

# Poverty, Insecurity and Conflict Mitigation - The Nigerian Special Case?

## I The conflict trap

While it may seem intuitive that a correlation exists between poverty and insecurity, there is a dearth of empirical studies to establish the extent or causal relationship. Over the last 25 years a substantial body of research has arisen around the issue of whether there is a causal link between poverty and conflict, and if so, in which direction the influence runs. The studies in question tend to be written by economists and political scientists and draw on empirical investigations mainly of civil-war scenarios, and mainly based on research in sub-Saharan Africa. The studies show quite clearly that in the region large populations and low-income levels have to date often correlated with civil war. By contrast, the ethnic and religious diversity that often goes hand in hand with such large populations does not align with such a propensity for internal conflict.

In light of the above, it might seem plausible to expect a pronounced propensity for conflict in Nigeria, which has not only the largest population of any African country but over 100 million citizens living below the UN-defined 'poverty line'. Indeed, of late Nigeria has donned the dubious mantle of 'poverty capital' of the world. The main question we shall explore here is whether it is possible to say that in Nigeria the greater the poverty the greater the insecurity. A subsidiary question is whether efforts to obviate conflict by government spending on security forces can lead to any long-term meaningful improvement in insecurity and by extension whether this 'investment' has paid off. In seeking answers to these two questions we shall first define "insecurity" and a yardstick for "poverty" before going on to assess whether or how the two correlate in the Nigerian case.

## 1 Security

In her seminal paper on development and security, Frances Stewart defines insecurity as follows:

"...*insecurity* consists in inter-personal violence or the risk of it. Inter-personal violence may have criminal or political objectives (or both). I am defining *insecurity* as arising at the individual or community level. Hence it is not the same as national insecurity, since it is experienced at the level of the individual, community, or group, rather than that of the nation."

This definition is apt for the Nigerian case, as while insecurity is considered a national problem in Nigeria, it is not conflict that occurs at the national level. Rather, irrespective of whether the insecurity occurs for commercial or political gain or not, we can distinguish between banditry (in-state or cross-border, and including kidnapping), herder/farmer conflicts, Boko Haram/ISWAP incursions, pipeline sabotage, and overt political thuggery during elections, all of which occur at the community/group level. In what follows we shall ignore the last point as the phenomenon is very transient. If we concentrate on the first three categories, we find a sustained pattern of incidences in recent months. While one might be tempted to describe incidences of Boko Haram/ISWAP attacks as 'national', if only because many of them are cross-border insurgencies, the attacks always target specific communities as opposed to an entire state or nation. The attacks thus likewise fit into Stewart's definition. In the first half of 2020 total incidents of insecurity in Nigeria were as follows: Banditry: 784 casualties; Boko Haram/ISWAP: 1,390; Farmer/Herder conflict: 1,174; Unknown causes: 358.

Are these incidents of conflict somehow related to the fact that the Nigerian economy features little diversification, and the key source of revenue (oil is the predominant export commodity) is subject to the vagaries of world market prices, exposing pricing within the economy to exogenic shocks that spill through into exchange rates. This reliance on oil is noted as a key indicator for causes of civil war conflict in one of the benchmark studies on the subject, namely, Collier and Hoeffler's "Greed and Grievance in Civil War".

"The effect of primary commodity exports on conflict risk is both highly significant and considerable. At peak danger (primary commodity exports being 33% of GDP), the risk of civil war is about 22%, while a country with no such exports has a risk of only 1%. The effect is sufficiently important to warrant disaggregation into different types of commodities. ...".

By contrast, they found that political or social factors played less of a part in driving the grievances that led to conflict: "While it is difficult to find proxies for grievances and opportunities, we find that political and social variables that are most obviously related to grievances have little explanatory power. By contrast, economic variables, which could proxy some grievances but are perhaps more obviously related to the viability of rebellion, provide considerably more explanatory power."

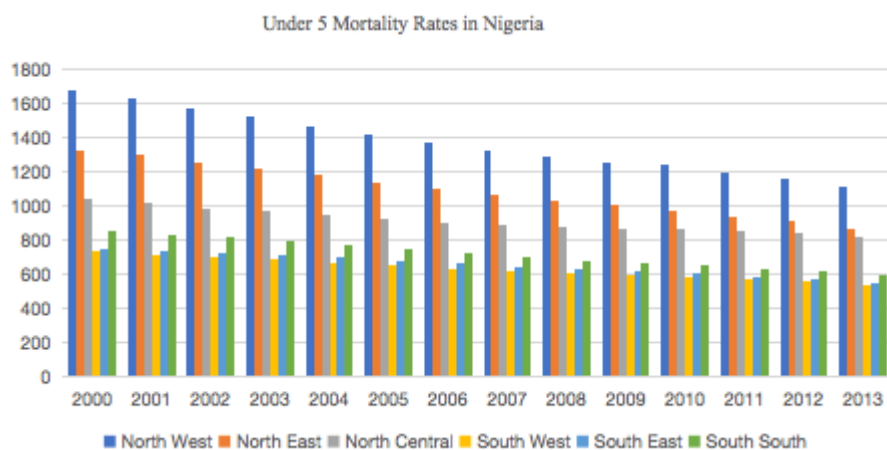
It would follow from the above that oil-price fluctuations, and the economic impacts thereof or ineffective policies could combine to amplify poverty - thereby, if we follow Stewart's argument, accentuating the spectre of conflict in Nigeria. The conflicts had, consistent with her argument, remained localized phenomenon. This leads us to the issue of what constitutes

the socio-economic conditions under which insecurity reaches flashpoint, that is, how do we define poverty in the Nigerian setting and how does it correlate with localized conflict to date?

## 2 Poverty - horizontal inequalities

We rely on a multi-dimensional definition of poverty. Following Amartya Sen we assume that “the basic foundational issues force us ... toward understanding poverty and deprivation in terms of lives people can actually lead and the freedom they do actually have.” Adopting this definition means finding indicators that are multi-dimensional rather than monocausal, such as the standard low-income yardstick of “one dollar a day”. To this end we shall use as the indicator of poverty for the purposes of this paper the infant mortality rate (IMR). The thinking behind this choice is that we assume that infant mortality reflects a combination of deprivation (lack of freedom of opportunity) in the fields of healthcare, access to nutrition, and education. The under-5 mortality rates are shown in the two historical tables below. Again, there is a lack of some data to enable complete comparability over time, but we assume the data suffices for meaningful comment. The figure below shows a significant North/South divide in this regard in the period 2000-2013:

Fig. 1: Under 5 Mortality Rates in Nigeria (IHME 2000-2013)



More recent statistics do not point to any emphatic change in this geographic bias. If anything the situation in the Northwest has become even worse compared to the peer geopolitical regions:

Table 2: Under 5 Mortality Rates in Nigeria (IHME 2016-2017)

Region	Neonatal mortality rate	Post-neonatal mortality rate	Infant mortality rate	Child mortality rate	Under 5 mortality rate
<b>North Central</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>103</b>
Benue	41	28	70	14	82
Kogi	29	20	49	28	75
Kwara	27	12	40	6	45
Nasarawa	47	34	81	43	121
Niger	59	41	100	54	149
Plateau	34	20	55	27	80
FCT - Abuja	27	17	44	28	71
<b>North East</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>115</b>
Adamawa	21	28	49	37	8
Bauchi	41	40	81	87	161
Borno	26	15	42	42	82
Gombe	35	56	90	78	162
Taraba	22	41	64	45	105
Yobe	44	20	64	41	102
<b>North West</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>162</b>
Jigawa	37	46	83	120	192
Kaduna	28	38	66	18	82
Kano	69	44	112	103	203
Katsina	35	32	68	72	135

Kebbi	55	56	111	70	174
Sokoto	28	23	51	72	119
Zamfara	53	51	104	118	210
<b>South East</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>67</b>
Abia	32	23	55	30	83
Anambra	23	16	39	15	53
Ebonyi	30	18	47	15	62
Enugu	(†)	(†)	(†)	(†)	(†)
Imo	35	30	66	33	96
<b>South South</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>59</b>
Akwa Ibom	21	21	42	32	73
Bayelsa	29	27	57	41	95
Cross River	20	18	38	15	52
Delta	28	19	48	16	63
Edo	(†)	(†)	(†)	(†)	(†)
Rivers	27	14	41	18	58
<b>South West</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>67</b>
Ekiti	46	24	69	18	86
Lagos	29	16	45	6	50
Ogun	28	20	49	19	66
Ondo	30	6	37	32	67

Osun	56	21	78	25	101
Oyo	42	17	59	15	73

A brief look at the above table shows evidence of strong *horizontal inequality* within Nigeria. Horizontal inequality is understood here as the forced inequality between groups solely as a result of their different identities, be it their religious affiliation (Muslims and Christians) or their geographical / geopolitical location. Not only are there marked differences in IMR from one region to the next, the degree to which improvements were seen in the period 2000-13 also differed, as did the degree to which as of 2017 gains made were subsequently lost, in particular in the North West region. What is clear from this definition of poverty as measured by IMR is that specific states in the North, particularly those in the Northwest were hardest hit by poverty. We shall return to this below in our discussion of how it correlates with the insecurity as outlined in our first chart above (table 1).

Empirical research shows that poverty also compounds the vulnerability to insurgency at the individual and community level by lowering the opportunity cost of mobilising for violence. In other words, unemployment and the horizontal inequality mentioned above (combined, for example, with the high levels of multi-dimensional poverty evidenced by the IMR indices) would appear to make it easier for insurgent groups or internal bandits to recruit fighters and motivate them to continue. Such groups then offer a ‘manifest future’ which, more to the point, enables young men to earn a living. In their empirical study of the reasons behind participation in the rebellion (led by the Revolutionary United Front, [RUF]) against the rule of the All People’s Congress in Sierra Leone, Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein concluded that came to the conclusion that “the estimated effect of poverty is statistically significant and sizeable.”

## **II Insecurity in Nigeria: Unemployment & Insecurity.**

In light of the correlation mooted above between poverty and insecurity, it bears establishing whether there is a significant correlation between the incidents of insecurity given in Table 1 and the unemployment/underemployment rates. We find that the treble-digit casualty incidents in the Northwest, North Central, and Northeast zones correlate in all instances with state unemployment figures in excess of over 29%. Moreover, figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show that unemployment nationally is highest among the male, rural population. Of the ten states with the treble-digit incidents in questions, six have a combined

rate of unemployment and underemployment (UUR) of over 65%, while the remaining four have combined rates of 52.9%, 57.7%, 61.7% and 62.9% respectively.

The correlation does not obtain in the same way for the worst rates of under-five and infant mortality. However, this may be attributable to the fact that no reliable data on the number of insecurity incidents were available for the three 'front-line' states of Bauchi, Gombe, and Kano. In other words, one could tentatively conjecture that unemployment rather than multi-dimensional poverty correlates more accurately with higher incidents of casualties attributable to insecurity in the three geopolitical zones in question. More detailed analysis and, moreover, more detailed data would be required to ascertain whether this speculative assumption is borne out by quantitative assessment.

We can draw on the figures for the states in the three southern geopolitical zones by way of a control group. The statistics reveal that in the Southeast while there is a strong correlation between the IMR and UUR, this does not translate into anything other than low double-digit figures for casualties attributable to insecurity. In other words, there seems to be a positive correlation between high UUR and high incidents of insecurity. Conflict could then possibly be read as a product of primarily rural, male unemployment or underemployment.

While the above discussion has in part suffered from a lack of data for some states, the suffering from the twin evils of poverty and insecurity is unambiguous. **What we can say is that poverty differs within the country:** While the infant and under-five mortality rates are among the worst in Africa (and with them the HDIs on health, education, environmental degradation, etc.), and the total percentage of the population in extreme poverty is the highest in the world, given the horizontal inequalities from one geopolitical zone to the next, the country in its entirety has not been affected to such an extent that conflict has escalated.

Likewise, **it would seem that the key driver of insecurity varies from one state to the next.** Indeed, in the absence of further data, we could conjecture that it is simply economic grievance that is the criterion behind banditry in the north (Zamfara) and the 'genocide' in South Kaduna given the correlation with UURs. However, Zamfara has only a medium UUR and is exposed to an international border that is not secured and to spillover from Katsina and Kano. By contrast, it has by far the highest IMR in the country – and we can therefore classify it as having the greatest extreme poverty. Is this then the cause of the banditry? By contrast, Kaduna has a comparatively low IMR, but its UUR is 72.7% and therefore places a close second highest in the Federation. **In other words, more than one key indicator comes into consideration when determining the 'poverty' side of the**

**poverty/insecurity nexus and further detailed empirical studies would be needed to establish with precision the specific causes on a state-by-state basis.**

#### **IV Conclusions**

The issue facing Nigerian policymakers is what the lessons are that they should learn from the above as regards defining a holistic methodology for tackling insecurity. More poignantly, in light of the correlation mooted between poverty and insecurity, the focus in combatting insecurity needs to be realigned toward breaking the cycle of poverty begets insecurity begets poverty. Since, as we have seen, there is most clearly empirical evidence (IMRs, UURs) for a connection between insecurity and poverty in the North of Nigeria, any policy must endeavour to combat both if it is to succeed in breaking the linkage - by alleviating poverty and disincentivizing insecurity. Moreover, given that the correlation discerned above is especially strong in those states where UURs are high, effective intervention in the field of job creation might well be lay far more appropriate foundations on which 'policing' can then ensue.

What we can infer from the discussions thus far for policymaking going forward is fourfold:

1. Relying mainly on military solutions and/or the security apparatus cannot work, as they address a symptom, not a cause.
2. Relying on palliatives as a strategy to combat poverty has not worked because it cannot work. This is manifest from the fact that during the five-year period in which this strategy has been pursued, government spending in absolute terms on the security forces has skyrocketed. Palliatives cannot work because they cannot reduce either the IMRs or the UURs in the medium or longer term. Indeed, in the five years in which the current administration has doggedly pursued its policy of distributing palliatives in a variety of forms (cash, cheap loans, etc.), the IMRs have deteriorated and the UURs have risen.
3. Both the military/policing and the palliatives strategy should be discontinued on their current scale and the monies freed up re-allocated to paying frontline workers in local development - staff in primary healthcare facilities and teachers in primary and vocational education facilities.

**In the current situation, a concerted effort must be made to stop the potential 'security collapse' of the North - viz banditry in Zamfara/Katsina, etc. - given the**



**degree of immiseration there. Such an effort must be holistic and include a raft of instruments, starting with fast and effective climate change mitigation (e.g., Great Green Wall), local job creation by incentivizing investments in agriculture and putting in place last-mile infrastructure, securing and patrolling the border, cancelation of rail projects and rerouting of the attendant investments into low-interest financing for local irrigation and renewable-energy projects, etc. Jobs pull job training, which in turn lowers UUR.** With a view to overcoming the North/South divide, a conscious effort needs to be made to engage strongly with young people in the North and explain the interlinkages to them. Tackling high IMRs as a means of long-term amelioration of poverty is something to be assigned fully and firmly to the states - and for which they should be held accountable.

*"We also find that after controlling for per capita income, more ethnically or religiously diverse countries have been no more likely to experience significant civil violence in this period." Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D. (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. American Political Science Review 97(01): 75-90, cited from [https://fsi.stanford.edu/publications/ethnicity\\_insurgency\\_and\\_civil\\_war](https://fsi.stanford.edu/publications/ethnicity_insurgency_and_civil_war)*

*Frances Stewart: "Development and Security," being CRISE Working Paper, no. 3, Univ. of Oxford*

*Source: TAPI, compiled on the basis of figures given weekly by Council of Foreign Relations Nigeria Security Tracker, <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>. Note that no data is available for Bauchi, Borno and Kebbi states. This is attributable to the fact that there was no press coverage of casualty incidents, no that there were none. Figures such as the number of persons who fell victim to the SARS unit are not included as they have not been statistically monitored.*

*p. 580.*

*Paul Collier & Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," in: Oxford Economic Papers, vol. 56 (2004), pp. 563-95, here p. 563*

*Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom, (OUP: Oxford, 1999), pages 87, 92.*

*Humphreys, M. and Weinstein, J. M., 'Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil*

*War', American Journal of Political Science, vol. 52, no. 2 (2008), pp. 436-455, p. 447.*

*The difficulties in finding solutions to the herder/farmer issues may likewise be attributable to the fact that causes differ by state - presence of water/waterholes, impact of climate change, UUR figures, etc.*