

# Insecurity in **NIGERIA** **POLICY BRIEF**





A POLICY BRIEF

by **PSJ UK**

to

**HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT**

and **THE NEW BRITISH PARLIAMENT**

# Introduction



**"Peace is not everything; but without peace, everything is nothing."  
– Willy Brandt**



Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa" due to its status as the continent's most populous nation and a significant oil producer, is currently facing a complex and worsening security situation. The country is grappling with an unprecedented security crisis stemming from its vast geography, intricate social dynamics, and complex political landscape. These conditions have fostered an environment conducive to insurgency and violence, creating multiple security threats which now plague the country, including terrorism, kidnapping, militancy, and inter-communal strife.

In many northern states, terrorists have established parallel governments that enforce their own form of justice, collect taxes, and resolve disputes. This erosion of state authority is causing the fabric of the nation to fray, and the repercussions extend far beyond Nigeria's borders. The country now finds itself at a critical juncture, facing an escalating security crisis that threatens not only its own stability but also the security and prosperity of the West African sub-region and beyond. Addressing these challenges is essential for maintaining regional stability and safeguarding global security.

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# International / Global Dimension



The crisis in Nigeria, fueled by Boko Haram, ISWAP, Jihadist herders and IPOB separatists has evolved into a disaster of global proportion. What was once a Nigerian or African calamity has now become a serious international concern. Despite the clear danger, the West and the world remain in denial, similar to their inaction prior to the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Groups such as ISIS, ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansaru share a common extremist ideology and have destabilized numerous African nations across West, Central, and East Africa. Nigeria is seen as a key target for ISWAP. A collapse in Nigeria could displace millions of people, triggering a refugee crisis that would strain the social and economic infrastructure of West Africa and potentially impact other regions worldwide. It is critical for countries like the UK and EU nations to intervene now to help prevent this looming catastrophe.

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# Root Drivers of Insecurity in Nigeria

The roots of insecurity in Nigeria are complex and vary significantly across different regions. These challenges are interconnected and stem from multiple factors. Weak governance and systemic corruption have undermined effective responses to insecurity, eroding public trust in state institutions and enabling criminal actors to exploit vulnerabilities in the state apparatus.

Economic disparities, a lack of opportunities, and pervasive poverty, especially among disillusioned youth, create fertile ground for recruitment by terrorist groups and criminal organizations. High unemployment rates exacerbate these issues, leading many young people to become susceptible to the lure of extremism. The unequal distribution of resources also contributes to frustration and feelings of marginalization, further fueling recruitment by extremist groups.

While Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity should be a source of strength, it has become a point of vulnerability. Historical grievances, competition over resources, and identity-based divisions ignite and perpetuate conflict. These divisions are particularly pronounced in areas where groups vie for control of essential resources.

The easy availability of weapons fuels violence and criminal activity, while Nigeria's vast porous borders and widespread arms trafficking exacerbate local conflicts. These porous borders facilitate the flow of illegal weapons and the movement of foreign fighters, amplifying the intensity of the security crisis. Additionally, Nigeria's expansive borders enable cross-border criminal activities, as militants traverse boundaries with ease.

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# Social and Political Context



Nigeria's social context is marked by a diverse tapestry of ethnic and religious groups, creating fertile ground for insurgents and criminal organizations to exploit underlying tensions. Deep-rooted grievances over the allocation of resources, political representation, and land rights intensify these divisions and stoke discord. Inadequate law enforcement and military responses, along with allegations of human rights abuses, have further eroded public confidence in state institutions, leading to a perception that the state is either unwilling or unable to tackle the nation's security challenges.

Nigeria's rich ethnic and religious mosaic can provide a backdrop for violence to take root and spread. The country is home to over 250 ethnic groups, and its nearly even split between Muslims and Christians has led to a history of inter-communal violence and competition over resources. These factors can be easily manipulated by politicians and other actors seeking to incite discord.

Some have attributed the crisis to "clashes between farmers and herders" competing for land; however, this explanation oversimplifies the situation. The issue stems more from the government's inability to effectively manage the nation's diversity and balance the needs of different groups. Nations with higher population densities and less land have managed their challenges more effectively. Additionally, regions such as the north, where most of the atrocities occur, possess vast arable land, in contrast to other areas such as the South-east.

Rural communities bear the brunt as once fertile fields transform into battlegrounds. Arguments attributing the crisis to "climate change" fall short when considering the north's productivity in agriculture, which continues to supply the south with staple foods such as rice from Kebbi State, tomatoes and onions from Kano, potatoes from Plateau, and yams from Benue. The collaboration between Lagos and Kebbi State Governments led to the launch of Lake Rice at the Lagos House, Ikeja, in December 2016, underscoring the potential for cooperative efforts across regions.

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## Perpetrators and Regions Affected

The nature of the security threat in Nigeria varies significantly across its different geo-political regions, with insurgents now operating throughout the country, including in rural communities, along highways, and in urban centers. These actors instill fear and generate chaos as they perpetrate various forms of violence.

The Northeast is heavily affected by jihadist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP). These groups orchestrate bombings, kidnappings, and attacks while promoting a strict version of Islamic ideology. They target civilians, government institutions, and security forces, resulting in widespread violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises.

In the Northwest, organized criminal gangs, often mischaracterized as bandits, are the primary drivers of insecurity. These criminal networks treat crime as an economic enterprise, engaging in activities such as extortion and the abduction of traditional rulers, schoolchildren, clerics, and ordinary citizens for ransom.

In the North-Central region, also known as the Middle Belt, jihadist Fulani herdsmen habitually carry out raids on defenseless villages and rural communities. These groups perpetrate violence against unarmed farmers, disrupting security and hindering economic activities.

The Southwest faces challenges such as kidnapping for ransom and cult-related violence, ritualism as well as organ harvesting. Kidnapping has become a lucrative trade in the region, affecting both urban and rural areas.

In the South-South, resource-control conflicts are prevalent due to the region's status as an oil-producing area from where Nigeria makes most of its foreign earnings. Issues such as oil theft, kidnapping, and economic militancy remain ongoing challenges, as the citizens there, particularly the youths, feel that their resources are being used to develop other parts of the country while their area is largely undeveloped and left to waste from oil spills and degradation.

Meanwhile, in the Southeast, the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is seeking to establish an independent Biafra state, leading to heightened tensions and insecurity in the region. This separatist movement continues to be a major source of instability.

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# Consequences of Continued Unrest

The ongoing protracted violence in Nigeria leads to civilian casualties, mass displacement, and severe humanitarian crises. The presence of extremist groups like ISWAP directly threatens international security, as the potential for radicalisation and terrorism extends beyond Nigeria's borders.

Continued conflict in Nigeria could result in significant regional instability, posing a threat to the stability of neighbouring countries and exacerbating security challenges across West Africa. The potential for large-scale displacement of people could overwhelm nearby nations and even affect Europe, creating an unprecedented migration and refugee crisis.

The ongoing insecurity in Nigeria carries severe national, regional, and international consequences:



Violence disrupts economic activity, discourages investment, and hampers development. The humanitarian toll includes displacement and a pervasive climate of fear. Governance is compromised, economies suffer, and lives are lost daily, leaving Nigeria on the brink.



Nigeria's instability can spread to neighbouring countries, affecting the entire West African sub-region. The flow of weapons, refugees, and criminal activity can destabilise surrounding nations, causing refugee crises and economic strain.



Nigeria's rise as a hub for extremism could serve as a breeding ground for international terrorism, posing a threat to global security. The country's instability fuels migration and disrupts global security efforts.

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# Threats to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Nigeria

The abductions and killings of clergy in Nigeria have caused widespread panic within church hierarchies, raising concerns for the safety of Christians. These targeted attacks on Christian leaders echo the biblical principle that striking the shepherd scatters the flock. The consequences of widespread kidnapping and murder of Christian clergy are severe: many congregations experience a cloud of fear, and even after ransom is paid, victims are often killed in brutal ways. These payments, in the millions of Naira, impoverish already poor congregations and communities while financing further violence.

The increase in the abduction of students, particularly in the northern regions, has led to the closure of many Christian schools. The crisis began with the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in Borno State by Boko Haram in April 2014. Ten years later, over 98 girls remain in captivity. Subsequent abductions include the kidnapping of 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi, Yobe State, in 2018, and 121 students from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna in 2021. These events have disproportionately targeted Christian schools.

Many abducted children are young Christian girls who are often forced into marriages marked by abuse and suffering. The forced conversion of underage girls to Islam is a troubling trend, with resistance from the Christian community often met with violence. Churches, homes, and missions have been destroyed, and Christian leaders like Reverend Yohanna Shuaibu have been killed.

Islamist Fulani militia groups have taken over and renamed numerous Christian villages, seizing control of over 150 communities in Plateau State by the end of 2022. This deliberate strategy of economic terrorism and land-grabbing targets Christian communities, as described by Choji Chuwang, president of the Berom Youth Movement.

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# Potential Solutions

Addressing Nigeria's complex security challenges requires a comprehensive approach that moves beyond a militaristic response. Tackling the root causes of the crisis, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, is essential for long-term stability. The international community can play a pivotal role in supporting Nigeria through targeted investments in socio-economic development, governance reforms, and conflict resolution.

## Holistic Approach:

The current "one-size-fits-all" militaristic approach has proven ineffective. A nuanced strategy is needed to address the underlying causes of violence and insecurity. This includes investing in education, job creation, and infrastructure development.

● **Targeted Assistance:** International partners should provide targeted assistance to support Nigeria's security and governance capabilities. This includes investing in programmes that create jobs and opportunities, particularly for youth, and strengthening governance structures.

● **Regional Cooperation:** Collaborating with Nigeria's neighbours to secure borders and combat transnational threats is crucial to mitigating spill-over effects of the crisis. This includes sharing intelligence, best practices, and resources for border control.

● **Humanitarian Aid:** Increasing support for humanitarian efforts is vital to assist displaced persons and affected communities. Providing food, shelter, healthcare, and other essential services can help stabilize the situation.

◆ **Strengthening Governance:** Combating corruption, enhancing service delivery, and upholding the rule of law are essential to restoring public trust and legitimacy in state institutions. Transparency and anti-corruption measures should be promoted across all levels of government.

**Security Sector Reform:** Nigeria's security sector requires reform to improve training, equipment, and oversight. This will ensure the sector becomes more effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of citizens.

◆ **International Collaboration:** Allies such as the United Kingdom, European Union, and United States must collaborate with Nigeria to share intelligence and counter-terrorism strategies. These include strengthening Nigerian security forces and improving their ability to combat terrorism and violence.

◆ **Negotiation and Mediation:** Engaging in dialogue and mediation efforts between conflicting parties is key to addressing grievances and promoting peace. This process should involve all stakeholders to facilitate lasting solutions.

By adopting this comprehensive approach and working closely with international partners, Nigeria can begin to address its security challenges and work towards a more stable and secure future for its citizens and the region.

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# Conclusion

The security crisis in Nigeria is a multifaceted and deeply rooted challenge that necessitates a nuanced and region-specific approach. The reliance on a one-size-fits-all militaristic response has proven ineffective, as the varied nature of insecurity across different regions requires tailored strategies. The international community must take decisive action to support Nigeria in addressing these challenges and preventing the crisis from escalating further.

Nigeria's security crisis demands a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and insecurity. A military solution alone is insufficient. The international community, including key allies such as the UK, EU, and US, can provide critical support by:

- Offering development assistance: Long-term investments in education, job creation, and infrastructure development are crucial for sustainable progress.
- Promoting good governance: Strengthening democratic institutions and processes, fighting corruption, and upholding the rule of law are essential for restoring public trust in the government.
- Encouraging dialogue and mediation: Facilitating negotiations and peace talks among conflicting parties can lead to durable and peaceful resolutions.

By working together, the international community can help Nigeria confront the multifaceted roots of its security crisis and guide the nation towards a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous future for its citizens.

In a nation as vast and diverse as Nigeria, a singular militaristic approach cannot effectively address the complexity of the crisis. The country stands at a critical juncture between chaos and potential redemption. Urgent international support is crucial to avert a tragedy akin to Rwanda and to help Nigeria navigate a path toward peace and stability.

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# Final Recommended Action Points

To effectively support Nigeria in its fight against insecurity, the international community should undertake the following actions:

**Strengthen Governance:** Support initiatives aimed at improving Nigeria's institutions, promoting transparency, and combating corruption. These measures are essential for rebuilding public trust and enhancing governmental legitimacy.

**Invest in Economic Development:** Direct resources towards programmes that foster job creation and economic opportunities, particularly for at-risk youth. Providing alternatives to criminal involvement can help mitigate the risk of radicalisation.

**Boost Security Cooperation:** Collaborate closely with Nigeria and its regional partners to enhance border security, monitor arms trafficking, and counter transnational crime. Joint efforts can help prevent the spread of violence and instability.

**Expand Humanitarian Aid:** Provide greater support for humanitarian efforts, focusing on assisting displaced persons and vulnerable communities. This includes supplying food, shelter, and medical care to alleviate suffering.

**Facilitate Dialogue and Mediation:** Advocate for and support dialogue and mediation initiatives among conflicting parties. Fostering open communication can help address grievances and pave the way for sustainable peace.

By embracing these recommendations, the international community can assist Nigeria in navigating its current crisis and working towards a more secure and stable future for the country and the broader region

In particular, the UK, EU, and US should:

**Increase targeted aid:** Focus on programmes that reduce poverty, enhance education, and promote good governance.

**Condition assistance on measurable progress:** Ensure that aid is contingent on tangible advancements in areas such as human rights, governance, and the rule of law.



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