

NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND NIGERIA'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE PERCEPTIONS, 1999-2023

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Abstract

This study examines the interconnections between national security challenges and Nigeria's international image perception from 1999 to 2023. The background to the study highlights Nigeria's struggle with insecurity, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and cybercrime, which have significantly affected its global reputation. The study's objectives include analyzing the impact of these security threats on diplomatic relations, foreign investments, and Nigeria's global standing. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study relies on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and government reports, to provide a critical analysis of Nigeria's security issues and their implications. The findings reveal that persistent insecurity has led to negative international perceptions, reduced foreign investments, and strained diplomatic relationships. However, Nigeria's efforts in counterterrorism, regional cooperation, and cultural diplomacy have contributed to improving its global image, albeit with limited success. The study concludes that for Nigeria to regain international credibility, it must implement comprehensive security reforms and governance improvements to address the root causes of its security challenges.

Keywords: Nigeria's Insecurity and Causes, National security, Nigeria's international image and Terrorism, Diplomatic relations, Foreign investment

Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the country has faced a persistent array of security challenges that have significantly impacted its international image. From the Niger Delta militancy in the early 2000s to the rise of Boko Haram in 2009, banditry, herder-farmer conflicts, and separatist agitations, Nigeria has struggled to maintain internal stability. These security threats have not only posed existential risks to the nation's unity but have also shaped the way Nigeria is perceived on the global stage. International organizations, foreign governments, and investors have frequently cited insecurity as a major obstacle to Nigeria's development, thereby affecting its diplomatic relations, foreign investments, and overall global standing.¹

The impact of these security challenges on Nigeria's international image is profound. Reports by international organizations such as the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) have frequently ranked Nigeria among the most terror-affected nations in the world. For instance, the GTI ranked Nigeria as the sixth most terrorism-impacted country due to Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) activities.² Similarly, the U.S. Department of State has repeatedly issued travel advisories warning against visits to parts of Nigeria due to security concerns. These perceptions influence foreign relations, tourism, and economic opportunities, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Nigeria's ability to ensure law and order.³

Furthermore, security challenges have affected Nigeria's diplomatic engagements and regional influence. As Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, Nigeria is expected to play a leading role in peacekeeping and regional stability. However, its domestic security struggles often undermine its credibility in global politics. For example, despite being a major contributor to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping missions, Nigeria has faced criticisms for failing to address its internal security crises effectively. This has sometimes led to perceptions of hypocrisy, with some neighboring nations questioning Nigeria's ability to lead security initiatives while it grapples with insurgencies and banditry at home.⁴

The economic implications of Nigeria's security challenges on its international image are also significant. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into Nigeria have fluctuated over the years, often declining in response to heightened insecurity. Investors are wary of putting their resources into a country where kidnapping, terrorism, and violent crimes are prevalent. For instance, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicate that Nigeria's FDI dropped from \$8.84 billion in 2011 to \$2.39 billion in 2021, partly due to concerns over insecurity.⁵ The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have also emphasized the role of security in determining a country's economic competitiveness and attractiveness to investors. This study explores Nigeria's security challenges from 1999 to 2023 and their impact on its international image. Using the Realist Theory of International Relations and the Constructivist Theory, the study examines how national security concerns influence foreign relations and how international perceptions are shaped by both internal and external narratives.

Theoretical framework

To analyze Nigeria's national security challenges and their impact on its international image from 1999 to 2023, this study adopts the Realist Theory of International Relations and the Constructivist Theory. These two theoretical frameworks provide complementary perspectives on how national security influences foreign policy and international perception. While realism focuses on power, national interest, and the anarchic nature of international politics, constructivism highlights the role of identity, perception, and social constructs in shaping global interactions. Both theories help explain how Nigeria's security crises—ranging from terrorism and banditry to separatist agitations—have affected its diplomatic engagements, foreign relations, and global reputation.

The Realist Theory of International Relations, rooted in the works of scholars like Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, asserts that the international system is anarchic, meaning that no central authority regulates the actions of states. Consequently, national security is paramount, and states must prioritize their survival and sovereignty above all else. Realists argue that states with weak security apparatuses struggle to maintain influence in global affairs, as insecurity diminishes their power and credibility.⁶ Nigeria's experience reflects this reality, as persistent security threats have weakened its ability to project strength in international relations. For instance, despite being a regional powerhouse in Africa, Nigeria's inability to contain Boko Haram's insurgency since 2009 has raised concerns about its effectiveness as a security leader within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU).⁷ Countries like Chad and Cameroon, which initially relied on Nigeria for regional security, have increasingly taken independent security measures, demonstrating a decline in Nigeria's influence. Furthermore, realism explains how Nigeria's security challenges have affected its foreign relations with powerful nations like the United States and the United Kingdom. Both countries have repeatedly cited Nigeria's security instability as a reason for limiting military cooperation, arms sales, and intelligence-sharing agreements.⁸ The reluctance of Western nations to sell advanced weaponry to Nigeria due to concerns about human rights abuses by its security forces further demonstrates the realist argument that states prioritize strategic interests over moral considerations.⁹ The recent killings of policemen and security personnel by armed groups in the South East, North West, and North Central regions illustrate how Nigeria's domestic security weaknesses undermine its external credibility. In realism, a weak state loses bargaining power in international negotiations, which explains why Nigeria has struggled to secure strong diplomatic leverage in addressing its international security concerns, including cybercrime, human trafficking, and transnational terrorism.

While realism explains Nigeria's declining global influence due to security challenges, the Constructivist Theory highlights the role of perception and narratives in shaping Nigeria's international image. Constructivism, as developed by Alexander Wendt, argues that international relations are socially constructed through shared ideas, beliefs, and discourse.¹⁰ Unlike realism, which views state behavior as driven primarily by material capabilities, constructivism suggests that how states are perceived globally can significantly impact their diplomatic standing, economic opportunities, and foreign policy engagements.¹¹ Nigeria's security challenges have led to widespread negative perceptions, reinforced by global media coverage, reports by international organizations, and the country's placement in indices measuring security and stability. For example, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) has consistently ranked Nigeria among the top ten most terror-affected nations, a ranking

that influences how foreign investors, tourists, and policymakers view the country.¹² Constructivism explains why, despite having Africa's largest economy, Nigeria continues to struggle with negative international perceptions due to persistent insecurity. Countries like Rwanda, which faced a devastating genocide in 1994 but has since managed to rebuild a positive global image through strategic diplomacy and security reforms, contrast sharply with Nigeria's situation. Constructivist scholars argue that Nigeria's inability to control the narrative around its security issues has led to external actors defining its global reputation. Reports from international media outlets such as CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera often highlight violence, corruption, and terrorism in Nigeria, shaping foreign audiences' perceptions.¹³ Furthermore, travel advisories issued by countries like the United States, Canada, and the European Union reinforce the perception of Nigeria as an unsafe destination, discouraging tourism and business investments. Constructivism also explains how Nigeria's international image is shaped by diplomatic responses to its security crises. For instance, the #EndSARS protests of 2020 against police brutality attracted global attention, with international organizations like Amnesty International criticizing Nigeria's security forces. Such incidents contribute to the country's image as a state struggling with human rights violations, further damaging its diplomatic relationships and international standing.¹⁴

Nigeria's Insecurity and Causes

The Nigeria's insecurity is a complex issue with multiple causes and challenges since this democratic dispensation. Some of the main causes includes, ethnic and religious tensions. Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups and several major religions. This diversity has sometimes led to tensions and conflicts between different groups. However, political instability has remained a major cause of insecurity in Nigeria. This is because, Nigeria has experienced periods of military coups and civil wars, which have contributed to proliferation of firearms, weapons. It has therefore, exacerbated insecurity on the long run. Additionally, economic inequality which remains a large gap between the rich and the poor has led to social unrest and instability. This has necessitated arm robbery, kidnapping, deviants behaviors etc. Terrorism has affected Nigerian image negatively due largely to numerous terrorist attacks, particularly from the extremists group Boko Haram, which has contributed to insecurity in the country.

The challenges of insecurity in Nigeria are significant, including the threat of terrorism, ethnic and religious tensions, and political instability. However, there are also prospects for addressing these challenges to obtain global reputation.

1. Promoting dialogue and reconciliation. Encouraging dialogue and reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups, and promoting a culture of tolerance and understanding. Secondly, there should be will to strengthen the rule of law which ensures that laws are applied fairly and consistently, and that those in power are held accountable for their actions. Also, there should be improved economic opportunities for all citizens, and ensuring that the economy is well-managed and equitable. There should be heavy investments in security and defense. This will enable Nigeria's security and defense institutions to effectively manage and protect citizens and also to maintain orderliness in the country. Finally, there should be encouragement for international corporations with other countries to address regional security challenges and promote stability in the region.

National security challenges in Nigeria (1999–2023)

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the country has faced persistent and evolving security challenges that have undermined its stability, economic growth, and international reputation. The threats have ranged from terrorism and insurgency to banditry, herder-farmer conflicts, kidnapping, and organized crime. These security challenges have affected various sectors of the economy, weakened governance, and contributed to widespread displacement and humanitarian crises. According to A. Akinola "Nigeria's security landscape has deteriorated due to a combination of weak governance, corruption, and the inability of security forces to effectively counter threats."¹⁵ The inability of successive governments to address these challenges has further eroded public confidence in state institutions, leading to increased reliance on vigilante groups and non-state security actors. Nigeria's national security crisis is deeply rooted in historical, political, and socio-economic factors, and it continues to shape the country's global image and diplomatic engagements.

One of the most significant security threats Nigeria has faced since 1999 is terrorism and insurgency, primarily driven by the activities of Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram emerged in the early 2000s but gained international notoriety in 2009 when it launched a violent insurgency against the Nigerian government. The group has carried out numerous attacks, including the 2011 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja and the 2014 abduction of over 270 schoolgirls from Chibok, an event that sparked global outrage.¹⁶ Despite military efforts such as Operation Lafiya Dole and the involvement of regional forces, Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to launch deadly attacks in the North-East, displacing millions and destabilizing the region. According to the Global Terrorism Index “Nigeria remains one of the most terror-affected countries in the world, with Boko Haram and ISWAP responsible for thousands of deaths annually.”¹⁷ The persistent terrorist activities have not only weakened national security but have also damaged Nigeria’s reputation as a regional leader in Africa. The failure to completely eradicate terrorism has led to foreign governments issuing travel advisories, restricting military aid, and questioning Nigeria’s ability to handle internal security challenges.

Another major security challenge is the rise of banditry and kidnapping, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions. Since the early 2010s, criminal gangs, commonly referred to as “bandits,” have engaged in large-scale cattle rustling, mass abductions, and violent attacks on villages. The problem escalated in 2020 when bandits began targeting schools, leading to multiple mass abductions of students in states like Zamfara, Kaduna, and Niger.¹⁸ The December 2020 abduction of over 300 students from Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State, underscored the growing influence of these armed groups and the government’s struggle to contain them. “The Nigerian state has increasingly lost control over rural areas, allowing non-state actors to thrive and impose parallel governance structures”.¹⁹ The proliferation of small arms, the collapse of local governance, and the complicity of some security personnel have exacerbated the crisis. Additionally, the rise in ransom payments has fueled the kidnapping industry, making it one of the most lucrative criminal enterprises in Nigeria. The government’s inability to curb these activities has led to further erosion of public trust in security institutions and has discouraged foreign investments in affected regions.

The farmer-herder conflict has also contributed significantly to Nigeria’s security crisis, with violent clashes between Fulani herders and local farming communities escalating in the past two decades. The conflict, which is driven by competition over land and water resources, has resulted in thousands of deaths and large-scale displacement, particularly in the Middle Belt states such as Benue, Plateau, and Taraba.²⁰ According to P. Eke “The farmer-herder conflict has morphed into a deadly ethno-religious struggle, further deepening divisions among Nigeria’s diverse communities”.²¹ The situation has been exacerbated by climate change, desertification, and the movement of herders into new territories, leading to violent confrontations. Despite the federal government’s introduction of initiatives such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), the crisis remains largely unresolved, with accusations that security forces have failed to act decisively. The conflict has also fueled separatist sentiments, as some ethnic groups perceive the government’s response as biased in favor of the Fulani herders. The inability to address the crisis effectively has led to growing instability, further complicating Nigeria’s national security framework.

In addition to these internal security threats, Nigeria faces separatist agitations and militancy, particularly in the South-East and South-South regions. The resurgence of Biafra separatism, led by groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), has reignited tensions between the federal government and Igbo nationalists. IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu, has demanded an independent Biafra state, leading to violent clashes between its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and Nigerian security forces.²² Similarly, in the Niger Delta, militant groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers have targeted oil installations, disrupting Nigeria’s crude oil production and threatening the economy. Nigeria’s failure to address historical grievances and regional inequalities has fueled renewed separatist agitations and militant activities.²³ The government’s militarized response to these groups has resulted in human rights violations, further worsening Nigeria’s international reputation. The recurring tensions highlight the deep-seated political and economic grievances that continue to undermine national unity and security.

The persistence of these security challenges has significantly impacted Nigeria's global standing, economic stability, and national cohesion. According to M. Eze notes "A nation plagued by insecurity cannot achieve sustainable development or maintain a strong diplomatic presence."²⁴ The loss of investor confidence, frequent travel warnings from foreign governments, and the rise in internally displaced persons (IDPs) are clear indicators of the worsening security situation. Nigeria's security architecture has struggled to keep pace with the evolving threats, largely due to corruption, poor intelligence-sharing, and inadequate funding of security agencies.

Nigeria's international image and perception

Nigeria's international image has been significantly shaped by its political stability, economic performance, human rights record, and security challenges. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, the country has struggled to maintain a positive global reputation due to persistent issues such as corruption, insecurity, electoral malpractices, and human rights violations. According to B. Akinyemi "A nation's image is a reflection of its governance, economic stability, and adherence to international norms, and Nigeria has faced difficulties in projecting a positive image due to its internal challenges."²⁵ Nigeria's involvement in regional peacekeeping efforts, its role as Africa's largest economy, and its diplomatic engagements has helped to shape its global standing. However, these positive contributions have often been overshadowed by negative perceptions linked to issues such as terrorism, corruption scandals, and governance failures. International media portrayals of Nigeria have also contributed to the country's image problem, often highlighting issues of insecurity, internet fraud, and political instability while neglecting positive developments in business, culture, and technological innovation.

One of the most significant factors affecting Nigeria's international reputation is its persistent security challenges, particularly terrorism, banditry, and separatist agitations. The rise of Boko Haram in the early 2000s and its violent insurgency has led to widespread global concern about Nigeria's ability to maintain internal security. The 2014 abduction of over 270 schoolgirls from Chibok by Boko Haram drew international condemnation and led to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which gained support from world leaders such as former U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama.²⁶ Despite military interventions and counterterrorism efforts, Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), continue to operate in the North-East, leading to foreign travel advisories and reducing investor confidence. Similarly, rising cases of banditry and kidnapping in the North-West and North-Central regions have further damaged Nigeria's image as a secure investment destination. According to Eze "Nigeria's failure to effectively curb insurgency and banditry has led to travel restrictions by Western nations and a decline in foreign direct investment."²⁷ The inability to address these security threats has reinforced negative perceptions of Nigeria as an unstable and unsafe country, deterring tourism and business opportunities.

Another critical factor shaping Nigeria's global image is corruption and financial crimes, which have long been associated with the country's political and economic systems. Nigeria has consistently ranked low on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, reflecting widespread corruption in government institutions. The infamous case of former military ruler General Sani Abacha, who looted billions of dollars from state funds and deposited them in foreign accounts, remains one of the most cited examples of corruption in Nigeria's history.²⁸ More recently, allegations of financial mismanagement and fraud involving government officials, including the misappropriation of COVID-19 relief funds, have further tarnished Nigeria's reputation. Additionally, Nigeria has been linked to international cybercrime, particularly online fraud (popularly known as "Yahoo Yahoo"), which has led to crackdowns on Nigerian citizens abroad. The 2019 arrest of Nigerian businessman Ramon Abbas, also known as Hushpuppi, for his involvement in a multi-million-dollar fraud scheme reinforced global stereotypes of Nigeria as a hub for internet fraud.²⁹ The prevalence of corruption and financial crimes has discouraged foreign investment, strained diplomatic relations, and reinforced negative stereotypes about Nigerians in international circles.

Nigeria's human rights record and democratic governance have also played a crucial role in shaping its international perception. While the country has maintained a democratic system since 1999, elections have often been marred by violence, voter suppression, and electoral fraud. The 2007 general elections,

for example, were widely criticized by international observers as being highly flawed and lacking credibility.³⁰ Similarly, the handling of protests and civil unrest has drawn global condemnation, particularly the violent suppression of the #EndSARS protests in 2020, where security forces allegedly opened fire on unarmed demonstrators at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos. The incident led to widespread international criticism, with organizations such as Amnesty International and the United Nations condemning the Nigerian government's actions.³¹ Additionally, concerns over press freedom, police brutality, and the treatment of opposition figures have further damaged Nigeria's image as a democratic nation. The consistent failure to uphold human rights has led to strained diplomatic relations with Western nations and has affected Nigeria's ability to secure favorable trade agreements and international partnerships.

Despite these challenges, Nigeria has made positive contributions to international diplomacy, regional stability, and economic growth, which have helped to improve its global standing. Nigeria has played a significant role in peacekeeping missions across Africa, contributing troops to United Nations and African Union-led operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan.³² As Africa's largest economy, Nigeria has also emerged as a leader in economic and trade initiatives, particularly through its involvement in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The country's vibrant cultural and entertainment industries, particularly Nollywood and Afrobeats, have gained global recognition, projecting a more positive image of Nigeria on the international stage. According to Eze "Nigeria's cultural and creative industries have become powerful tools for rebranding the country's image and challenging negative stereotypes."³³ Additionally, Nigerian professionals in various fields, including medicine, technology, and sports, have contributed positively to the country's global reputation. The success of Nigerian-born athletes such as Kamaru Usman in the UFC and artists like Burna Boy and Wizkid winning Grammy Awards have demonstrated Nigeria's global influence beyond its security and governance challenges.

Interconnections between national security and international image

National security and a country's international image are deeply interconnected, as security challenges significantly impact how a nation is perceived globally. Nigeria's security issues—ranging from terrorism, banditry, and secessionist movements to cybercrime and political instability—have contributed to its negative international reputation. According to K. Adebayo "A nation's ability to maintain internal stability and protect its citizens is a fundamental determinant of its global perception."³⁴ The frequent terrorist attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP, the rise in kidnapping for ransom, and the activities of unknown gunmen in the South-East have led to international travel advisories and a decline in foreign direct investment. Countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have repeatedly issued warnings to their citizens regarding travel to Nigeria, citing security risks.³⁵ Additionally, foreign companies operating in Nigeria have expressed concerns over the high cost of security, which affects business operations and discourages economic partnerships. These security threats have reinforced perceptions of Nigeria as a dangerous country, negatively affecting tourism, investment, and diplomatic relations.

Another major aspect of the interconnection between national security and Nigeria's international image is the impact of terrorism on diplomatic relations and foreign policy. Nigeria has been actively engaged in counterterrorism efforts, both at the regional and international levels, to mitigate the impact of insurgency. The country has received military assistance and counterterrorism training from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, reflecting the global concern over Nigeria's security challenges.³⁶ However, despite these efforts, persistent terrorist activities have strained Nigeria's diplomatic relations, particularly with neighboring countries like Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, which have suffered cross-border attacks. In 2014, following the abduction of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram, global outrage led to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, drawing attention to Nigeria's security failures.³⁷ While this incident led to international assistance in counterterrorism operations, it also reinforced negative perceptions of Nigeria as a nation unable to protect its citizens. Furthermore, the failure to effectively prosecute terrorists and bring perpetrators of violent crimes to justice has led to criticism from human rights organizations and international bodies such as the United Nations and Amnesty International, further damaging Nigeria's reputation.

Corruption within Nigeria's security sector has also had a direct impact on the country's international image. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index has consistently ranked Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries, with the security sector being one of the most affected.³⁸ Reports of military officials diverting funds meant for counterterrorism operations have raised concerns among international partners who provide financial and military assistance. For instance, in 2015, the former National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, was accused of misappropriating \$2.1 billion meant for arms procurement.³⁹ Such scandals have led to skepticism regarding Nigeria's commitment to security reforms and have discouraged foreign countries from fully trusting Nigeria's leadership in counterterrorism efforts. Additionally, corruption within law enforcement agencies has contributed to issues such as extrajudicial killings, bribery, and human rights abuses, further damaging Nigeria's global reputation.⁴⁰ The #EndSARS protests of 2020, which highlighted police brutality and the killing of unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate, sparked international condemnation, with the United Nations and Western governments criticizing Nigeria's handling of the situation.⁴¹ These incidents have reinforced perceptions of Nigeria as a nation struggling with governance, accountability, and law enforcement integrity.

Nigeria's security challenges have also influenced foreign investment and economic development, directly affecting its global perception. Investors prioritize stable environments where security threats are minimal, but Nigeria's persistent issues with insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping have discouraged both local and foreign businesses. The oil and gas sector, which is critical to Nigeria's economy, has suffered from attacks on pipelines and oil theft, leading to reduced production and loss of revenue.⁴² Multinational corporations such as Shell and Chevron have, at various times, threatened to reduce their investments in Nigeria due to security concerns in the Niger Delta. Additionally, the rise in cybercrime, often linked to Nigerian fraudsters, has led to increased scrutiny of Nigerian businesses abroad. In 2019, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested dozens of Nigerians involved in online fraud, further reinforcing the negative stereotype of Nigeria as a hub for cybercrime.⁴³ This has had consequences for legitimate Nigerian businesses, with many facing stricter regulatory requirements when dealing with international clients. The combination of insecurity and fraud-related crimes has made Nigeria a less attractive destination for global trade and investment, negatively affecting its economic growth and diplomatic influence.

Despite these challenges, Nigeria has made efforts to improve both its national security and international image, recognizing the interdependence between the two. The government has invested in counterterrorism strategies, regional security partnerships, and military modernization to combat insurgency and violent crime. The establishment of multinational joint task forces with Chad, Niger, and Cameroon to fight Boko Haram has demonstrated Nigeria's commitment to regional security.⁴⁴ Additionally, diplomatic initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) have positioned Nigeria as a leader in economic integration, helping to counteract negative perceptions. The country's cultural exports, including Nollywood and Afrobeats, have also played a role in reshaping global perceptions of Nigeria. According to Eze "While security challenges persist, Nigeria's soft power in culture, entertainment, and diplomacy offers an opportunity to redefine its global image."⁴⁵ However, for Nigeria to fully restore its international reputation, it must implement comprehensive security reforms, strengthen its institutions, and address the root causes of violence and crime. Failure to do so will continue to undermine its efforts to attract investment, build diplomatic alliances, and position itself as a key player in global affairs.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the relationship between national security challenges and Nigeria's international image perception from 1999 to 2023. The primary objective was to analyze the impact of security threats—including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, cybercrime, and political instability—on Nigeria's global reputation. It also sought to evaluate how these security concerns have influenced diplomatic relations, foreign investments, and international cooperation. The study found that persistent security threats have significantly damaged Nigeria's international standing, leading to negative travel advisories, reduced foreign direct investment, and strained diplomatic ties. Moreover, corruption within the security sector has further compounded these issues, undermining international trust in Nigeria's

ability to address its internal security problems effectively. The study also highlighted how Nigeria's efforts in counterterrorism and regional security cooperation have been met with mixed success, as ongoing security breaches continue to overshadow any progress made in governance and military reforms.

Furthermore, the research revealed that while Nigeria has struggled with security challenges, it has also taken steps to improve its international image through diplomatic initiatives, economic policies, and cultural influence. The rise of Nollywood and Afrobeats, along with Nigeria's involvement in regional trade agreements such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), has contributed positively to its global perception. However, these soft power elements alone cannot fully counteract the impact of widespread insecurity. To restore its international reputation, Nigeria must adopt a holistic security strategy that includes political, economic, and social reforms alongside military interventions. Addressing the root causes of insecurity, improving governance, and strengthening law enforcement institutions will be crucial in reversing negative global perceptions. Ultimately, the study underscores that national security and international image are deeply interconnected, and any meaningful improvement in one must be accompanied by progress in the other.

Endnotes

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