSOB. Members who were impatient and poor and who disapproved of the militia’s non-violent approach had split off and formed new groups. Fearing Igbo “hegemony,” youth leaders in the ethnic minority communities of former Biafra also avoided contact (Opata 2001). By calling on their Igbo counterparts to reject this “false democracy” the MASSOB, which

came to limelight shortly after the 1999 Election, has exacerbated political tensions in the nation by denying them their fair share of the national cake. The leaders became embroiled in a heated argument over what “Biafra” actually meant, with friendly young Igbo on one side and businessmen from the other ethnic minorities that made up the “old” Biafra in 1967 on the other, rather than the mobilisation quickly leading to the expected ethnic violence. An influential elderly Igbo, still all-powerful and uncontrolled, though chastened by vivid memories of the deadly struggle, pleaded for prudence and indeed endeavoured to reinterpret what it means to be “Igbo” in the face of perilous times (G. Onuoha 2013).

The majority of the members are young men with an average level of education of a high school diploma, with the exception of the leader and some senior officials who are in their fifties. University graduates are quite rare. Although their numbers are drastically decreasing at the grassroots level, women are represented in the highest administrative positions, especially in the categories of regional and area administrators. Most MASSOB members work part-time or are unemployed and live below the UN poverty line as seasonal subsistence farmers, sporadic artisans, casual labourers and motorbike taxi drivers (Okada). The group was founded in Lagos and now has several branches with monthly meetings. Major cities in the north, including Kaduna, Jos and Kano, also have local chapters. However, the influence of MASSOB is particularly noticeable in Igbo towns (Harnischfeger 2011).

When Ojukwu announced the new state to the foreign press in Enugu in May 1967, the Biafran flag consisting of vertical stripes in green, red and black with half a yellow sun in the centre was unfurled and used as the official symbol of Biafra, which was adopted later by MASSOB. This flag flies from the utility poles in Igbo towns such as Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi, Umuahia, Enugu, Asaba, Nsukka, Umuahia, Abakiliki, Owerri and Awka. This flag flies on the front of commercial buses, high-rise buildings and electricity poles. Police contingents frequently raid these buildings to remove the flags labelled “secession flags” in their official protocols, but they are quickly reinstalled after their departure. The majestic “Freedom House,” the global headquarters of MASSOB, is located in Ralph Uwazuruike’s hometown of Okwe, a community near Okigwe. His wife and some of his children still live in his other residence in Lagos (Duruji 2012). As a direct result of this agreement, MASSOB renamed its future state from Republic of Biafra to United States of Biafra, a federal umbrella large enough to accommodate the Igbo and their neighbours in the Delta (Waddington 2013a).

In May 2006, when MASSOB leaders attempted to organise market women and men in Onitsha to resist the harsh levies imposed on them by the Anambra State Government, there was a violent backlash. At the request of the Governor, the Federal Government sent troops into the town, who killed a number of MASSOB members. In February 2007, an attempt by Nnamdi Ohiagu, a member of the collegiate leadership, to take the place of Uwazuruike as “acting leader” failed (Waddington 2013a).

In order to form a confederation for the realisation of the Biafran state, MASSOB formed an alliance with activists from the Niger Delta. “Having come to terms with the glaring realities of unchecked internal colonisation in Nigeria today, we have decided to face the bull and take our destiny firmly in our hands,” reads the seven-point agreement that MASSOB signed in May 2004 with “the “Great Commonwealth of Niger Delta” (GCND), a coalition of youth-led civic and ethnic organisations from the various states that comprise the region. GCND and MASSOB have “entered into an alliance to strive for the non-violent realisation of the Sovereign

State of United Biafra (the New Biafra),” the preamble continues. In an effort to unite the different factions, the leadership henceforth referred to the group as MASSOB/Biafra Liberation Front. It also stated that thirty administrative regions had been created in the eastern region of the country, which includes the Niger Delta and the Igbo heartland (Waddington 2013b).

The MASSOB leader and a couple of other members, were arrested by the Nigerian government. Five months after Obasanjo’s successor, Umaru Yar’adua, assumed the presidency, Uwazuruike was released in October 2007 by a federal court, apparently acting on government orders. To allow Uwazuruike to carry out the funeral ceremonies for his mother, who had died six months earlier, the judge cautiously labelled the decision “interim bail” Uwazuruike and the MASSOB were not able to take the decisive final step and realise their dream of a nation state, although they still enjoy a lot of support and goodwill in the Igbo heartland. As a result, MASSOB died naturally and without incident (G. Onuoha 2011).

8.2.3. Indigenous Peoples of Biafra

The separatists and insurgents currently active in the Southeast are the IPOB and its affiliate ESN. In 2012, a separatist movement from the Southeast of Nigeria called the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was founded with the aim of restoring the now defunct Biafra. The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Biafran Zionist Movement (BZM) are regarded as precursors of the group. Although they pursued a similar goal, they conducted their operations in a less radical way. Ekpo and Agorye (2019) conceded that the rise of IPOB was made possible by the failure of MASSOB, a more extreme grouping. The mostly ethnic Igbos, the young people who are members of secessionist organisations such as IPOB, “feel discriminated against by those in power” (The UN Refugee Agency 2023).

An ethno-political movement called IPOB has emerged to support the right of Igbo-dominated provinces in the Southeast to self-determination. The entire structure of IPOB is loose and represents a rather random combination of criminal gangs, quasi-political movements and local agitation groups. As mentioned earlier, the IPOB name serves as both a convenient flag and rallying cry for a broad but still modest independence movement. The new dimension of IPOB, motivated by its demand for Biafra, an independent Igbo nation, has led the organisation to regularly violently engage the Nigerian government. After Uwazuruike, the head of MASSOB, was arrested, Nnamdi Kanu, an Igbo living in the UK, founded a splinter organisation called Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2012. IPOB claims that Uwazuruike sided with the Nigerian government after his release in 2007 (Ugorji 2017).

Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB and holder of a British passport, has been detained since 2021 on charges of treason and terrorism, which he denies. Although a court ordered his release in October 2022 after finding that he had been unlawfully arrested abroad, he remains behind bars. Due to his continued detention, the IPOB no longer functions as a unified force with a clear political agenda or command structure (Mark et al. 2022). The BBC has established that a prominent leader of a Nigerian breakaway organisation has been arrested at his Finnish residence. Simon Ekpa is accused of inciting violence on social media. Within the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), he is the leader of a faction fighting for a breakaway state in Southeast Nigeria. He has advised people to boycott Saturday’s election because of the deadly attacks on candidates in the region. Mr. Ekpa, a Nigerian-born Finnish national, claims the Nigerian government is responsible for the killings and unrest in the

region and denies any involvement. He has since been questioned and released. Although the investigation is still in its early stages, Finnish police said they are investigating a possible money-laundering offence, as well as other possible offences. The Nigerian government has already asked Finland to take action against Mr Ekpa (Nwonwu 2023).

Nnamdi Kanu, the then leader of IPOB, was arrested in 2021 and is still behind bars. In October 2022, a Nigerian court ordered his release, concluding that he had been unlawfully arrested in Kenya and abducted to Nigeria. Kanu's arrest and imprisonment led to a leadership dispute that resulted in a factionalised movement with contradictory and centrifugal internal tendencies, which also shook the unity and political goals of the movement. In 2022, however, the movement became deadlier than ever (Ojo et al. 2023).

8.3. Motive

IPOB claims to be fighting for the rights of the Igbo ethnic group in the region. It seeks the creation of Biafra, their sovereign land in the Southeast and part of the Niger Delta. In 2012, under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) publicly declared its desire to restore the former Biafra through secession. The IPOB fought for the freedom and rights of the remaining Biafra and sought self-determination for the Igbo people. Under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu and his assistant Uche Okafor-Mefor, the group has been active since its founding in 2012 in favour of a referendum to establish a separate state for the eastern region. The organisation itself emerged and gained its convictions through the support of the breakaway Biafra that ruled the Southeast from 30 May 1967 to 15 January 1970 (Nwankpa 2021).

As mentioned earlier, when discussing the goals of pro-Biafran organisations such as MASSOB and IPOB, MASSOB claimed that IPOB's goal was to restore the former Republic of Biafra in order to create "a separate homeland for the Igbo people". This desire is a result of perceived cultural, social and political marginalisation by the Nigerian state (The UN Refugee Agency 2023). The Nigerian government has been attacked by the IPOB for extrajudicial executions, ethnic marginalisation, political alienation and unequal distribution of resources in the Southeast of the country (The UN Refugee Agency 2023). The IPOB claims to be a nationalist movement that seeks the restoration of Biafran identity and independence. Although it does not explicitly claim that Biafra and Igbo ethnic identity are interchangeable, the separatist parties seem to easily confuse the two terms in some of their comments, such as the one in the previous paragraph. Additionally, the group has expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Fulani views (The UN Refugee Agency 2023).

8.4. Strategies

Armed civil resistance is the primary form of the IPOB's secessionist demands, which are pursued within the framework of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. Similarly to how MASSOB has been viewed in recent times, IPOB is seen as a political movement rather than a true secessionist movement like Biafra. Based on a combination of current and old political and economic grievances, Biafran separatist organisations like IPOB are trying to get the attention and concession of the central government. According to sources, Kanu also serves as the director of Radio Biafra. According to reports, Radio Biafra is an illegal station that propagates a

bloody struggle for Biafran independence and broadcasts “very aggressive messages full of falsehoods, hate speech and mockery of Nigeria”. A new phase of the struggle for self-determination was ushered in by the rise of Nnamdi Kanu. Biafra’s online radio and the introduction of information telecommunication technologies have helped the new movement to gain worldwide recognition. Millions of followers at home and abroad are mobilised through online broadcasting. It is important to remember that naming the internet radio after Biafra is a nationalist assumption. According to sources, there is a video on YouTube showing Kanu asking the Igbo diaspora for arms for Biafra during the World Igbo Conference in the United States in September 2015 (Idowu 2023).

The IPOB started the ethnic divide to stoke ethnic sentiments and reignite pressure on the Nigerian government. A statement released in March 2016 in coordination with MASSOB called for the evacuation of all Fulani herdsmen to northern Nigeria because IPOB and MASSOB could no longer tolerate the systematic slaughter of our people and the annexation of our territory for cattle grazing. Next comes the seating instruction. To demand Kanu’s release from detention, the IPOB launched a “sit-at-home” demonstration in many Southeastern states, resulting in residents being asked to stay at home on 23 September 2016. Markets, banks and schools were closed, as well as business and education in Onitsha. The IPOB directive led to the closure of the towns of Onitsha and Nnewi in Anambra State (Nwangwu 2023).

To gain local and global support, IPOB used the shared memory of war, marginalisation and injustice. The serious security situation in the region is exacerbated by secessionist aspirations. The idea of protecting the lives and livelihoods of the Igbo and the sense of marginalisation are often the basis for the IPOB’s secession campaign. This is how the Eastern Security Network, the security arm of the organisation, was founded. Paradoxically, the region has been anything but calm since the ESN was founded in December 2020. There have been reports of brutal police violence and military attacks on communities in the region. According to several locals, the secession efforts of the IPOB are being suppressed by the Nigerian military (Relief Web 2021).

Ideological representations in the media are the resistance movements that are stalling socioeconomic activities in Southeastern Nigeria. Violent attacks have been recurring in Southeast Nigeria since 2021. Security groups have linked “unknown gunmen” or thugs, who often commit deadly crimes, to the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which was founded by the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The IPOB has strongly denied the allegations. However, the attacks continue. Data from the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database shows that 138 violent incidents claimed 253 victims between January and November 2021 (Nextier SPD 2022). According to security officials, victims in some of these incidents were beaten for not complying with IPOB’s Monday instructions. In other cases, gunmen stopped security forces or drivers. Violence has increased insidiously in Southeast Nigeria (Mark et al. 2022).

Although the IPOB repeatedly claims to be a non-violent and peaceful organisation, many people doubt this claim. The IPOB has been blamed for a number of violent incidents and attacks in recent years. They have protested to draw media attention to the Biafran independence movement and to oppose the Nigerian government by throwing the local economy into turmoil. In 2021, the IPOB threatened to deploy the ESN if the Governors of Southeast Nigeria did not relent (Njoku 2021) and ban open grazing. Instead of waiting 14 days, the ESN raided a Fulani camp in Isuikwuato, Abia State, where the operatives destroyed houses and killed cattle. A confrontation between the Nigerian Army and the ESN took

place in January 2021, shortly before this incident. As the ESN bases were seen as a challenge to the power of the state, the government sent the army to destroy them. After a week of fighting broke out in the town of Orlu in Imo State, Kanu announced a ceasefire, claiming that he was focusing ESN efforts on “Fulani brigands” and that the forces had left the town (J. Campbell 2021).

From the beginning, the rise of IPOB was based on a foundation of dishonesty. IPOB, under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, emerged from the supposedly reformed Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), a pro-secessionist organisation that had previously lost influence and was notorious for its devious tactics and violent tendencies. Kanu had already amassed a considerable following through his provocative Radio Biafra broadcasts, which he had adopted as a member of MASSOB (Griffin 2018). He achieved this by instilling hope in vulnerable citizens and spreading misinformation against the Nigerian government. By changing its name and transforming itself into a new organisation, the IPOB deliberately avoided links with MASSOB’s earlier actions and presented itself as a new organisation for self-determination. His plan was successful, as Kanu quickly rose to the top of the IPOB hierarchy and took control of the organisation’s activities (Jerome 2023).

IPOB was emboldened as it began its mode of agitation. Overnight, Nnamdi Kanu became a prophet. His enthusiastic followers were the impoverished, defenceless and illiterate market apprentices. He exploited them. Kanu used his knowledge of Radio Biafra effectively to trick them. He influenced public opinion and perception in favour of IPOB by spreading false information and inflammatory statements. The anger and discontent of his supporters were fuelled by the misleading stories he spread about the objectives and actions of the Nigerian government. The one-sided portrayal of victimhood made it impossible for supporters to critically assess the situation by using hate speech and derogatory language against the government, which they portrayed as oppressors and enemies of the people. The IPOB spread its message worldwide by capitalising on the attention of the international media. Their tactics included sensationalist headlines and articles detailing their operations. This allowed them to downplay or ignore their more extreme acts while maintaining the appearance of a respectable movement fighting for self-determination. The group produced martyrs and gained sympathy around the world while planning actions that provoked reactions from the Nigerian government. Their main strategy was to divert attention from their own violent actions by portraying IPOB as a non-violent organisation that was being unjustly persecuted by an opposing government (Jerome 2023).

8.5. Manifestations

With 40 attacks in 2022, resulting in 57 deaths and 16 injuries, the IPOB is the tenth deadliest terrorist organisation in the world. This is according to a report by the US think tank Global Terrorism Index (GTI). Compared to the 26 attacks and 34 fatalities caused by the gang in 2021, this is a significant increase. While these figures may not seem like much, they show that violence in the Southeast has steadily increased over the past two years. The Eastern Security Network (ESN), an armed paramilitary branch established by the IPOB in 2020, has been linked to attacks on state property and infrastructure, as well as the killing of civilians and security forces. In May 2022, the UK government also declared IPOB a terrorist organisation and barred its members from applying for refuge in the country.

Although the IPOB is ranked as the tenth most dangerous terrorist organisation in the world in the GTI assessment, the actual number of incidents and casualties is still quite low compared to the impact of Islamic State and Boko Haram attacks in West Africa. The Igbo indigenous population is the most affected by the actions of IPOB/ESN and the Federal Government's response has been blunt and occasionally repressive. The latter merely serves as a recruiting sergeant for the armed wings and sympathisers of the separatist organisations (Ogbonnaya 2017). The harsh tactics of the IPOB militants include the assassination of security operatives and bombing of police stations. The task of restoring law and order has often fallen to the military. The unlawful imposition of a weekly "sit-in order" to be enforced every Monday in all Southeastern states is probably one of the most widely denounced actions of the IPOB (Mark et al. 2022).

Stores, schools, banks, transportation companies, markets and other important services must therefore remain closed. The atmosphere on these days resembles that of a war zone and people are generally afraid to leave their homes for fear of the punishment they face. According to AFP, in April 2016, the Nigerian secret police accused IPOB of killing 55 people, including five Hausa–Fulani, whom the terrorist allegedly kidnapped and whose bodies were buried in a forest in Abia State. Following the arrest of the IPOB leader in 2021, there were numerous demonstrations against the government's detention of Kanu and calls for a pure Igbo state. Protests took place in the Rivers State capital, Port Harcourt, as well as in a number of other towns in the Igbo-majority states in Southeastern Nigeria (Ogbonnaya 2017).

8.6. Implications

The new separatist movement to advance the self-determination of Biafra State re-emerged after the Civil War between Nigeria and Biafra. A new separatist movement for the alleged liberation of the nation of Biafra emerged in the early months of 2000, with a lawyer named Ralph Uwazuruike spearheading the formation of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). In the meantime, the resurgence of the independence movement was suppressed by the confrontation of the Nigerian security forces with MASSOB and his imprisonment. After the death of MASSOB, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was founded in 2012 by the Nigerian–British, London-based Nnamdi Kanu. Civil resistance, online propaganda, mobilisation on the ground and in the diaspora, marches and sit-in rituals enforced by IPOB have influenced this trend (J. S. Ojo 2024).

The rise of neo-Biafra organisations such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) as well as related social movements, brings to light an unresolved conflict. The Igbo people face challenges arising from the persistence of anti-Igbo prejudice in Nigeria, which has also contributed to the exceptionally strong public memory of the Biafra war. These neo-Biafra movements, composed mainly of Igbos of the post-war generation, use modern social media to draw attention to the current situation of the Igbo and the memory of the Biafra War (Korieh 2021). The Nigerian state is in a vulnerable position due to the escalating secessionist efforts, especially in the south of the country (Ojo et al. 2023).

The ESN and IPOB are accused of killing members of the civilian population, including Igbo members. House arrest orders, forcing people to stay in their homes for up to seven days and occasionally longer, are a common practise of the movement. A population that largely survives as street vendors and small business owners

suffers greatly as a result. Before such orders are issued, many people cannot afford to stock up on food and drinking water. The movement often threatens punishment for violating orders, and there are documented cases where ESN members have attacked and occasionally killed those who have disobeyed orders. ESN members have set fire to other properties, claiming that the owners did not provide for them. The population has been badly affected, and although many people are in favour of an independent Biafra, many more are against IPOB and the ESN (Onah et al. 2023).

In business, education, commerce and transportation, the mandatory Monday rest has had a significant impact on productivity and human resources. The group reportedly banned the Nigerian national song from being played in schools in the Southeast as part of its 2022 action plans. However, this has not worked well, as some Southeastern Governors have struggled to keep their states legal and orderly by not portraying the movement as a conflict with federal might. However, because they cannot attend classes on Mondays, children are currently falling behind the general curriculum available in other states due to poor administration of schooling (Ebonine and Akinyetun 2021). Another worrying feature of this enforced order is the huge decline in market trading and transportation. The market of Onitsha, the commercial centre of Anambra State, is considered one of the largest in West Africa. Every day, commuters and traders from all over the world flock there to do business. However, the market will not open until Tuesday due to the seating policy (Igwebuikie and Akoh 2023). According to Daily Trust newspapers looking at the financial impact on the market economy, the market loses an average of 25 billion naira and other eastern regions lose almost the same amount. Every time the [Southeast] region follows the sit-at-home directive, it loses more than 10 billion naira. In Anambra alone, the poor are estimated to lose N19.6 billion if they decide to stay at home (Kabir 2022).

In an attempt to make their grievances heard, the indigenous people of Biafra have, in recent times, taken steps that directly challenge the sovereignty of the nation. Many of these actions have hindered the progress of national integration over time and are seen as self-defeating by both the affected states and the nation as a whole. Civil disobedience is a tactic used by IPOB supporters to showcase their desire for Biafran freedom. Radio programmes and other media have also played an important role in fomenting negative sentiments and discord among the people, making it more difficult to build national unity. Ordinary Nigerians will continue to be affected by IPOB/ESN violence, including the Igbo people they claim to speak for and who are fighting the State on their behalf. As a result, the operations of the Nigerian security forces are also likely to intensify. There will be a backlash and accusations and rebuttals about who is to blame for the resulting deaths and property damage (Kabir 2022).

As the region is home to two of the largest markets in the country, the main market of Onitsha and the market of Aba, transportation plays an important role in the region. This requires a significant inflow and outflow of people in the region. However, the report notes that transportation companies lose a huge sum of N10 billion (£18.5 million) for every day they stay at home. Less revenue means less purchasing power for transportation companies in the Southeast, which in turn means less tax rebates for state governments. This is a double tragedy for a nation whose economy is already in tatters. The Southeast takes great pride in its status as a centre of commerce. Unfortunately, traders are being forced to stay home on Mondays, though it is normally the busiest day of the week, and for some the most productive. This

has led to a trading loss of between N700 billion (\$110,586,700,000,000,0.00 million) and N3 trillion (\$4,739,430,000,000,000.00 billion) (Aligwekwe 2022).

The stay-at-home order has also affected the major roads used to transport people, products and services from one place to another. On days like these, transport companies continue to record losses and travellers avoid going to the East out of fear. As visitors no longer feel safe travelling to or staying in the East, this circumstance has further complicated interactions between the Southeast and other states. Many more people have been killed by “unknown gunmen” trying to implement this seating arrangement. The gruesome murder of Dr. Chike Akunyili, the late husband of Dora Akunyili, was one of the saddest incidents. In an incident that would traumatise any decent citizen, his face was blown off by gunshots in broad daylight, and this was captured on camera by onlookers (Aligwekwe 2022).

8.7. Responses

Nnamdi Kanu has become even more unpopular in the corridors of power in the Southeast and across the country following his call for a sovereign convention in Nigeria shortly after his release from detention. An ambiguous group of northern youths known as the “Coalition of Arewa Youths” gave the Igbo living in the nineteen states of northern Nigeria a deadline of 1 October 2017 to leave the region. This was an irrational reaction to the growing power of IPOB and Kanu’s colossal posturing in the fledgling agitation for Biafra. Confiscation of Igbo assets and property in the North after this date is one of the threatened consequences (Anugwom 2019). Biafrans have attempted to start a new struggle, and they continue to aggressively pursue their goal of secession. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist movement with several divisions and affiliated groups, was classified as a terrorist organisation by the Federal Government in 2017. It functions similarly to the now defunct Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). MEND became a franchised social justice movement and a convenient banner for many criminal organisations. The IPOB allows criminals to justify themselves by identifying with a socio-political activist movement that is widely accepted and supported (The UN Refugee Agency 2023).

The Nigerian security forces have responded vigorously to the actions of IPOB and ESN. Amnesty International has accused the security forces of using excessive force, claiming that up to 115 people were killed in just four months in 2021. According to the Imo State Government, many citizens and the security forces themselves, the ESN is responsible for a large number of civilian deaths. While the security forces target civilians because they allegedly support the ESN and IPOB, many civilians believe that the ESN is targeting them and extorting material and financial support. As evidenced by their conduct in Okporo on 2 August 2021, where they destroyed the homes, stores and vehicles of people they believed were supporting the separatists, the security forces have also been accused of causing civilian casualties. Two police officers and “at least eight” protesters were killed in clashes between separatist protesters and police on 2 December 2015. Pro-Biafran activists who have participated or attempted to participate in protest marches in Southeastern Nigeria have often been attacked by security forces with excessive brutality. It is known that supporters and members of several pro-Biafran groups in the region have been arrested, forcibly disappeared and often killed. Many of the supporters of Biafran independence have been detained since January 2016 for trying to organise or participate in peaceful gatherings (The UN Refugee Agency 2023).

Despite breaking up gatherings and arresting large numbers of people, the authorities' initial response to Biafran separatist activities was muted. By 1 December 2015, 137 pro-Biafran individuals had been charged. On 30 May 2016, ten people were killed when police officers opened fire on IPOB members during rallies in the towns of Onitsha in Anambra State and Asaba in Delta State to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the Biafra conflict in 1967. Both the IPOB and the police have conflicting positions and figures. IPOB claims that at least 35 members of the group were killed in Onitsha, but sources say the police shot at the protesters after IPOB members opened fire on them. The IPOB has refuted this claim. The Nigerian military opened fire on IPOB members and sympathisers as well as onlookers at three locations in the town of Onitsha in Anambra State during the Biafra commemorations on 29 May and 30 May 2016. At least 17 people died and 50 were injured. The excessive and unnecessary use of force led to the deaths of IPOB members and supporters (The UN Refugee Agency 2023).

9. A Comparison of the Socioeconomic and Political Implications of Violence by Niger Delta Militants, Boko Haram Insurgents, Bandits and IPOB

9.1. Motive

One of the main activities of any armed group worldwide is to spread its motives and ideology. These motives differ from one group to another, from one environment to another and according to the disposition and influence of the actors. The ideology is also influenced by different characteristics. In the case of this study, the four groups examined so far, the Niger Delta militants, the Boko Haram insurgents, the bandits and the IPOB, have very different motives, even if they can sometimes overlap. The region, politics, economics, social factors and adaptation or pacification, as well as the presence or absence of state benefits, could all point to the motive and ideology that a particular armed group in Nigeria espouses.

As far as the motive is concerned, the first group, the Niger Delta, has a contradictory—or rather, a changing—motive. In the beginning, the goal of the early activists like Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people’s movement was the pursuit of environmental justice and more fairness in the economic benefits to the oil-producing states. However, with the decline of the early movement and the emergence of incoherent militant groups, especially during the MEND era, the movement or militancy lost focus from its struggles for environmental justice, instead focusing on organised criminal groups and political militias for electoral violence (Asuni 2009a). Thus, the motive of Niger Delta militancy changed in the long run from community struggles against environmental injustice and economic exploitation to the exploiters themselves contributing to environmental injustice through activities such as oil bunkering, pipeline explosions and vandalism, as well as the kidnapping of oil company employees for ransom and of errand boys of politicians for electoral gain (Taft and Haken 2015).

The motive of Boko Haram is the only one that has not changed in all four groups examined here (although, to a lesser extent, the same may be true of the IPOB movement). In the early days of its movement, Boko Haram insurgents unequivocally expressed their aversion to everything Western, be it culture, values, the education system, the political and economic system or anything else associated with the West. The group affirms that its goal is to establish an Islamic state by rebelling against the Nigerian authorities (Thurston 2016a). The motive is therefore a religious one. And even when splinter groups later emerged around 2013, such as the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), the parent group Boko Haram and many others, and after joining external terrorist groups, the motive remained one and the same: to establish an Islamic state within the Nigerian state by force (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). This qualifies the Boko Haram insurgency as an Islamic militant terrorist group that violates the fundamental tenet of Islam, which unanimously and universally accepts, without any contradiction, that rebellion against the constitutional authorities is forbidden (Sambo and Sule 2025).

In the case of the bandits in the Northwest, the motive, as with the Niger Delta militants, changed in a different direction. The initial reaction was retaliation against

perceived Hausa hostilities by the Fulani cattle breeders, whose livestock were killed and stolen in the rural areas of Northwestern Nigeria. Having realised how lucrative the business of ransom and school kidnapping is, and with unfettered access to small arms and light weapons, the bandits became looters and marauding criminals who now kill indiscriminately (Omotola and Oyewole 2024). Like the Niger Delta and Boko Haram groups, the bandits are also divided into many groups, sometimes even fighting among themselves to gain control of an area of influence in order to collect taxes and fine members of the communities. But the motive remains simply organised crime with no other goal than economic and material accumulation by the warlords (Okoli and Ngom 2024).

The same cannot be said of IPOB, which continues where the earlier groups, Biafra and MASSOB, left off, fighting for the realisation of secession from the Nigerian state. Some argue that the Biafra movement has changed course and lost its lustre compared to the original Biafra movement, which was a mere secessionist movement suppressed by the Nigerian government. However, IPOB is not asking for an increasing share of economic or political benefits but insists that Biafra must secede from Nigeria and that there is no potential for compromise or concession. However, some opinions (G. Onuoha 2013; Okonta 2014) have noted that the lukewarm support for the Biafran cause expressed by Igbo leaders Ohaneze Ndigbo and other groups indicates that the movement has lost its vigour and cannot in any way be equated with the Biafran war (1967–1970). The three groups, the Niger Delta, the bandits and the IPOB, have thus changed their original motives, but Boko Haram has kept its motive unchanged.

9.2. Ideology

Ideologically, all four VNSAs examined in this book share a certain ideological worldview, and at the same time, all four diverge widely in terms of the ideology behind their movements. The activists in the Niger Delta, for example, are fighting against what they perceive as inequality in the distribution of resources and environmental justice, as it was called in the early movements. The activists have no intention of seceding and forming a state, and carried out indiscriminate killings and attacks on innocents until the movement changed course, which was an important precursor to the militants' inability to form a unified group. The emergence and growth of various incoherent groups derailed the motive, criminalised the activities and the movement, and described how unserious the agitations had become, especially when politicians intervened in the Fourth Republic (1999–2025) and misused the machinery of some of the group leaders for political racketeering (Asuni 2009b; Okonta and Douglas 2001).

The Boko Haram insurgents are a group with a strong and uncompromising ideology that claims to want to establish an Islamic state within the state of Nigeria by rebelling against the existing authorities and opposing the Nigerian security forces. The group also shared the ideology of what Al-Qaradawi (1991) described as extremism among Islamic youth because of the misinterpretation and misperception of the fundamentals of Islamic law and justice. Sule et al. (2018b) emphasise that Boko Haram has a similar ideology to Maitatsine, a similar radical Islamic group that ravaged northern Nigeria in the 1980s, believing in everything but the glorious Quran and labelling all Muslims who opposed them as “kafir” (infidels). The Boko Haram believed that they do not need space to establish a state; the Nigerian environment is

enough for them. The ideology of Boko Haram is the result of a gap in governance and the failure of policy-makers to exercise authority over all groups and movements.

The bandit group is the weakest of the four groups analysed in terms of ideology. No one can say exactly what they are after other than looting and economic gains through arson and marauding. Several times, the bandits were unable to voice their grievances when questioned or invited by the government to attempt reconciliation. They insisted that their cattle were stolen, that they have no access to schools, hospitals, roads and potable water, and other similar excuses experienced by virtually all Nigerians across the country. Why, then, are other law-abiding Nigerians patient with government incompetence but the bandits think they have an extraordinary right to rebel? The answer is simply because they want a share of the resources in their territory, as noted by Ogonnaya (2021) and Attah and Sule (2024).

IPOB has the strongest ideology among all the groups, which is to secede from the Nigerian state and form an independent state of Biafra. The cause has never changed, but it was weakened after the unconditional surrender of the Biafran forces in 1970. The Biafran agitation groups that emerged later, such as MASSOB and IPOB, lacked the lustre, vigour and zeal to pursue Biafra as passionately as the Ojukwu rebellion did. However, the movements continued to insist that Biafra will only be put to rest if they are allowed to have their way. This is the only group that has maintained a unified ideology for over 50 years (Okonta 2014).

All four groups have similar ideologies, such as their willingness to use violence to achieve their goals. This is common to all groups. However, the intensity of the use of violence, the pattern of violence and the impact differ significantly. For example, the Niger Delta militants rarely kill innocent citizens indiscriminately, as they only do so when a community has either informed the Nigerian security forces of their hideouts or refuses to harbour them, or when they are caught in the crossfire of two or more fighting groups. The militants also do not use heavy weapons against innocent citizens, even when they are used against Nigerian security forces and kidnapped foreigners. The Boko Haram is the deadliest group in this regard because it uses heavy weapons against both the state and innocent citizens, sometimes staging horrific scenes that psychologically traumatise and frighten residents of the Northeast, such as bombing car parks, markets, mosques, churches and large crowds, or attacking towns with RPGs, heavy bombs and automatic machine guns that terrify residents. In some cases, Boko Haram burns people alive or massacres them in a feast that is recorded and broadcast on social media, traumatising the entire nation. Sometimes they kidnap schoolchildren, especially women, to extort ransom from the government.

The bandits, like Boko Haram, exerted a high level of torture and inhuman treatment against the innocent citizens by kidnapping them, torturing them and raping and then killing their wives and children in front of them, setting an entire village ablaze, intercepting commuters and burning their cars alive without allowing a single soul to escape, including infants and women. Sometime in March 2022, the bandits completely paralysed Nigeria by ambushing the Abuja–Kaduna train in a horrific firefight in which many people died and many were kidnapped. Worse still, like Boko Haram, they kidnap schoolchildren (mostly girls) to force negotiations and ransom payments for financial deals. IPOB also attacks innocent citizens and specifically targets their economic wellbeing by enforcing their sit-at-home order which threatens to bring economic activities in the commercial centres of Onitsha and other industrial areas in the Southeast to a standstill. What distinguishes the

ideology of IPOB is the fact that the militant wing, ESN, engages in selective ethnic killings, just as Biafra was initiated by selective targeted killings of northern leaders in January 1966. The Hausa–Fulani people in the Southeast are attacked and often killed, and sometimes their properties are destroyed or looted.

9.3. Killings of Innocent Citizens

The VNSAs examined in this book cause numerous deaths in their respective areas of operation. It is estimated that the Niger Delta militancy has caused the death of over 10,000 people since its inception, including innocent citizens, community members, the militants themselves, Nigerian security agents and other victims such as kidnapped oil workers (J. Campbell 2020). J. Campbell (2020) reports that a recent annual report published by the Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta Foundation (PIND), the Niger Delta Annual Conflict Report, shows that there have been 351 incidents of violence with 546 deaths in 2018 alone and 416 violent incidents, with over a thousand deaths recorded in 2019. PIND attributes much of the increase to organised crime, political rivalries, communal disputes, “cult clashes” and land disputes.

The Boko Haram insurgency has claimed more lives than any other armed group. There are numerous reports of deadly attacks and killings by Boko Haram. Between 2009 and 2018, Boko Haram militants carried out 1639 violent attacks in Northeastern Nigeria alone, killing 14,436 people, injuring 6051, taking 2063 hostages and forcing more than 2 million people to flee their homes due to the crisis (Okolo and Akubo 2019). According to N. Allen (2016), the Boko Haram group carried out more than 4000 deadly attacks between 2011 and 2019, killing around 13,000 people. The CNN Library (2018) reports 75 violent attacks by Boko Haram, with over 20,000 victims and more than 6000 injured. In another study, Sule and Gombe (2020) document more than 200 deadly attacks by Boko Haram fighters in Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and the Republic of Niger. Monguno and Umara (2020) state that Boko Haram was responsible for more than 258 attacks in 16 communities in Borno State alone. A recent assessment by the United Nations states that more than 350,000 people have died as a result of the Boko Haram conflict in Northeast Nigeria, with 314,000 of these deaths attributed to indirect insurgency-related factors such as disease, hunger and malnutrition (Sanni 2021). Compared to the other three groups, the Niger Delta militants, the bandits and the IPOB, Boko Haram has killed almost ten times the total number of people. The reason for this could lie in the motives, ideology and patterns of the killings, where a single suicide bombing claims up to 200 or more victims, and sporadic indiscriminate machine gun shootings that kill more than 200 people each time, and above all the severe humanitarian crisis that traps hundreds of thousands and millions in a hard-to-reach zone.

The bandits are the second deadliest group in terms of killing Nigerians. Bandits have killed more than 6319 people between 2011 and 2018. In Katsina, over 2000 people were killed and 500 communities destroyed. Additionally, 1058 people were killed in the states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Niger. In Kaduna State alone, more than 4000 people were killed between 2018 and 2000 (West Africa Network for Peace Building 2020). The ACLED estimate shows that between 2010 and 19 May 2023, a total of 13,485 deaths could be attributed to banditry. And the actual figures could be higher, as the ACLED data is based on information from local groups and media reports (Ojewale 2024b). The IPOB is the youngest armed group, but it is already showing its violent impact on innocent citizens in the form of killings.

In 2022, IPOB carried out 40 attacks, killing 57 people and injuring 16, earning the group the status of the tenth deadliest terrorist organisation in the world. According to the Nextier SPD (2022), IPOB violence led to the killing of more than 5000 people between 2016 and 2022, while IPOB members lost more than 1000 members in separate battles at the hands of Nigerian troops, according to Al Jazeera (2024).

Taken together, the four groups have killed an estimated 420,000 Nigerians, including some of their members, in three decades from the 1990s to date, with Boko Haram having the largest share with an estimated 350,000, followed by bandits with 40,000, militants with 10,000 and IPOB with 5000. No government in a saner climate would allow such madness in the name of any motive or ideology. The end of all four groups and their rampage is not yet in sight. This means that the political decision-makers have a Herculean task ahead of them.

9.4. Forceful Displacement

One of the effects of the VNSAs and their activities in Nigeria is violent displacement. This applies to two groups in particular: Boko Haram in the Northeast and bandits in the Northwest of Nigeria. This is not to say that the conflicts in the Niger Delta and IPOB have not caused displacement. However, the scale of displacement is more prevalent in the Northeast and Northwest and the Northcentral regions affected by Boko Haram and bandit violence. There are no exact statistics on displacement caused by the Niger Delta, but several communities are known to have been either wiped out or relocated due to the conflicts, such as the Odi massacre in 2000, where President Obasanjo ordered the total annihilation of the community because some militants were hiding among them and killed some Nigerian military officers as a deterrent against future incidents (International Crisis Group 2020). Similarly, several communities left their enclave and relocated to other areas for fear of the conflict, where militants often used heavy weapons in their clashes with Nigerian troops or against other sister groups (Global Conflict Tracker 2020).

In the case of the IPOB, many groups, especially the Hausa–Fulani, are now fleeing the Southeast for fear of being attacked or killed. Even the Igbo are fleeing to the Southwest and the north of the country to prevent their businesses from collapsing due to the ugly sit-at-home activities that are threatening to crush the economy of the Southeast, and to escape the firefight with the Nigerian military. Thus, IPOB is also accused of displacement and other atrocities that have caused a humanitarian crisis, leading to a socioeconomic crisis and political problems for the Nigerian government.

The scale of displacement is similar to that of Boko Haram; Idris (2022) and the estimated that more than 3.5 million people have been displaced since the start of the conflicts. The displacement has resulted in internally displaced persons living in several camps in the Northeast, Northwest, Northcentral and even southern Nigeria. The pattern of displacement shows that rural dwellers, especially farmers, children, women and fishermen in the Baga region and traders in the Bama, Banki and Lake Chad regions of Borno State have suffered the most, as these have been the strongholds of Boko Haram activities, in addition to Monguno, Kukawa, Geidem and Gujuba in Yobe State and Madagali, Mubi and Askira-Uba in Adamawa State. In the IDP camps, the IDPs suffered untold hardship and a serious humanitarian crisis, as reported by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA (2020), including lack of food, shelter and other daily needs. In addition, the IDPs have caused a serious economic gap and social change in the Northeast.

Banditry is the second-largest conflict in terms of displacement. More than 500,000 people have been displaced so far, and 190,340 people in Zamfara State alone. In Katsina, over 33,000 people have been displaced (Kola 2020). In addition, 4000 people were displaced in Kaduna State between November 2019 and March 2020 (West Africa Network for Peace Building 2020). According to ACAPS Nigeria (2020), banditry has displaced 318,000 people in the country. According to a March 2020 report, more than 210,000 people have been displaced within the country and more than 35,000 refugees have crossed Nigeria's communal borders into Niger Republic (ACAPS Nigeria 2020). Attah et al. (2021) report that in 2020–2021, during the COVID-19 lockdown, more than 70,000 people were displaced from the Northwest to the Republic of Niger and more than 200,000 people were displaced within the country. Nwosu (2017) also reports that more than 150,000 people have been displaced in Northcentral Nigeria, particularly in Benue, Nassarawa and Plateau, due to conflicts between farmers and herdsmen and the activities of bandits. In Niger State, the ACAPS report (2020) also shows more than 50,000 displacements. From the above assumptions, it is clear that displacement by the various armed groups analysed in this work constitutes both internal and external displacement.

In comparison, the bulk of displacement attributable to the activities of the four armed groups amounts to about 4.5 million, with Boko Haram alone accounting for about 3.5 million, followed by banditry, which has caused about 500,000 displacements, while Niger Delta militants and breakaway IPOB groups have caused an estimated number of displacements. Thus, displacement by Boko Haram and bandits accounts for about 4 million, or 88.89 percent of the total displacement. Therefore, the intensity of the displacement crises in the Boko Haram and bandit conflicts may be attributed to the large geographical scale, the tendencies of the conflicts and possibly the environment and motives, as well as the ideology and extent of the groups' strategies and activities.

9.5. Loss of Agricultural Land

Like displacement, the destruction of farmland is more noticeable and more likely to affect Boko Haram and banditry in the Northeast and Northwest of the country, respectively, because these are agricultural areas that specialise in farming and food production. The Niger Delta militancy and IPOB activities have an impact on the Nigerian economy, but not on the agricultural sector because agriculture is exclusively carried out in the north, especially cereal production such as rice, beans, wheat, millet, maize, corn and others such as soya beans.

Sule and Sambo (2022) report that more than 40 percent of arable land in the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe remained uncultivated, as the Federal Government itself lamented at a security briefing. This has led to a food crisis and food insecurity in Nigeria. Many residents of Lake Chad were forced to leave their homes due to the escalating and spreading Boko Haram rebellion. The resulting migration caused them to stop fishing and farming, slowing down the replenishment process and thus contributing to the current depletion of the lake (Frimpong 2020). The FAO reports that 340,000 of the 704,000 inhabitants of Lake Chad are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. The drastic effects of climate change, exacerbated by the activities of Boko Haram insurgents on Lake Chad, have led to a growing water crisis in the region. The persistent water scarcity in the region has reduced the yield of foliage needed for grazing livestock, and the impacts have exacerbated tensions and competition for water and increased insecurity in the region (Usigbe 2020).

In Northeastern Nigeria, the centre of the Boko Haram insurgency, at least 70 percent of all displaced people are farmers. Fearing imminent attacks, farmers are forced to flee their communities and fields, even during the harvest season. In 2013, for example, 19,000 rice farmers were forced to leave their fertile fields near the Sahel, leaving around 24,700 hectares of rice fields unharvested (Adelaja and George 2019). This is because if the existing farmers remained on their land, they were threatened with giving up their produce to meet the needs of the terrorist organisation. In a field study, Sambo and Sule (2025) report that farmers were fined before they were allowed to cultivate their farmland in areas controlled by Boko Haram. The insurgents have also confiscated land and farmed it themselves. They also demanded zakat and other levies from farmers, which eventually drove them from their fields.

Assessments conducted in late 2014 following key informant interviews in Gombe, Yobe and Adamawa states revealed that vast areas in southern Yobe and Borno and northern Adamawa were under-cultivated and/or left unharvested during the peak farming season from May to December due to attacks and conflict-related fears orchestrated by Boko Haram insurgents in the region. They have abandoned their farms, agricultural activities and homes due to insecurity. Statistics for 2015 show that more than 5.2 million people in Northeast Nigeria suffered from severe food insecurity due to the Boko Haram insurgency, and around 54,000 were threatened by famine. The crisis in this conflict-prone region of Nigeria is massive. More than 15 million people are currently affected by food insecurity, of which more than 5.2 million are severely food-insecure. Given the extent of the destruction of flora and fauna in the area, this problem is likely to continue for a long time. In addition, many farmers who have defied the odds to grow crops that are in demand in the cities are struggling to deliver these crops. This is because key bridges on important communication routes have been sabotaged by militants. Vehicles travelling on remote roads have been attacked, crops destroyed and the occupants killed. A bridge linking Nigeria to border communities near Cameroon and another linking Maiduguri in Borno State to Damaturu in Yobe State were both blown up by Boko Haram in 2014. This disrupted transport in the region, which had long-term consequences for the food supply in Cameroon and Nigeria.

In Northeastern Nigeria, access to land and farms has been severely restricted due to security concerns related to insurgent attacks, but also due to security measures taken by the government, including the establishment of security zones around "garrison towns". One estimate is that only 20 percent of agricultural land is accessible to farmers and that military transportation is still required for 66 percent of major roads. Several interviewees mentioned the 2 km security perimeter around garrison towns and how this limits their ability to access land. A 2016 estimate of the impact of damage to infrastructure and social services on the agricultural sector put this figure at USD 3.7 billion (\$5,946,291,164,000.00 trillion) between 2011 and 2015 (UNDP 2019).

The disastrous consequences of violent extremism for agricultural production and trade have been emphasised. In Nigeria, for example, the urban centres in the Northeast are secured to a certain extent, but this security perimeter only extends to a distance of about 10 km from the centre. People working on land outside this area, either for subsistence farming or for trade, either risk their lives on a daily basis or have abandoned their land altogether. Stakeholders explained that this limited ability to earn a living is one of the main indirect reasons for the large-scale displacement of the population in the Northeast. A study by Mercy Corps on market revitalisation in Northeast Nigeria found that there are differences from state to state in terms of

agricultural employment and, therefore, who may be most affected by disruptions in production, transport and trade. According to projections by the International Labour Organisation, before the start of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009, more than a third of agricultural labourers were female. As violent extremist acts became more common, the proportion of female agricultural labourers more than halved and now stands at less than one in six (UNDP 2019).

The loss of arable land continues to be one of the emerging problems in the Northwestern region, largely as a direct result of banditry. Consequently, a food security crisis is inevitable, as farmers are unable to grow food on a large scale. The geopolitical zone remains one of the most fertile and extensive grain- and food-growing regions in the country. Around 80% of the population works in agriculture. However, as banditry became pervasive in 2015 and beyond, farmers began to abandon their farmland for fear of kidnapping or assassination. In Zamfara state, more than 13,000 hectares of farmland were destroyed or rendered inaccessible as a result of bandit attacks (International Crisis Group 2020). In 2019, the Sokoto State Disaster Management Authority reported that 21,316 hectares of farmland in five communities were uncultivated in October of that year and around 80,000 farmers stayed away from farming for fear of bandit attacks (Amani 2019). From 2011 to 2019, around 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were stolen in Zamfara state alone (International Crisis Group 2020). As a result, most farmers in the affected region were evicted from their farms, leading to food shortages across Nigeria, driving food prices in the country to astronomical levels never before seen in the country's history and exacerbating malnutrition, especially among children.

9.6. Illegal Mining

Illegal mining and oil bunkering have affected the Nigerian economy to the extent that between 2016 and 2018, Nigeria lost an estimated N353 billion (\$900 million) to the activities of illegal miners, smuggling syndicates and banditry, as lamented by the Minister of Mines and Steel Development, Abubakar Bawa Bwari (Ogbonnaya 2021). Similarly to the case of Boko Haram, where Frimpong (2020) and Usigbe (2020) argue that climate change and Boko Haram are influencing each other in the Lake Chad Basin, it is speculated that the new nature of the bandits' activities and operations are inspired and encouraged by conflict entrepreneurs, encouraging them to exploit resources such as gold, lithium, californium and other valuable minerals and gemstones found in the Northwestern states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi and Sokoto as well as Niger State in North Central Africa (Ojakorotu 2024).

Illegal mining is associated with two armed groups: the Niger Delta militants and the bandits in the Northwest. There is no solid evidence of a link between the activities of Boko Haram and IPOB and illegal mining, even though the jihadist groups have recently moved into the Northwest and joined forces with the bandits (Aina 2022). This has not yet been observed in the Northeast. Oil theft in the Niger Delta is shaking the Nigerian economy and affecting national development. According to government estimates, the annual financial loss amounts to about 3.5 billion dollars (N5,925,075,240,000.00 trillion). The NNPC and about 18 other oil and gas companies have lost over 27 million barrels of crude oil to vandalism, oil theft and illegal refining activities between 2006 and 2015. It is clear that there have been about 227 incidents of vandalism on Nembe Creek Trunk Line 1, 2 and 3, which is the subject of the study, since it was commissioned in 2010 (Jatto 2024). The 2016 NNPC report shows that Nigeria lost over \$7 billion (N11,058,670,000,000.00

trillion) between January and October 2016, representing more than 30 percent of the national budget.

The International Centre for Reconciliation (ICR) estimates the monetary value lost to pipeline vandalism and illegal oil bunkering activities between 2003 and 2008 to be over USD 100 billion (N157,981,000,000.00 trillion). Vandalism has significantly affected Nigeria's oil production, as demonstrated by the decline in production in 2016; production averaged between 1.3 and 1.8 million barrels, below the target of 2.2 million barrels per day (Jatto 2024). According to statistics from the International Centre for Reconciliation (ICR), the cost of militancy to the Nigerian economy through stolen crude oil (bunkering) and disrupted oil production between 2003 and 2008 alone amounted to around 14 trillion naira, equivalent to 100 billion dollars (Oluyemi 2020). This can be attributed to Nigeria's low economic performance and debt crisis, which currently stands at over 150 trillion naira in 2024 according to National Bureau of Statistics (2024b).

Illegal mining in the Northwest has contributed to the underdevelopment of the region and Nigeria in general. Illegal mining is directly linked to the increase in rural banditry in Northwest Nigeria, particularly in the states of Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara, where 3600 people were abducted between 2011 and 2019. In Zamfara State alone, about 6319 people, including women and children, were killed between June 2011 and May 2019, and it was observed that most of the areas of attacks fell within the enclaves of the mining zone. This trend prompted the Nigerian government to ban all forms of gold mining in Zamfara State in April 2019 (Ogbonnaya 2021). Section 44 (3) of the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act 1999 states that the ownership and control of all minerals in Nigeria shall lie with the Federal Government, which is mandated to manage such natural resources in such a manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly (Kabir 2022).

Based on a study by Kabir (2022), many inhabitants in the Northwest stated that they had found new livelihood opportunities in illegal mining. A gram of gold that is mined illegally is sold through intermediaries for N10,000 (\$6.22), as the real sponsors of mining are not visible to the labourers working at the sites. Apart from the fact that illegal mining activities destroy landscapes and lush vegetation and lead to erosion, the formation of sinkholes, loss of biodiversity and soil contamination, they also contribute to local conflicts (Kabir 2022). Local residents told our reporter that illegal miners sometimes clash with their "Chinese" bosses, who have acquired the land for their illegal activities. "Once, two overseas Chinese were kidnapped by miners for a fortnight because he had not paid them for their services. He was released after a ransom was paid," said a source in the community, who pleaded anonymity for fear of being attacked. The miners are approaching farm and community owners to acquire land and community leaders who always give them permission after they have collected money, adds Kabir (2022).

The Federal Government took proactive measures against illegal mining in Zamfara in 2019, claiming that these activities contribute to kidnappings and killings in the state. According to reports, about 80 percent of mining in the Northwest region is illegal and is carried out on an artisanal basis by the local population. In November 2020, the Katsina State Government stated that illegal mining is the wheel that drives armed "banditry" in Katsina and neighbouring states in Northwestern Nigeria. According to the state's Commissioner for Rural Development, Mustapha Bello, bandits use guns to displace innocent rural dwellers in order to gain access to mineral resources. President Muhammadu Buhari agreed that illegal mining activities are

fuelling the crisis in local communities. His spokesman Garba Shehu recently said, "There is a strong suspicion that some helicopters are being used to transport arms for bandits and also to remove gold illegally smuggled out of the country". Also, speaking to journalists in March 2021, the Chairman of the Association of Licensed Small-Scale Mining Operators of Nigeria (ALSSMON), Olugbenga Ajala, said the funding of terrorism through illegal mining in Nigeria was regrettably disappointing. The Federal Government has also accused some high-profile political "godfathers" of supporting illegal mining activities in the country (Kabir 2022).

9.7. Setback to Commercial Activities/Sit-at-Home Syndrome and Economic Losses

The activities of the VNSAs in Nigeria selected and examined in this book are causing serious setbacks to economic and commercial activities in all four geopolitical zones of the South-South, where militancy is prevalent; the Northwest, where Boko Haram is thriving; the Northwest, where banditry is devastating; and the Southeast, where the secessionist movement, IPOB, is threatening. The cost of the losses (estimated or confirmed by accurate data) reaches trillions of naira. These figures refer to the losses of private companies and not those of the government, which are discussed under the heading of illegal mining. However, the government can also lose taxes and revenue as a result of business blocked by the conflicts.

The conflicts and insecurity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria cover the nine states of Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. About 31 million people live in the region, which is considered to be one of the ten most important wetlands and marine coastal ecosystems in the world. Erosion, canalisation and conflicts within and between communities are further effects of oil production in the region. This has led to protests by the local population, which in turn have resulted in full-blown conflicts. This has affected agriculture, fishing, trade and commercial activities worth billions of dollars or trillions of Naira since the 1990s. It has also destroyed property worth millions of Naira. The militancy indeed took its toll on the Nigerian economy, as the country lost more than 1.8 billion Naira daily to militants' attacks on oil facilities. This mainly affected the Niger Delta residents' daily search for means of livelihood (Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2017).

As the crisis in the Niger Delta is hampering the operations of oil companies, some of them have started laying off their staff. The British-Dutch oil company Shell Development Company made 3500 workers redundant in September 2007. Similar action was taken in 2004, when around 1500 Shell employees were made redundant. The idea was developed to reduce operating costs in light of the deteriorating security situation in the Niger Delta. Shell's management decided to take this action in response to the decline in production, particularly in the western operations in Bayelsa and Delta states; production has been suspended since February 2006. Since the outbreak of a new crisis in the Niger Delta in February 2006, production in the western region has been reduced by 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day (I. Anthony 2010).

Since the beginning of the crisis, and especially since the onset of the hostage-taking and attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta, business activities have come to a standstill. Restraint has reduced growth in the corporate sector over the last three years. In Rivers State alone, the situation has reached an alarming level: about 80 percent of businesses in the state have ceased operations as employees have either returned to their home states or sought refuge in other areas. This development has, in turn, led to an increase in unemployment among the youth. Commenting on the situation, the Deputy Governor of Rivers State, Engr. Tele Ikuru, said, "Rivers State has

become a carcass of itself. Go to Trans-Amadi and you will see that about 80 percent of businesses have closed down, not because they are unable to run their businesses properly, but because of the activities of our youths at home". He specifically mentioned that "Indorama Petrochemicals has shut down operations, leaving over 3000 youths jobless and worsening unemployment." The Niger Delta crisis has negatively impacted the telecoms sector, as militant activities have exacerbated the problems of dropped calls on the networks of mobile operators in the country (Nigeria) as several base stations in the region have become inaccessible. Confirming this development, the General Manager, Regulatory Affairs, Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN) Nigeria, Mr. Wale Goodluck, said, "The company has shut down 43 base stations in the Delta region due to militant activities that made them inaccessible". He added that "due to the situation, operators are unable to refuel their base stations when power is scarce. This has led to a significant number of dropped calls" (I. Anthony 2010).

According to the UNDP (2019), the economic cost of terrorism in Nigeria, i.e., the activities of Boko Haram and other jihadist groups, between 2007 and 2016 is \$97,966 (N157,496,360,560.00 billion). The costs are broken down into the costs for the defence budget and the expenses for security and the losses due to refugees and internally displaced persons. The cost of refugees and internally displaced persons in Nigeria from 2007 to 2016 is \$75,660 (N121,593,618,775.20 trillion) (UNDP 2019). Field research in Borno State, Nigeria, found that there is a prevailing belief that Boko Haram deliberately attacks markets and trade routes to cripple the economy and disrupt trade routes and relations. Markets, once a vibrant focal point for communities and traders, are still closed in 16 of the 27 LGAs in Borno State. An assessment found that 80 percent of farmers still do not have access to their favourite or most frequented markets (UNDP 2019). In response to Boko Haram's targeted attacks on markets, the Nigerian government has imposed restrictions on the movement of goods and people, closures, curfews, restricted goods: the types of goods traded and the manner in which they are traded. While some markets remain completely closed, others operate on a very limited basis, with the LGA determining market days and times. Curfews are often imposed, restricting trading hours to daylight hours. Finally, there are also restrictions on trading in certain goods, such as fertiliser. The attacks on the markets have a significant impact on women. A large proportion of the goods traded in the attacked markets are agricultural products sold by women. Women make up almost half of all agricultural workers in Nigeria. When a market is disrupted, women agricultural workers cannot sell their perishable produce and lose a valuable source of income (UNDP 2019).

In Nigeria, for example, women make up around 30 percent of traders and sellers in the markets; a disruption to market activity therefore also affects this form of economic activity. Although employment in agriculture has been declining for both men and women since 2007, the proportion of women employed fell significantly after the rise in terrorist attacks on markets began in 2010. It fell from 18.6 percent of female employment in 2010 to 14.6 percent in 2016, while the share of male employment in agriculture fell by only 1.5 percent points over the same period (UNDP 2019). The UNDP further explains that, according to one estimate, the informal economy in Northeastern Nigeria accounted for between 80 and 90 percent of business in Borno before the crisis. Petty traders with businesses worth USD 10 to 15 in terms of capital and revenue accounted for 60–70 percent of the population. The main forms of informal activity were agriculture and market-based petty trading, and informal cross-border trade. Each of these informal activities was affected by

the insurgency and the state's response to the insurgency. The informal economy has been by far the hardest hit by the insurgency. People's sources of income were completely destroyed.

Before the crisis, agriculture dominated the economy, both with cash crops such as cotton and groundnuts and food crops such as maize, as well as livestock and fishing. The service sector was followed by trade and transport, especially with significant cross-border trade with Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and Niger. The loss of livelihoods, trade and economic activities is a consequence of the disruption of cross-border trade. Another significant disruption was that of the Baga fish trade around Lake Chad, whose annual turnover in 2001 was estimated at US\$19 million (N30,535,008,680.00). Due to its strategic location on Lake Chad and as a border town, Boko Haram had overrun the fishing town twice and taken over the fishery because it was so profitable. In response, security measures against Boko Haram, including the imposition of administrative and security barriers, have reduced this fishing trade to a fraction of its former size. The state has imposed barriers on this trade precisely because of its high revenue, fearing that Boko Haram would try to usurp the trade and profits in search of funds.

The security-related roadblocks not only restrict fishing, but also mean that even those who can fish cannot get their fish to the markets without a military escort. The price of transporting fish has risen from about 700 naira before the crisis to about 2000–2500 naira now. One respondent explained that on a recent visit to Baga, he bought a bag of dried fish for 10,000 naira, while the same bag can fetch 45,000 naira in Maiduguri and 80,000 naira in Lagos. However, the trader cannot sell his fish, so he is forced to sell it far below the market price and suffers severe income difficulties. More recently, it has been alleged that Nigerian security forces have "hijacked" this informal trade for their own benefit by imposing high tariffs on transport and generally regulating the sale of fish stocks (UNDP 2019).

In the Northwest, bandit activities have affected the economy and trade, costing the Nigerian government billions of naira in lost revenue and the closure of private businesses. This escalation has had a significant impact on Nigeria's cross-border trade and agribusiness with neighbouring countries such as Niger and Benin. On the border with Jibia, which was known as a vibrant trading centre, activities have declined sharply. Importers and exporters have completely shunned the area, leading to a significant drop in border revenue, according to the Nigerian Customs Service. This decline can be attributed to the constant attacks by bandits in the border region. The once thriving agricultural sector in Jibia, where many large-scale farmers export their produce to various parts of Africa, including Niger, Mali and Benin, has also been hit hard. Many farmers have abandoned their farms and relocated due to the escalating incidents (Onota et al. 2024).

The IPOB secession conflicts have cost a lot of money and wealth worth trillions of naira. This is due to the sit-at-home arrangement imposed by the group. Another disturbing feature of this enforced order is the huge decline in market trading and transport. Onitsha market, the trading centre of Anambra State, is considered one of the largest in West Africa. Every day, commuters and traders from all over the world flock there to do business. However, due to the sit-at-home arrangement, the market always closes on Monday. According to the Daily Trust newspaper, which looks at the financial impact on the market economy, the market loses an average of 25 billion naira (\$15,555,915.00 million), and other eastern regions lose almost the same amount. Every time the Southeast region follows the sit-at-home directive, it loses

more than 10 billion naira (\$6,222,366.00 million). In Anambra alone, the poor lose an estimated 19.6 billion naira (\$12,195,837.36 million) by staying at home. The report notes that transporters lose a huge sum of N10 billion (\$6,222,366.00 million) for every day they stay at home. Less revenue means less purchasing power for transport operators in the Southeast, which in turn means less tax rebates for state governments. This is a double tragedy for a nation whose economy is already in shambles. The Southeast takes great pride in its status as a centre of commerce. Unfortunately, on Monday, which is normally the busiest day of the week and for some the most productive, traders are forced to stay at home. This has led to a trading loss of between N700 billion (\$435,565,620.00 million) and N3 trillion (\$1,866,709,800.00 billion) (Aligwekwe 2022). Figure 7 shows a more recent details of the financial implications distributed across the affected states in the zone, while Figure 8 shows the comparative financial losses and cost of lives.

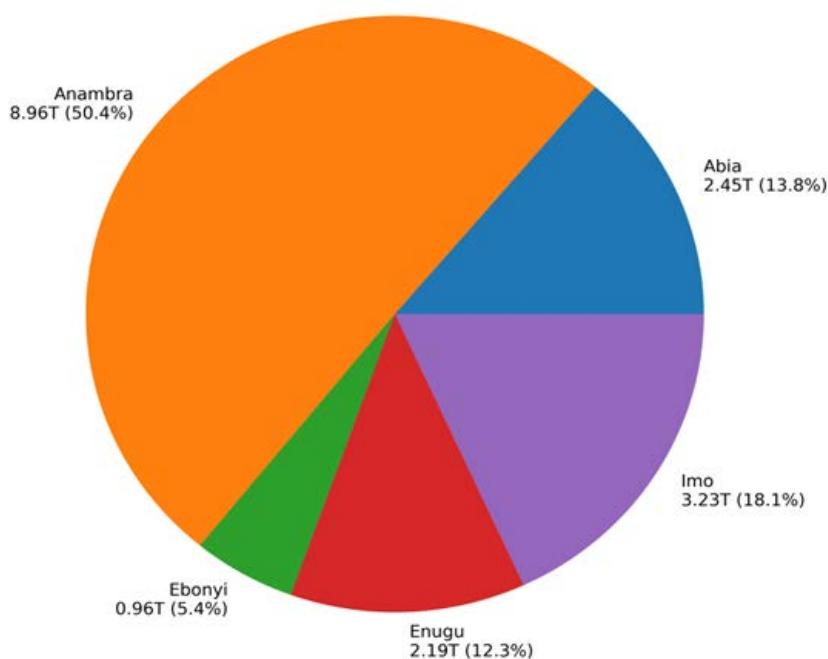


Figure 7. Financial loss distribution (trillion Naira) in the Southeast states. Cost of the sit-at-home order and wealth lost in the Southeast. Source: Authors’ compilation based on data from the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2026).

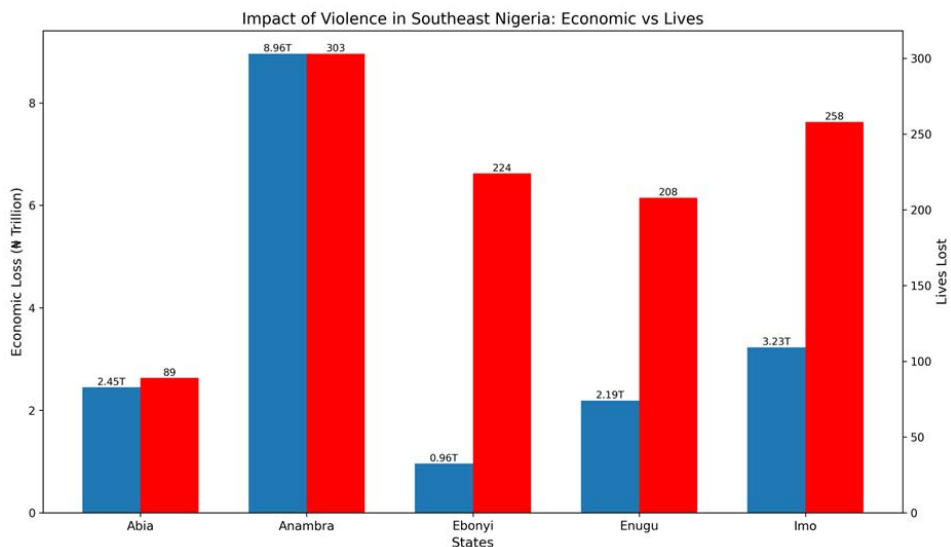


Figure 8. Impact of sit-at-home violence vs. lives lost in the Southeast. The blue bars represent losses recorded in trillions of naira due to the activities of sit-at-home, while the red bars represent losses of lives due to violence. Source: Authors’ compilation based on data from the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2026).

In summary, the VNSAs have affected the Nigerian economy immeasurably. The situation is even worse for the Niger Delta, as it is the source of the country’s major sources of revenue and foreign exchange. It has faced an estimated loss of over \$20 billion (N32,142,114,400,000.00 trillion), almost ten times more than what the Boko Haram conflict and the IPOB secessionists have destroyed. The other conflict, banditry, cost more than \$3 billion (N4,821,317,160,000.00 trillion) in losses from farmlands, kidnapping ransoms, and other forms of destruction. In all, the Niger Delta militants, Boko Haram insurgents, bandits and IPOB renegades have cost the Nigerian government over N50 trillion (\$31,111,830,000.00 billion) in revenue losses, an amount sufficient to cover a deficit in any sector or infrastructure the country is grappling with.

9.8. Kidnapping for Ransom and School Abduction

The following applies to all the groups analysed here. The first group, the Niger Delta militants, used kidnapping as a source of income to procure weapons and other logistical resources, to scare away foreigners and oil companies, and to sabotage oil production, affecting the Nigerian government. Before the resurgence of democracy in 1999, kidnapping was a rare occurrence and was not heard of in any part of the country. Today, it has become a lucrative business due to the activities of VNSAs in almost all parts of the country. In the Niger Delta, the struggles against the atrocities of the oil companies and the Nigerian government’s perceived inadequate response to the plight of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta areas began. From 2007 to 2008, some criminal elements in the Niger Delta began to commit kidnappings for purely criminal reasons. This crime was not given the importance it deserved, as the routine activity theory and the broken windows theory show it was not given

the attention it deserved by the Nigerian government, and the activities got out of hand and spread beyond the South-South zone to the Southeast and some parts of the Southwest (Albert et al. 2020). The International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2026) reveals that families, friends and loved ones of kidnap victims in Nigeria paid a whopping sum of \$18.34 million (N28,973,715,400.00 billion) to the kidnapers from June 2011 to March 2020. The report also reveals that \$11 million (N17,377.910.000.00 billion) was paid out between January 2016 and March 2020. Although the phenomenon is widespread across the country, it appears to be much more prevalent and acute in the Niger Delta. The ICIR report lists Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states, three states at the centre of oil and environmental politics in Nigeria, as three of the top 10 states with the highest number of reported kidnapping cases in Nigeria (Omotola and Fayomi 2024).

Oil workers were the main target of the Niger Delta phase of the problem from 2002 to 2008, with victims abducted at oil production stations and on the way to their project sites. Other victims included construction workers who had signed contracts with oil companies; federal and state government officials; and the crew of oil ships in the Gulf of Guinea. The list also included children of prominent people: politicians, contractors and oil workers. However, the ransoms demanded at the time were often modest and not difficult for the victims to pay (Albert et al. 2020). What distinguishes the kidnappings in the Niger Delta from those of Boko Haram in the Northeast and bandits in the Northwest is that the kidnapers and hostage-takers in the Niger Delta rarely kill their victims. The victims were released immediately after they agreed on the amount to be paid.

The first major case of kidnapping of foreign oil workers in the Niger Delta occurred in April 2002, when some youths from Ekeremoh Local Government Area of Bayelsa State abducted ten employees of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). The militants demanded and received a ransom of N3.1 million before handing over the foreign oil workers to the former Governor of the state, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha. The next hostage-taking took place almost a year later on 29 June 2003. But since then, hostage-taking and kidnappings have become regular occurrences (Albert et al. 2020). Some are reported, while others go unnoticed because the cases accumulate. In June 2007, there were seven major cases of hostage-taking and kidnapping in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States, with most of the cases occurring in Rivers. The two most high-profile cases were the kidnapping of some Indian workers from Indorama, the new owners of Eleme Petrochemical Company Limited, on 1 June 2007. This was the second time the company had been attacked by hostage-takers. In the first attack (three weeks before the second), the militants, who called themselves the Movement of Niger Delta People, had taken three hostages. They demanded a ransom of N150 million (\$93,335.49 thousand)—N50 million (\$31,111.83 thousand) per hostage. The Indian company paid a meagre N40 million and the militants struck a second time, taking the company's managing director with them. They described the N40 million (\$24,889.46 thousand) previously paid to them as rations money for the hostages they had initially taken and threatened not to release any of the hostages until the N150 million initially demanded was paid in full. The next day, another militant group struck at the Aluminum Smelting Company of Nigeria Limited in Ikot Abasi, Akwa Ibom State. They kidnapped five Russian workers.

The number of foreigners kidnapped in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region for financial or political gain has exploded in recent years. In 2005, for example,

seven foreigners were reported kidnapped. In 2006, this figure rose to 72 and in 2007 to 223; 26 of those who were kidnapped were British nationals. Five of the 295 foreign nationals abducted in 2006 and 2007 died as a result of their abduction injuries, including one British national who was killed when the kidnappers' boat was attacked by the Nigerian navy. One Syrian hostage died of illness shortly after her release (Omotola and Fayomi 2024). Between January 2022 and December 2023, more than 300 kidnapping incidents and more than 250 fatalities were reported in the Niger Delta. Between January 2022 and December 2023, over 300 abductions and more than 250 deaths were reported in the Niger Delta (Partnership Initiative in the Niger Delta 2024).

Another notorious group that makes a business out of kidnappings is the terrorist organisation Boko Haram. Kidnappings have been Boko Haram's main tactic and tool of correspondence with the government since 2011. Between February and May 2013, the Boko Haram base in Maiduguri, Borno State, held 12 government officials captive. The threat intensified when the sect kidnapped seven members of a French family in northern Cameroon, who were rescued and returned to Nigeria after a ransom was paid. Following the kidnapping of a French family of seven in northern Cameroon in 2013, the group received \$3.15 million (N4,976,401,500.00 billion) from Cameroonian and French negotiators for the family's release. Since then, Boko Haram has gone on a rampage of kidnappings for ransom and terrorism. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, Boko Haram has kidnapped and abducted more than 1000 children, mainly girls, since 2013. The abductions of the Chibok girls and the Dapchi school, in which 276 and 110 children were kidnapped, are among the most significant of these abduction operations; they occurred in 2014 and 2018, respectively.

The consolidation of the Boko Haram kidnapping saga became even clearer with the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from a public secondary school in Chibok community in Borno State in April 2014. The abduction case attracted attention, and many human rights organisations not only condemned the action but also called on the government to find a way to rescue the innocent girls. Although a large number of the girls were later released by the government after years of captivity, the abduction of the Dapchi schoolgirls was another tactic by Boko Haram to remain relevant and have a reason to persuade the government to engage in dialogue. Despite the swift action that led to the release of the Dapchi girls, abduction has become an operational modus operandi of the Boko Haram terrorist organisation.

According to Amnesty International (2024), more than 1700 children have been abducted by gunmen since 2014, with 17 mass abductions of schoolchildren recorded in six years. Twenty released Chibok girls were forced to marry former Boko Haram fighters. The Boko Haram abductions culminated with the Chibok Girls saga. In 2014, 276 schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram in the town of Chibok. Dozens are still missing. In April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were abducted from a government secondary school in Chibok, a town in Borno state. Some of the girls escaped from captivity on their own, while others were later released after intensive campaigns by civil society organisations and negotiations by the government. However, of those originally abducted, 82 girls are still in captivity, while several children were abducted in later attacks (Amnesty International 2024).

While the case of the Chibok girls was still ongoing, Boko Haram struck again on Monday evening, 19 February 2017, in the town of Dapchi in Yobe State. They made their way to the Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi,

and abducted 110 students. All the girls were released except one, Leah Sharibu, a Christian. The Boko Haram insisted that she refused to convert to Islam. They therefore held her hostage and married her off to one of their members. This dangerous act almost led to a rift between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. It is said that the Nigerian government had to pay a ransom of several billion naira before they were released, with the exception of Sharibu, who is still held captive today (Amnesty International 2024). This is one of the main arguments of Sambo & Sule that Boko Haram has nothing to do with Islam and Muslims because Allah (SWT) clearly mentions in the glorious Quran that there is no compulsion in religion (Q.2:256).

Banditry led to high ransoms being paid for kidnappings. The SBM (2021) estimates that families and relatives of the victims paid ransoms of between 1000 and 150,000 dollars. It is worrying to note that the kidnappers or bandits escaped with the ransoms, while the security agencies always claim that the rescue of the victims was done without the payment of ransoms. Rufa'I (2021) further explained that families, friends, enemies and unexpected persons can tip off the bandits about a target or locate a rich man to be kidnapped for ransom. In some cases, one group collects the ransom after the kidnapping and hands the victim over to another group to renegotiate the ransom. In this context, several ransoms are demanded from one victim. Shockingly, it can happen that someone is kidnapped and later finds out that his or her family members or friends are behind the kidnapping (Rufa'I 2021). The data on the criminal economy of ransom payments in Nigeria reveals a complex challenge. Between 2011 and April 2020, Nigerians lost at least \$18.34 million in payments to secure the release of their family members from bandits. In April 2021, the Zamfara government announced that bandits collected N970,000,000 (\$603,569.50 thousand) as ransom from victims' families between 2011 and 2019. The figure is likely higher than reported, as ransom payments are negotiated in secret and opaque and not every payment is reported to the authorities (Ogunnubi and Idowu 2024).

During the school abductions, some students died in captivity while others were killed by the gunmen or escaped with fatal wounds (AFP 2021). The school abductions in Northwest Nigeria have further exacerbated the collapsing security architecture in the country and exacerbated the education crisis in a country where one in five children is already out of school. Since December 2021, 10 mass abductions have been reported, with many smaller incidents going unreported. In all cases, parents and governments are blackmailed before the students are released (Iwara 2021). UNICEF stated that attacks on schools and abductions deprive children in the Northwest and other parts of the North of the right to education (Kaalu 2021). Notable cases of abductions in 2021 were those of the Government Secondary School in Kagara, Niger State (although this state is in Northcentral, another area plagued by banditry and abductions); the Government Girls School in Jangebe, Zamfara State; and the Federal University of Forestry Mechanisation. The school abductions were not limited to primary and secondary schools, but also extended to tertiary institutions (Attah and Sule 2024). On 20 April 2021, 23 students from Greenfield University in Kaduna State were kidnapped and their parents were asked to pay a ransom of N800 million (\$497,789.28 thousand). The students were later released on 29 May 2021 after a ransom of N100 million (\$62,223.66 thousand) was paid (Akinwotu 2021).

Similarly, on 29 November 2020, bandits attacked Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria and abducted Dr. Ibrahim Bako, a lecturer in the Department of Physiology. Before he regained his freedom, a ransom of an undisclosed amount was paid. On

2 November 2021, another kidnapping took place at a university, this time in the country's capital, at the University of Abuja, where a professor and his three children were kidnapped for ransom (Obiezu 2021). The breakdown of school kidnappings in Northwestern Nigeria from 2020 to date shows that 1409 students and 17 teachers have been kidnapped and 16 killed since the incidents began, including nine in Kaduna, three in Zamfara, one in Kebbi and three in Niger (a North-central state bordering many Northwestern states). At least one ransom totalling £220 million was paid during this period. The most affected states are Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna and Kebbi (SBM 2021).

Like the other groups, the IPOB has also carried out kidnappings through its armed wing, the ESN. Amnesty International (2024) notes that the number of kidnappings in Nigeria is not decreasing but increasing because IPOB has recently begun to participate. In an operation in Imo State, the security forces comprising the Police Command and the Nigerian Army successfully rescued four kidnapped victims and neutralised one suspect in an operation in Ezioha, Mbaitoli Local Government Area. The joint security forces dismantled a kidnapping syndicate believed to be members of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). In another raid in Enugu State, a combined force of security agencies neutralised at least 27 persons suspected to be kidnappers and members of the Eastern Security Network, the security arm of the Indigenous People of Biafra. Some of those neutralised were loyal to Simon Ekpa, also known as Auto Pilot IPOB, based in Finland (Ede 2024). IPOB tried extensively to refute claims by Nigerian security agencies that it was involved in kidnappings. However, the group's violent activities are enough to harbour criminal groups hiding under IPOB to operate in the same manner as various criminals hiding under Boko Haram, bandits and Niger Delta militants to commit crimes. The IPOB kidnappings are becoming as dangerous as those of Boko Haram and bandits, as the police have discovered that some of those kidnapped were killed, buried and hidden by IPOB.

However, what makes the abduction patterns of the four groups under investigation fundamentally different are the consequences. So far, the Niger Delta fighters have not killed the victims. They collect ransom money and release them. The Boko Haram collect ransom money, release some, hold others and kill some. In the case of the bandits, they run their kidnapping business like Boko Haram. The IPOB has yet to record a kidnapping for ransom. They have mainly kidnapped and killed.

9.9. Ungoverned/Contested or Under-Governed Spaces

All four armed groups investigated have created ungoverned spaces/under-governed spaces/contested governed spaces in their respective areas of operation. Circumstances have made it clear that the Niger Delta has become an ungoverned space that is being abused because there is no effective Nigerian security administration in the area, which raises the issue of ungoverned/under-governed/contested governed space, as theorised in the earlier part of this study. Few efforts have been made to theorise about Nigeria's ungoverned space despite the fact that contested areas and activities of armed groups have existed for more than three decades. In the 1990s, Niger Delta militant groups took control of a significant area in Nigeria's economic centre, the riverine oil production area. The militants bunker oil, kidnap foreigners to extort ransom money, destroy oil pipelines and also disrupt the economic activities in oil production.

In areas such as Azuzuama, Gbekenegbene, Ezetu, Agge, Kurutiye, Forupa, Okubie, Olugbobiri and Okiegbene/Ebirigbene (Ikebiri 1 and 2), there are camps where the militants have established an unofficial government. Ken's Camp in Odi, Robert Creek and Cawthorne Channel in Nembe as well as the Korokorosei and Southern Ijaw Camps are all located in Bayelsa State. In addition to the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Forces in Akuku-Tori, the Niger Delta Vigilante in Okirika, the Icelanders/Outlaws in Borokiri, Port Harcourt and Okirika and the Yeghe camps in Bori and Ogoni in Rivers State, there are also the Okerenkoko and Opuraza camps in Warri South and the Egbema, Ubefem and Berger camps in Warri, Delta State (Asuni 2009b). Since these camps are located in difficult terrain, it is a challenge for the military to re-establish government control over the region and effectively combat militancy and piracy in the region. This development under MEND justifies the assumptions and applications of all three theories used in this study with regard to the emergence of ungoverned/contested, governed or under-governed spaces where the authorities of the constituted government are disregarded and challenged by non-state actors and armed groups (Akinola 2011).

The most recent examples of ungoverned spaces are the terrorism of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria and rural banditry in the Northwest. Of all the ungoverned or contested areas in Nigeria, Boko Haram deserves more attention and theoretical consideration due to the size of the areas captured, activities, destruction and impact. Boko Haram controlled about 16 local governments from 2013 to 2017, which is equivalent to the size of England (De Montclos 2021). In addition, Boko Haram insurgents set up roadblocks, levied taxes on commuters, fined residents and confiscated supplies and consumables, including medicines, food and fuel, killing over 40,000 people in addition to the displacement of over 3.5 million people in the Lake Chad region (Mohammed 2021). The activities of Boko Haram insurgents have created more uncontrolled areas in Lake Chad, leading to a near collapse of fishing, farming and commercial activities. The Lake, which produces about 100,000 tonnes of fish, has come to a standstill due to the activities of the insurgents. The Nigerian government has lost authority and sovereignty in the area controlled by Boko Haram. The Chief of Army Staff reported over 100,000 deaths (Idris 2022) due to Boko Haram atrocities instead of the 40,000 mentioned by Mohammed (2021) and a loss of about 3.3 trillion naira (Idris 2022).

The acts of banditry have increased drastically over the years, largely due to the activities of the bandits, especially in the Northwest of Nigeria. This has led to a gap in governance and government control over the spaces in the Northwest. The most affected states are Kaduna, Zamfara and Katsina. Ungovernable areas such as the Kamuku, Birnin Gwari, Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma and Sububu forests are used by the bandits as hiding places from which they launch attacks on the neighbouring communities (Olaniyan 2024). In the course of the attacks, they often kill livestock, kill people and rape women and children (Suleiman 2019). In addition, the takeover and control of territories in Northwest Nigeria remains an important issue in the current Nigerian security discourse. It is evident that some bandit groups have taken full control of some villages and imposed levies by removing district chiefs and appointing new chiefs who are loyal to them (J. S. Ojo 2020). A member of the State House of Assembly representing Sabon Birni in Sokoto reported on 9 November 2021 that his constituents still paying taxes to bandits (Umar 2021a). The member added that Sabon Birni residents have to pay taxes before going to their farms or transporting their farm produce home. The member disclosed that the

bandits collect about N500,000 to N1,000,000 up to N4,000,000 for over 20 cities in the local governments, and about 10 of them had already paid (Idris 2021).

In another development, the bandits were involved in the removal and appointment of district heads who were tasked with collecting taxes for them in the villages and towns of Sokoto (Hassan-Wuyo 2021). In a similar usurpation of power from the government, Dogo Gide banned the use of drugs and other intoxicants in Dansadau Emirate in Maru Local Government in Zamfara State (Umar 2021b). In Kaduna State, Baleri declared the Birnin Gwari axis as his domain and area of control and now imposes taxes as he sees fit (Umar 2021b). These warlords and gang leaders are gradually taking over Nigerian authority and undermining the sovereignty and authority of the Nigerian government. Ungoverned spaces are emerging and the inhabitants of the affected towns and villages feel that there is virtually no government anymore. This is an ominous and suicidal stage that must be reversed immediately by the authorities concerned.

The IPOB is the most dangerous group in terms of ungoverned space, as it is not only imposing house arrest but also threatening to secede completely and destroy some parts of the Nigerian state-occupied space. The sit-at-home order also affects the major roads used to transport people, products and services from one place to another. On Mondays, transport companies continue to suffer losses and travellers avoid the East out of fear. As visitors no longer feel safe travelling to or staying in the East, this has further complicated interaction between the Southeast and other states. Many more people have been killed by “unknown gunmen” trying to enforce this sit-at-home order. The IPOB has even composed its Biafran song and flag and demarcated its territories from the Nigerian state, hence the frequent clashes with Nigerian security forces on that course (Nextier SPD 2022).

In Southeast Nigeria, the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Unknown Gunmen (UGM) are currently leaving many places in the region in a state of ungovernance. While formal and informal security arrangements attempt to maintain stability in the region, many places remain vulnerable to criminal gangs. Mondays in the Southeast are still spent sitting at home, despite the government urging people to go about their normal activities. Many residents sympathise with the IPOB’s cause, are afraid to disobey their orders or do not trust the security agencies to protect them on Mondays. Therefore, the bans on going out on the designated days are largely obeyed (Nextier SPD 2022).

9.10. Threats to National Security and Undermining National Sovereignty and Political Legitimacy

There is no doubt that the activities of the VNSAs in Nigeria have compromised national security, territorial integrity and national sovereignty. This is evident in the way some of them are trying to secede completely and no longer recognise the essence of Nigerian nationhood, like IPOB, where others seek to establish a state within a state, like Boko Haram, and still others control a sphere of ungoverned/under-governed/contested/loosely governed spaces for their crimes.

The actions of these extremist organisations have further complicated the problem and severely compromised the security of the country. The militants have succeeded in stealing or spilling and sabotaging more than 10 percent of the total oil production in Nigeria, thereby significantly reducing Nigeria’s revenue, and the resources of the state as sources of revenue for national development have been hit, according to Abdullahi and Dan-Inna (2023). The deployment of JTF in many communities in the

region shows how some identities or communities were defined as a threat to national security by hindering oil activities. It started with the execution of the Ogoni leaders, the military operations in Odi and Zaki communities, and the military invasion of villages of Vasae, Anyiin Iorja, Ugba, Sankera, and so on. Many human rights violations occurred during these operations, as the youths of these communities were targeted for military attacks because of their identity and not because they had committed crimes against national security (Oluyemi 2020).

The military response and the corresponding activities of the militants caused environmental hazards in the Niger Delta, such as oil spills, oil theft, vandalism and sabotage of oil production. This has significant implications for the environmental and economic security of the country, thereby undermining national security, national integrity and territorial sovereignty. Furthermore, these impacts have dragged Nigeria into the mud of international criticism and made Nigeria a red spot of human rights violations and humanitarian crisis that portrays the Nigerian state in the international community as a socially, politically and economically insecure state. The attacks on critical national infrastructure also have an impact on national security, as the vandalism of pipelines, electricity towers and other state infrastructure leads to deficits in social institutions and governance in the Niger Delta, which is a form of threat to national security (Oluyemi 2020).

Boko Haram is a serious security threat and challenge to the Nigerian polity. The group has attacked the police, military and civilian targets with extreme brazenness, vengeance and destruction. The insurgents of Boko Haram threaten the Nigerian state and their "successes" are unsettling the continued existence of Nigeria. This emerging security threat has hindered Nigeria's sustainable development. It is affecting the country economically, socially, politically and educationally, creating ethnic and religious tensions that lead to clashes and conflicts. The violent activities of Boko Haram have largely undermined human security in recent years (Queiroz 2022). Mass kidnappings also attract worldwide media coverage, embarrassing the government and emboldening the bandits. Often, this publicity reveals the ineffectiveness of the government's capabilities and responses (Akinyetun 2021).

The Boko Haram almost escalated an armed clash beyond the regional boundary when they attacked a church in Jos, a city in northern Nigeria, on Christmas Eve. The attack, which killed 38 people and sparked a week of sectarian violence, was the group's first assault and prompted responses from other violent armed groups. But the attacks have spread to mosques and crowded places such as car parks in northern Nigeria, particularly in the Northeast. These clashes could seriously affect Nigeria's unity and stability. In 2012, several militias from the south, including the Joint Revolutionary Council, the Oodua People's Congress and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, threatened to take action against Boko Haram if the killing of Christians continued, but no one has followed through on these threats. Boko Haram poses a real and serious challenge to security, stability and development in Nigeria and to Nigeria's neighbours. The temporary closure of Nigeria's borders with Cameroon and Niger in 2012, after Boko Haram activities were suspected in the border towns, had a negative impact on the economies of these countries. In 2012, some Western governments banned their delegations from travelling due to the deteriorating security situation (Crowley and Wilkinson 2013).

Armed banditry has a negative impact on the human and national dimensions of security in the Northwest and Nigeria in general. Above all, they are responsible for a large number of deaths and loss of human freedom. Bandit attacks in the Northwest

have led to the death of many civilians, especially in the rural communities. These cases are rarely reported by the government, media and security agencies (Ojo et al. 2023). Bandits have seriously undermined Nigeria's national security in many ways. They have seized land and manifested their control by taxing communities and levying fees and fines on trade and agricultural produce. Since there have been numerous material and human deaths, the menace of banditry in Nigeria has assumed a new catastrophic dimension, jeopardising the peaceful co-existence of the inhabitants (Onota et al. 2024). The rise of bandits and their easy access to illicit arms have destabilised the Northwest and some parts of the Northcentral region, undermining national security and territorial control by the Nigerian state (Ojewale 2024c). In addition, armed bandits have taken advantage of the ineffective and deteriorating security climate across Nigeria to enforce their objectives. One of the most recent factors is the weak security architecture, particularly alleged extortion by the police, which has led individuals to engage in armed banditry rather than seeking justice. Weak border management is also part of the challenges faced by Nigeria's security architecture. This has increased the trafficking of people, arms and drugs through the Sahel and the impact of armed conflicts in the region (Ojo et al. 2023).

In addition, the takeover and control of territories in Northwest Nigeria remains an important issue in the current Nigerian security discourse. It is evident that some bandit groups have taken full control of some villages and imposed levies by removing district chiefs and appointing new persons who are loyal to them (Umar 2021b). A member of the State House of Assembly representing Sabon Birni in Sokoto reported on 9 November 2021 that his constituents are still paying taxes to bandits (Umar 2021a). The member added that Sabon Birni residents have to pay taxes before going to their farms or transporting their farm produce home. The member disclosed that the bandits collect about N500,000 to N1,000,000 and even up to N4,000,000 for over 20 cities in the local governments, and about 10 of them had already paid (Idris 2021). In another development, the bandits were involved in the removal and appointment of district chiefs to collect taxes for them in the villages and towns of Sokoto (Hassan-Wuyo 2021). These warlords and gang leaders are gradually taking over Nigerian authority and undermining the sovereignty and authority of the Nigerian government. Ungoverned spaces are emerging and the inhabitants of the affected towns and villages feel that there is virtually no government anymore.

In an attempt to make their grievances heard, the indigenous people of Biafra have recently taken steps that directly challenge the sovereignty of the nation. Over time, many of these actions have hindered the progress of national integration and are seen as self-defeating by both the affected states and the nation as a whole. Civil disobedience is a tactic used by IPOB supporters to press home their desire for freedom for Biafrans. Radio programmes and other media have also played an important role in stirring up negative sentiments and discord among the people, making it difficult to build national unity. Ordinary Nigerians will continue to be affected by IPOB/ESN violence, including the Igbo people they claim to speak for and who are fighting the state on their behalf. As a result, operations by the Nigerian security forces are also likely to increase. There will be a backlash and accusations and rebuttals about who is to blame for the resulting deaths and property damage (J. S. Ojo 2024).

10. Conclusions

10.1. Conclusion and Implications

Violent non-state actors (VNSAs) have emerged and proliferated in Nigeria since the 1990s thanks to the prevailing circumstances that favoured their unhindered emergence. The existence and activities of VNSAs in Nigeria are not isolated cases or particular socio-political problems. Many countries around the world have been and are currently being confronted with various violent armed groups that have emerged from different circumstances. The security phenomenon shows that there is and will never be a conflict-free environment. However, the prevailing vibrant socioeconomic situation and a responsible political response can control the escalation of violence by armed groups through dialogue and the presence of responsive and accountable governance structures.

The Nigerian state is currently battling with various armed groups from different directions and with varying degrees of devastation, violence and socioeconomic and political impact. Practically speaking, there is no geopolitical zone that is not confronted with some form of violence or the other, apart from the political and electoral violence that pervades every nook and cranny of the country. This internal struggle of the Nigerian state is draining resources, undermining national security and sovereignty and threatening the survival of the state. This precarious situation in which Nigeria finds itself has something to do with the historical antecedents that have shaped the country's future. The national security architecture and environment of the Nigerian state provide a clear explanation for the phenomenon that is currently affecting the security of the state. The deliberate merger of several independent states by Britain during colonialism laid the foundation for future ethnic, regional, religious and other divisions, conflicts and struggles.

To show the extent of killings by VNSA in Nigeria, a report was published by the National Bureau of Statistics. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has revealed that between May 2023 and April 2024, 26.53 million criminal incidents were reported in rural households across the country. The report, referred to as the Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey (CESPS), shows that 51.89 million criminal incidents were recorded in Nigerian households during the reference period. According to the survey, the Northwest region recorded the highest crime rate with 14.4 million reported incidents, followed by the North-Central region with 8.8 million incidents and the Southeast region with the lowest crime rate of 6.18 million incidents. The CESPS data on safety, based on a nationwide survey of the six geopolitical zones, is as follows: Southeast—6.2 million, Southwest—6.9 million, South-South—7.7 million, Northeast—7.9 million, North-Central—8.8 million and Northwest—14.4 million (National Bureau of Statistics 2024a).

An estimated 51,887,032 offences were committed in households nationwide. The Northwest (14,402,254) reported the most offences at the household level, followed by North Central (8,771,400), while the Southeast (6,176,031) reported the lowest number of offences. The result also shows that the crime rate was higher in the rural areas (26,526,069) than in the urban areas (25,360,963). In Nigeria, 4,142,174 households were victims of residential burglary. Less than half (36.3 percent) of households that were victims of robbery reported their experiences to the police. Of the households that were affected by kidnapping, 65.0 percent paid a ransom (National Bureau of Statistics 2024a).

The report shows that between May 2023 and May 2024, 614,937 Nigerians were killed by armed groups, gunmen and criminals. About 2,235,954 Nigerians were kidnapped and paid a total ransom of N2.2 trillion, an average of N2.7 million per person. The highest ransom payments were made in the Northwest, with a total of N1.2 trillion, followed by the Southeast with N84.5 billion (National Bureau of Statistics 2024b).

The armed groups that have plagued the Nigerian state have different backgrounds, motivations, environmental factors, impacts and other relevant actions. In general, all the four armed groups examined in this book are motivated by governance failures manifested in infrastructural deficits, poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption and the inability of policy-makers to harness God-given resources such as oil, agriculture and mineral resources to make development programmes and projects work for citizens. The citizens' frustration with the vast resources that the ruling elites are comfortably feeding on and squandering at will, therefore, translates into violent reactions. This explains why and how the VNSAs emerged in Nigeria.

There is a gradation of causes, strategies, ideologies, manifestations, consequences, reactions and other logics associated with the various armed groups. The first violent armed group to manifest was the Niger Delta militants, who formed a fragmented and incoherent movement that attacked the Nigerian state over unjust environmental conditions and inequitable resource distribution. However, this movement later lost its trail and retreated into organised crime and became a pawn of politicians in the battle for electoral victory. The Niger Delta militants have no intention of seceding from Nigeria or creating another state. They simply want a larger share of the oil money that is extracted in their areas. To achieve their goal, they resort to violence and crime. Of all the armed groups analysed, the Niger Delta has the greatest impact on the Nigerian economy, as oil is now the mainstay of the country's economy and a source of foreign currency.

The other group, Boko Haram, is the deadliest in terms of destruction. The conflict has claimed more than 350,000 lives and some 3.5 million people have been displaced so far. Moreover, the conflict is full-blown terrorism masquerading in the name of Islam. The insurgents have decided that they will not settle for anything except the establishment of an Islamic state within the Nigerian state. Apart from destruction and displacement, the Boko Haram sect is a threat to the territorial sovereignty of the Nigerian state as it seeks to establish a state. Guided and misguided by misinterpretations of Quranic verses and Islamic teachings, the group has adopted an extremist posture that has pitted it against the Nigerian state by fighting security personnel while indiscriminately killing all members of communities in the Northeast of the country, putting the Nigerian state in embarrassing situations such as the abduction of schoolchildren.

Banditry is another violent crime plaguing the Nigerian state, with all four groups being the subject of less focus. The previous clashes between farmers and herdsmen escalated and took on a completely different dimension of organised regional and transnational crime. The bandits, who are disorganised and fragmented into different gangs, are not fighting for the formation of a state or economic injustice, but to launch a retaliatory attack that will become new patterns of crimes that will cost Nigeria dearly in socioeconomic and political terms. IPOB is the most dangerous of all the groups because of its roots and the history associated with the movement. It threatens to divide the Nigerian state by forming an independent state of Biafra. The

Biafrans, who were oppressed by the Nigerian troops, have taken up arms against the Nigerian state and have not let themselves be defeated even after many decades.

This study examined the major armed groups, their roots, motives, ideology, manifestations and strategies; how they acquire arms and funding; the Nigerian government's responses to each group; and the impact of the movements or groups on national security, national integrity and territorial sovereignty by explaining how the groups affect the economy, politics and social and environmental conditions in Nigeria. These four groups are not the only violent non-state actors in Nigeria. There are others, such as the separatist agitation movement of the Yoruba group led by Sunday Igboho and the recent emergence and disappearance of a new Lakurawa terrorist group in the Northwest. Although this work examines the major armed groups in one volume, the study cannot claim to cover all aspects that highlight the dilemma of Nigerian security threats at home and abroad. There are other groups that deserve attention, as mentioned here. Also, the groups under study themselves evolve as their characteristics and motives change, which calls for future research. Therefore, this study presents some important suggestions on how the Nigerian state can address the armed groups based on their unique character of being violent collectively and individually depending on their motives, ideology and impact.

10.2. The Need to Re-Strategize Responses

The interactions with the various activities and impacts of the VNSAs under study indicate that the Nigerian state is weakened, vulnerable, fragile and failing and losing its legitimate position on many fronts. This trend cannot continue. Nigerians already have a negative perception that the ruling class responds only to violence. All efforts to persuade, negotiate and convince policy-makers of the need for what is necessary always fall on deaf ears and pass blind eyes. However, whenever a group or certain segments of the population took up arms, the government hastened to offer concessions such as amnesty, a higher percentage share of resources, establishment of ministries and agencies for the economic and political benefits of the groups, and other responses that are forced on the government when it is cornered. In a democratic environment, negotiations and concessions should be based on lobbying, argumentation, political processes and representation, not responses to violence.

Therefore, an approach is needed for all violent armed groups across Nigeria to stop their activities. The government must wake up from its slumber and intensify good governance by genuinely fighting corruption and introducing economic redistribution that will ensure justice, equity, equality and social security. Any response that ignores this approach is ineffective and will only exacerbate the violence. The level of corruption, looting, misappropriation of public funds, extravagance, lavish lifestyles, lavish salaries and allowances for politicians and the luxuries associated with holding public office must be reversed in order to save resources for comprehensive national development. In other words, the governance gap must be intensively closed to provide Nigerian citizens with a decent lifestyle that will prevent any resentment against the state or violence on the part of citizens. Citizens in other countries, even in Africa, are law-abiding and peaceful because the government has provided them with decent economic and social security so that they feel adequately provided for.

While the VNSAs differ in their motives, intensity of harm and ideology, and impact on the national economy and security, an inevitable response to all groups is to launch an intermediate or moderate counter-offensive by first offering them

a peace initiative so that they will abandon their violence and turn to peace. If the groups, or some of them, refuse to accept peace, the state must assert its authority by making the trapped citizens in the area affected by the violence feel that their government cares about them. The authorities need to counter the violence with more spontaneous violence, which is not currently the case. Due to the corruption of policy-makers and corruption in the Nigerian security sector, the groups have more sophisticated weapons and a better fighting strategy which, together, make a mockery of a giant state like Nigeria, which has earned an outstanding reputation for its peacekeeping missions in Africa and around the world.

While the action proposed in this section applies to all groups and the government itself, there are specific approaches for each of the four groups that take into account the particularity of the groups' motives and ideology. Such policy implications are discussed below for each of the groups.

10.3. Niger Delta Militants: Revising the Models

In the case of the models applied in response to the Niger Delta militant groups, the government has made some great efforts to alleviate the concerns of the people of the Niger Delta, but it has also made some mistakes in its response. The main argument of those who sympathise with these armed groups is based on the government's overreach through unnecessary military operations and its inhumane treatment of the communities. But a government, no matter the level of shouting, cannot allow its means of economic survival to be threatened and watch helplessly. There are governments around the world that have gone to the extent of committing all atrocities and terrorism, such as slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism, to source resources to complement the needs of their citizens. What of a government that is endowed with resources and does not need to go and loot from other states, but is being denied by its citizens? This government will respond aggressively and will not take it lightly by any means.

In addition, various successive Nigerian governments have introduced many measures to concede some benefits to the agitations and demands of the Niger Delta people. For example, the OMPADEC was established to channel more resources to the oil-producing states to enable the leaders in the region to transfer development and benefits to the local communities. Unfortunately, the Commission was embroiled in corruption scandals and failed to utilise the funds allocated for the development of the Niger Delta. Furthermore, the early approach of MOSOP was good, as it was peaceful and intellectual, but it was the later use of force that led the Nigerian military government to execute some of the leaders, which eventually led to militancy that later lost its focus and turned into criminal gangsterism and the looting of national resources by militant gang leaders.

The government persisted and introduced a derivation formula, but it was rejected as inadequate. It was raised to 13 percent, which was supposed to support and alleviate the militants' activities. However, the agitators became insatiable and seemed to be dissatisfied no matter what the government did. This was followed by the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which is separate from the allocation of derivatives, later followed by an amnesty programme. With all these measures, the Niger Delta militants have found a lucrative, multi-million-dollar criminal enterprise that they will not let go of easily. The militancy continues. So what alternative is there to the models introduced by the government, all of which have failed?

For its part, the government should maintain allocation, derivation and amnesty for the oil-producing states and establish a dialogue with the leaders of the zone and the militants to find a way forward for environmental justice and cleaning up the devastated river basins. Furthermore, an additional commission is needed, the Niger Delta Infrastructure Development Commission, which should receive at least 3% of the oil companies' profit tax to provide infrastructure for the oil-producing states in response to their demands for control of resources and lack of social amenities. The Federal Government must publish monthly what is allocated as 13% derivation, an annual budgetary allocation to the NDDC and the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) to sensitise the Niger Delta communities to look inward and hold their leader accountable instead of blaming the centre in all the efforts being made to be more mindful of the resources allocated to the region. This is because corruption is the bane of development in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. This is evident in the fact that many state governors in the region have been accused of stealing billions of naira while impoverishing their people.

10.4. Boko Haram: An Alternative Approach

All the measures taken by the Nigerian government and its sister countries in the Sahel to combat terrorism and insurgency are not bad and are in line with the usual global standards for responding to such armed violence. For all the outcry over the excessive use of security forces and the brutal actions of the military in the early stages of the insurgency, no government will sit back and allow its territory to be undermined and threatened while its citizens are threatened with death by any group. The biggest challenge associated with the early response, the military crackdown, is the unprofessionalism and unethical behaviour of the security personnel who are reportedly involved in the torture of innocent citizens and suspects, rape, looting, extrajudicial killings and other forms of traumatic punishment, leading to resentment among Nigerian troops and the withholding of vital intelligence information from the security forces that could have assisted in uncovering the location of the terrorists and arresting senior figures.

The military response, the formation of the JTF, the MNJTF, the state of emergency, the declaration of terrorism, the amnesty and, more recently, the deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes are all good measures that can counter radical extremism in the Northeast if properly implemented. However, as reported in a comprehensive study (Sambo and Sule 2025) conducted over many years as a field study of the Boko Haram insurgency, corruption, insincerity, mishandling of the program and failure to prioritise the most deserving actors, especially the Ulama, hinder the success of the programmes. This means that the main obstacle to counter-terrorism in Northeast Nigeria is not the approaches themselves, but rather the inability to implement the programmes effectively.

One area that the Nigerian government should improve in its response to the Boko Haram insurgency is prevention at the root. This simply means that Boko Haram and its predecessor, Maitatsine, is an example of Islamic extremism that is misguided and misinterpreted either deliberately or out of ignorance and lack of knowledge of religious jurisprudence. Therefore, the root must be drastically curbed. This should be done through the introduction of an effective censorship programme that will protect the Nigerian environment from the resurgence of such radical groups. This has been achieved in most Islamic countries, especially Arab Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and some others.

The problem in the Nigerian context is that religion is handled so loosely that any itinerant preacher can mount a podium and gather a crowd to spread his evil ideas unmolested. What we need is censorship. A shura committee should be formed at all levels, from the districts to the local governments to the states and the national level. This committee should include Ulama from all sects to ferret out all harmful views and radical currents that could be detrimental to Nigerian security.

Through the establishment of a Shura committee, all preachers must be censored and allowed to preach if the committee is convinced that they have sufficient knowledge to carry out the Da'awah (call to the way of Allah, the Exalted). Any expression that is perceived as extreme and could lead to radical violence should be reported immediately to the security forces and the government and must be stopped. This is not to say that the ulama are prevented from criticising policy-makers or politics or teaching religion, such as issues of Jihad and other related concepts and jurisprudential views on Islamic law. They may even rigorously pursue the course of implementing Shari'ah law, which historically applied in Nigeria before it was banished by British colonialism. The provision for Shari'ah is still present in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, but there is no room for violence or the creation of an Islamic state that is constitutionally separate from the Nigerian state.

The major weakness of the current deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programme should also be revised and corrected. There is no way to resettle the repentant insurgents without compensating the families of the affected victims. This will never allow the host communities to accept the repentant ex-combatants. To ameliorate this, the training that the ex-combatants receive in the rehabilitation camps should be expanded to include modern skills such as cell phone repair, software and hardware creation and repair, digital content creation, cybersecurity courses and other skills that will make them indispensable and their services much needed by the community members. This will support their rapid reintegration. However, equipping them with skills in carpentry, tailoring and other related fields will not make them valuable and welcomed by members of the communities. Also, the ulama must be given more priority in the implementation of deradicalisation and resettlement than is the case today. Since the radicals are committed to the Islamic movement, they should be fought psychologically from the Islamic perspective, as is done in other Islamic countries with deradicalisation models, e.g., Somalia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Although this study emphasises a peaceful approach and negotiations, this does not mean that the current military approach will not be pursued. For the insurgents who have refused to surrender and be rehabilitated, especially those who are still controlling some areas of the Nigerian state and blockading government agencies in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, Nigerian troops should be given all necessary financial, arms, logistical and intelligence support to flush them out completely and ensure that all their remnants are eliminated.

But driving out the insurgents provides no guarantee that such groups will not re-emerge in the future. The Maitatsine movement, which is still reflected in Boko Haram after more than 20 years, will continue to manifest itself in the present day under different names and forms, but with the same ideology and methodology, as reported by Sule et al. (2018a). The best alternative to look to the future is to practise prevention. This prevention is the general model of rigorous governance mentioned in the first part of this chapter, which eliminates poverty, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, corruption, inequality and other socioeconomic and political injustices. The

second preventive measure is the establishment of the Shura Committee to recognise and prevent all forms of extremist views.

10.5. Banditry: A Model for Suppression

As in the cases of Niger Delta militants and Boko Haram terrorists, the Nigerian government has responded to bandits and banditry in Northwestern Nigeria on several occasions. However, as Sambo and Sule (2024) note, the responses have been ineffective and weak and insufficient to combat and eliminate the menace. As with other acts of violence, there has been a military crackdown in the early stages of banditry, but what makes banditry and the fight against banditry in Northwest Nigeria and some parts of Northcentral complex is the weak national security architecture. The inability to pay, compensate, motivate, inform and equip security personnel well with obsolete weapons sabotages operations. On many occasions, the military or security forces deployed to fight banditry turn out to be complicit, passing vital information on operations, weapons, logistics and intelligence to the bandits in return for a share of the loot generated from ransom kidnappings, school abductions and illegal mining. The National Security Adviser (NSA), Malam Nuhu Ribadu, himself lamented in October 2024 that most of the weapons used by violent armed groups come from government arsenal stocks.

Unlike the Niger Delta militants, who have economic motives and aspirations or struggles against environmental injustice that later culminated in organised crime and political violence, and the insurgents of Boko Haram, who claim to establish an Islamic state through their ideology, bandits have no clear focus other than organised crime condoned by the Nigerian state, as postulated by the theories of routine activities and broken windows and state failure that provides a loophole for these criminals to thrive. Previously, the bandits seemed to have a valid argument or justification for their actions. The bandits argue that they were forced into violence because all their livestock, their main source of livelihood, was robbed and destroyed by farmers in Northcentral and Northwest. But the trend that the bandits quickly turned their actions into violent crimes such as rampant, aimless killings, arson, rape, looting, illegal mining, kidnapping, ransom demands, confiscation of farm produce and all kinds of crimes cannot justify the bandits' grievances. Rather, it is better to call it organised domestic crime that is expanding into transnational organised crime.

The activities of the bandits are motivated by a weak government structure and a failure of governance. The Northwest, where bandit activities are prevalent, is one of the poorest geopolitical zones in the country, with all the indicators of underdevelopment, such as low school enrolment rates, a high poverty rate that is only slightly better than in the Northeast of the country, illiteracy, disease, hunger, unemployment and a low level of infrastructure. Several reports already discussed in Chapter 7 point out that in most rural areas in the Northwest, the government is only present during the scramble for votes at election times. Most villages have no electricity and are not connected to the national grid; there is no healthy and clean water source, there are no access roads and no means of communication, schools are dilapidated, health facilities are scattered and cannot even provide first aid, and various other poor indicators of governance are evident. So, the frustration of the criminals is palpable.

Therefore, the government has done a good job by using various forms of response such as military crackdown, amnesty, procurement of better weapons, disruption of communication to avoid ransom negotiations and payments, and other approaches. However, the curse of corruption is the bane of the success of the Nigerian government's

responses. Therefore, it is advisable to use force to suppress this kind of violence because the bandits have no real avenue to pursue. If pressure is not exerted to eliminate the criminals, the citizens trapped in these areas in the Northwest will feel neglected and unimportant in the eyes of the government. Any transparent and professional strategy that the Nigerian government can employ to combat banditry should be implemented as soon as possible to restore calm to the Northwest, the zone that produces a large proportion of food for the country and beyond.

The most difficult consideration, however, is that the Governors of the Northwestern states must avoid chasing ghosts and extravagant projects that benefit their insatiable quest for contractocracy. Instead of spending too much money on roads, bridges and structures, the funds allocated to the states should be channelled into the provision of quality education, sound health care, social amenities, social security and development projects that will enhance human resource development for national development. Most importantly, special attention must be given to agriculture through mechanisation, as agriculture will improve food supply and income for residents in the Northwest and across Nigeria. The Northwest, as President Buhari lamented in 2022, has the potential to provide food for the entire nation and other West African states if agriculture is prioritised. Let the governors prioritise agriculture as suggested.

For the grazing reserves and grazing routes that have been encroached upon by farmers, urbanisation and other government and private activities, those that can be restored should be restored, while those that have been permanently lost should be replaced by demarcating new routes in the nations. This will reduce the conflicts between farmers and herdsman because there will be a dividing line between their areas of activities. All ridiculous political actions against this living method should be stopped. In some parts of the country, there is politicking and kicking against the restoration of grazing reserves and grazing routes, a policy that existed in Nigeria in the 1960s. Policy-makers should avoid hostile politics and do what is needed. If some parts of the country are not ready to accept this proposal, then the northern states should do so, at least in their domain, because agriculture is their economic mainstay and a means of livelihood.

10.6. IPOB: A Suggestion for Tranquil Accommodation/Secession

Of all the armed groups examined in this study, this group, IPOB, requires an exceptional approach for a peaceful resolution of the protracted conflict. IPOB is the newest source of conflict among the four groups, but historically the oldest, as it claims to reactivate the Biafra movement in modern Nigeria. The first attack was made by Biafra when Igbo army officers deliberately targeted northern leaders and massacred them in a brutal, bloody coup and installed an Igbo president. When the North repelled against the coup, the Igbo in eastern Nigeria decided that they would not accept anything short of either ruling and dominating the country or seceding. And when the Nigerian state reiterated that there was no legal basis for secession, the Biafrans decided to do it the other way: by force. The result was the Civil War (1967–1970).

After all the unfortunate events that led to the death of a famous nationalist and a war that cost Nigeria over a million lives, Biafran agitations have not died down. After the Biafran Civil War, the Nigerian government took some strategic measures to appease the warring factions and allay the fears of the Igbos that they would be dominated in the Nigerian federation. One of these measures is the creation of federal

states to give all regions and ethnic groups more autonomy to govern themselves. Another approach is the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) where all Nigerian graduates with a university degree or its equivalent are required to complete one of year national service and preferably exchange youth between zones, those in the North to the South and vice versa. Also, to mitigate the effects of ethnic, regional and religious politics and division, the 1999 Nigerian constitution made it mandatory for all registered parties to adopt a national perspective, and no one can win the presidency unless he gets at least, apart from a simple majority, 25 percent of the votes in at least two-thirds of the states. But all these measures could not convince Biafrans to accept national integration.

So, this study suggests that if the Biafran agitations have not abated after more than 50 years of violence and have not been suppressed by the Nigerian government, there is a possibility that they will never abate until their aims are realised. But this is about the process. May it be peaceful and harmonious. This study shows that it is neither reasonable nor just to forcibly detain anyone or any group that does not want to stay. Instead of neglecting the agitations, as was the case in the 1960s when the Civil War (1967–1970) broke out, the Nigerian government should embark on a process that will determine the will of the Biafran agitations. The Federal Government should summon all elected and appointed Igbo leaders, elders and the agitators, especially IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu and his team. This should include all the five Governors of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. Other attendees will include all elected Senators and Members of the House of Representatives, Ministers appointed from the Southeast, leaders of the Igbo cultural organisation Ohaneze Ndigbo and a facilitator that should consist of representatives of ECOWAS, representatives of the AU, representatives of the United Nations and other institutions or organisations that may be invited.

Before all Igbo leaders and mediators, the Nigerian government should give IPOB and every other Biafra agitating group a free choice for a referendum. If they decide to go ahead, they should be given four years to adequately consult, hold a referendum and formulate their final position. If the Biafran movement gets a positive result in favour of secession, a bill for the secession of the Southeast should be forwarded to the National Assembly to amend the section of the 1999 Constitution that says Nigeria is an indivisible, inseparable entity to make room for Biafrans. This would be very helpful because it is not the Nigerian state's first experience with this phenomenon. The Soviet states split into more than 40 states after the collapse of the USSR in 1990. South Sudan broke away from Sudan, Eritrea broke away from Ethiopia, the Saharawi is no longer part of Morocco, Somaliland is now independent from Somalia, Singapore broke away from Malaysia, Pakistan and Bangladesh broke away from India, and there are many other examples. The Nigerian state cannot continue to imprison people in freedom by force and cause trouble for itself by meeting the anger of the agitators with force. A three-year war cannot extinguish this movement, but a peaceful and diplomatic approach can.

However, should the Biafrans and their leaders decide to remain in the Nigerian Union, a stern warning against intolerance and any violence should be issued. All political or socioeconomic agitations and grievances should be legally channelled from the Southeast in this regard. And any violence or agitation that resurfaces after this referendum should be treated as treasonable and a clampdown is necessary. This could free Nigeria from the burden of security threat from multiple fronts and give all Nigerians their will beyond the arbitrary British union of 1914.

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This work is a rigorous and timely analysis of one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary Nigeria. Moving beyond the security discourse, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of how groups such as Boko Haram insurgents in the Northeast, armed militias in the Niger Delta, bandit criminal groups in the North Central and Northwest regions, and IPOB (Biafra) secessionists have redefined Nigeria's political landscape, security and governance systems, and socioeconomic spaces. Using empirical data, case studies, and interdisciplinary theories, the authors examine the complex and dynamic phenomenon of violence and its implications for Nigeria's democracy, governance, and socioeconomic environment. They carefully analyse the dynamics of power contestation between the state and non-state actors, highlighting how weak institutions and governance have enabled the emergence and operation of non-state actors. Perhaps more importantly, unlike other works, the book does not focus solely on violence as a security issue but also engages with the broader debate on state formation, sovereignty, and political economy in Africa. By addressing the human costs, economic implications, social factors, and institutional strains caused by violence, the authors provide a comprehensive understanding of how violence affects and reverberates across the population and markets. The study is an essential reading for scholars, policymakers, development practitioners, and security experts interested in the dynamics and implications of violence in Nigeria and beyond. Both theoretically and policy-relevant, the book makes a critical contribution to contemporary debates on violence, governance, and sustainable development locally, regionally, and internationally.

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