Leadership Failure and the Challenge of Insecurity in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Buhari's Administration (2015 – 2023)

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Abstract
This paper discusses the relationship between leadership failure and the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria. The particular focus is on the administration of Muhammadu Buhari, (2015 – 2023). In order to achieve the objective of the paper, the study adopted *expos facto* research design, hence data for the paper were obtained from secondary sources and discussed through content analysis. Social contract theory was used as a framework to guide the discussion on establishing the nexus between poor leadership and national security. The study discovered among other things that despite the fact that the administration of Muhammadu Buhari promised to bring to an end, insecurity in the Northeast within the first six months of his assumption in office, leadership failure made the crisis linger, even up to the end of his administration and also snowballed into other regions of the country in a high degree. The study recommended among other things that Leadership should show strong political will in tackling security issues and challenges by bringing the culprits to justice.

Keywords: Leadership failure, insecurity, national security, Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction

The Trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of Leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land, or climate, or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or the inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership (Achebe, 2012)

The quotation above, which provides a springboard for this paper, illustrates the necessity of effective leadership in addressing national security challenges in Nigeria. The paper argues that the type of leadership adopted in a state determines the kind of security situation that the state will grapple with. Where the leadership is willing and committed to addressing the various challenges in the land, the result is obvious. Conversely, the situation of chaos and insecurity is the case where the leadership is not sincere.

Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically (Keith, 2012). Without leadership, people cannot constitute a state, and without good leadership, there can be no developed or integrated technology. It is the primary responsibility of a government to guarantee the security of its citizens because this is what gives the government its legitimacy. The responsibility to protect and guarantee security is clearly spelled out in Section 14(2) (b) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, which states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government." This is the basis for the social contract, where citizens surrender some of their freedoms in addition to submitting themselves to the authority relating to governance in order for the government to grant them full protection of rights and national security.

National security refers to the protection and defense of national values, beliefs, systems, and resources, both human and natural, including physical territories and infrastructure (Adekoya 2020, p. 395). This means that it encompasses a wide range of measures, policies, and actions undertaken by a government to ensure the safety, stability, and well-being of its nation. The relationship between leadership and national security is vital and interconnected. The decisions, actions, and policies of leaders have a significant impact on a nation's ability to safeguard its sovereignty, protect its citizens, and address security challenges effectively.

The role of leadership in addressing security challenges is well captured by Maxwell (2010, p.6) thus, "everything rises and falls on leadership", so, the strength of any country is a direct reflection and result of the strength of its leaders. A weak and incompetent leader equals a weak nation. A strong and competent leader equals a strong nation. Leadership is the catalyst of great nations. Big powers such as the USA, Britain, Russia, France, and also some emerging big powers whose influence in world politics is no less important like India, Japan, Germany, and China, couldn't have made their mark without strong and good leadership. In Africa, despite over fifty years of political independence, Africa's aspirations and hopes remain today largely unfulfilled due to the failure of leadership. The governance institutions and practices that were bequeathed to a majority of the African states at independence were, for the most part, ill-adapted to the African realities and the continent's development challenges (Afegbua, 2012, Chukwu. 2019: 3). From Libya to DR Congo, Egypt, Sudan, and Cameroun, among others, the story of leadership failure

clearly abounds. However, the efforts of Leaders like the late Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and very recently, Paul Kagame of Rwanda show that there is still light at the end of the tunnel.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Since the return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the country has been battling with various security threats such as ethnoreligious crisis, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons amongst others (Dokubo, 2000 in Maigida, 2020 p.269). The security threats have degenerated into farmers versus herders' clashes, militancy, kidnapping, insurgency, and terrorism with very negative consequences on national security. The rise of Boko-Haram in 2009 and its ISWAP components has created an unprecedented human security crisis in the Northeast and Nigeria at large (Chukwuma and Phili, 2014). The then administration in 2009, led by Goodluck Jonathan made concerted efforts that yielded only little results in addressing the security malady of Nigeria. This was part of the reasons the administration was voted out of office in 2015 and a retired General, Muhammadu Buhari took over the mantle of leadership in the country.

However, since the advent of Muhammadu Buhari as the chief executive officer of the nation, Nigeria has been undergoing serious national security challenges, including the upsurge of violent agitations by non-state actors, like the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), unknown gunmen and the spread of the radical extremists, the Boko-Haram across the Northwestern parts of the country (*Premium Times*, August 5, 2022). Although when he assumed office in 2015, he adopted a military fire-for-fire approach, the Global Peace Index, GPI, a barometer for checking the level of security in a country, kept getting worse about Nigeria. For example, the 2021 Global Peace Index (GPI) ranked Nigeria 136 out of 163 countries in the world according to their level of peacefulness. Also, in 2022, the GPI showed that it became 143 out of 163 countries, implying that insecurity in the country kept getting higher rather than reducing. Against the backdrop of leadership failure especially during Buhari's administration in Nigeria and the challenge of insecurity, this study raised the following questions:

i. What is the relationship between leadership failure and the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria?

ii. What are the issues related to the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria during the Buhari administration?

iii. What are the contributions of the Buhari administration to addressing the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria?

iv. What were the challenges that militated against the success of the strategy adopted by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari?

2.0 Conception Framework

2.1. Leadership

Leadership is the ability to guide, inspire, and influence individuals or a group toward a common goal or vision. It involves the skills, qualities, and actions that enable a person to motivate and direct others effectively. Leadership is not limited to formal positions of authority but can be demonstrated at various levels and in different contexts, including personal, organizational, community, and political settings (Alexander and Chukwuma, 2021 p. 4). For Northouse (2000), the concept of leadership is essentially embraced from a personality perspective which proposes, for example, that leadership is a combination of special traits or characteristics, which individuals ought to possess so that they can persuade others to accomplish tasks through effective governance practices (De Vries, 2008).

According to Chukwurah, Ubiebi & Elechi, (2020 p.57), cited in (Ologbenla, 2007:100), "Leadership simply means "the quality of being good at leading a team, organization, a country, etc". Leadership is also a willingness to take the blame. Therefore, viewed from this perspective, leadership is a relationship or a partnership between those who lead and those who follow. Based on that, people who engage in leadership are referred to as 'leaders', whereas individuals, toward whom leadership is directed, are referred to as 'followers.

From the foregoing and for the purpose of this paper, leadership is the process of providing direction, energizing others, and obtaining their voluntary commitment to the leader's vision. Thus, a leader creates a vision and goals, and influences others to share that vision and work towards the goal (Wendy, Cook & Hunsaker, 2003).

2.2 **Leadership Failure:** Patterson (2022), cited in the *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*. (P. 7442) defines leadership failure as

> When negative unintended consequences occur as the result of mistakes, errors, ignorance, lack of expertise, flawed communication, and inability to lead. The unintended consequences can have a minor or major impact on the organization being led, the public being served, and the surrounding internal and external environment. In some situations, the failures can lead to death and have a long-term catastrophic impact

The above assertion depicts the fact that leadership fails mostly due to a leader's own actions or inactions. When leaders act ethically, they succeed, but when they act unethically, the tendency is to fail.

- Unethical leaders fail to distinguish between right and wrong.
- They also put their own needs above the needs of those they are supposed to serve and of their followers

- They fail to exemplify virtues such as courage, temperance, and integrity; and
- They feed their selfish and ambitious needs rather than the public good

In his book "*Power and Leadership in Nigeria*", Okadigbo (1987) examines the role of leadership in Nigeria and concludes that the lack of national cohesion, indeed of any bold attempt at raising institutions or leaders to really unite Nigeria, is indicative of leadership failure in Nigeria, i.e., failure of personal leadership as well as institutional or structural failure. (p.134). Achebe (1983) arrived at the same conclusion in his book "*The Trouble with Nigeria*", when he simply identifies the problem of Nigeria as a failure of leadership. The Nigerian problem, he concludes, "is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership." Achebe's argument is very valid because, in Nigeria, most leaders have failed to follow the attitudinal prerequisites of true leadership. When leaders take an active role in styles, patterns, systems and processes of good leadership, they change the narrative because they become more passionate about the functions attached to their positions and the need to give it their best shot to enhance better living for the people.

2.3 Security

Security is a multifaceted term, which can simply refer to the state of being protected from threats, dangers, or risks. It encompasses various aspects, including personal, national, and international security. Security can be defined on the basis of threat perception – threats that may impact on our physical body as individuals or groups; psychological thoughts or behaviour; our properties; means of livelihood; socio-economic needs (food, health, education, etc); the environment; freedoms or fundamental rights; and sovereignty or territorial integrity (Dambazau, 2014). Security, therefore, entails a situation in which a person or thing is not exposed to any danger or risk of physical or moral aggression, accident, theft, or deterioration (Anyadike, 2013). As it refers to a nation, it is being associated with the safety and survival of the nation and its citizenry from harm or destruction or from dangerous threats. The experts of this school of thought believe that state is the only institution with the responsibility to ensure safety of its territory and its people (Zabadi, 2005; cited in Anyadike, 2013).

Other scholars in conceptualizing security place emphasis on the absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socioeconomic objectives of a country (Igbuzor, 2011, Oche, 2011, Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2010, Olabanji and Ese, 2014 in Bassey & Ogbonnaya, 2019, p. 330). For Ogunleye, et al. (2011), security embraces all measures designed to protect and safeguard the citizenry and the resources of individuals, groups, businesses and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrence. Nwolise (2006), posits that security is an all-encompassing condition which suggests that a territory must be secured by a network of armed forces; that the sovereignty of the state must be guaranteed by a democratic and patriotic government, which in turn must be protected by the military, police and the people themselves; that the people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals such as unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution cum socio-economic injustices. McNamara (1968, p. 159), looked at the

concept differently when he argued that, 'Development means security and without security, there is no Development'.

For the purpose of this paper, therefore, we adopt the definition of security by Okolie (2022, p.249) thus; "Security is a peaceful state of well-being of people; not exposed to danger be it internal or external, injustice, unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases and ignorance".

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The Social Contract theory is chosen as the framework to guide the discussion. Social contract theory says that people live together in society in accordance with an agreement that establishes moral and political rules of behaviour. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau were the proponents of the theory in modern times. Locke's social contract theory asserts that government exists only with the consent of the people in order to protect basic rights and promote the common good of society. (Nation, 2019). The theory explains the role of the government in protecting its citizens. It is informed by the responsibility of states to protect their citizens rather than leaving them to provide security for themselves. In other words, the state is socially responsible for ensuring that lives and property within its borders are not jeopardized. According to Laslett (1967), Locke posits that, the government is an organization that derives consent from the people, and the social contract exists because citizens are willing to give their consent to governments (states) to protect their lives and property. As a result, the government uses the legitimacy granted to act based on a social contract to prevent all forms of insecurity in order to discourage self-help, which could lead to anarchy.

In relation to national leadership and the security of Nigerians, the social contract theory can be applied. The preamble to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), implies that Nigerians willingly and collectively surrendered their respective freedoms and liberties to the government of Nigeria in exchange for protection of their lives and property, as well as guarantee to enjoy certain natural rights such as the right to life, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement, among others. This presupposes, therefore, that the 1999 Constitution exists as the legally binding contract agreement between the Nigerian people and the Nigerian government. Going by the trend of insecurity in Nigeria, especially during the administration of Muhammadu Buhari, it will be true to say that the government has failed in its protection of the lives and properties of Nigerians. By Section 14(2)(b) of the Constitution, the Nigerian government has the primary obligation of securing the lives of Nigerians and promoting their welfare. Section 33, on its part, guarantees the inviolability of a Nigerian's right to life and only permits the denial of this right in rare circumstances. On a daily basis, unfortunately, the print and electronic media are awash with stories of the loss of lives caused by armed bandits, insurgents, boko-haram, criminal gangs, and even law enforcement agents (Ambi, 2021, cited in Fidelis, 2022 p. 104).

4.0 Leadership Failure and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria

4.1 Leadership failure by Buhari's administration:

The then President Muhammadu Buhari's administration in Nigeria faced significant challenges in the areas of leadership and national security. On assuming office in 2015, Buhari promised to address key issues such as corruption, terrorism, and economic development. While there have been some positive strides, there have also been notable shortcomings.

In terms of leadership, Buhari's administration has been criticized for its handling of certain issues. One of the key concerns is the slow pace of governance and decision-making. For example, it took him six months to appoint ministers during his first tenure, despite the precarious situation he met in the country when he took over (Allison, 2015). Also, he couldn't sack the service chiefs even when it was clear that they were not performing optimally (Iroanusi, 2020).

Some argue that Buhari's leadership style was too cautious and lacked the agility required to address Nigeria's pressing issues effectively. This led to delays in implementing critical reforms and policies, hindering the government's ability to tackle corruption, improve the economy, and address social challenges.

Corruption remains a significant issue in Nigeria, despite Buhari's anti-corruption agenda. The administration made efforts to combat corruption through initiatives such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and the whistle blower policy through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). However, progress was very slow, and there were concerns about the selective nature of the anti-corruption campaign, with some perceiving it as politically motivated. Furthermore, Nigeria's ranking in the Corruption Perception Index has not significantly improved during Buhari's tenure. Nigeria is the 150 least corrupt nation out of 180 countries, according to the 2022 CP reported by Transparency International (Sanmi, 2023).

Clashes between farmers and cattle herders from a particular ethnic group, which had simmered for years, were allowed to boil over into deadly armed confrontations with an ethnic element, as the government ran out of ideas to solve the problem of where animals could graze, or better still, it was unwilling to adopt the ranching grazing scheme.

Another aspect of failure was the shocking discovery in 2021 of kilometres - long pipeline used to steal oil was described by commentators as "nearly impossible" without help from authorities. In one location, the thieves built their own 4km long through the heavily guarded creeks to the Atlantic Ocean. Their barges and vessels blatantly loaded the stolen oil from a seven-metre rig visible for miles on the open waters. That theft on such a scale happened directly under Mr Buhari, who also doubled as Nigeria's petroleum minister, undermined his claim to be fighting corruption (Punch Newspaper, May 22nd 2023).

The week before he left office, Mr. Buhari pleaded with lawmakers to hurriedly approve $800m (£640m) loan from the World Bank. Nigeria's public debt could pass $150bn this year - when he took over it stood at a little over $60bn. His borrowing spree has drawn warnings from the World Bank that Africa's largest economy was using 96% of its revenue to service debts (BBC News Abuja, May 21, 2023).

While the Buhari administration made some progress in the area of national security, including the release of some kidnapped individuals and the recovery of territories from Boko Haram, the overall security situation remains a major concern. For example, he revealed that his administration had invested over $1 billion in the acquisition of weapons from the United States and other countries in the fight against insurgency since he assumed office in 2015 and over N8 trillion at the end of the tenure (THISDAY, 18th January, 2023) & The Guardian, June 21, 2021). However, insurgency still thrives in Nigeria, despite these colossal sums of money spent.

His disregard for the rule of law made him less a Democrat. The cases of Alzazaky and Nnamdi Kanu's continual detention despite the order by the courts to release them, are cases in point. This is a complete unwillingness to act.

The economy has also been a significant challenge during Buhari's administration. Nigeria experienced a recession in 2016, largely due to falling oil prices. While efforts have been made to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil, progress has been slow. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent policies, and a difficult business environment have hindered economic growth and foreign investment.

4.2 Implications for National Security in Nigeria

As mentioned earlier, Nigeria is facing a very precarious security situation to varying degrees in the six geo-political regions. According to data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, cited in *BusinessDay, May 7th 2023*), Nigeria experienced over 80,000 deaths related to insecurity between 1999 and 2022. The report went further to say that "during former President Obasanjo's tenure, approximately 11,141 deaths were attributed to insecurity incidents, while the combined tenures of the late President Yar'Adua and former President Jonathan saw 32,694 deaths." However, since assuming office in 2015, President Buhari's administration has recorded 41,903 deaths related to insecurity.

Regarding security-related attacks, Nigeria has witnessed 17,591 incidents from 1999 to June 2022. Among these, President Buhari's administration had the highest number of attacks with 12,665, while Obasanjo's administration had the lowest at 1,183. The administrations of Yar'Adua and Jonathan recorded 3,743 attacks.

Security related attacks in Nigeria (1999 - June 2022)

■ Obasanjo (1999 - 2006) ■ Yaradua/Jonathan (2007 - 2014) ■ Buhari (2015 - 2023)
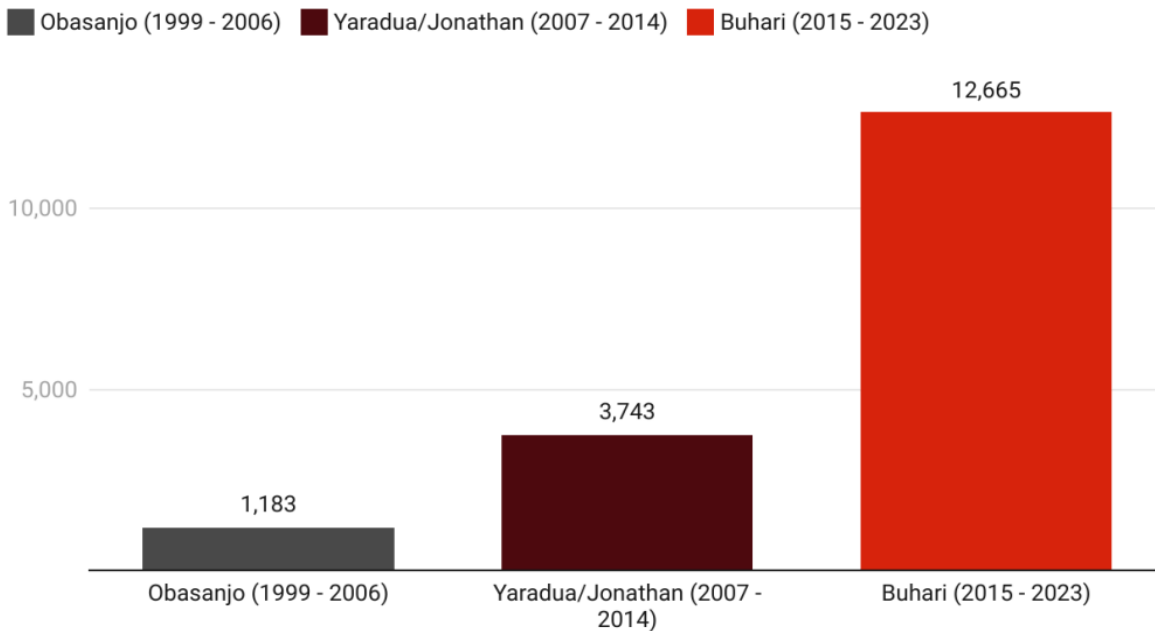

Chart: Ijaseun David • Source: ACLED • Created with Datawrapper

Adapted from ACLED, 2023

A breakdown of the killings by geopolitical zones reveals the following figures: South-West (2,170 deaths), South-South (3,688 deaths), South-East (2,271 deaths), North-Central (including the Federal Capital Territory, 8,593 deaths), and North-East (23,106 deaths). Notably, the North-West region saw a total of 13,590 deaths, with Zamfara State leading at 5,614 deaths.
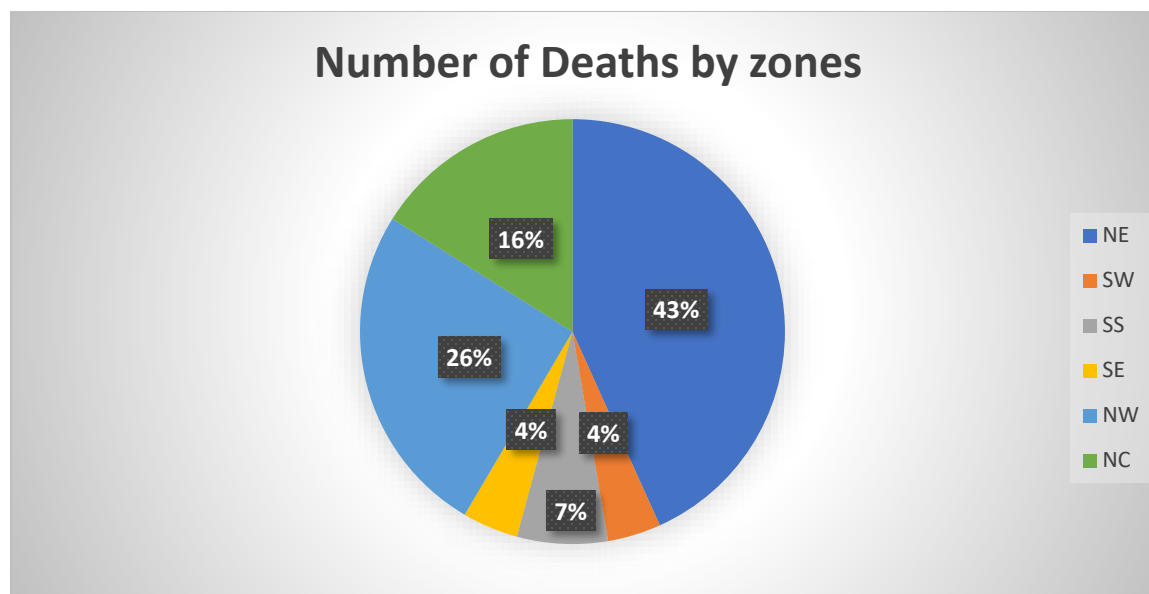
Fig. 1 Number of deaths in Nigeria between May, 2015 – October 2022

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During Obasanjo's administration religious fighting and violent attacks in the oil-rich Niger Delta were the very common security challenges that the country faced. Popular frustration over the government's failure to deliver basic services also exacerbated the problems. More than 10,000 Nigerians were killed in sectarian and communal violence (Crane, 2007 p.3). The politics of sharia, or Islamic law, in twelve northern states, also increased tension. Obasanjo has been criticized both in and outside Nigeria for not definitively responding to the religious violence and communal tensions. According to the 2005 U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom, many Muslims and Christians have been identified as perpetrators of violence, but very few—if any—have been prosecuted (Ibukun and Olukayode, 2015)

Good luck Jonathan was confronted with the emergence of Boko-Haram in the Northeast amidst other security issues like the farmers-herders clashes, especially in the North-central. To avert a total descent into the abyss of insecurity, the then President Goodluck Jonathan in his response to the numerous bombings and the subsequent breaches of Nigeria's national security posited, that "the time has come for a serious **review of the security policy in the country."** Hence, he charged the military to "rise to the occasion and arrest this new and dangerous challenge (bomb-blasts and other acts of domestic terrorism) to our peace and stability"

The Jonathan administration also took other measures including the **adoption of the antiterrorism bill.** Despite these measures, violence increased at an alarming rate. The

perpetrators became more daring even more daring. The targets of their attacks became are – army barracks, police headquarters, and the Federal Capital Territory – Abuja, major cities in the North East, etc (Omede, 2011 p. 91). Initial government response was predominantly the use of physical force, then it later combined verbal admonitions and warnings; moral persuasion; deployment of troops to flashpoints and also the passage of a bill to tackle terrorist activities.

In the North east the Boko Haram insurgency, which started in 2009, persisted during Buhari's tenure. According to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2009) "insurgency activities of extremist Islamic groups had led to the death of an estimated 35,000 persons in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states since 2009." The report estimated that through the end of 2020, the conflict in the north-east will have resulted in nearly 350,000 deaths, with 314,000 of those from indirect causes,"

When Muhammadu Buhari was sworn into office as President of Nigeria on May 29 2015, he reiterated his campaign promises that his administration would concentrate on the economy, fight corruption, and tackle security. However, data by the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) checked by The ICIR showed that non-state actors killed 31,821 people between May 2015 and April 2023. The NST website tracks violent incidents related to political, economic, and social grievances directed at the state or other affiliated groups.

In the South East, the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) are posing threats with regional agitations that are threatening the daily livelihoods of ordinary citizens and businesses who comply with sit-at-home orders issued and enforced by non-state actors. Nigeria's government has responded with a heavy hand to killings and violence widely attributed to the armed group calling itself Eastern Security Network (ESN), the armed wing of IPOB. According to the *Punch*, March 27th, 2023, IPOB members were responsible for 40 attacks and 57 deaths in 2022, an increase from 26 attacks and 34 deaths the year prior. In response, security forces comprised of the military, police, and the Department of State Services (DSS) have killed dozens of gunmen as well as civilians in areas where attacks have occurred (*Premium Times,* August 5, 2021). Economically, the loss is monumental, as the Southeast is the business hub of Nigeria. However, residents are forced to comply with the sit-at-home order for fear of molestation by the IPOB since government security forces, especially the police, cannot adequately grant them the protection of their lives and property.

Also, during Buhari's administration, insecurity increased to the extent that some Governors, from Benue, Katsina and Zamfara were of the opinion that citizens should be granted the permission to carry arms and defend themselves. Mass abductions of school children were also witnessed (Adasu, 2021). Some notable abductions in 2021 and 2022 were mostly students from states in the Northwest, including Niger, Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, and Kebbi among others.

In September 2021, SBM Intelligence released data indicating that over 1,400 students were abducted from schools, with 16 fatalities. Two years later, insecurity still persists in Nigeria. Also, SBM Intelligence media report on killings in Nigeria during Q1 (January – March) 2023 revealed a range of violent incidents, including attacks by Boko Haram and militia herdsmen, abductions,

gang clashes, and terrorist activities. The reported deaths numbered up to 2,047, with approximately 100 security personnel among the victims *(Business Daily, May 7th 2023).*

Another report by SBM Intelligence also show that two months before he departed office, the following deaths were recorded in the six regions in Nigeria.

Breakdown of deaths recorded in 2023 (Jan -March)
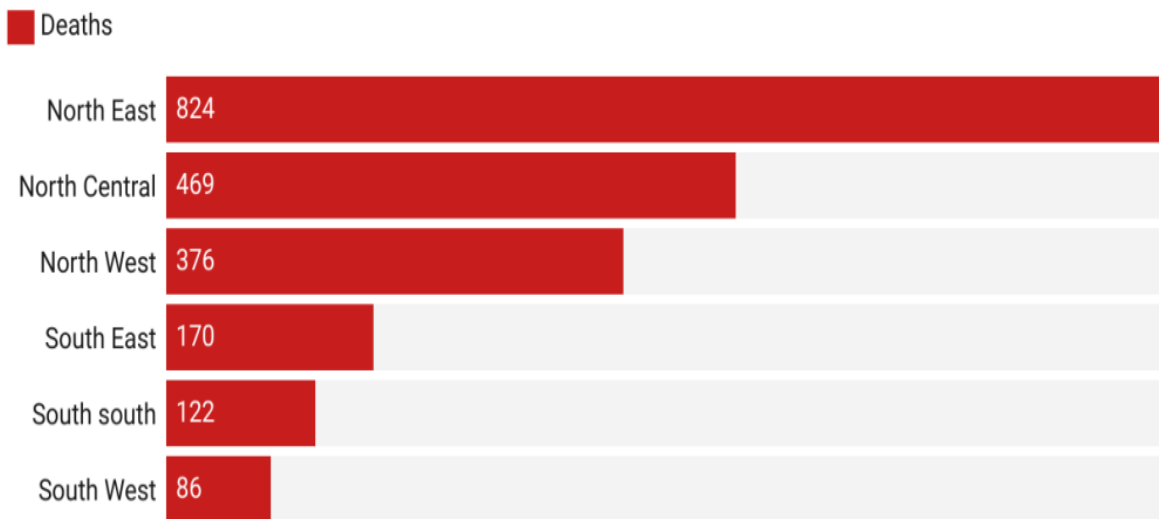
According to geopolitical zones in Nigeria:

■ Deaths

Region	Deaths
North East	824
North Central	469
North West	376
South East	170
South south	122
South West	86

Chart: Ijaseun David • Source: SBM Intelligence • Created with Datawrapper

Breakdown of deaths recorded in 2023

(January to March)

■ Casualties

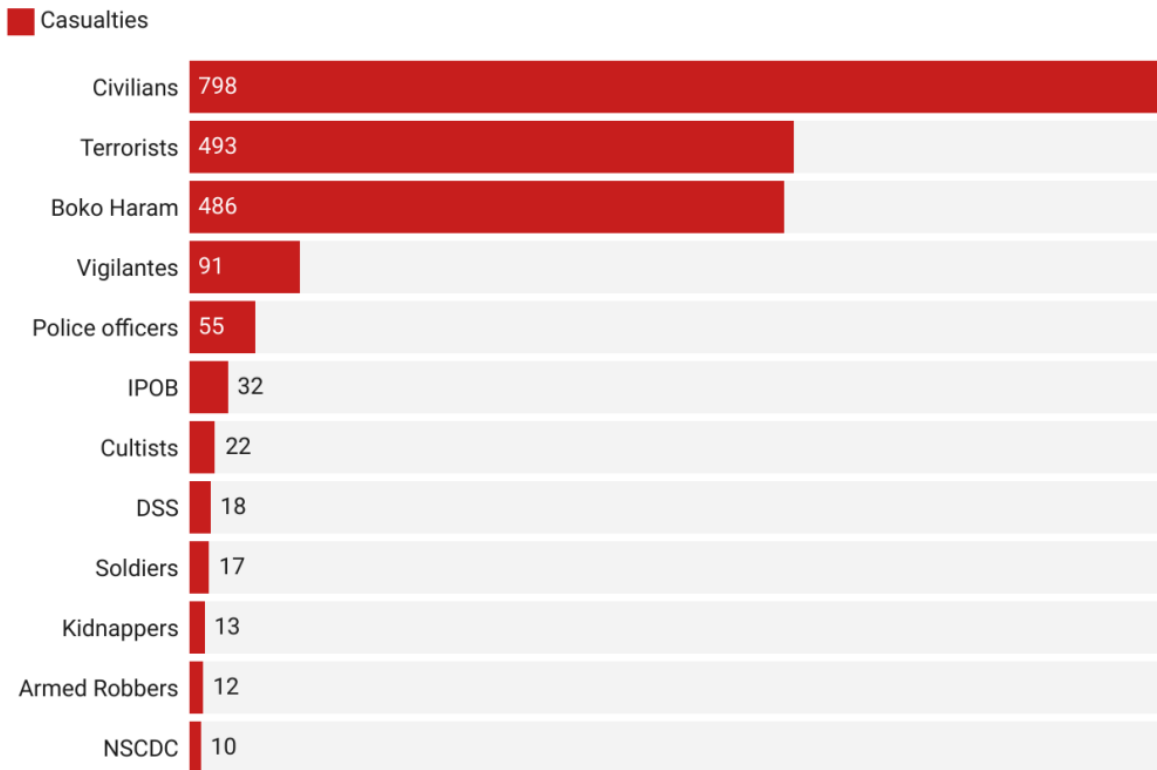| Category	Casualties
Civilians	798
Terrorists	493
Boko Haram	486
Vigilantes	91
Police officers	55
IPOB	32
Cultists	22
DSS	18
Soldiers	17
Kidnappers	13
Armed Robbers	12
NSCDC	10

Chart: Ijaseun David • Source: SBM Intelligence • Created with Datawrapper

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

President Buhari's administration in Nigeria faced significant challenges in the areas of leadership, corruption, national security, and the economy. While there were some positive efforts to address these issues, progress was slow, and many challenges persisted until he left office. The administration's unwillingness and lack of urgency in addressing pressing issues made all his efforts futile. Going forward, it is crucial for Nigeria's leadership to adopt more proactive and comprehensive strategies to tackle these challenges effectively in order to promote sustainable development.

Also, of critical importance is the need for strengthening legislative and judicial processes to enhance quick dispensation of justice. The criminal justice administrations need to be strengthened in order to allow for efficiency in the fight against security challenges in the country. Lastly, the new government must muster the courage and show the capacity to take up and apprehend high-profile criminals through the justice dispensation process.

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