

NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NIGERIA

Iorshe Akav¹, John Tor Tsuwa² and Terkula Gaavson³

Department of Political Science,
Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio ADASU University, Makurdi
iorsheakav50@gmail.com¹, johntsuwa@gmail.com², tgaavson@gmail.com³

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between national security and the political economy of Nigeria through a qualitative systematic review of secondary literature comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, and reports from international organisations. Guided by Human Security Theory, the review reframes the analysis of insecurity away from a narrow, state-centric military conception toward a multidimensional framework encompassing freedom from fear and freedom from want. Using thematic content analysis, the review identifies four recurring and interdependent patterns in the literature: the structural entrenchment of a rentier political economy built on oil dependence; the diversification and mutual reinforcement of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflict, and separatist agitation; the erosion of institutional capacity and public trust through corruption and weak accountability in the security sector; and the compounding economic and humanitarian costs of insecurity, particularly for agriculture, investment, and public finance. The review shows that these dimensions are consistently treated across the literature as interdependent rather than isolated, reinforcing Human Security Theory's central claim that durable stability requires addressing socio-economic deprivation alongside conventional security threats. The paper argues that Nigeria's continued reliance on militarised, kinetic responses has not resolved these interlinked drivers and proposes that institutional reform, economic diversification, and people-centred welfare policy be treated as core components of security strategy rather than peripheral development goals.

Keywords: *National Security, Political Economy, Insecurity, Rentier State, Human Security, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

National security and the political economy of Nigeria have become increasingly interconnected in contemporary discourse because of the country's persistent struggles with insecurity, economic instability, governance deficits, and uneven resource distribution. Traditionally, national security was narrowly conceived as the protection of territorial integrity and the defence of state sovereignty against external aggression (Buzan, 1991). Contemporary perspectives, however, have expanded the concept to include economic security, political stability, human welfare, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion (Booth, 2007). In Nigeria, national security extends beyond military defence to encompass the capacity of the state to provide economic opportunities, social justice, political inclusion, and protection of lives and property. The inability of the Nigerian state to address poverty, unemployment, corruption, and inequality effectively has contributed substantially to the proliferation of insecurity across the country's regions (Nnoli, 2006).

The political economy approach offers a useful framework for understanding the relationship between Nigeria's economic structures and its persistent security challenges. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria's political economy has been heavily dependent on crude oil revenues, producing a rentier state characterised by excessive centralisation of wealth, weak productive capacity, and elite competition over state resources (Watts, 2004; Ake, 1981). This overdependence on oil has generated structural inequalities and underdevelopment, particularly in rural communities, creating fertile ground for militancy, insurgency, kidnapping, and banditry (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Despite a substantial and growing body of scholarship on insecurity in Nigeria, this literature remains largely fragmented. Existing studies tend to be issue-specific, examining a single manifestation of insecurity, such as the Niger Delta militancy (Ibaba, 2011), the Boko Haram insurgency (Onuoha, 2014a, 2014b), and the increasing Banditry in the North central and also North west (Okpe, 2026; International Crisis Group, 2020), in relative isolation from one another. Where political economy is invoked, it is frequently treated as background context rather than as an explicit analytical lens, and few studies systematically interpret Nigeria's diversified and evolving threat landscape, spanning insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflict, and separatist agitation, through a single, coherent theoretical framework. This fragmentation constitutes the specific gap that the present study addresses: the absence of an integrated, theory-anchored synthesis of how structural political-economy conditions connect the many faces of Nigerian insecurity.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Review

National Security. The concept of national security has historically been associated with the protection of a state's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence from external military aggression (Buzan, 1991). Traditional realist scholars such as Morgenthau (1967) viewed national security primarily through a military lens, in which the state is the principal referent object of security and military institutions are the primary instruments of stability. The end of the Cold War and the emergence of non-traditional threats, terrorism, poverty, environmental degradation, pandemics, cybercrime, and internal conflict, broadened this understanding considerably. Booth (2007) argued that national security extends beyond military defence to include political stability, economic development, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and human welfare, while Buzan (1991) proposed that national security encompasses military, political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors that are interconnected in sustaining state survival.

Insecurity. Insecurity refers to the condition of being exposed to danger, uncertainty, fear, or instability arising from the inability of the state or society to protect lives, property, and social institutions from threats (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). It is generally understood as the opposite of security and manifests when individuals or groups experience persistent threats to their existence, livelihoods, or socio-political rights. Insecurity was traditionally interpreted mainly in military terms, as threats posed by external enemies or armed aggression (Wolfers, 1962). Contemporary perspectives recognise, however, that insecurity may also emerge internally through structural inequality, poor governance, unemployment, corruption, and weak institutions, and that it involves both objective threats and subjective feelings of fear and vulnerability among individuals and

communities (Beland, 2005). In Nigeria, insecurity has become one of the most significant obstacles to national development and democratic consolidation.

Political Economy. Political economy is an interdisciplinary concept that examines the relationship between politics and economics in the distribution, management, and control of resources within a society (Gilpin, 1987). It studies how political institutions, public policy, and economic systems interact to shape production, wealth distribution, and power relations. Classical political economy, associated with Smith (1776), focused on production, labour, trade, and wealth creation, emphasising the role of markets and state policy in economic development, while Marxist political economy viewed economic relations primarily in terms of class struggle and the use of political power to control economic resources and sustain social inequality (Marx, 1867). Contemporary political economy incorporates broader concerns such as globalisation, governance, corruption, and public policy, and provides the analytical bridge used in this study to connect Nigeria's economic structure to its security outcomes: competition over access to state resources, political exclusion, unemployment, and economic marginalisation have been linked to violent conflict and social unrest in different regions of the country (Ikelegbe, 2005), reflecting Leftwich's (2000) argument that sustainable development and security can only be achieved where political power is exercised transparently and economic resources are distributed equitably.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Scholarship on security has developed along several competing theoretical traditions, and situating Human Security Theory (HST) within this landscape clarifies both its distinctiveness and its relevance to the present study. The realist tradition, associated with Morgenthau (1967) and classical strategic studies, treats the sovereign state as the sole legitimate referent of security and privileges military capability and territorial defence over other concerns; applied to Nigeria, this tradition would explain insecurity chiefly as a function of the state's coercive capacity relative to armed non-state actors. The Copenhagen School's securitisation framework, developed by Buzan (1991) and later Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998), widened the referent object beyond the state to include political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors, but retained a state-centred logic in which an issue becomes a 'security' issue only once political actors successfully frame it as an existential threat. Human Security Theory, associated with Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen, and Booth (2007), departs more fundamentally from both traditions by relocating the referent object of security to the individual and treating economic deprivation, social exclusion, and structural violence as security threats in their own right, independent of whether they are securitised by political elites. This study adopts Human Security Theory in preference to the realist and Copenhagen School traditions because Nigeria's security landscape, as the empirical review below indicates, is driven less by external military threats to the state than by internal socio-economic grievances that manifest as insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflict; a framework centred on the welfare and vulnerability of citizens is therefore better suited to explaining these dynamics than one centred on the survival of the state as such.

2.3 Empirical Review

A substantial body of empirical research has examined discrete dimensions of insecurity in Nigeria, generally treating each as a distinct research problem tied to a particular region or threat type. Ikelegbe (2005) documented how decades of environmental degradation, youth

unemployment, and perceived economic marginalisation in the Niger Delta fuelled militant movements that targeted oil installations and state institutions, a pattern further examined by Ibaba (2011) in relation to displacement and humanitarian consequences. Onuoha (2014a, 2014b) linked the emergence and persistence of the Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria to poverty, illiteracy, and socio-economic deprivation rather than to religious ideology alone, while the International Crisis Group (2020) traced the escalation of banditry and farmer-herder conflict in the North-West to competition over diminishing natural resources, weak state presence, and economic desperation. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) examined how political elites exploit ethnic and religious identities to secure political support, deepening social fragmentation and weakening national cohesion, and Transparency International (2022) documented how corruption and weak accountability mechanisms have limited the translation of large defence budgets into improved security outcomes. More recent institutional assessments by the International Monetary Fund (2025), the World Bank (2024), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (2025) have quantified the macroeconomic and food-security costs of continued insecurity.

Taken together, this body of empirical work establishes that insecurity in Nigeria is structurally rooted in political-economy conditions rather than being reducible to isolated criminal or ideological phenomena. What it does not generally do, however, is bring these region- and threat-specific findings together within a single analytical framework capable of showing how they reinforce one another, nor does it consistently interpret them through an explicit human-security lens. It is this synthesis, rather than the discovery of a previously undocumented threat, that the present review contributes.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Human Security Theory (HST) as its theoretical framework. The principal proponents of the theory include Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen, Barry Buzan, and Ken Booth. Haq, a Pakistani economist and former United Nations official, was instrumental in popularising the concept through the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994, arguing that the true measure of national progress is not military capability alone but the extent to which citizens enjoy freedom from fear and freedom from want (UNDP, 1994). Sen (1999) expanded the theory by emphasising human capabilities, including access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, as essential components of security, while Booth (2007) argued that genuine security can only be achieved through emancipation from poverty, oppression, and structural violence.

HST rests on several core assumptions that structure the analysis in this paper. First, the individual, rather than the state, is the primary referent object of security: a country cannot be considered secure if its population suffers from hunger, disease, unemployment, or violent conflict, even where the state possesses strong military capability (Newman, 2010). Second, security threats are multidimensional and interconnected, arising from economic crisis, environmental degradation, political instability, and social exclusion, as well as from military aggression (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007); this assumption underlies the study's treatment of insurgency, banditry, and communal conflict as related expressions of a common set of structural drivers rather than as unconnected phenomena. Third, development and security are mutually reinforcing, such that poverty and inequality create conditions that increase social tension and violent conflict (UNDP, 1994). Fourth, security requires both freedom from fear, protection from violence, armed conflict, terrorism, and

repression, and freedom from want, access to food, healthcare, shelter, education, and employment (Mack, 2005).

HST has attracted sustained criticism, principally on the grounds that its scope is excessively broad and its boundaries poorly defined, which complicates efforts to operationalise the concept for policy and measurement purposes; critics also note that treating almost any source of human deprivation as a security issue risks diluting the analytical and practical distinctiveness of the term (Newman, 2010). This study addresses that limitation by restricting its application of HST to the specific dimensions, economic deprivation, unemployment, institutional weakness, and social exclusion, that the empirical literature reviewed in section 2.3 directly connects to Nigeria's security outcomes, rather than treating the framework as an open-ended catalogue of grievances. Despite its limitations, HST remains well suited to this study because it provides a framework capable of connecting economic deprivation, weak governance, and social inequality to the specific, varied manifestations of insecurity that recur across the Nigerian literature, and because it directs attention toward the developmental and institutional remedies that the concluding section of this paper proposes.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a systematic secondary data review (SDR) and thematic content analysis to examine the relationship between national security and the political economy of Nigeria. It is important to clarify that the study is not a longitudinal research design in the sense of primary data collected repeatedly from the same subjects over time; rather, it is a documentary and trend-oriented review that draws on literature and institutional reports published across a defined recent period, broadly 2005 to 2026, to trace how the relationship between political economy and security has evolved as the wider literature has reported it. The use of secondary sources is appropriate for this purpose because it enables a comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarly debate, government policy, institutional reporting, and empirical study relating to insecurity, governance, economic structure, and political dynamics in Nigeria without requiring direct fieldwork in active conflict environments.

Sources were purposively selected from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, government publications, and reports issued by recognised international organisations, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF, Transparency International, and the International Crisis Group. Sources were included where they (i) directly addressed national security, insecurity, or political economy in the Nigerian context; (ii) were published by an identifiable author or a recognised institutional body, rather than attributed only to a publishing platform; and (iii) were traceable to a verifiable outlet. Sources that could not be independently verified, that cited a publishing platform rather than an author, or that originated from non-academic, informal online discussion were excluded from the final synthesis.

Analysis proceeded through the standard stages of qualitative thematic analysis: familiarisation with the selected literature; open coding of recurring concepts and claims; the grouping of codes into candidate themes; and the review and refinement of those themes against the full body of reviewed material and against the assumptions of Human Security Theory. This process generated the four themes presented in section four, each of which draws on multiple, independently authored sources rather than restating the position of any single study. The study acknowledges the

limitations inherent in this design: because it relies exclusively on secondary sources, it cannot independently verify the primary data underlying the studies and reports reviewed, and the quality and currency of the literature vary; findings are therefore presented as a synthesis of the existing evidence base rather than as new primary evidence.

4. Thematic Synthesis

4.1 Rentier Political Economy and the Unequal Distribution of Economic Opportunities

One of the strongest patterns in the literature is the relationship between Nigeria's dependence on petroleum revenues and the unequal distribution of economic opportunities. Since the discovery and commercial exploitation of oil, public finance has become heavily dependent on revenues generated from a commodity whose production is concentrated geographically but whose revenues are centrally managed. This arrangement has strengthened competition for control of the state because access to political office provides significant opportunities to influence the allocation of nationally controlled resources. Ake (1981) and Watts (2004) demonstrate that Nigeria's political economy has consequently been shaped by centralisation, elite competition and struggles over the control and distribution of resource wealth.

The Niger Delta provides the most prominent example. The region has generated enormous petroleum revenues for the Nigerian state, yet many oil-producing communities have experienced environmental degradation, destruction of agricultural and fishing livelihoods, inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic services. Oil spills, gas flaring and contamination of rivers and agricultural land have affected communities whose traditional livelihoods depended heavily on farming and fishing. The resulting grievances contributed to the emergence of militant organisations that attacked oil installations, kidnapped oil workers and challenged the authority of the state and oil companies (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2004). Ikelegbe (2005) shows that the conflict in the Niger Delta became embedded in an economy of violence involving militant groups, political actors, local elites and criminal networks. The important lesson from this experience is that the availability of oil revenues did not automatically produce security or development. Instead, perceptions of exclusion from the benefits of resource extraction became a source of political mobilisation and violent resistance.

A similar contradiction can be observed outside the oil-producing region, although under different circumstances. Many northern communities have historically remained distant from the economic opportunities associated with the petroleum economy and have experienced persistent deficits in infrastructure, education, employment and industrial development. The expansion of insecurity in parts of the North-East and North-West therefore occurred within an environment where large sections of the population faced limited economic opportunities. This does not mean that poverty automatically produces terrorism or banditry. Rather, economic exclusion creates a pool of vulnerable populations within which criminal organisations, insurgent groups and political entrepreneurs can recruit, mobilise and establish alternative sources of income and authority (Onuoha, 2014a, 2014b; International Crisis Group, 2020).

The broader implication is that Nigeria's rentier structure has generated a contradiction between national resource wealth and widespread household-level economic insecurity. The problem is therefore not simply that Nigeria possesses oil, but that the distribution of the benefits associated with national wealth remains highly unequal. Where communities perceive that economic resources

are extracted from their territories without corresponding improvements in livelihoods, infrastructure and public services, grievances become more difficult to resolve through conventional political institutions (Ake, 1981; Watts, 2004).

4.2 Regional Diversity and the Convergence of Security Threats

The second major finding is that Nigeria's security threats are geographically diverse but increasingly interconnected. The country does not experience one uniform form of insecurity. Instead, different regions have developed distinctive forms of violence reflecting their particular historical, political, economic and environmental circumstances. Nevertheless, the literature reveals significant convergence in the factors that enable these conflicts to persist. Tsuwa and Tough (2022), for instance, identify terrorism, insurgency, communal conflicts, farmer-herder clashes and kidnapping as increasingly prominent dimensions of Nigeria's security landscape, with substantial socio-economic and political consequences. This broadening of the threat environment suggests that insecurity in Nigeria has evolved beyond a limited number of regionally contained conflicts into a more complex national security problem.

In the North-East, Boko Haram and ISWAP have exploited longstanding socio-economic vulnerabilities and weak state presence. The prolonged insurgency has destroyed schools, health facilities, markets and agricultural infrastructure while displacing large populations. Communities in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states have experienced repeated attacks, restrictions on movement and loss of access to farmland. The consequences have extended beyond immediate deaths and injuries. Farmers unable to cultivate their land lose income; traders lose access to markets; children are unable to attend school regularly; and displaced households become dependent on humanitarian assistance. Violence therefore becomes economically self-reinforcing because the destruction of livelihoods increases dependence and vulnerability while weakening the capacity of communities to recover (Onuoha, 2014a, 2014b; FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

The historical development of Boko Haram also cautions against reducing the insurgency entirely to poverty or unemployment. Tsuwa and Odigbo's work on insecurity in Nigeria emphasises the broader historical and political circumstances surrounding violent conflict, while the literature on Boko Haram points to the importance of ideological mobilisation, state responses, political grievances and institutional weaknesses alongside socio-economic conditions. Thus, poverty may create vulnerability, but it does not by itself explain why particular forms of ideological violence emerge, acquire organisational capacity and persist over time.

The North-West presents a different but related pattern. Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and parts of Kebbi have witnessed the growth of armed banditry, kidnapping and rural criminal economies. Armed groups have attacked villages, abducted schoolchildren and farmers, demanded ransom payments and restricted access to agricultural land. In Zamfara, for example, insecurity has affected farming communities and contributed to displacement, while illegal mining has created additional economic incentives and sources of financing for armed groups (International Crisis Group, 2020; EUAA, 2026). The expansion of banditry demonstrates how criminal violence can develop beyond conventional political grievances and become an organised economic activity. Kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, illegal taxation of communities and control of rural territories provide financial incentives that can sustain armed groups even when their original grievances become less important.

The relationship between weak state presence and the expansion of banditry is particularly evident in parts of the Middle Belt. Okpe (2026) demonstrates that state fragility, poorly governed spaces and institutional deficits have contributed to conditions that facilitate the emergence and operation of armed groups across parts of the region. The significance of this finding is that banditry is not sustained by criminal motivation alone; it is also facilitated by environments in which formal institutions have limited capacity to provide protection, regulate territory and secure rural livelihoods.

The North-Central region demonstrates another dimension of the problem. Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and neighbouring areas have experienced recurrent farmer-herder conflicts involving disputes over access to land, grazing routes and water. Tsuwa and Odigbo's analysis of the Fulani herdsmen attacks in Benue demonstrates how resource scarcity, changing patterns of pastoral movement, ecological pressures and weak state capacity have contributed to rural violence and created serious challenges for securing affected communities. Their analysis is particularly relevant to the present discussion because the violence has directly affected farming communities and therefore the productive foundation of rural economies (Tsuwa & Odigbo, 2019). In Benue State, for instance, attacks on farming communities have resulted in deaths, displacement and the abandonment of agricultural land. The economic consequences are substantial because affected communities depend heavily on farming for household income and food production.

The South-East illustrates yet another form of insecurity. Attacks associated with separatist mobilisation, violence against security personnel, destruction of public infrastructure, kidnapping and enforced sit-at-home orders have disrupted economic activity in parts of the region. Markets, transport services, schools and small businesses have been affected by periodic restrictions and attacks. The economic impact is particularly significant because the region depends heavily on commerce, transportation and small and medium-sized enterprises. A security environment characterised by uncertainty therefore reduces business operating hours, discourages investment and increases the cost of transportation and protection (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; International Crisis Group, 2021).

These cases demonstrate that Nigeria's security threats should not be interpreted as unrelated regional problems. The immediate triggers differ, but the conflicts frequently develop where populations experience weak institutional protection, economic vulnerability, poor infrastructure, limited employment opportunities and ineffective mechanisms for resolving disputes. The common denominator is therefore not a single ideology or ethnic identity but the inability of existing economic and political arrangements to provide sufficiently credible and peaceful alternatives to violence (Ake, 1981; International Crisis Group, 2020; Tsuwa et al., 2018; Watts, 2004).

4.3 Weak Institutions, Corruption and Declining Public Confidence

A third recurring theme is the importance of institutional weakness in sustaining insecurity. Across the literature, there is evidence that Nigeria has repeatedly struggled to convert substantial public expenditure and security interventions into durable improvements in human safety. The persistence of armed violence despite extensive military and police operations raises questions about intelligence

coordination, accountability, institutional capacity, judicial effectiveness and the management of public resources (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Transparency International, 2022).

The problem is visible in the relationship between security expenditure and security outcomes. Nigeria has consistently devoted significant public resources to defence and internal security, yet communities continue to experience attacks, kidnappings and communal conflicts. This does not necessarily mean that security spending is unnecessary. Rather, it suggests that expenditure alone cannot compensate for weaknesses in institutions, intelligence systems, local governance and accountability. Where procurement is inefficient, funds are poorly managed or security agencies operate without adequate coordination, additional expenditure may produce limited improvements in actual community safety (Transparency International, 2022).

The consequences are particularly serious when citizens perceive that state institutions are unable or unwilling to protect them. In rural communities affected by banditry, for example, repeated attacks despite previous warnings can create perceptions of state abandonment. Where communities believe that security agencies will arrive only after attacks have occurred, residents may resort to informal security arrangements, vigilante groups or self-defence organisations. Although such arrangements can provide immediate protection, they can also intensify cycles of retaliation and introduce new actors into already complex conflicts (Okpe, 2026).

The weakness of the criminal justice system compounds the problem. Where suspects are not effectively investigated and prosecuted, perpetrators may conclude that the likelihood of punishment is low. Victims may similarly lose confidence in formal justice and become less willing to cooperate with law-enforcement agencies. This creates a significant governance problem because effective policing depends partly on community cooperation, information sharing and confidence in institutions.

Corruption further weakens this relationship. Where public resources intended for security, infrastructure or social development are diverted or poorly managed, communities experience the consequences through inadequate roads, schools, health facilities, policing infrastructure and emergency services. In this context, corruption becomes more than a financial problem. It reduces the state's capacity to deliver the public goods necessary for preventing insecurity and responding effectively when violence occurs (Transparency International, 2022).

4.4 Insecurity, Agriculture and the Erosion of Rural Livelihoods

The fourth major theme concerns the relationship between insecurity and Nigeria's agricultural economy. This relationship is particularly important because agriculture remains central to employment, household livelihoods and food supply. The expansion of armed conflict across major agricultural regions has therefore created consequences that extend well beyond the immediate areas of violence (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

In Benue State, for example, repeated attacks on farming communities have forced many farmers to abandon their fields and relocate to internally displaced persons' camps or safer communities. Farmers who previously cultivated several hectares may be unable to return to their farms for months or years. This results in the loss of crops, livestock, farm equipment and productive capital. At the household level, reduced agricultural production means lower income and greater dependence on purchased food. At the community level, it reduces the volume of agricultural commodities entering local markets. Evidence from Benue further indicates that insecurity, including kidnapping, has

adversely affected farming and business activities, reinforcing the wider economic consequences of insecurity in the state (Shaibume et al., 2026).

The relationship between rural violence and agricultural disruption is also evident in Tsuwa and Odigbo's analysis of farmer-herder attacks in Benue. Their study demonstrates that rural violence has affected farming communities and undermined the security of populations whose livelihoods depend on access to land and agricultural production (Tsuwa & Odigbo, 2019). This is significant because the loss of agricultural security can produce effects that persist long after individual attacks have ceased.

The same pattern is evident in parts of Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina and Plateau states. Farmers may be forced to cultivate smaller plots, avoid distant farmland or restrict the periods during which they travel to their farms because of fear of attack. In some areas, rural communities have also faced restrictions imposed by armed groups, including informal levies, taxation and demands for payments before farmers can access their land. Such conditions transform agriculture from a productive activity into a high-risk economic undertaking (International Crisis Group, 2020; FAO, 2025).

The consequences are increasingly visible in national food-security indicators. FAO assessments have identified conflict, displacement, economic pressures and climate-related shocks among the major factors contributing to acute food insecurity in Nigeria. Recent assessments have placed tens of millions of Nigerians at risk of acute food insecurity during lean seasons (FAO, 2025). The significance of these figures extends beyond humanitarian concerns. Food insecurity can increase household indebtedness, reduce children's school attendance, worsen malnutrition and encourage migration from rural areas (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

There is therefore a direct economic chain between insecurity and food prices: conflict reduces production; reduced production constrains supply; constrained supply contributes to higher prices; higher prices reduce household purchasing power; and declining purchasing power increases poverty and vulnerability. This process is particularly damaging in a period of high inflation because households already experiencing declining real incomes have limited capacity to absorb additional increases in food prices (World Bank, 2024; IMF, 2025).

4.5 Displacement and the Expansion of the Humanitarian Economy

Another important dimension of Nigeria's insecurity is the scale and persistence of internal displacement. Displacement is not simply a humanitarian consequence of conflict; it has significant political-economic implications. When productive populations are displaced, agricultural production declines, local markets contract and public resources are redirected towards emergency assistance (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

The North-East provides the clearest illustration. Years of insurgency have produced large internally displaced populations, particularly in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states. Displaced households have lost access to farmland, livestock, homes and other productive assets. Although humanitarian assistance provides essential short-term support, prolonged dependence on humanitarian resources can create additional vulnerabilities where opportunities for safe return or economic reintegration remain limited (FAO, 2025).

A similar pattern has developed in North-Central Nigeria, particularly in Benue and Plateau states. Communities displaced by attacks often settle in camps or informal settlements where access to food, healthcare, sanitation, education and employment is limited. Women, children and elderly persons

are particularly affected because displacement frequently separates households from their normal livelihood networks. The findings from Benue on kidnapping further show that insecurity can contribute directly to displacement and disrupt established patterns of economic activity (Shaibume et al., 2026).

Displacement also places pressure on host communities. When large numbers of displaced persons move into relatively safer areas, existing schools, health centres, water systems, housing and food markets may become overstretched. Consequently, the economic cost of insecurity extends beyond the original conflict zone. It is transferred to communities that must accommodate displaced populations while simultaneously dealing with their own economic constraints (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

4.6 Insecurity and the Investment Climate

The literature further demonstrates that insecurity has significant consequences for investment and private-sector activity. Investors require predictable conditions, secure property rights, functioning infrastructure and reasonable expectations about future operating costs. Persistent violence undermines each of these conditions (IMF, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

In areas affected by kidnapping, for example, businesses may incur additional expenditure on private security, transportation and insurance. Workers may be unwilling to travel to high-risk locations, while companies may shorten operating hours or relocate entirely. Small businesses are particularly vulnerable because they have limited financial capacity to absorb security-related costs. Evidence from Benue shows that kidnapping has adversely affected farming and business activities, demonstrating that the consequences of insecurity extend into ordinary commercial and livelihood decisions (Shaibume et al., 2026).

Agricultural investment is similarly affected. Commercial farmers and agribusinesses are less likely to invest in land, machinery and processing facilities where access to farms cannot be guaranteed. This creates a wider development problem because Nigeria requires increased investment in agricultural production and agro-processing to reduce food imports and create employment. Insecurity therefore undermines not only current production but also future productive capacity (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

The oil sector also remains exposed. Although Nigeria's petroleum industry differs significantly from the agricultural economy, disruptions to oil production and infrastructure have direct consequences for government revenue and foreign exchange earnings. The experience of the Niger Delta demonstrates how attacks on pipelines and oil facilities can simultaneously reduce national revenues, damage local environments and intensify political tensions (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2004).

4.7 Security Expenditure and the Opportunity Cost of Insecurity

The persistence of insecurity also has important implications for Nigeria's fiscal structure. Government must allocate resources to military operations, policing, intelligence, counter-insurgency, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and internally displaced populations. These expenditures are necessary responses to immediate threats, but they carry opportunity costs when fiscal resources are limited (IMF, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

The problem is particularly acute because the same communities experiencing insecurity often have substantial deficits in education, healthcare, roads, water supply and employment opportunities. Resources devoted to repeated emergency responses in conflict-affected communities could

otherwise contribute to schools, rural roads, irrigation systems, agricultural extension services and health facilities. Insecurity therefore creates a fiscal dilemma: the state must spend more to manage violence while simultaneously having less fiscal space to address the socio-economic weaknesses that contribute to vulnerability.

The issue is therefore not simply the amount spent on security but the balance between reactive security expenditure and preventive development expenditure. A country that continuously spends resources responding to attacks without sufficiently investing in the conditions that prevent violence risks becoming trapped in a cycle of crisis management. This is particularly problematic where public resources are already constrained by debt-service obligations, inflationary pressures and declining real household incomes (IMF, 2025).

4.8 Insecurity as a Self-Reinforcing Economic and Political Cycle

Taken together, the evidence reveals a circular relationship between insecurity and Nigeria's political economy. Economic exclusion and weak governance create vulnerabilities that can be exploited by violent actors. Violence then destroys livelihoods, infrastructure and investment, thereby deepening poverty and weakening local economies. The resulting deterioration in living conditions creates new grievances and increases dependence on informal or illicit economic activities, which can further sustain violence (Ake, 1981; World Bank, 2024).

The cycle can be observed clearly in conflict-affected agricultural communities. A security incident displaces farmers; displacement reduces agricultural production; reduced production increases food prices; higher food prices reduce household purchasing power; declining incomes increase vulnerability; and vulnerable populations become more dependent on humanitarian assistance or informal economic networks. When the displaced population remains unable to return safely, the cycle becomes prolonged (FAO, 2025).

A comparable process occurs in areas affected by banditry and kidnapping. Armed groups attack communities and demand ransom; households sell livestock or productive assets to raise money; the depletion of household assets reduces future earning capacity; poverty increases; and communities become more vulnerable to subsequent attacks. At the same time, ransom payments can strengthen the financial capacity of armed groups, creating incentives for further kidnapping. Evidence from Benue demonstrates that kidnapping has imposed costs on farming, business activity, displacement and public confidence, illustrating how criminal violence can progressively undermine household and community resilience (Shaibume et al., 2026). The wider banditry literature similarly demonstrates that weak state presence and poorly governed spaces can provide favourable environments for armed groups to sustain their activities (Okpe, 2026).

The Niger Delta provides another illustration. Environmental degradation damages traditional livelihoods; affected communities demand compensation and development; inadequate or delayed responses increase grievances; grievances facilitate militant mobilisation; attacks on oil infrastructure reduce production and increase state security expenditure; and intensified militarisation can further deepen tensions between communities and the state (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2004). Although the specific actors and circumstances differ from those in the North-East or North-West, the underlying pattern of economic disruption, institutional weakness and conflict reproduction is strikingly similar.

5. Implications for Nigeria's Political Economy

The evidence has several important implications for understanding Nigeria's political economy. First, insecurity should be treated as a structural constraint on economic development rather than as a temporary disturbance to otherwise normal economic activity. The effects of insecurity extend across agriculture, petroleum production, trade, transportation, investment, employment, public finance and household consumption. Its economic consequences are therefore cumulative and capable of weakening national growth even where macroeconomic reforms are producing improvements in other areas (IMF, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

Second, the evidence indicates that economic diversification alone will not resolve Nigeria's insecurity unless diversification is accompanied by more equitable access to economic opportunities. A diversified economy that continues to exclude conflict-affected communities from productive assets, employment and infrastructure may reduce dependence on oil without eliminating the grievances associated with inequality. Development policies therefore need to prioritise regions and communities experiencing persistent insecurity (Ake, 1981; Watts, 2004).

Third, the agricultural sector requires particular attention. Restoring security to farming communities should be considered an economic policy priority because agricultural recovery has implications for food prices, rural employment, household income and national food security. Security interventions should therefore be integrated with access to farmland, rural roads, agricultural inputs, storage facilities, irrigation, extension services and market infrastructure. Rebuilding destroyed communities without restoring their productive capacity would leave the underlying economic problem unresolved (FAO, 2025; Tsuwa & Odigbo, 2019; World Bank, 2024).

Fourth, Nigeria's approach to security expenditure requires stronger emphasis on accountability, prevention and measurable outcomes. Security agencies require adequate resources, but financial allocations should be accompanied by stronger procurement systems, legislative oversight, independent auditing, inter-agency coordination and community-level accountability. Security expenditure should ultimately be assessed not merely by the amount allocated but by its ability to reduce attacks, protect communities, improve response times and restore public confidence (Transparency International, 2022; IMF, 2025).

Fifth, conflict-affected communities require economic recovery strategies that extend beyond emergency humanitarian assistance. Prolonged displacement without livelihood restoration can deepen dependency and poverty. Reconstruction should therefore incorporate housing, education, healthcare, agricultural rehabilitation, small-business support, access to finance and reintegration programmes. Such interventions would allow displaced populations to transition from dependence towards productive economic participation (FAO, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

Finally, the evidence suggests that Nigeria requires a fundamental shift from crisis response to structural prevention. Military and policing measures remain necessary to contain immediate threats, but they cannot independently resolve conflicts sustained by unemployment, weak institutions, resource competition, poor infrastructure, food insecurity and political exclusion. Sustainable security requires the simultaneous strengthening of public institutions and productive economic opportunities. This means that security policy and economic policy can no longer be treated as separate policy domains. The durability of Nigeria's economic development will depend, in substantial measure, on the state's ability to protect livelihoods, restore confidence in public

institutions, improve equitable access to economic opportunities and prevent vulnerable communities from becoming permanently trapped in cycles of violence and deprivation (Ake, 1981; Okpe, 2026; Shaibume et al., 2026; Tsuwa & Odigbo, 2019; World Bank, 2024).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This review synthesises the existing literature on national security and the political economy of Nigeria and interprets that synthesis through Human Security Theory. Four interdependent themes recur across the sources reviewed: the structural entrenchment of a rentier political economy; the diversification, yet common socio-economic rooting, of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflict, and separatist agitation; the role of institutional weakness and corruption in converting structural pressure into active conflict; and the compounding economic and humanitarian costs that reinforce the conditions from which insecurity arises. Read together, these themes support the view, consistent across the literature reviewed, that Nigeria's continued reliance on predominantly military responses has not resolved the underlying drivers of insecurity, because those drivers are substantially socio-economic and institutional rather than purely military in character.

On this basis, the study offers the following recommendations, each linked to a theme identified in the review. First, in response to the rentier structure identified in section 4.1, the Nigerian government should pursue economic diversification away from oil dependence, prioritising sectors capable of generating broad-based employment, particularly for the youth population most exposed to recruitment by armed and criminal groups. Second, in response to the interconnected threat landscape identified in section 4.2, security policy should move away from treating insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and separatist agitation as unrelated problems requiring purely regional or tactical responses, and toward integrated, cross-regional strategies that address their shared socio-economic roots. Third, in response to the institutional weaknesses identified in section 4.3, government should strengthen transparency and accountability in the management of defence and security budgets, including independent oversight of security expenditure, and should invest in inclusive, non-exclusionary political institutions capable of channelling grievance away from violence. Fourth, in response to the compounding costs identified in section 4.4, government should treat the restoration of agricultural productivity, food security, and access to education and healthcare in conflict-affected regions as core security policy rather than as separate developmental spending, consistent with Human Security Theory's treatment of freedom from want as inseparable from freedom from fear.

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