

## Social injustice, corruption and Nigeria's national security quest: A theoretical discourse

**Olawale Olufemi Akinrinde\***, Osun State University, Osun, Nigeria

### Suggested Citation:

Akinrinde, O. O (2020). Social injustice, corruption and Nigeria's national security quest: A theoretical discourse. *Global Journal of Sociology: Current Issues*. 10(2), 63–70. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjs.v10i2.4997>

Received from July 15, 2020; revised from September 13, 2020; accepted from November 10, 2020.

Selection and peer review under responsibility Prof. Dr. Mustafa Gunduz, Cukurova University, Turkey.

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### Abstract

While across known histories of societies the human societies had always developed within the confines of their limits of social justice, the security or otherwise of societies had always been directly proportional to their level of social justice. Invariably, this implies the higher the acceptance and recognition of the need for social justice by a society, the higher the society's chances for national security. Social justice has thus proven to be a critical sine qua non for an egalitarian and a just society where equity, selflessness and equitable distribution of resources reign. However, the lack and deliberate emasculation of social justice within the society by the state and/or its machineries has over time, consequentially, informed a pathological situation; a situation where, due to the absence or deliberate neglect of the need for social justice in the accumulation of wealth, distribution of wealth and resources as well as social, economic and political relationships amongst the people, the rich are becoming richer whilst the less privileged are becoming more disadvantaged. The social implication and effect of this social pathology is the impulse by the rich or the privileged to see and use corruption to accumulate more wealth, resources and power in unjust social, economic and political exchanges in their bid to maintain the unjust socio-economic and political systems, whilst the poor and the less privileged tend to see and use corruption as a leveller and means to accumulating their own share of the societal wealth, resources and power. The corrupt environment created by social injustice is therefore antithetical to any country's quest for national security. This is chiefly because national security objectives and corruption are two parallel lines that cannot and have never met. This article therefore argues that social justice backed by egalitarian and equitable distribution of wealth, resources and social services by the government would bring about a corrupt-free society where insecurity would be minimised and reduced to the barest minimum.

**Keywords:** Social injustice, corruption, insecurity, Nigeria's National Security, Nigeria.

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\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Olawale Olufemi Akinrinde**, Osun State University, Nigeria.

E-mail address: [olawale.akinrinde@uniosun.edu.ng](mailto:olawale.akinrinde@uniosun.edu.ng)

## 1. Introduction

Trapped in the triangular web of the Boko Haram insurgency, farmers–herdsmen crisis and the resurgent art of banditry, the Nigerian state now sits almost hopelessly on the threshold of discontinuity due to the pervasiveness of insecurity. The spontaneity of the manifestations of this triangle of terrors has tested the resolution and preparedness of the Nigerian state to stem the tide of this triangle of terrors and insecurities. With thousands of innocent Nigerians killed and internally displaced owing to the continued manifestation of this triangle of insecurities, several attempts had been made to understand the dynamics of this triangle, its causes and why it has remained almost unshakable and indestructible with no end in sight despite the amount of efforts, resources and policies and strategies that have been committed to its eradication by successive Nigerian governments. Whilst various paradigmatic and tested hypothetical rationalisations have been advanced to explain the wave of Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and the farmers–herdsmen crisis that is embedded in the triangular web of national insecurity in contemporary Nigeria, little or no attention has been given to the deep-rooted causes of the triangulated web of terrors and insecurities in Nigeria and why this unwholesome triangle of insecurities has remained almost supreme, unsolvable and indestructible till date. Without downplaying the capacity of other security threats breeding insecurities in Nigeria, the security posed by the Boko Haram menace, banditry and farmers–herdsmen persistent crises remain daunting and a major challenge to our country's national security. Notwithstanding the abundance of insightful explanations offered by the isolation thesis and the relative deprivation, Nieftagodien's endemic poverty explanation and John Dollard and Neal Miller's frustration–aggression theory, Burton's (1979) human needs theory and the relatively new human security approach to the understanding of the causes of insecurity across the globe, this article locates the persistent manifestation of security threats and insecurities in our country within the sphere of 'social injustice'.

While across known histories of societies the human societies had always developed within the confines of their limits of social justice, the security or otherwise of societies had always been directly proportional to their level of social justice. Invariably, this implies the higher the acceptance and recognition of the need for social justice by a society, the higher the society's chances for national security. Social justice has thus proven to be a critical sine qua non for an egalitarian and a just society where equity, selflessness and equitable distribution of resources reign. However, the lack and deliberate emasculation of social justice within the society by the state and/or its machineries has over time, consequentially, informed a pathological situation; a situation where, due to the absence or deliberate neglect of the need for social justice in the accumulation of wealth, distribution of wealth and resources as well as social, economic and political relationships amongst the people, the rich are becoming richer whilst the less privileged are becoming more disadvantaged. The social implication and effect of this social pathology is the impulse by the rich or the privileged to see and use corruption to accumulate more wealth, resources and power in unjust social, economic and political exchanges in their bid to maintain the unjust socio-economic and political systems, whilst the poor and the less privileged tend to see and use corruption as a leveller and means to accumulating their own share of the societal wealth, resources and power. The corrupt environment created by social injustice is therefore antithetical to any country's quest for national security. This is chiefly because national security objectives and corruption are two parallel lines that cannot and have never met. This study therefore argues that social justice backed by egalitarian and equitable distribution of wealth, resources and social services by the government would bring about a corrupt-free society where insecurity would be minimised and reduced to the barest minimum.

## **2. Making meaning out of the concepts of social injustice, corruption and national security**

### **2.1. Social injustice**

One of the ironies of the early twenty-first century is that ideological struggles between and within nations have intensified a decade after the end of the Cold War. Today, proponents of diametrically opposed visions of society, secular and religious, march under the banner of social justice. As desirable social and political goals are depicted in starkly different forms, labels like 'good' and 'evil' become interchangeable and the meaning of social justice becomes obscured. As it has been for millennia, the concept of social justice is now used as a rationale for maintaining the status quo, promoting far-reaching social reforms and justifying revolutionary action. If liberals and conservatives, religious fundamentalists and radical secularists all regard their causes as socially just, how can we develop a common meaning of the term? Notwithstanding the conceptual and interpretational relativity, we can take social Injustice, in this study, to mean a situation when some unfair practices are being carried in the society. Whatever unjustness is happening is usually against the law and it might not be something that is considered a moral practice. Areas in which the government policy often gives rise to social inequality and injustice therefore include: voting laws (i.e., redistricting and voter ID), education laws (i.e., public school segregation and integration), labour laws (i.e., worker's rights, occupational health and safety), tax law, wealth and resource distributions etc. In the Republic, Plato (1974, trans.) expanded the meaning of justice by equating it with human well-being. He linked the concept of individual and social justice by asserting that justice was derived from the harmony between reason, spirit and appetite present in all persons. Within this formulation, if a society lacked such harmony, justice could not be achieved.

Aristotle further developed this concept of justice in the *Nicomachian Ethics* (1980, trans.), where he introduced a view of justice that anticipates modern debates about issues of resource allocation. Aristotle regarded justice, as fulfilled through law, as the principle that ensures social order through the regulation of the allocation and distribution of benefits. In Book V, Aristotle states, 'equality for the people involved will be the same as for the things involved, since in a just society the relation between the people will be the same as the relation between the things involved. For if the people involved are not equal, they will not [justly] receive equal shares; indeed, whenever equals receive unequal shares, or unequal's equal shares, that is the source of quarrels and accusations' (p. 123). Yet, like Plato and many other philosophers and political leaders over the past 2,000 years, Aristotle did not regard people as fundamentally equal. His view of equality and justice applied only to those individuals who occupied the same stratum of a hierarchical social order.

### **2.2. Corruption**

Corruption has been variously defined. Whilst the Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines corruption as an act of dishonesty especially using bribery or an immoral or wicked act, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary sees it as a dishonest or illegal behaviour especially of people in authority. This definition looks at both moral and legal aspects. But for Joseph Nye (1967), corruption is basically a deviation from the formal duties of a public role because of private regarding (personal, close family and private clique) pecuniary exercise of certain types of private regarding influence. This includes behaviour such as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in position of trust); nepotism (appointment by reason of inscriptive relationship or sentimental affiliation rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private regarding uses).

The definition by Nye (Ibid) sees corruption as a deviant behaviour. This suffices to imply that the normal behaviour or the antithesis of corruption thus equally means anti-corruption. This conception may run into conflict with broader conceptions in terms of operationalisation, especially in instances where corruption is widespread and regarded as the norm by majority of the people. Similarly,

Huntington (1968) conjectured and likened corruption to behaviour of public officials, which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private end. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank defined corruption as 'the abuse of public office'. According to the World Bank, corruption is the abuse of public office through the instrumentality of private agents, who actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Beyond bribery, public office can also be abused for personal benefit through patronage and nepotism, for example, the theft of state assets or the diversion of state revenues. This is a very wide-ranging definition, which delineates some of the acts of corruption. And it agrees with Otite's (1986) interpretation of the meaning of corruption as the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity.

In addition to the above, the Transparency International equally defines corruption as behaviour on the part of officials in the public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those close to them, by the misuse of public power entrusted to them (Cited in Pope, 1996). Although the definition of the Transparency International is very descriptive, it focuses only on the public sector. But there is corruption in private sector with negative consequences for the whole of society. Similarly, El-Rufai (2003) viewed corruption as covering a wide range of social misconducts, including fraud, extortion, embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, influence peddling, bestowing of favour to friends, rigging of elections, abuse of public property, the leaking of a government secret and sale of expired and defective goods, such as drugs, food and electronic and spare parts to the public etc.

From the foregoing, however, it can be opined that in as much as we strive to understand and conceive what corruption is all about, it will continue to elude a universally accepted conceptualisation due to its constructivist posture. It is sufficed to say that corruption can fully be grasped when located within our unique and local cultural understanding and context. This goes to say that our meanings and interpretation of corruption is locally and culturally constructed. In light of this, this study adopts Joseph Nye's conceptually nuanced understanding of corruption as it mirrors the local practice of corrupt behaviours in Nigeria.

### **2.3. Nigeria's national security objectives**

Basically what readily constitutes the national security objectives of sovereign states could differ on so many pretexts. This is to inform that national security objectives of sovereign states may be circumstances bound, environmentally bound and politically, culturally and economically bound. Whilst recognising the fluidic nature of Nigeria's national security objectives over the years, this study construes Nigeria's national security objectives in terms of its responsibility to quash fears and uncertainty occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency and ensures the safeguarding of its territorial integrity and protection in an environment where the people are economically, politically, socially and environmentally secured. The realities of the years which have revealed the systematic decline in the actualisation of these security objectives have further reinforced the sad reality that Nigeria's security objectives only exist now in the realms of dreams and fantasies given the tsunami-like security challenges ravaging the national landscape of the country.

### **3. The intersecting causality between social injustice, corruption and the fleeting Nigeria's national security objectives: a theoretical discourse**

Trapped in the triangular web of the Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani herdsmen wave of terror and the resurgent art of banditry, the Nigerian state now sits almost hopelessly on the threshold of discontinuity due to the pervasiveness of insecurity. The spontaneity of the manifestations of this triangle of terrors has tested the resolution and preparedness of the Nigerian state to stem the tide of this triangle of terrors and insecurities. With thousands of innocent Nigerians killed and internally displaced owing to the continued manifestation of this triangle of insecurity, several attempts have

been made to understand the dynamics of this triangle, its causes and why it has remained almost unshakable and indestructible with no end in sight despite the amount of efforts, resources and policies and strategies that had been committed to its eradication by the government. Whilst various paradigmatic and tested hypothetical rationalisations have been advanced to explain the wave of Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and the Fulani herdsmen terror embedded in the triangular web of national insecurity in Nigeria independent of the others, little or no attention has been given to the theorisation of the relationship between these three triangulated web of terrors and insecurity in Nigeria's national security and why this unwholesome triangle has remained almost supreme, unsolvable and indestructible.

Notwithstanding the abundance of insightful explanations offered by the isolation thesis and the relative deprivation theory (May, Woolard & Klasen, 2000; Pillay, 2008), Nieftagodien's endemic poverty explanation (2008) and John Dollard and Neal Miller's frustration–aggression theory, this study finds Burton's (1979) human needs theory and the human security approach as the most relevant and appropriate theoretical framings to understanding the inherent causality in the triangular intersections of the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and the Fulani herdsmen terror as well as why this triangle of terrors has remained persistent and constant in the security complexion of the Nigerian State.

The thrust of Burton's (1979) human needs theorisation lies in its assumption that persons or groups, or groups of persons patronise insecurity and rely on same as means to finding fulfilment of their needs. In Nigeria and more specifically in the Northern region, most of the human needs have become practically non-existent. Contextualised to mean food, clothing, shelter and identity as the case may be, security, inclusiveness, liberty, religious tolerance and respect, as well as fundamental human rights, the availability and ease of accessing these human needs in Nigeria have been conspicuously low. The Nigerian state now boasts of being the poverty capital of the world (World Poverty Clock, 2020). This is in addition to the World Bank report on human needs that is already scaling up. Burton (1979) further explains that the reasons why insecurity persists is not entirely due to weak institutions or structures but rather is a result of the inability of the institutions of state and the government to provide for the basic human needs of its citizenries.

Since its attainment of statehood in 1960, the Nigerian state has remained one of the states that have consistently struggled to meet the human needs of their citizenries. Not only that Nigeria is now regarded as the poverty capital of the world having taken over from India, Nigeria now harbours then highest numbers of children that are out of school and malnourished. The World Poverty Clock has revealed Nigeria to be the poverty capital of the world with 86.9 million out of 180 million people still living in extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2020). The failure of successive Nigerian governments to comprehensively address the roots of poverty in Nigeria has been particularly consequential for two reasons: the rising profile of poverty level and the role the high poverty level has been playing in the making of insecurity. The poorly catered and trained citizens who are mostly teenagers and youths have thus become ready-made tools for the breeding of terrorism, banditry and herdsmen terror. The current leader of the Boko Haram terrorist sect since the demise of its founding father, Mohammed Yusuf, was formerly an Alma-Jiri who wandered the streets of Yobe state in Nigeria before he came in contact with the late Mohammed Yusuf, the supreme founder of the Boko Haram sect. Ibrahim Shekau, like most members of the deadly Boko Haram terrorist sect, bandit clusters and the killer herdsmen, was a victim of failures of successive Nigerian governments to meet the basic human needs of the citizens. Shockingly, 80% of nearly half of the population living below the poverty line are domiciled in the Northern region. This explains why the Northern region of the Nigerian state, especially, the North-eastern region (the least developed region) continues to account for the highest rate of insecurity in the Nigerian state at the moment. Whilst the other parts of the country are not exempted in the precipitation of the triangular network of Boko Haram, banditry and the killer herdsmen in the country, the Northern part remains the major contributor for the breeding of this triangle of insecurity.

The inability of nearly half of the entire population of the country to have their economic needs met as evidenced by the poverty line coupled with the rising frustrations of the people, specifically, the youths to be free from fear and wants has further exacerbated. This underscores the relevance of the human security approach in understanding why the triangle of insecurity in Nigeria, Africa, and indeed, the world.

The human security approach, following the end of the Cold War and the end of certainty that came with it, became the bedrock of security discourses, strategy and even a security paradigm that seeks to extol the primacy of human basic need as security measures itself, to forestalling insecurities (Hough, 2004). The failure of governments to, through the usual traditional security paradigm, address the emerging human insecurities that threatened the existence of humanity led to the emergence of an alternative approach, i.e., the human security paradigm to approaching and understanding the rising profile of human-related insecurity issues.

More recently, analysts, following the United Nations Development Programmes 1994 Human Development Report and their notion of security as 'freedom from fear and want' (Hough, 2004), have settled on the phrase 'human security' to emphasise the people-centred aspect of security efforts, strategies and paradigms. Thus, human security takes the individual as primary referent, and also concentrates on how best to protect them. Emphasis is therefore on the quest to actualising the well-being of individuals, and responding to the people's needs in dealing with sources of threats. Furthermore, the human security paradigm aims to find a means to protect the nation from external aggression, and also, to safeguard it from a range of menaces, such as environmental pollution, infectious diseases and economic deprivation. Environmental destruction, poverty, famines and diseases are huge threats to the lives of millions of people all around the world, and, indeed, in Nigeria.

For instance, some of the threat caused by environmental degradation seems less clear-cut and direct than most other dangers to human life. Thus, the potential threat of global warming and ozone depletion appears far-off, when compared to more imminent threats, such as natural disasters and military attacks (Hough, 2004). However, the negative modifications in environmental conditions have heightened peoples' vulnerability to other threats, such as disease, and are thus largely an indirect threat to human security. Hence, some studies have revealed that close to one-third of deaths related to diseases worldwide have some environmental causes, such as air or water pollution (Hough, 2004), which are indirectly aiding the rise of terroristic activities, especially from those that have been badly affected by the harsh effects of the emerging environmental challenges. Furthermore, human-induced environmental degradation, and the resulting scarcity of resources also, has been one of the motivators of insecurity and insurrections in Nigeria, and most parts of the globe (Terriff, 1999).

Similarly, one of the major threats is air pollution, caused by vehicles, factories and power plants, which can seriously damage people's health. Developing countries, on the other hand, mostly face the threat of scarce water resources, as well as water pollution. Thus, for example, a recent study has revealed that close to two million children die each year from diarrhoea, largely because of the contamination of their drinking water and the lack of sanitation in developing countries (The Economist, November 11, 2006). Water scarcity is also increasingly becoming a factor in ethnic conflicts and political friction. Nigeria is not shielded from the harsh realities of human insecurities. In fact, these human insecurities have thus placed individuals at the mercy of desperate and survivalist actions and activities that could in most instances; precipitate the youths and teenagers into taking up arms against the state through terrorism or banditry and the herdsman killing. Environmental issues coupled with poverty and underdevelopments, which are both serious threats to the individual's security as well, have become ready-made motivators of insecurities in Nigeria.

Further to the above, poverty is often regarded as most significant threat to life and human security. Through famine and hunger, poverty has heightened the vulnerability to other threats by creating unfavourable structural economic conditions. Therefore, poverty can kill directly in huge numbers when people are unable to secure sufficient food, as well as precipitate and motivate the



poor into taking up terrorism, banditry and monstrous herdsmen killings as a means to surviving economically. Poverty, therefore, as it was, does not simply mean a lack of material possessions, but, more generally, the deprivation of the three basic economic needs: food, water and shelter (Akinrinde, 2016a; 2016b). Historically, the immediate economic threat to food security, over time, has always been famine. Famines chiefly occur due to the combination of both natural and economic factors. Since, it is manmade phenomenon, they are sometimes economically motivated (Hough, 2004). An inadequate political response of governments to challenge of food insecurity has also been a critical issue. It seems though that the overall accessibility of food is not the problem, but rather poor distribution and the lack of the economic means or access to affordable food. The implications of food insecurity or famine are multifold. The desperate attempt by victims of food insecurity to resort to profitable criminal activities with a view to meeting their food needs. This explains why the Nigerian state has the highest number of Almajirs (a group of northern children and teens whom have been abandoned by their parents and have consequently resorted to street begging). The key to solving the issue is to tackle the problems relating to access to resources, employment and secure revenue. Furthermore, a malnourished population is generally more susceptible to diseases, making concerns about healthcare closely related to the issue of poverty, especially in third world countries.

Against the backdrop of the aforementioned human security threats and variables that readily precipitate the triangle of insecurity in Nigeria, some proponents of human security also include various other issues, such as natural disasters, bad leadership and electoral violence.

The human security approach, like every other paradigm, has had its fair share in criticisms and queries. Its critics have however argued that, if all the components of well-being are included, the term will become essentially meaningless, as it permits the inclusion of practically everything that affects any larger group of individuals adversely (Terriff, 1999). Human security has also been criticised for being little more than a way for activists to promote certain causes, and that the term is impractical, as it does not advance the frontiers of the understanding of the meaning of security. Furthermore, human security could be regarded as mere polemic that seeks to provoke greater discussions, at both political and public levels, without necessarily seeking to incubate more policy initiatives.

Again, one of the major reasons for including non-traditional challenges into security considerations is the hunt by analysts for new issues and threats to fill the void left by the end of the Cold War (Terriff, 1999). Equally, contributions to global campaigns against AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are being criticised for having as the only aim political stabilisation of certain strategically important African countries, while the enhancement of human security is only a welcomed side-effect. Thus, securitisation of infectious diseases, as well as that of environmental and economic issues, can be seen as merely considering the implications of these problems for state security rather than the general security of individuals, which implies that some human security studies ultimately follow the logic of traditional security studies.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Towards a new theorisation on the intersecting parallels of social injustice, corruption and Nigeria's failed national security objectives, it has been established here that human security paradigm now represents and offers empirically robust theoretical frame and lens in which the rationale and immediate motivations for the rise and prevalence of insecurities remain constant in recent times. Immediate motivations such as environmental degradation, poverty, poor healthcare system, leadership deficit and electoral violence ('lack of freedom from fear and want') are not just major threat to the lives of many people, but also catalysts and motivating factors for the manifestation of larger insecurities. Thus, the inextricable linkage between poverty, inequalities, social deprivations, environmental degradation, social injustice, food insecurity and famine, as well as leadership deficits, electoral violence and the triangle of the three larger insecurities of Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and the killer herdsmen terror are best captured in the human security paradigm.

## Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the guidance and academic mentoring from Professors Bolaji Omitola, Usman Tar and Associate Professor John Agbonifo.

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