

## UNGOVERNED SPACES AND SECURITY GAPS: RETHINKING LAW ENFORCEMENT IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** Nigeria has significant challenge in ungoverned spaces as state presence is not only minimal but not felt. These scenarios have created fertile ground for violet and non-violet state actor's criminal syndicates and insurgents to reign supreme. The focus of research is on relationship between ungoverned spaces and security gaps in Nigeria. Study indicates how the deteriorating role of state presence, deep rooted corruption, and lack of inter-agency coordination affect law enforcement process. Research is anchored on the broken windows and failed state theories and examines how weak enforcement, lack of effective intelligence collection, and socio-economic marginalization contributes to insecurities in Nigeria. The findings shows that traditional law enforcement models that is not only reactive but militarized cannot address security challenges in ungoverned spaces. It is therefore recommended that a paradigm shift that will embrace community-oriented policing, inter-agency cooperation, and technological integration will help address insecurity in ungoverned spaces. It is further recommended that a a re-evaluation of the law enforcement strategies in Nigeria should be done that will be not only be versatile but, inclusive in addressing insecurity not only in ungoverned spaces but the country at large.

**Keywords:** Ungoverned Spaces, Security Gaps, Law Enforcement, State Capacity, Governance Deficit, Nigeria, Community Policing.

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### BACKGROUND

Ungoverned spaces or territories where official power is weak, non-existing, or disputed by non-state actors, is now shaping contemporary security landscape of Nigeria. They are governance empty spaces where the legitimacy and presence of states are not felt making it an ideal place for violent non-state actors, criminal syndicates, and insurgent groups to operate (Okoli & Ugwu, 2022; Onapajo, 2023).

These ungoverned regions may in the borders of Nigeria, hinterlands and conflict prone areas. Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) take advantage of governance failure in the North-East to form parallel authorities that facilitate their illicit business with audacity of collecting taxes and provision of services to residents (Zenn, 2020; Hassan, 2023). Elsewhere in the North-West, big forests like Rugu and Kamuku have been used as bases by groups of bandits to kidnap, ransom their victims, rob cattle, and traffic weapons (Ewi & Salihu, 2022). In the South-South creeks of the Niger Delta oil bunkering, piracy, and unlawful refining continue to thrive due to low state penetration couples with transnational network complexity and involvement (Okon & Akinwale, 2022).

It is crystal clear that these ungoverned places are not only characterized by the absence of governance but are hybrid governance characterized by the contest of power among state actors, violent groups, traditional rulers, and informal community organizations (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2019; Agbiboa, 2021). The fall out of this ugly scenario is a disjointed and inefficient security landscape that is typified by incompatible authority styles and the unstable legitimacy.

The Nigeria government traditional reliance on militarized methods and frequent policing has failed woefully to address these challenges. The typical adversities associated with security activity include but not limited to poor logistics, overworked staff, outdated technology, and ineffective intelligence equipment (Akinola, 2021; CLEEN Foundation, 2020). Moreover, the harsh disposition of law enforcement personnel, corruption and flagrant human rights abuses, has undermined trust with community members making possible collaborate with security agencies a challenge (Amnesty International, 2021; Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021). Insecurity and crime exist in this context.

Modern security landscape in Nigeria is changing as a result of proliferation of ungoverned spaces where official authority is weak, absent, or threatened by the non-state actors. These territories are not just geographical spaces, but a governance vacuum where the legitimacy of states and their presence is reduced, and a fertile ground for violent non-state actors, criminal syndicates, and insurgent groups (Okoli & Ugwu, 2022; Onapajo, 2023). Uncontrolled territories, governance is a major challenge as it highlights the necessity of proper re-evaluation of the law enforcement practices of Nigeria. The reevaluation concerns not only its effectiveness, but also regarding their legitimacy and accountability. Research thrust therefore is on ungoverned spaces, vulnerabilities in security and alternatives that would emphasize an integrated community based law enforcement that is built on legitimacy.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is increasing rates of insecurity in Nigeria resulting despite a series of security sector reforms and military campaigns (Ezeani, 2022; Hassan, 2023). Ungoverned spaces continue to be fertile ground for armed insurgency, banditry, abduction, oil theft, and cross-border smuggling which suggests that the Nigerian government have failed to bring effective governance and law enforcement in these spaces.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), with the mandate of civilian law enforcer, is extremely constrained as their capacity is below international standards with less than 400,000 policemen patrolling a population of more than 200 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). There is systemic weaknesses that have increased disconnect between law enforcement provisions and security requirements with far reaching implications.

Intelligence collection is still centralized, reactive, and unlinked to local realities with little impact on situational awareness in rural and border areas (Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021; Hassan, 2023). A large number of police divisions do not have operational patrol vehicles, communication devices, and access to inaccessible terrain, thereby hampering mobility and response time (Akinola, 2021). The Nigeria police history of abuse, corruption, and militarized policing has harmed the required trust of the people which limit cooperation and sharing of information (Agbiboa, 2021; Amnesty International, 2021). The multiplicity, rivalry, and incoherent responses caused by overlapping mandates between police, military, DSS, and paramilitary agencies are equally a challenge (Okafor, 2022; Onuoha, 2023).

In present today Nigeria, arrest does not often lead to conviction due to poor competency levels of investigators, corruption, ineffective evidence handling, and prolonged trials that allows

for impunity and ends up undermine deterrence element of punishment (Ezeani, 2022). These and other loopholes have enabled the violent non-state actors to establish their own forms of governance in the form of tax, dispute resolution, and security at the expense of state legitimacy (Hassan, 2023; Nsaibia, 2021). The more Nigeria fails to reform its law enforcement institution to deal with the problems of operations and legitimacy, the ungoverned areas will remain a breeding grounds of violence, crime, and instability. Research question is therefore: What can be done to reform law enforcement in Nigeria to ensure that it is not only positioned to take appropriate steps to control ungoverned places but avoid the repeated cycles of repression, mistrust and vulnerability.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research is of great relevance as it will not only make a contribution to academic discourse but also to policy interventions on how to improve security, governance and development in ungoverned spaces

In terms of academic knowledge contribution, study on insecurity in ungoverned spaces is analyzed within the context of Failed State Theory and Broken Windows theoretical models that gives conceptual clarification on how breakdown of governance, weak institutions, and visible disorder account for systemic insecurity. This no doubt will adds value to the body of literature in African security discourse by offering context-dependent information on how structural inequalities, institutional failures, and socio-political processes contribute to insecurity in the ungovernable regions in Nigeria. The outcome of the research will impact on policy makers in their search for long term solutions to insecurity and crime in Nigeria.

The research recognizes the necessity of holistic approach that will involve law enforcement, military and community development as obvious correlation exist between insecurity and the collapse of governance. Research effort will not doubt provide evidence-based suggestions that will be bases of informed policy decisions by the Nigeria police force, military, department of State Services (DSS), and other stakeholders in tackling insecurity not only in uncontrolled spaces but the society at large. Study will offer actionable information that will assist security agencies in not only restoring public trust but legitimacy that is vital for effective intelligence-based enforcement. Research also highlights how insecurity in uncontrolled areas further perpetrates poverty, displacement, and underdevelopment cycles.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Ungoverned Spaces**

Clunan and Trinkunas (2019) described ungoverned spaces as geographical, social, or political regions where the authority of the state is absent, weak, or disputed, therefore leading to the lack of effective governance. Such areas shows lack of presence of state in the form of enforcement of law, delivery of justice, infrastructure and service delivery. Uncontrolled spaces in Nigeria are more evident in remote rural areas, porous borders and conflict prone areas like the North-East, North-West and parts of the Niger Delta.

Ungoverned spaces do not clearly refer to no governance at all but in most cases, they turn to be the platforms of alternative form of governance. This is often the case with violent non-state actors that establish control, levy taxes, administer rules, and offer crude services in

these regions, i.e. Boko Haram, ISWAP, or armed bandits (Thurston, 2022). The vacuum can also be filled by traditional institutions, vigilante groups, and religious leaders who offer security or dispute resolutions. This renders uncontrollable spaces as not absolutely without authority but various actors struggle to gain legitimacy and authority (Akinola, 2021).

#### Law Enforcement

Alemika (2021), described law enforcement as a constitutional mandate of governance and domestic security as they are established institutions, policies, and procedures that state uses to ensure the adherence to its laws, the existence of order, and safeguarding citizens against threats to life and property. It goes beyond formal state agents like the police, the military, the paramilitary groups, and the judicial system to include the informal players that in some cases act in concert or replace the state in weak situations (Bayley, 2006). Law enforcement can be thought of in terms of three inter-relational dimensions:

- **Crime Prevention and Control:** Are activities and actions that target to prevent, detect, and penalize criminal acts including routine patrols to hinder theft and assault to combating insurgencies, terrorism, and organized crime (Goldstein, 1990).
- **Public Order:** It involves maintaining peace and stability in the case of protests, elections, communal conflicts or natural disasters. In Nigeria, law enforcement personnel are frequently assembled to deal with violent conflicts like the farmers-herders violence or electoral violence (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2022).
- **Protection of Rights and Justice:** This task involves balancing coercive powers and accountability, legality and the respect of the human rights. This normative aspect makes law enforcement seem legal instead of police repression (Tankebe, 2019).

#### Empirical Review

Okoli and Ugwu's (2022) research on Nigeria's border regions, insurgency and banditry concluded that conflicts were fueled by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons made possible by porous borders and a lack of law enforcement presence. The absence of state authority and lack of visible enforcement in Nigeria's rural hinterlands has made it possible for bandits and kidnappers to set up alternative systems of administration, which frequently impose taxes on communities and administer harsh punishment. These results demonstrate how visible governance gaps allow violent actors take advantage of residents in ungoverned spaces.

Otu and Ugwuoke's (2021), study of community perceptions of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) posit that communities' reliance on vigilante groups and self-help security arrangements is correlated with low levels of trust in law enforcement organizations. This research finding is consistent with those of Agbibo's (2021) study, that found out that communities are pushed to seek security from insurgents or ethnic militias as a result of official neglect and abuses by law enforcement agents. Research evidences show that enforcement operations in ungoverned regions frequently increase uneasiness rather than decrease it in the absence of legitimacy and confidence.

Ochefu (2021) examined the use of drones and surveillance devices in Nigerian counterinsurgency operations. The study found that the effectiveness of technology-driven methods was constrained by corruption and inadequate intelligence fusion centers, even in the face of large spending. This study is consistent with the finding of Adebajo's (2022) on digital

policing in Africa, which discovered that technology cannot solve long-standing security flaws on its own without adequate integration, responsibility, and training.

To Thurston (2022), Northern Nigeria's poverty, unemployment, and official indifference have made it easier for Boko Haram and ISWAP to attract new members. Aghedo (2020), further pointed out that insecurity persist in areas where state development programs are lacking and where communities view governance systems as predatory rather than protective. These studies demonstrate the need for a governance-centered strategy that goes beyond traditional law enforcement to alleviate insecurity.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study of ungoverned spaces and security gaps in Nigeria will be based on broken window and failed state theories that provide insight into the causes of insecurity, the dynamics, and the challenges of law enforcement.

### **Broken Windows Theory**

The Broken Windows Theory as initially proposed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), states that observable indicators of disorder in a society that includes small-scale offenses like vandalism, disorder in the street, littering and the existence of unchecked armed entities is a reflection of governmental laxity and create a climate in which more serious crimes will later be perpetrated. The argument is that any small disruption that is not properly handled damages not only the social norms but emboldens both organized and opportunistic criminal members.

In Nigeria, the present lack of control over the environment mark an excellent example of the dynamics proposed by Broken Windows Theory. The low levels of law enforcement, collapsing or dilapidated public infrastructure, and banditry or insurgency which are characteristic of the North-West, North-East, and Niger Delta regions emerged over time. The visible indications of anarchy not only demonstrate how the state is losing control, but also prompt local communities to find protection in other parties, such as vigilante groups, insurgents, or informal militias (Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021; Agbibo, 2021; Hassan, 2023). This clearly illustrates how small lapses in executing enforcement can result in the system-wide insecurity. The villages of Zamfara and Katsina states are often forced to pay a protection fee to bandit gang due to the belief that the police are not effective and efficient in tackling security issues. Findings of empirical studies have concluded that the feeling of state absence plays a significant role in the formation of parallel institutions of governance in these ungoverned spaces. The obvious lack of visible police forces implies the lack of enforcement and punishment of criminality and insurgency accounting for the gradual development of insurmountable disorder cycles (Okafor, 2022; Small Arms Survey, 2023). This scenario has been particularly evident in counterinsurgency responses to Boko Haram and ISWAP, where local vigilante activity is often seen as more effective and effective than official security responses because of its perceived inefficiency and human rights abuses (Thurston, 2022). The circumstances call for a strategy that demands the importance of visible and proactive policing. Law enforcement personnel are able to stop more serious crimes and regain the trust of citizens if they effectively address petty crimes and maintain constant presence. In Nigeria of today, these obviously will involve not only making police more visible, but also adding community-oriented policing strategies, which

include engaging people in intelligence-gathering and neighborhood security (Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021; UNDP, 2022).

Broken Windows Theory further emphasizes the symbolic use of state in providing control and legitimacy. When territories, show absence of basic law enforcement coupled with apparent anarchy, a clear message is sent to both residents and criminal elements that the government is weak or not capable of enforcing rules and regulation. The necessity to address these little cracks in governance will prevent violence cycles, normalization of criminality, and permit larger security and development responses.

In fact, Broken Windows Theory gives a theoretical insight and understanding of how micro-lapses in authority and governance in the ungoverned regions of Nigeria can result in systemic instability. Theory supports the necessity of legitimacy-seeking, visible, and active police work, along with community participation and specific development policies, in not only the prevention of disturbance but escalation and recovery of state power (Agbibo, 2021; Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021; Hassan, 2023).

### **The Failed State Theory**

The Failed State Theory provide a paradigm shift that shows how gaps in governance serves as precondition to insecurity, anarchy, and the growth of non-state actors. Failed state concept is synonymous with the ideas that a state becomes a failure the moment it loses the monopoly on the legal use of force, incapable of providing basic security, incapable of enforcing the laws effectively, or find it difficult to provide critical public goods and services (Rotberg, 2004; Zartman, 2010). The visible absence of effective governance allows the violent non-state actors, organized crime groups, and insurgent groups to establish alternative sources of authority thereby undermining the legitimacy and the control of the state.

The argument imbibed in failed state theory applies to Nigeria in several regions where the state authority not only weak, fractured but actively contested. The insurgency attributed to Boko Haram and breakaway group, ISWAP, have destabilized the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. The reoccurring incidents of attacks, kidnappings, and the creation of insurgent-controlled zones reveals that state are no longer able to maintain constant control and surveillance over its territorial boundaries (Hassan, 2023; Thurston, 2022). The same scenario is playing out as bandits, kidnappers-ransom, and other criminal groups abound in the North-West especially in the states of Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna where there are governance vacuum and armed groups can move around with impunity.

The Niger Delta region also present another case in point where the clear lack of regulation and control with insufficient policing has enabled oil theft, sabotage, and local militancy to thrive (Okon & Akinwale, 2022).

The Failed State Theory with its emphasizes on the interaction of the institutional deficits, social disintegration, and inadequate security account for state decline. The present duplication of mandate between the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the military, the Department of State Services (DSS), and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has resulted in a lack of operations efficiency and coordination challenges in tackling insecurity not only in ungoverned spaces but the country at large (Okafor, 2022).

The prevent institutional failures in Nigeria continue to propagate the feeling of state failure, thus compelling communities to seek informal institutions of security like vigilantes, militias and insurgent forms of governance which further erode the legitimacy of the formal law

enforcement institutions. In addition, the failed state theory throws light on how structural reasons of insecurity such as poverty, unemployment, political marginalization, and competition over resources can cripple security. The socioeconomic challenges in uncontrolled territories make it easy for non-state actors to recruit their members, create alternative forms of taxation, or even primitive social services, thus sealing the lapses in governance by the state (Agbibo, 2021; Okoli & Ugwu, 2022). Evidence indicates that state failure cannot be narrowed to coercive incapacity alone but also ineffective social contract enforcement and failure to provide the basic needs of citizens.

Failed State Theory application to Nigeria demonstrates the obvious shortcomings of conventional, coercive policing methods in uncontrollable regions. The use of military operations, sporadic police operations and punitive operations often do not deal with structural and legitimacy gaps that fuels insecurity. The theory of failed state theory instead postulates that long-term security requires innovative and multifaceted strategies that involve legitimacy, oriented police, community partnerships, intelligence-oriented operations, government reforms, and developmental intervention. The clear advantage of such a strategy will result in the restoration of state authority instead of the one-sided process that involves coercive power that erode public trust, confidence and effective service delivery.

## **SECURITY CHALLENGES IN UNGOVERNED AREAS**

### **Institutional Gaps**

Institutional weakness constitutes a key challenge in the reoccurring incidents of insecurity in ungoverned areas. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) with constitutional mandate for law enforcement is understaffed, with fewer than 400,000 officers serving a population of over 220 million which is far below worldwide norms (CLEEN Foundation, 2020; International Crisis Group [ICG], 2023). Apart from understaffing, chronic underfunding, corruption, and political meddling undermine law enforcement capacity. The challenge of overlapping mandates across police, military and paramilitary institutions aggravate fragmentation, resulting in duty duplication, resource waste, and lack of accountability (Okafor, 2022; Adebajo, 2023).

### **Operating Gaps**

Nigeria diverse and difficult terrain, limited infrastructure, and antiquated equipment make it difficult for law enforcement to assess remote rural and border communities. In these remote zones, armed groups use forest in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna as sanctuaries, while riverine and maritime zones in the Niger Delta are makes oil theft possible (Hassan, 2023; Okon & Akinwale, 2022). Most of our law enforcement agencies do not have adequate patrol vehicles, lack communication devices, and the lack of aerial and sea monitoring equipment's exacerbate operational deficiencies. It is not uncommon to find many divisions rely on vigilantes for mobility and intelligence which raises concerns about legality and accountability.

### **Intelligence and Information Gaps**

Intelligence in Nigeria remains not only centralized but slow and detached from local reality. Community's members frequently deny information to the police out of fear of retaliation or suspicion of complicity between security professionals and criminals (Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021). This disconnect in information has impeded counterinsurgency efforts in the North-East, where, despite lengthy military operations, Boko Haram and ISWAP remain operationally resilient (Zenn, 2020; Campbell, 2022). In the absence of community-driven intelligence networks reactive rather than proactive security efforts will persist.

### **Legitimacy Gaps and Trust Deficits**

The legitimacy challenge between law enforcement personnel and community members impair law enforcement's authority. Incidents of corruption, cruelty, and human rights breaches undermine public faith. Communities in Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto frequently pay "taxes" to armed groups for security just as insurgents in the Lake Chad Basin provide dispute resolution and basic services (Hassan, 2023; Thurston, 2022). It is glaring that these dynamics demonstrate how legitimacy, rather than coercive capacity, affects the success of law enforcement in ungoverned environments.

### **Judicial and Legal Gaps**

The weak and inefficient legal systems in Nigeria foster impunity. The low conviction rates are the outcome of investigative inadequacies, poor evidence collection, and overcrowded courts that eventually embolden criminals (Okafor, 2022; Akinyemi, 2023). In Nigeria of today, no current legal frameworks exist for tackling rising incidents of cyber-enabled kidnapping, cross-border banditry, and environmental crimes which further restricts prosecuting ability (Ezeani, 2022).

### **Socioeconomic and Governance Gaps**

The overwhelming poverty, unemployment, and insufficient social safety nets allows for easy recruitment into insurgent groups and criminal gangs (UNDP, 2023). The recurring farmer-herder conflicts worsen in places where the government fails to mediate disputes or effectively regulate land usage (Okoli & Ugwu, 2022). These ungoverned areas are thus not only locations of insecurity, but also of persistent exclusion. The security measures that overlook governance and development elements risk further exacerbate instability.

### **Transnational and Border Gaps**

The porous Nigeria borders allow for the unrestricted movement of weaponry, drugs, and trafficked individuals. Weapons that are trafficked from Libya to Niger and Chad continues to flood Nigeria particularly violent groups in Nigeria's northwestern and northeastern regions (Nsaibia, 2021; Small Arms Survey, 2023). The maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as Niger Delta oil theft, highlight the global dimension of these security vulnerabilities (Okon & Akinwale, 2022). In Nigeria, weak border policing and inadequate sub regional collaboration hinder the containment of transnational crime networks.

It is obvious that Security gaps in Nigeria's ungoverned areas are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The institutional weakness account for operational shortcomings;

operational deficits impede intelligence gathering; and legitimacy crises increase community reliance on alternative governance systems. These dynamics not only exacerbate insecurity but undermine national sovereignty. Evidence indicates that militaristic measures alone are insufficient in tackling insecurity and crime (Hassan, 2023; ICG, 2023).

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES AND LIMITATIONS**

The Nigeria government has used a variety of policing and militarized techniques to tackle challenges in ungoverned territories and combat instability. These techniques have yielded tactical successes but the majority have failed in providing long-term enduring security outcomes due to structural, institutional, and legitimacy issues.

The Nigeria Police implementation of community policing in 2004 was intended to increase citizen participation in local security and build confidence between communities and police. The trial schemes actually improved information collecting, but the program was unfortunately hampered by inadequate training, insufficient financing, and a lack of political commitment (Eneanya, 2019; CLEEN Foundation, 2020). The federal government in the year 2020 re-launched community policing as part of the Nigeria Police Trust Fund plan, by deploying special constables across many states. These attempts at rebranding community policing have been hampered by allegations of politicization, inadequate oversight, and insufficient collaboration with traditional security systems (Otu & Ugwuoke, 2021; Adebajo, 2023).

The federal government resort to the use of Joint Task Forces (JTFs) and Militant Coalitions as response to insecurity in ungoverned spaces has increasingly relied on joint task forces made up of military, police, and paramilitary organizations. Such operations like Operation Lafiya Dole in the North-East and Operation Hadarin Daji in the North-West show Nigeria's reliance on militarized interventions (Hassan, 2023). The use of JTFs have achieved tactical successes, such as reclaiming territories from Boko Haram or destroying bandit enclaves, their effectiveness has been hampered by incidents of human rights violations, inter-agency rivalry, and inadequate civilian protection frameworks (Amnesty International, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2023). The military's focus on internal security also exceeds its mission and weakens the police's mandate of law enforcement (Campbell, 2022).

Evidence on ground shows there has been a surge in investment in surveillance technologies such as drones, closed-circuit television (CCTV), and biometric databases. In states like Lagos and Abuja surveillance equipment's have been implemented ensuring smart city monitoring systems, while the federal government on his own part has deployed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in conflict zones. The usefulness and effectiveness of these systems has been hampered by a poor maintenance culture, insufficient technical competence, and a lack of integration with intelligence fusion centers. The acquisition of drones to monitor forests in Zamfara and Kaduna, have not stopped bandit groups attack as they continue to foment trouble in these areas due to insufficient intelligence cooperation (Hassan, 2023; Small Arms Survey, 2023).

The federal government amnesty 2009 Niger Delta Amnesty Programme, temporarily reduced militancy and oil-related sabotage by integrating ex-militants with vocational training and stipends (Okon & Akinwale, 2022). The challenge is that this initiative did not address underlying governance inadequacies such as environmental degradation, unemployment, and political marginalization, resulting in cycles of renewed militancy and oil theft (Akinola, 2021).

Recently, deradicalization initiatives for repentant Boko Haram members under the Operation Safe Corridor framework have been criticized for poor reintegration, a lack of openness, and community opposition (Thurston, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

The states in Nigeria has become more reliant on informal and hybrid security institutions, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast, the Amotekun Corps in the Southwest, and the Ebube Agu project in the Southeast. While these organizations provide community-level intelligence and assist overburdened police agencies, they also risk human rights violations, politicization, and ethnic profiling (Okafor, 2022; Adebawwi, 2024). The proliferation of these informal security set up demonstrates governmental weakness while also emphasizing the role of local agencies in filling security gaps.

### **Limitations of Current Approaches**

In spite of these initiatives, unease and insecurity still persist in ungoverned spaces. There are limitation in law enforcement interventions in ungoverned space. These limitations are:

- The clear over-militarization tend to harm police-led efforts and alienate communities (Agbibo, 2021).
- The absence of coordination and collaboration among security services leads to decreased intelligence sharing and operational effectiveness (Okafor, 2022).
- The legitimacy deficits allows for heavy-handed tactics, corruption, and human rights violations which weaken public trust, leading communities to seek alternative governance systems (Hassan, 2023; Amnesty International, 2022).
- The use of amnesties and deradicalization measures offer temporary relief as such efforts hardly address the root causes of insecurity, including poverty, exclusion, and governance failures (UNDP, 2023).

### **RETHINKING SECURITY IN UNGOVERNED SPACES IN NIGERIA**

The federal government of Nigeria inability to effectively control ungoverned spaces in Nigeria, be it in the North-East insurgency-ridden, the North-West banditry-ridden, the Middle Belt farmers-herders wars, or the Niger Delta oil bunkering wars, requires fresh paradigms from the traditional perspective of law enforcement. It requires a redefinition of security outside of the traditional paradigms. The consistent traditional response of Nigeria to instability has been force-based, which includes militarized policing and mass military propositions. Evidence and experience of academic literature and empirical facts are in support that these strategies have not been very successful (Agbibo, 2021; Hassan, 2023). The government rethinking of security will necessity the change of a state-focused approach towards law enforcement to a more diverse, multidimensional and community-based approach.

The traditional security architectures in Nigeria that prioritize the stability of the state and the regime over the safety and wellbeing of its citizens cannot address present security challenges. The traditional perspective has exposed the communities of uncontrollable regions to predatory violence and alienated them from the state (Buzan and Hansen, 2020; Adebajo, 2022). Rethinking security in Nigeria entails having a human security approach with emphasis on the protection of the individuals against chronic insecurity in the form of violence, poverty, and exclusion. Human security should not be limited to mere protection of physical buildings, but

also livelihoods, health, education, and justice that are all important aspects of peaceful process of the long term. This transformation would involve the law enforcement combining development and governance strategies in its security strategy. The possible integration of social wellbeing into the security strategies in Nigeria will enhance legitimacy and resilience in weak states. This practice would enable establishing positive coalitions with traditional leaders, community groups, and vigilante groups that will enhance the law enforcement presence and legitimacy. The government if possible may absorb the non-state actors into a larger security system instead of pushing them away.

Building a relationship of trust and community-oriented policing is one of the significant facets of reconsidering security as this will make policing not to be coercive but proactive agency that provides service to community. It is the absence of trust between the communities and the law enforcers has enabled terrorists and criminal networks to develop alternative governance in Nigeria (Tankebe, 2019). Community-oriented policing (COP) will address the concern of advancing police and community engagement, improving intelligence collection, and restoring legitimacy (Otu and Ugwuoke, 2021). Organized community-police partnership may help improve security in disadvantaged areas as evidence of Community Policing Forums in South Africa and Nyumba Kumi in Kenya have proven so far. Apart from closing the intelligence gap, community policing in uncontrollable regions would assist Nigeria government in portraying the image of law enforcement as a partner and not an oppressor.

Moreover, uncontrollable regions are usually isolated, vast and hard to patrol physically. Rethinking security will also require the application of technology to overcome operational limitations. The challenge of situational awareness and response time can be enhanced with the help of drones, satellite surveillance, biometric database, and geospatial mapping (Akinola, 2022). The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that have been deployed to counterinsurgency campaigns in the Lake Chad Basin have produced significant intelligence against Boko Haram but institutional factors has limited its effectiveness. There is urgent need for establishment of technology-based security systems in Nigeria as well as regulation of the usage of data, surveillance, and cyber-security (Ewi & Salifu, 2021).

Rethinking security gaps in Nigeria will involve also addressing the underlying causes of fragility such as poverty, unemployment, marginalization, and competition over resources for effort security to be sustainable. As when it comes to rethinking security, the aspect of law enforcement should be incorporated into the security governance and development nexus (Francis, 2020). The success of this approach will involve a coordinated action which entails policing, infrastructural building, service provision, employment creation and conflict management as such actions that involves mitigating farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, will only not be possible through increased law enforcement, but also land-use reforms, grazing management regulations, and economic diversification of pastoralist communities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2022).

Insecurity in Nigeria should be discussed beyond the local and national lines. In Niger and Chad, there are bandit networks, cross-border supply chains of Boko Haram, and international cartels that are involved in the theft of oil in the Niger Delta (Nsaibia, 2021; Assanvo, 2022). The challenge of rethinking security should include domestic multi agency coordination, as well as, international and regional security frameworks. On the domestic front, the police, military, DSS, and NSCDC, among others, need to abandon the competition model and collaborate in terms of sharing information and assets. Nigeria needs to engage more in

forums like Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to provide solutions to the ungoverned spaces aspect that are transnational (Onuoha, 2022).

The present security policy of Nigeria that is mainly reactive based, and focus is on reacting to the crisis as opposed to preventive measures must change. Rethinking security therefore means attention be directed to preventive efforts like early warning, peace education, conversation forums, participatory government (Francis, 2020). Prevention measures will no doubt reduce conflict costs and enhance resilience and improve the image of law enforcement as a keeper of peace and not an enforcer of law and order (Francis, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

The focus of redefinition of security in the ungovernable areas of Nigeria will require the state-centric paradigm to shift to a human-centric, coercive to collaborative, reactive to proactive paradigm that target legitimacy, community trust, technical innovation, interagency collaboration and how development is incorporated into the security measures. Without this reorientation, law enforcement will be trapped in the circles of coercive intervention with clear inability in tackling systemic and legitimacy concern.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nigeria ungoverned spaces possess threat to national security, governance, and development. Security flaws, which includes but not limited to institutional weaknesses, operational weaknesses, intelligence weaknesses, crisis of legitimacy, inefficiencies in the judiciary to socioeconomic vulnerabilities shows that insecurity multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and entrenched in Nigeria. The resort to traditional law enforcement and militarized methods have so far been ineffective at certain moments and have not succeeded in tackling the fundamental causes of the insecurity particularly as it concerns regaining the trust that people have in the institutions of state.

The application of Failed State Theory has demonstrated that security vacuums are not short-term failures, but are evidence of systemic governance failures where the state has lost monopoly on the legitimate use of force, provision of basic services, and the establishment of the rule of law. On the other hand broken windows theory has highlighted that any apparent chaos, absence of police presence and even minor violations of compliance can increase to a bigger criminality captures development in ungoverned spaces. These theoretical frameworks would suggest that communities in the uncontrolled areas often resort to other forms of governance, such as vigilante groups, insurgent governments, or local militias, which makes them challenging to control by state security. The interplay between the lack of institutional capability, bad intelligence, low legitimacy, and structural inequality can be seen in the insecurity in these regions, which range all the way to the North-East insurgency to North-West banditry and the Niger Delta militancy.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the review, the following recommendations are made:

- The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) ability to perform effectively will be empowered by boosting the manpower and resources to meet the requirements of not population coverage but area of coverage. Government should increase institutional efficacy,

accountability, invest in capacity development, capacity-building and anti-corruption campaign.

- The reform of security institutions should also target improve cooperation and collaboration the agencies instead of the present rivalry. The DSS, NSCDC, police and military, should eliminate overlapping and clarify their mandates.
- The access to difficult and inaccessible locations can be enhanced by developing communications, transportation, and logistical infrastructure that expand operational capabilities. Government should deploy state of the art intelligence and surveillance capabilities along with regional intelligence networks that includes deployment of drones, satellite imaging and geospatial mapping. This in high risk will enhance response teams allowing a proactive and intelligence-driven operations.
- Community-oriented policing and building of trust in community policing structures will engage local communities in the prevention of crime and collection of intelligence. Government should encourage cooperative security policies that ensure the integrity and unity of the society and build a coalition with civil societies, vigilantes, and traditional authorities.
- Government should take the issue of judicial and legal reforms serious as it will enhance the capacity to carry investigations and evidence collection that will ensure arrests lead to successful convictions. The reform of legal frameworks to address novel forms of crime, including transnational smuggling, financing of terrorism and crimes that cyberspace enables. The stream ling of the legal system to reduce delays and increasing transparency will reduce the impunity of criminals.
- The issue of socioeconomic factors that fuel insecurity will be curbed through a combination of security measures with the incorporation of development interventions like poverty reduction, unemployment of youth, education and development of infrastructure. Government at state and federal levels should promote responsive resource management and land-use policies particularly in places where farmers and herders clash are frequent.
- Regional and transnational collaboration will help check the proliferation of weapons, human trafficking, and transnational criminal networks through enhance border control and intelligence dissemination with neighboring countries. The crushing of cross-border insurgency, banditry, involve more the use of regional security structures such as Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).
- Government should implement human security approach and give priority to livelihoods, protection, health and justice and inclusive government as fundamental elements of sustainable peace.

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