

Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

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Abstract

Since the return to civil rule in May 1999, Nigeria faced with varying degree of security threats ranging from insurgency in the North East; banditry and kidnapping in the North West, the rise of separatists movement in the Southern part of the country, the violent crime of armed robbery, ritual, murders, rape, the cross-border criminal activities in arms, drugs and human trafficking and ethno-religious conflict resulting in violent destruction of lives and properties. Unemployment and chronic poverty accompanied by bad governance due to government's failure to address inequality has provided a breeding ground for terrorism and insurgency. The study, thus, relates this to the Nigeria's classification as one of the poorest countries in the world, according to the World Bank (2023) as the reasons for the rise in insurgency and terrorism and the impact it is having on Nigerian politics which has affected the stability of the country. To achieve this, the study adopted descriptive research design which is qualitative and explorative in nature, implying that data used in the study were derived from secondary sources, via books, journal publications, government official documents, internet and civil societies sources, among others. The paper adopts the structural conflict theory, to examine the reasons why people resort to insurgency/terrorism, crimes and other forms of unrests as alternative means to register their grievances against the government. It recommends that government should provide jobs and poverty alleviated programmes so as to reduce the rate of recruits amongst insurgent and terrorist groups.

Keywords: Politics, Insurgency, Terrorism, Crimes, Civil-unrests, Poverty, Unemployment.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse federation of 36 autonomous states and Federal Capital Territory, it accounts for about half of West Africa's population with an estimated population of about 202 million people, with the largest population of youth in the world, a growth rate of 2% and an average life expectancy of 53 years (World Bank 2021). About 44.1% of the Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society with more than two hundred and fifty two (252) different ethnic groups and tribes. These diversities make Nigeria one of the most complex societies in Africa with its attendant consequences for corruption, political instability, ethnic, communal, sectarian and religious clashes, leadership crisis among other problems which has remained a bane to the development of the country. Despite having the largest economy and population in Africa, Nigeria offers limited opportunities to most of its citizens (World Bank, 2023).

Since the 1960 independence, the country's abundant human and mineral resources are yet to be significantly harnessed to combat the impoverishment of ordinary Nigerians. Nigeria remains the largest oil producer in Africa and the world's eighth largest oil producer, the world's fourth largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and possesses the seventh largest reserves of natural gas. The country's crude oil resources include about 35 billion barrels of oil and an estimated 180 trillion cubic ft of natural gas, with reserves projected to be sustainable for the next 40 and 110 years respectively.

Nigeria is classified as one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 157th out of 189 on the Global Human Development Index (UNDP, 2017). The level of poverty is high with over 70% of the population living below the income poverty line. It is also referred to as the poverty capital of the world. Conversely, the adult literacy level is relatively high approximately 61.1%, yet employment opportunities are scarce. Nigeria's over dependence on oil as the highest foreign revenue earner for government has not only stifled the prospects of other productive sectors of the economy, but has also created avenues for illicit enrichment through corrupt practices. The country has experienced political and religious conflicts since the inception of democratic dispensation in 1999. Violent conflicts in Nigeria have been motivated and sustained by factors such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, ethnicity, economics and religion (Mavalla, 2015).

Since 2011, there has been increased in insurgency and terrorists activities in the North West, and North central and seizures of some areas in the North East by Boko Haram group. They have succeeded in holding onto some of the areas since 2009, and have displaced thousands of Nigerians from their villages, homes, towns, and communities. The worst casualties of the Boko Haram Insurgents are the youths, women, children, and the elderly (Bilyaminu & Idris, 2016).

Nigeria is faced with varying degree of security threats ranging from terrific insurgency in the North East; banditry and kidnapping in the North West, the rise of separatists movement in the Southern part of the country, the violent crime of armed robbery, rituals murders, rape, the cross-border criminal activities in arms,

Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

drugs and human trafficking; ethno-religious conflict resulting in violent destruction of lives and properties. Unemployment and chronic poverty accompanied by bad governance due to government's failure to address inequality has provided a breeding ground for a group that claimed to address people's needs. While Boko Haram was partially weakened leaving it to attack soft targets, the northwest states started to experience banditry activities. States like Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto and Kaduna states have become the dens of bandits. These notorious bandits have continued to attack, kill and abduct helpless farming communities. The North-central states are battling with farmers/herdsmen crises. Security personnel have increasingly become the target of Eastern Security Network (ESN). The daily horrific trending news emerging from the south-east states, where police and other men in uniform are being killed justifies the escalation of tension in the country. With this alarming rate of insecurity pervading the country and the government's perceived attitude towards addressing it questions are being asked whether future elections will be possible or not. Election can be conducted in an atmosphere devoid of rancour. People are not sure if Boko Haram, bandits, kidnappers and other non-state actors will allow peaceful elections to take place in the country. It is against this background that this paper tends to examine the effect of insurgency and terrorism on Nigerian politics.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design which is qualitative in nature, implying that data used in the study were derived from Secondary sources, via books, journal publications, government official documents, internet sources, among others.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the structural conflict theory, structural conflict has two main sub-orientations, the first is the radical structure theory represented by Marxist dialectical school with exponents like Marx and Engels, V.I Lenin. The second is the liberal structuralism represented by Ross (1993), Scarbrough (1998) and the work of Johan Galtung (1990) on structural violence (Best, 20019). The main arguments of the structural conflict theory are that conflict is built in the particular ways societies are structured and organized. The theory looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequality and so on. As a source of conflict be it war, terrorism insurgency, ethnic or religious. Structuralists maintained that conflict occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies, domination of one class by another such as the rich political elites dominating the poor in Nigeria. Liberal Structuralists like Galtung, propounded the theory of negative peace and positive peace to buttress how structural conflict can occur in society (Best, 2019), the solution to this form of conflict to the Marxists, is to that the contradictions will end in a revolution, civil war, or some form of violence leading to the overthrow of the exploitative system.

But liberal structuralists call for the elimination of structural defects with policy reforms.

The emphasis of the structural theory according to (Best, 2009), is thus on how the competing interests of the insurgents and terrorists groups such as banditry and kidnapping, in the North West and North Central Nigeria. Boko Haram activities in the North East, the rise of secessionist movement in the South East and the South Western part of the country. This ties conflict directly into the social, economic, and political organisation of society. When social, political, economic, and cultural processes are monopolized by a group, it creates the conditions that make people to adopt adversarial approaches to conflict. According to Scarborough, (1998), in situations where existing structures are tilted to in favour of one group while putting others at a disadvantage as amply seen in Nigeria today, it will contribute in the emergence of more insurgents and terrorists group in due to corruption and marginalisation, where holders of certain powers or privileges are unwilling to acknowledge the rights of others to be different or where people find it very difficult to identify with the political and economic ideas of a political regime or class, the chances are that insurgency and terrorism will emerge and escalate if nothing is done to correct such anomalies.

Conceptual Clarification

Insurgency

Robert and Timothy (2019) argued that insurgency is a violence against constituted authority when those taking part in the rebellion are not seen or recognized as belligerents. They also noted that not all rebellions are insurgency; and that the concept of insurgency is ambiguous.

Hall, (2018) on his part opined that there have been many instances of non-violent rebellions that cannot be described as insurgency, such as civil resistance as was seen in People Power Revolution in the Philippines in the 1980s that ousted President Marcos and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011.

Goldstein and McKercher (2015) believe that where a revolt takes the form of armed rebellion, it may not be viewed as an insurgency if a state of belligerency exists between one or more sovereign states and the insurgents rebel forces.

Weigand (2017) opined that when insurgency is used to describe a movement's or group's unlawfulness by virtue of not being authorized by or in accordance with the law of the land, its use is neutral not matter how logically their agitation may be. However, when it is used by a state or another authority under threat, "insurgency" often also carries an implication that the rebels' cause is illegitimate, whereas those rising up will see the authority of the state as being illegitimate; that's the irony of the situation.

Anderson (2017) believes that past models of insurgency do not perfectly fit modern insurgency. The current instances are far more likely to have a multinational or transnational character than those of the past. That several insurgencies may belong to more complex conflicts, involving "third forces"

Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

(armed groups which affect the outcome, such as transnational media), who may be distinct from the core insurgents and the recognized government; while overt state sponsorship becomes less common, sponsorship by transnational groups, is more common than the nesting of insurgency within complex conflicts is associated with state weakness or failure.

Terrorism

The challenge in defining terrorism arises from its complex nature and the absence of a universally accepted definition. Despite its persistent presence in global affairs, academics and policymakers struggle to agree on a concise definition. This ambiguity is highlighted by the multitude of definitions and typologies present in terrorism literature. Gardam, (2013) on the other hand argued the meaning of terrorism originated with Russian radicals in the 1880s. Sergey Nechayev, who found the People's Reprisal in 1869, described himself as a "terrorists". German radical writer Johann Most was said to have helped popularized the modern sense of the word dispersing "advise for terrorists" in the 1880s.

Dugan, (2007), further see terrorism as "acts by non-state actors involving the threatened or actual use of illegal force or violence to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation". In a world perceived as peaceful, an act of political violence may be considered as domestic terrorism, while the same act of violence can be considered justified by others who perceive the world to be at war. Juergensmeyer (2017), described terrorism as a tool used to achieve a specific outcome by using force or violence on one segment of society with the primary goal of causing fear in the larger society to make change in that society.

Concept of Politics

Rod & Harrop (2004) defined politics as the activity of by which groups reach binding collective decisions through attempting to reconcile differences. Miller (1991) also defines politics as a collective activity involving people who accept a common membership or at least acknowledged a shared fate. Politics also involves reconciling differences through discussion and persuasion. Politics is "the process by which human efforts towards attaining social goal are steered and coordinated." Politics is the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the whole community (Marcus, & Howard, 2010). Politics as described by Lord Bismarck is "is the art of the possible." (Political Dictionary, 2024). It is the act of selecting the most worthwhile among whatever policies are possible (Anifowose, 1999).

The Nature of Nigerian Politics

According to Remi and Solomon (1999) that Nigeria started to evolve in 1861 following the annexation of Lagos as a Crown Colony and as a result of the gradual incorporation of the contiguous areas and peoples into the British Empire. The

structures of governance introduced by the colonial authorities then were meant to serve specific colonial purposes. Nigeria at independence inherited a weak socio-political structure, a defective and unbalance federation, an intensification of the ethnic consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture.

Anayo (2023) opined that Nigeria is a federal republic with a presidential system divided into thirty-six (36) states run by governors and a federal capital territory. Nigeria also runs a unitary system with states, having little very autonomy over their policies; states depend on Federal budgetary allocations which is heavily dependent on crude oil revenue. Nigeria runs a multi-party democracy, parties are not divided along ideological lines, they are rather divided along ethnic lines. This trend is however slowing down as the poverty-stricken majority is beginning to see through the façade of ethnocentrism. He went further to state that the reason why parties are divided along ethnic lines is because the country itself was created as a marriage of convenience by the British. That the union is not necessary a bad thing, but not many people affected by the union had a say in it. This is the root cause of the multiple secessionist movement in the country.

According to Fadakinte (2013) the Nigerian political process has been very unstable since the country attained independence in 1960. That governmental instability is therefore a feature of Nigerian political life and election crisis has become part of this instability. The problem of election crisis in Nigeria is therefore not a new one; it is being caused by ethnicity, modernisation of class relations. It had started soon after independence and had occurred at different times in varying degrees. Egwu (2014) stated that electoral authoritarianism is real and has haunted Nigerian politics since the attainment of political independence in 1960. That the footprints of electoral authoritarianism are the impunity and fraud have characterized the country's post-independence electoral history. The reality of electoral authoritarianism is underlined by the persistence of a culture of violence and impunity built into the electoral system. Despite the configuration of violence of the rhythm of violence from the largely ethnic cum regionally-based patterns of political competition in the First and Second Republics, violence has continued to undermine the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.

Causes of Insurgency and Terrorism

Scholars have argued that terrorism originates from various sources. It is therefore important to investigate this at both individual and group levels. At the individual level, some experts have distinguished rational, psychological, and cultural origins of terrorism. According to Simonsen and Jeremy (2000) rational terrorists think through their goals and options, making a cost-benefit analysis. Psychological motivation for resorting to terrorism derives from the terrorist's personal dissatisfaction with his or her life and accomplishments. At the group level, terrorism can grow out of an environment of political activism, when a group's goal

Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

is to redirect a government's or society's attention toward the grievances of an activist social movement.

Religious motivation: Hoffman (2006) observed that religion has become the key motivator for several terrorist organizations in Africa. Among the organizations and individuals who have been religiously inspired to adopt terrorist violence, those who espouse a radical interpretation of Islam are predominantly singled out. However, the relevance of extreme-right Christian groups is also underscored. According to Gurr and Cole (2005), the proliferation and significance of religiously motivated terrorist groups is notable in the period of time commonly assigned to the emergence of the new terrorism. Evidence of this claim is supported by trends that refer to the percentage of religiously inspired groups in relation to the total number of terrorist organisations. This literature indicates that numbers grew from less than 4% in 1980 to 42% by the mid-1990s (Lesser; Arquilla; Ronfeldt; Hoffman; Zanini & Jenkins, 1999). Substantiating this, Zalman (2014) opined that religion fanaticism creates conditions that are formidable for terrorism. Proliferation of weapons of war: The availability and the use of weapons of mass destruction and or disruption, namely, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weapons have continued to fuel terrorism. Some argue that the increasing desensitisation of audience caused by media trends have forced terrorists to become more violent and spectacular (Neumann, 2009). A point of divergence from the above analysis was given by Zalman (2014) who believed that terrorist attacks are motivated by social and political injustice. People choose terrorism when they are trying to right what they perceive to be a social or political or historical wrong i.e. when they have been stripped of their land or rights, or denied these.

Root of Causes/ Drivers for Insurgency and Terrorism in Nigeria

It is generally argued that there is no smoke without fire, which means there are root causes/drivers for insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria as stated by Imaan (2021) includes the following:

- a. **Corruption:** The corrupt ridden nature of Nigerian society is found in all sectors of the economy (both private and public). The ruling government has failed to perform its duties because officials are busy amassing wealth at the detriment of the society. The culture of dishonesty and duplicity has developed in which government positions are seen as a vehicle for obtaining economic benefit and increasing private wealth.
- b. **Poverty and Unemployment:** The vicious cycle of poverty continues to ravage the Nigerian society to the extent that majority of the citizens cannot afford three square meals per day. Also the unequal resource or wealth distribution and level of unemployment affecting the majority of the population causing intense resentment towards the political status quo.
- c. **Injustice and inefficiencies in the formal justice system and delays in court decisions**

- d. Weak institutional structure: The institutional structure that are put in place in all the three levels of government in Nigeria are so weak that policy formulated are haphazardly executed, therefore, government cannot provide the society with public goods and this qualifies Nigeria to be regarded as a weak state.
- e. Lack of formal education due to a low level of education in some regions, citizens does not have the basic practical critical thinking skills that would greatly aid in dissecting violent sects.
- f. Lack of socio-economic opportunities.
- g. Marginalization and discrimination.
- h. Radicalization in persons.
- i. Poor governance, violation of human rights and rule of law.

Security Threats in Nigeria: Overview, Causes and It's Impacts on Nigerian Politics

According to (Igbini, 2020 Cited in Chukwu and Chimera, 2015) that the most worrisome of all of these security threats in the country, is the intensified campaign launched by the pro-Biafra group, the IPOB for secession from the federal republic of Nigeria. That one of the major challenges confronting the people in recent time is the regionalization of security threats in the country. The peculiarity in criminality and regionalization of unrests and agitations in Nigeria makes it very difficult for the central and regional governments to combat the security challenges in the country. Apart from the fact that criminalities or security challenges in the country are in most cases regionalized, insincerity of purpose and corruption has been the bane to countering the upsurge of these security challenges, situation that is also pertinent in this discourse. Notably also, these groups have consistently unleashed mayhem in the country and continued to threaten peace and security particularly in their respective domains or regions such that in the South-western part of the country security threat takes the forms of political motivated and ritual killings; armed robbery and kidnappings, etc. In the South-eastern part, security threat comes from agitation from the secessionist group or what some scholars and analysts refer to as a separatist organization known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The northern part of the country for over a decade now is under siege from Boko Haram Islamic terrorist organization, ISWAP, banditry, cattle rustling. This region is the most volatile in the country in recent times having experienced several attacks from these insurgent groups and terrorist organizations.

Kidnapping in Nigeria: Overview, Causes and Its Effects

According to CISLAC (2020), kidnapping for ransom ranks very high among the numerous peace and security challenges confronting Nigeria. That it happens for political reasons (grievance); for ransom (greed); hybrid kidnapping for (generating money to support insurgency); and situational kidnapping (for settling custodial and

Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

family issues, indentured servitude and ethno-religious indoctrination). Contributory factors include poor governance; state weakness and distinct failure of government in its responsibility to protect (R2P); existence of alternative authority in ungoverned spaces; corruption in the security sector; explicit or implicit complicity of security responses; absence of strong deterrence; lack of national elite consensus, diametric loss of a sense value of life and situational circumstances. Kidnapping creates an overwhelming sense of insecurity that affects social and personal activities, movement and anxiety for children, especially when in schools. Kidnapping puts society on edge, compelling restricted movements, involuntary relocation, and reinforced personal security of homes, offices and vehicular movement. Victims suffer psychological stress and trauma.

Challenges of Governing and Securing Rural Spaces in Nigeria

Nigeria is experiencing a situational crisis in the governing and securing of its conflict-affected rural areas. Ungoverned space is a direct reflection of the inability of the state to effectively perform its minimal statutory functions: exercise of monopoly of use of force; full territorial control; and provision of basic social services. Incrementally, Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs), also referred to as Non-States Actors (NSAs), continue to pursue variously unique agenda through the asymmetric threats of violence and armed violence. This situation is further perpetuated by the failure or weakness of the governance and security institutions of the state at all levels federal, state and local government in guaranteeing public safety and the security of livelihoods. Six drivers of violent conflict pertinent to ungoverned space include: lack of quality governance and transparency, ethnic rivalry, religious extremism, mismanagement, of land and natural resources, declining economy and proliferation of small and light weapons. Some of the emerging ungoverned spaces are attributable to incremental pastoral conflict, in which armed herders have sacked farming communities, and in many instances, engaged in banditry and kidnappings. Over 25, 794 Nigerians may have died in violent crises from 2015-2019, the combined activities of Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), have claimed 30, 000 lives and displaced an estimated two million people (CISLAC, 2020).

Modibbo (2021) stated that there are effects of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria. That the deadly conflicts between herdsman and crop farmers have become one of the major insecurity problem in Nigeria only second to Boko-Haram imperil. The violent conflict between the two groups have been manifesting in form of bloody clashes attacks and counter attacks. These bloody attacks and counter attacks have created social or relational implications and economic adverse effects such as:

- Loss of Human lives
- Displacement of persons
- Destruction of houses and properties
- Destruction of farmlands and crops

- Distrust between the two groups
- Unemployment
- Threat in National Security
- Threat to food security

Boko Haram a self-declared ally of the Islamic State, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Militants, Fulani herdsmen and other bandits are responsible for immense damage and sufferings in Nigeria and her neighbouring countries including Chad, Niger and Cameroon. These groups manipulate convincing arguments based on religious claims, ethnicity and marginalization although religion is not the foundation of its recruitment instead the extremists target. “Social Grievance” and present themselves as “Problem Solvers and Freedom Crusaders”. Both the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations have acknowledged that violent extremism has reached a level of threat and sophistication that requires concerted action beyond law enforcement, military or security measures to address development, good governance, human rights and humanitarian concerns. It has continued to pose a major threat to international peace and security and undermines the core values of the United Nations (Imaan, 2021).

Impacts of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Political Environment

Also as highlighted by Olamilekan (2014) in the course of analyzing Nigeria's issues he argued that the political atmosphere in the country has always encouraged conflicts in the form of political violence, communal clashes and ethnic-religious crisis, and the Boko Haram insurgent attacks on public places such as schools, churches, mosques, market places, government and military installations. Ajuzie (2018) argued that insecurity in all its forms and those arising from fears and despairs the citizens fear on daily basis are the major problems of the people, the government and its security agencies in recent times. All these security challenges, insurgency in northern Nigeria seems to be an exception and has been growing in strength, sophistication, and most importantly, quite ominous and very difficult to combat. In a nut shell, the country is at the edge of dreadful precipice if the threat emanating from terrorism is not successfully surmounted. Ironically, the activities of Boko Haram insurgency and its affiliate groups have been complicated by occasional political violence, hereditary corruption, nepotism, tribalism, indiscipline in virtually all facets of the public, abduction and kidnappings, armed robbery, murder, extortion, bombings of places of worship and innocent Nigerians, hence, making it very difficult for the Federal government and its security agencies to combat (Muzan, 2014).

As highlighted by Ewang (2023) that Nigeria's elections have historically been fraught with violence and other abuse, the 2019 elections was marred by violent security forces, and thugs acting on behalf of the politicians. In states including Zamfara, bandit gangs, which emerged following years of conflict between nomadic herdsmen and farming communities, have continued to carry out

Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

violent activities causing widespread displacement among other problems. In Imo state, South East Nigeria, general public does not have confidence in authorities' ability to ensure people's safety during elections in areas like the Imo West Senatorial District, where several attacks have taken place.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) a Nigerian think-tank also highlighted the security challenges across the country in the polls of 2023. All six geopolitical zones of the country are confronted with insecurity, which has led to the deployment of the Nigerian military across the federation. Northern states are engulfed in long-standing violence with extremist jihadist groups, criminal bandit gangs and other non-stated armed groups who are engaged in deadly attacks against local communities. In the South, civil unrest continues against the backdrop of ongoing violence between farmers and herders and secessionist agitators. Also, nationwide fragility and instability provides fertile ground for non-state actors to be easily mobilized by political actors to perpetuate electoral violence. In the South East, the forced incarceration of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader Nnamdi Kanu in 2017 marked a significant inflection point in the trajectory of secessionist conflict in the region that first re-emerged a decade ago. The pronouncement in early 2020 of the launching of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), a paramilitary organisation attached to IPOB was a further point.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has been able to trace the root causes or reasons for the rise of insurgency and terrorism and the impact it is having on Nigerian politics which has affected the stability of the country due to the activities of the Boko Haram/ISWAP, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, activities of secessionist movements, of which ranks very high among the numerous peace and security challenges confronting the polity. The vicious cycle of poverty which has continued to ravage the Nigerian society to the extent that majority of the citizens cannot afford three square meals per day. Also the unequal resource or wealth distribution and level of unemployment affecting the majority of the population is causing intense resentment towards the political status quo.

The government should provide jobs and poverty alleviated programmes so as to reduce the rate of recruits amongst insurgent and terrorist groups bedeviling the country. Since poverty and unemployment make crime and other social vices attractive to our youth, government. There is the need for the overcoming of weak institutions which require government to establish modalities for granting and implementing national amnesty programmes that are backed by law and are uniformly applicable across the country in order to address the activities of non-state actors that are impacting negatively on Nigerian political environment. Strict adherence to early warnings should be enhanced with entrenched operational communicating linkages that bind the centre with the federating units, through the decentralization of discussions of solutions by re-locating some of the peace and

security and conflict resolution discussions to the local levels, where most of the challenges exist and crimes occur.

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Assessment of the Effects of Insurgency and Terrorism on Nigerian Politics

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