



Insurgency in Nigeria: A review of literature on its types, strategies adopted by insurgent groups, causes and solutions

Nnatu, Stella Obioma (P.hD)

Department of Sociology/Anthropology
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
s.nnatu@unizik.edu.ng; obiomannatu2022@gmail.com

Abstract

Insurgency is a protracted violent conflict in which one or more groups seek to overthrow or fundamentally change the political or social order in a state or region through the use of sustained violence, subversion, social disruption, and political action. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram group is the major example, although other minor groups do exist. This review paper, relying solely on secondary sources examined the types of insurgency and strategies adopted by the groups in their operations toward set goals. The paper also examined the major causes of insurgency and proffered multi-level solutions such as institution of good governance and adoption of peace building and conflict resolution initiatives.

Keywords: *conflict resolution, rebirth, terrorism, insurgency, peace, peace building*

Introduction

Insurgency can be defined as organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge a political control of regions. Insurgents seek to subvert or displace the government, and completely or partially control the resources and population of a given territory. In the view of Moore (2007), the term insurgency is used interchangeably and imprecisely with “irregular warfare, unconventional warfare, revolutionary warfare, guerrilla warfare and even terrorism”. For him, an insurgency is a protracted violent conflict in which one or more groups seek to overthrow or fundamentally change the political or social order in a state or region through the use of sustained violence, subversion, social disruption, and political action.

They do so through the use of force (including guerrilla warfare, terrorism and coercion/intimidation), propaganda, subversion and political mobilization. Insurgents fight government forces only to the extent needed to achieve their political aims: their main effort is not to kill counterinsurgents, but rather to establish a competitive system of control over the population, making it impossible for the government to administer its territory and people. Insurgent activity is therefore designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while



increasing insurgent control and influence. U.S. Government counterinsurgency guide (January 2009:5).

Types of Insurgency

In the meantime, O'Neill defined seven types of insurgencies based on the insurgent's ultimate goal and the aspects of politics the insurgent focuses on. The following are the different types of insurgencies according to O' Neill:

- Anarchist- To eliminate all institutionalized political arrangements; they view authority relationships as unnecessary and illegitimate, Black Cells in Germany
- Egalitarian (communist and socialist)- To impose a new system based on distribution equality and centrally controlled structures to mobilize the people and radically transform the social structure within an existing political community, Shining Path in Peru
- Traditionalist-To displace the political system; the values they articulate are primordial and sacred ones rooted in ancestral ties and religion, Hezbollah in Lebanon
- Pluralist-To displace the political system in favour of individual freedom and liberty UNITA, in Angola
- Secessionist-To withdraw from the present political community and constitute a new and independent political community, Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka
- Reformist- To gain autonomy and reallocate political and material resources within the present political system, Kurds in Iraq
- Preservationist-To maintain the existing political system by engaging in illegal acts against non-ruling groups/the authorities who want to change, Ulster Defence Association in N-Ireland.

Strategies of Insurgency

All the above types of insurgencies can, depending on the environment and strength of the insurgent, choose from several strategic approaches to reach their political goals. Although some types of insurgencies generally prefer a particularly strategic approach, they all can be useful. All have been used by the different types of insurgencies throughout history. The following strategic approaches are defined by O'Neill:



- The Conspiratorial Strategy - In this strategy a small and well-disciplined conspiratorial group forms a party to exploit grievances that have largely alienated elements of the population from the government. The insurgent does not seek to bring the general population against the government but it will mobilize segments for mass support in riots and demonstrations. When the government is no longer sure of the loyalty of the military and police, the government can collapse due to terrorism and mass demonstrations.
- Protracted Popular War Strategy - This strategy is the most successful and written about (China and Mao, Vietnam and Giap). This strategy assumes that the government is in a superior position of power and is unlikely to fall without a protracted and significant effort. Success will be reached by a phased battle in which the government is attacked in areas and with means in which the government is not strong. In the first stage, political organization terrorism, the organization and infrastructure of the insurgent is put in place. The focus of the first phase is on building a structure and isolating the government from the people. In the second phase, guerrilla warfare, violent military actions are aimed at the government. This makes the government to defend and militarize the country. The last phase, mobile conventional war, is started when the balance of power is in favour of the insurgent and the government can be defeated by overt military actions. The transition from one phase to another is seamless and stepping back into a previous phase is done if needed.
- Military Focus Strategy - This strategy is a variation of the protected popular war strategy introduced by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in Cuba. Instead of relying on a revolutionary condition to arise, this strategy is based on accelerating this (political) process by an armed revolt by a core of guerrillas. This strategy is easier to initiate and requires less organizational work, less popular support at the start and less time.
- Urban (terrorist) strategy - This strategy employs terrorism within urban areas of a society to destabilize it and its government. The object is to create a crisis in both the government's inactivity or over-reaction decreases the government's credibility. The strategy uses the complexity, freedom of movement and anonymity of urban areas. The growing world population and urbanization makes the urban strategy the strategy of the future.

CAUSES OF INSURGENCY

- **Bad Governance, corruption, poverty and Insurgency**

Bad governance, corruption and poverty can lead to insurgency even as regards the Nigerian case. Nigeria's political development has always been punctured by governance crisis and corruption at all strata of the society. There is thus a disconnection between the governed and the government. As comprehensively enunciated by Alemika (2004:1-2), "some manifestations of the crisis of the state and governance in the country are inability to guarantee a basic minimum standard of living that accord with human dignity for the majority of the citizens, lingering conditions of political instability, repression and violence, widespread petty and grand corruption, economic decline resulting in capacity under-utilisation, structural distortion, huge debt burden, very high unemployment rate, especially among young people, deterioration of socio-economic infrastructure, widening inequality among individuals and between rural and urban communities. Insecurity of life and property due to violent crimes and socio-political violence engendered by competition over resources, and deterioration of the social services, particularly education and health care, which has been made worse by structural adjustment programmes implemented by successive governments since 1986. "

This situation of anomie has continued to give serious concern to many Nigerians, as Kukah (2012:36) rhetorically puts it: how do we explain the fact that after over 50 years, we are unable to generate and distribute electricity, supply water to our people, reverse the ugly and avoidably high infant mortality, set up and run an effective educational system, agree on rules of engagement of getting into power, reverse the circle of violence that attends our elections, contain corruption, instil national discipline and create a more humane and caring society? The culmination of these failures accounts for repeated poor performance of the country on the Global ranking. For instance, out of the 177 countries considered in the 2011 ranking by the Fund for Peace- an American independent non-profit research and educational organization- Nigeria was ranked 14th most failed state in the world. According to the 2011 result which is the seventh annual Failed State Index report, the country maintains the same position as that of 2010. Nigeria was 15th in 2009, 18th in 2008, 17th in 2007, 22nd in 2006, 54th in 2005, which means that its 14th position assumes its worst stagnant status since 2007. The fall from 2005



to 2006 was sharp, while it has since then been maintaining the margin of one of the most failed in the world, having a status of being better than just eight other countries (Vanguard, 2011,). The 2012 Failed State Index ranked Nigeria as the 14th most troubled state. Also, in the 2012 Global Peace Index, published by the Institute of Economics and Peace, Nigeria was ranked 146th out of the 158 countries, signifying a decline in peace and stability in the country particularly in the last five years (The Punch, 2012). The ranking evaluates, among other things, the risk of renewed fighting, the resurgence of political instability and terrorist threats. Nigeria is also ranked the 6th most dangerous African country. The latest ranking came on the heels of Federal Government's insistence that Nigeria was safe for investment, despite incessant bomb attacks that had killed many people, especially in the North.

- **Religion as One of the Factor That Cause Insurgency**

The response to widespread disenchantment with the Nigerian State and its ruling class was exploited by the Boko Haram. Mohammed Yusuf—the founder of Boko Haram was an Islamic scholar and cleric who criticised Nigerian leadership (especially those from the North) for its failure to develop Nigeria and improve the socio-economic livelihood of the people. He specifically blames western education for training the Nigerian ruling class in the act of looting treasury. Boko Haram demonization of western education can be seen as a socio-political response to corruption and poverty brought by successive Nigerian leaders. Drawing its ideology from Quran, the Boko Haram leader believed that the enthronement of Islamic state on the basis of Sharia law remains the only solution to the attendant crises. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (which means People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) was formed by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002. It was later called Yussufiya movement (named after the founder). Yusuf was a secondary school drop-out who went to Chad and Niger Republic to study the Qur'an. While in the two countries, he developed radical views that were abhorrent to Westernization and modernization. Because of the sect's radical and provocative preaching against western education, it was nicknamed Boko Haram. Boko Haram is derived from two words in Hausa language "Boko" and "Haram." The 'Boko' means 'book' or 'western education' while 'Haram' means 'forbidden' or 'sinful'. Literally, it means 'western education is forbidden and sinful of corruption, unemployment, poverty, moral decadence and socio-economic problems in Nigeria. To enthrone Islamic state, Mohammed



Yusuf posited that modern state institutions such as civil service, government departments, security formations—police, military and other uniformed personnel should be destroyed (Danjibo 2009) cited by Ogunrotifa (2013).

- **Religion an Insurgency and Violence.**

Starting from the bloodshed in the Bible and the combat of the Crusades to the terrorist attacks on the WTC on September 11, the suicide bombings in the Middle East and the most recent large-scale arson, rape and murder in Gujarat, violence in the name of religion has a long history. But, as Mark Juergensmeyer noted in his book *Terror in the Mind of God* (2001), since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, there is an increase in the religion-related conflicts. The reason for this increase, according to him, is that with the fall of the USSR fighting in the name of religion has replaced the battles pitting the capitalist West against the communist bloc. The new fights, according to Juergensmeyer, are no longer my form of government against yours. It is my religion and my beliefs against yours. (Quoted in Shepard 2002)

Citing a large number of such instances of religion-related violence from both the past and the recent history, William Edelen, in an article published on the Internet titled *Religion is the Cause of Violence* (1999), places the responsibility for violence solely at the door of religion and argues that it is in the very nature of religion to produce conflicts and violence. It is religion, he writes, that, historically, has always produced violence. From Moses to the Crusades, Henry VIII, Salem, Hitler, Kosovo. Today, in our own time, it is those countries without religion that are the least violent. Edelen (Ibid)

The above argument, though flawed on account of being simplistic, highlights an intimate relationship between religion and violence. Although it might come as a surprise to many who see in religion a door to the sacred and a path to spiritual growth and human fulfilment, more than half of the terror organizations listed in the 1998 U.S. State Department listing of international terrorist groups were religious in nature (cf. Shepard 2002). It is also worth taking note that the ferocity and intensity of the religion-inspired violence – for example, September 11 attack on the US or the recent violence in Gujarat – surpasses that of violence inspired by purely secular motives such as an agitation for a separate state within a country or a freedom



struggle. It is, therefore, not surprising that all over the world, among the scholars, an urgent need is felt for acknowledging and exploring the intimate relation between religion and violence and that after the September 11 attack on WTC many scholars are focusing greater attention on the phenomenon.

The statement of the relation between religion and violence is at times marked by denial on the one side and by prejudice and exaggeration on the other. Apologists for religion often regard religion as the carrier of the message of nonviolence, love and peace, and deny that true religion has anything to do with violence. In support of this view, they array such messengers of peace and nonviolence as Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., and proffer religious violence as a strictly aberrant behaviour. Taking this line, many religious leaders, especially Muslim religious leaders, have argued in the recent past that religious people who use their faith to justify violence are not authentically religious, that Muslims who justify violence are not real Muslims (cf. Ingersoll 2001). By contrast, apologists for secularism, intent on indicting religion, hold it responsible for most conflicts and argue that the elimination of religion will assure an era of peace and prosperity (cf. Edelen 1999).

Needless to say that both these views state truths, but only partial truths. To dismiss the affinity of religion to violence as misguided fundamentalism, as some apologists for religion are inclined to do, is as one sided as to exaggerate it. There is a need to avoid the wishful thinking of the religionists on the one side and the exaggeration of the secularists on the other and subject the affinity of religion to violence to an academic investigation.

However, finding and stating the truth about the relation of religion to violence is exceedingly difficult. The difficulty arises chiefly from two reasons. First, since no violence is purely religious in nature, it is difficult to distinguish religious violence from other sorts of violence. It is not easy, for example, to decide whether the conflict in Northern Ireland is a religious one, or whether it is essentially a class and ethnic struggle; whether the recent Balkan wars are ethno-religious or ethno-nationalist conflicts; and whether Zionism is a secular or religious ideology. To overcome this difficulty, it might be useful to speak of religion-inspired violence, rather than religious violence and define it as violence arising primarily from the conflicts in religious beliefs and practices or as conflicts between religious groups as religious groups.



Secondly, each instance of violence is so unique that any generalization made on the basis of the study of a few instances is bound to be inapplicable to all instances. Only sociological naivete would prompt us to expect the same set of common factors active behind the eruptions of all instances of religion-inspired violence. For a comprehensive understanding of each instance of religion-inspired violence, therefore, it is mandatory to study each instance in its own context, paying attention to the unique circumstances and forces that contribute to its eruption. Nevertheless, the analysis of different manifestations of religious violence is likely to yield some common features. What follows is an attempt to identify those features common to most, if not all instances of religion-inspired violence Edelen (Ibid).

- **Religion as the Producer of Violence**

There is a school of thought who establishes a necessary relation between religion and violence. This view holds that religion per se, especially religion in its monotheistic form, leads necessarily to intolerance, conflicts and violence. It draws empirical support from the fact that most of our history is marked by conflicts and wars resulting from religious differences. Proponents of this view further point to the general human tendency, noticed throughout most of our history, to be suspicious and disdainful of differences, and argue that this tendency is maximal in religion, since religious differences tend to rationalize and to pump up the intensity of dislikes that might begin with ethnic, economic, or other differences (Langerak 1997, 514). Such intense dislikes, they claim, are bound, from time to time, to find expression in conflicts, violence and even wars.

But, as Langerak shows, religion is neither in its polytheistic form nor in its monotheistic form – not a natural breeding ground of violence as suggested by some critics of religion. Langerak further argues: When humans thought that the gods were local and their concerns provincial, we could pledge allegiance to them without insisting that everyone else do so. Hence polytheism was quite compatible with religious toleration or, just as likely, indifference toward the other's belief. Thus it is easy for polytheism to be tolerant of the gods of other peoples and we can without much difficulty understand why. However, it might appear that monotheism, since it accepts one and only one God, will naturally yield intolerance and its fruit, violence. This assumption, however, is erroneous, because as he argues. Even when people thought that

their God was the most powerful, even the only true God among many gods and a jealous god at that, they did not require outsiders to agree. The Jews, for example, considered Yahweh as the only true God; they were proud that they were Yahweh's chosen people and felt sorry for others who were not given that privilege, but did not require other people to worship Him. Thus, even monotheism with its universal implications can avoid clashing with atheists, or worshippers of other gods.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

Adoption of United Nations Templates

United Nations contended that an insurgency can be fought via counter-terrorism (counter-insurgency) warfare and may also be opposed by measures at every country's disposal, to protect the population and by political and economic actions of various kinds aimed at undermining the insurgents' claims against the incumbent regime.

Peace and Peace Building Options

Many terms have been associated with the concept of peace such as: “peacemaking”, “peace-building”, “peacekeeping”, “conflict resolution” etc (Obiajulu, 2011). [Peacemaking](#) involves stopping an ongoing conflict, whereas peace-building happens before a conflict starts or once it ends. [Peacekeeping](#) prevents the resumption of fighting following a conflict; it does not address the underlying causes of violence or work to create societal change, as peace-building does. It also differs from peace-building in that it only occurs after conflict ends, not before it begins. Peace-building, also include aspects of state building and socioeconomic development. Indeed, peace-building is an approach to an entire set of interrelated efforts that support peace. The [UN](#) Convention (2005), defined peace-building as a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development It has become such a vast enterprise incorporating pre-conflict and post-conflict strategies and has since been expanded to include many different dimensions, such as, [disarmament, demobilization and reintegration](#), rebuilding governmental, economic and civil society institutions.



Application of Conflict Resolution Initiatives

Obiajulu (2011) defined the term conflict as “a struggle over values, claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the opposing parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals”. Insurgency is a typical conflict situation.

Oftentimes, Conflict resolvers often talk about finding the win-win solution, or mutually satisfying scenario, for everyone involved (Fisher and Ury (1981). Strategies of conflict resolution Arbitration, Adjudication, Mediation, Negotiation, Conflict Suppression, Conflict management, Traditional Approach, Realism, Pacifism etc These strategies outlined will be further discussed in preceding chapters in line with the prospects/imperatives for peace and conflict resolution in a bid to proffer a lasting solution to the spate of Boko Haram terrorist insurgency in Nigeria.

Good Governance

Good governance is a key factor in preventing or mitigating problem of insurgency. Fawole’s (2012) submission is very pertinent here: Any government that derogates from this fundamental responsibility (securing lives and property) would soon become irrelevant and obsolescent, as citizens may be forced to resort to self-help for their safety and security, and watch the country descend into Thomas Hobbes’ conception of the state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. Thus, to abort the Nigerian possibility of further insurgent challenges, the government must work hard and guard against total institutional collapse, festering corruption, barefaced fraud, incandescent ethnic and religious violence and ineptitude, total collapse of the value system etc

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