

POLICY BRIEF

ON

POLICY OPTIONS IN RESPONDING TO
NIGERIA'S ECOSYSTEM OF VIOLENCE.





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Introduction and Contexts

In an environment that a perennial outbreak of violence is self-reinforcing and self-recreating, the development of effective response measures in form of policy options becomes imperative to address such complex violent conflict.

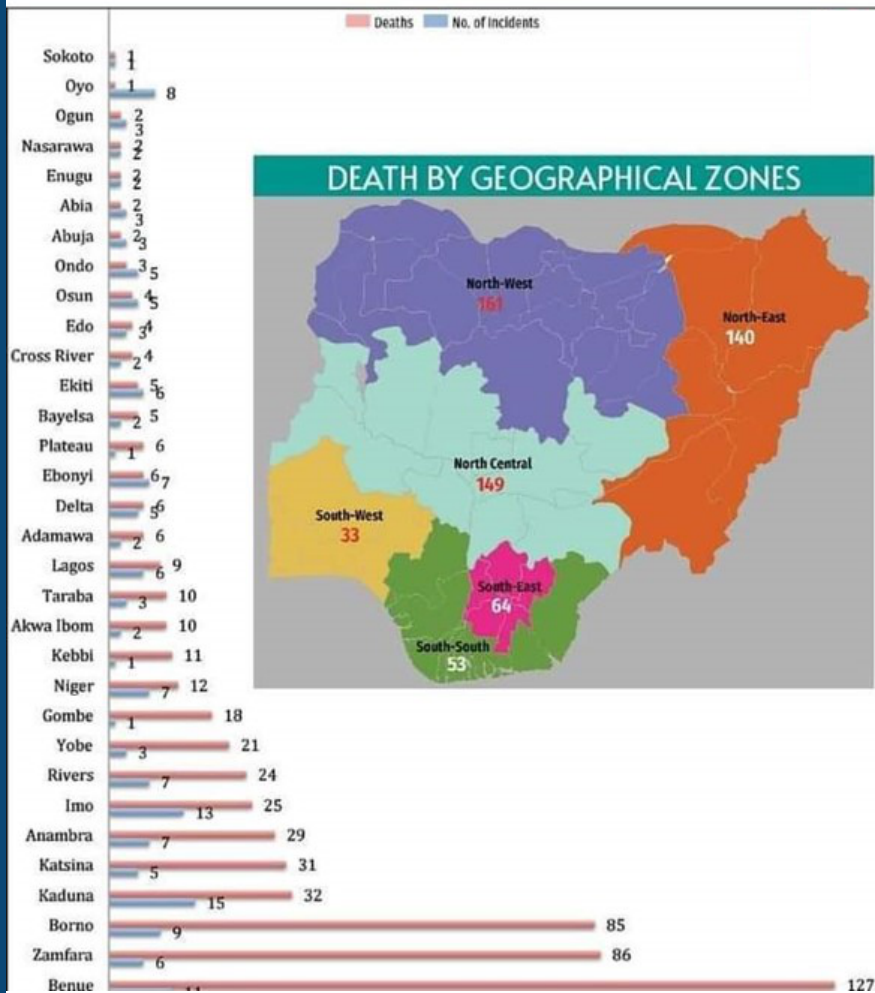
Appropriate policies with necessary political will are requisites for structural stabilization of the ecosystem of violence that has emerged in Nigeria if well implemented. In the face of increasing violent conflict, outright violence, and violent extremism in Nigeria, there is an upwelling of pressure on accountability as well as demand for an effective response that would translate into risk reduction as well as further the course of stabilization and sustainable peace. While there is a dearth of data in capturing the effectiveness of the heavy-headed military approach that tends to dominate the current response and policy direction, increase in intensity and frequency of terror attacks on people and communities resulting in high death tolls, abduction, and displacement of persons and disruptions of livelihoods is clear evidence of ineffectiveness.

While we need to consider some limitations of the availability of widespread data, some can give us clues to the worsening violent conflict in Nigeria. For instance, according to the Kaduna State Government, while presenting First Quarter Security Report at the State's Security Council Meeting on April 30, 2021, 'Bandits killed 323 people and abducted 949 persons within three months of January to March 2021.' SB Morgen Report which covered April 1 to 27, 2021 asserted that 591 persons were killed in 160 violent incidents across Nigeria.

It is clear that “the impact is evident in the incessant horrendous mass killings, kidnap, abduction and sundry crimes with attendant massive displacement of people from their homes and communities as well as the destruction of livelihoods and social and economic infrastructures”. According to Global Rights, “at least 4,556 persons were killed in “mass atrocities” in Nigeria in 2020. The figure represents an increase of 1,368, a “glaring spike of almost 43 percent” in the number of casualties compared to the 3,188 recorded in 2019”.

A total of 591 people were killed in 160 violent incidents between 1 and 27 April 2021

DEATH BY STATE





Understanding the Issues

This Policy Brief provides an opportunity to reflect on and assess practices and policy that guide the current response vis-a-vis emerging cyclic mutating, re-inforcing, and self-sustaining violence that has challenged governance in Nigeria; with the hope of making context-sensitive suggestions that could effectively contribute to addressing root causes.

While violence is expressly noticeable, attention to its drivers is more than often missing in response plans. It is easier for government at all levels to see and resist activities of the emerging separatist groups that have become more pronounced today than paying attention to causal factors that are structural, systemic, and cultural.

Over the years, Nigeria's response has deferred to a symptom-driven approach rather than addressing the root causes of violence. This has thrown up structure, system, and culture that do not support deliberative functions of driving the wheel of social justice, equity, and inclusive opportunities. Although, mutating, Nigeria's violent conflict and its extremist components are fundamentally driven by: Social Injustice, Unjust Governance, Unequal Opportunities, Poverty, Uneven Development, Inequality, and Ethno-Religious Secondary Causes.

It is unlikely that military intervention can contribute to a broader process of peace without understanding these contexts as well as building a National Strategy for engagements on them.

Beyond providing resources for military actions, which as arguably escalated the violence in the last few years, there is a need to address Social injustices such as discrimination, unfair power relation, nepotism among others that have torn the people apart. Nigeria, particularly her governments were not proactive to the threat of violence at the threshold of Boko Haram. We failed to understand it and characterize it early enough. However, we can still learn and understand its actors and motives from what it has become to stop its recruitment. In "Confronting Terrorism", Olajuyigbe Gbenro asserted that "the peculiarity of Nigeria's strains of terrorism is that of right-wing authoritarian extremists who are bereft of ideology but armed with tools for mindless cruelty and shameless banality, targeting mainly the poor, the hapless and helpless people and villagers that are neither related to the power equation that pushed the insurgents out of society nor with power to prevail on power holders for accommodation of terror actors' interest. It is an

internally conceived homegrown terrorism admittedly driven by extreme Islamist perspectives on modernity and civilization. It is an anti-civilization violent campaign with fatal hatred for an educational system it considers western. Hence, it evolved sub-culture that vehemently opposes formal education or any of such outside Islamic education. Astonishingly, most of their victims are those that have limited or no access to education as provided by Nigeria, a country with more than sixteen million children out of school, a historical trend of governance failure that arguably, ab initio birthed the like of Boko Haram". If for nothing, these understandings should enable plans for protection as well as support the building of a virile environment that is terror repulsive as we develop functional National Contingency Plans.

Where are the National Contingency Plans?

The complexity of Nigeria's crises should not have the luxury of accommodating a strictly military response-driven strategy. To effectively respond to it, ample consideration must be given to the development of broad-based National Contingency Plans that prioritize non-military actions as a complementary response. Elements of this plan should include National Strategy Plans, National Implementation Plan, Operational Plan, Preparedness Plan as well as Accountable Budget.

There is a need to be clear about the objectives we aim to achieve as well as the interventions we must carry out to achieve them. We cannot be clear without understanding the scale and scope of the crises, the contexts, their characteristics, interconnectedness, dynamics, actors, and capacity for mutation. As affirmed by Olajuyigbe, Gbenro(2021); "It will be absolutely impossible for Nigeria to tackle the problems of violence and violent extremism without building a national community-driven by shared vision and ideology that would invariably inform her approach to national security; an ideology that recognizes human security as the bedrock of national security. Nigeria's National Security vision has not given due regard to social, economic, and political matters, intelligence, and management of national resources the same way we have been prioritizing military action as the alpha of our national securitization. Militarization of security over the years has ignored constitutional stipulation that national security has to do with social, economic, and political securities. This means that the security of the state is not possible without enhancing the wellbeing of the people.

The corporate existence of Nigeria itself needs to be guaranteed given deep-seated differences between and among her constituents and the blocs they represent. It will be impossible to ensure security with current Nigeria's structure that has become a harbinger of lateral and vertical social injustices. Nigeria as presently constituted must be reconstructed; there must be genuine reform of government structure and its power mechanics as well as a sincere reform of our electoral process". All these are issues that should be recognized and articulated while developing National Contingency Plans.

Options and Recommendations

In exploring workable options, we must appreciate the complexity of the problems to focus on holistic solutions that can deal with the root causes, effects, and consequences of response so that they are context appreciative as well as conflict-sensitive. As complex as the violence has become, it has layers or levels that should be accommodated in the response plan.

To enhance holistic approach, there must be:

- De-institutionalization of Peacebuilding Process: Restrictive response, a situation where only the State is statutorily allowed to intervene in some areas of crises is largely ineffective in containing crises as well as in timely response. Individual, group and collective responses should be encouraged but with process built-in National Security Strategy. Strict institutionalization of response to violence given Nigeria's contexts can be counterproductive. Professionals, Community, Opinion, and Religious leaders should be deliberately but cautiously brought into response architecture to complement government efforts.
- People-Centered Human and National Security Governance: People-centered Participatory Security Governance is the sine qua non to resolving Nigeria's complex crises. It is simplistic to attribute violence in Nigeria to sheer criminality. Root causes are deeper and as such, solutions can only happen with a wider knowledge of underlying issues and the quality of their analyses. The current understanding of the dynamics that tend to differ to military option must be reviewed to accommodate germane potent evidence-based non-military human security strategy that focuses on people, particularly youth and women development; prioritizing human capital development that includes functional education, employment, political participation, and active citizenry with equal access to opportunities and development.

- **National Security Summit:** Nigeria is facing existential problems that need urgent attention. There is a need to wholesomely develop a collectively owned National Security Strategy that can effectively respond to assorted interconnected and interrelated issues and drivers. It is incumbent on the national government to facilitate a National Security Summit that would discuss and evolve an acceptable and adoptable strategy that will drive national response.
- **Periodic National Hazard Mapping to Feed National Contingency Plans:** Periodic hazard mapping and context analyses are crucial to successful intervention. There must be frequent context analyses that cover threat and risk analyses that must determine the type of intervention that is necessary at any point in time. This will enhance the review of National Contingency Plans.
- **Diversity Management:** Poor diversity management in Nigeria has compounded the problems of her unity, challenged her development as well as compromised her peace. Mutual mistrust among ethnic, religious, and social blocks is a strong basis for disenchantments, frictions, and violence. There is a great need in a plural society to have a strategy for diversity management that enshrine equity and fairness from fundamental principles to operational details.



Conclusions

In conclusion, responding to violence in a conflict-prone state will be difficult and non-sustainable without addressing equity issues, such as poverty, and inequality; the difference between the rich and the poor which are at the root of the causes. The crisis of empowerment that has made the country's active population groups redundant; and the troubling unemployed large army of youths and women that should represent development poles of the nation. The answers to these are in just and good governance without which sustainable peace will be impossible. Nigeria can turn her numerous challenges that have become combustible over the years into opportunities through purpose-driven leadership that is committed to using policy instruments to practices that respect diversity, accommodate differences and address questions of social inclusion, equity, and social justice. It is hoped that this Policy Brief will prompt a re-thinking and inform the fundamental path to enduring peace and sustainable national cohesion. While we focus on impacts, although desirably, we must not ignore the contributions of structural and social injustices such as poverty, inequality, institutional weaknesses as well as outright poor politics and bad governance that have amplified ethnic and religious cleavages that have given rise to separatist agitations and aided the emergence of criminal gangs including Boko Haram, among others. It is in that reflection that this policy brief becomes a working document to the government in search of solutions to a worrisome national malaise!

Recommended Sources

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