Killings by the security forces in Nigeria: Mapping and trend analysis (2006-2014)

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Abstract
Over the years, the Nigerian army has been regularly deployed to assist the police in law enforcement and internal security operations. This practice results largely from the belief that the presence of the security forces is sufficient to guarantee internal security. Data from the Nigeria Watch database, however, indicates that the intervention of the security forces in violent incidents often exacerbates the situation. This study shows that between June 2006 and May 2014 the security forces caused fatalities in 59% of the lethal incidents in which they intervened. Secondly, the more the security forces intervene, the more people are killed. This explains why from an annual average of 59% between June 2006 and May 2007, killings by the security forces peaked at 80% between June 2013 and May 2014. Thirdly, 58% of police interventions cause fatalities compared with 60% in the case of the army, an indication that killings by the police are more prevalent, while the army cause more fatalities per incident. Lastly, killings by the security forces are more prevalent in the southern part of the country but cause more fatalities in the northern part.

Introduction
This paper analyses the evolution and patterns of killings by the security forces in Nigeria between 1 June 2006 and 31 May 2014. This nationwide mapping focuses on the dynamics of security forces killings, including the political dimensions of violent incidents involving the security forces. The study also considers the intervention of the security forces in violent incidents involving religious groups and criminal gangs. The interactions between the security forces and these groups are often characterized by violence and, in most cases, result in deaths. In fact,
the intervention of the security forces in violent incidents often exacerbates the
situation and causes more deaths than the earlier stages of the incidents.¹

Deaths resulting from the intervention of the security forces are sometimes
overstated in both media and individual reports, while the security forces them-
selves rarely admit to causing deaths in their operations. This study discovered
that while media reports and victims’ accounts cannot be entirely disregarded,
there are many inconsistencies in the reported number of fatalities caused by the
security forces. Although it is very likely that media and victims’ accounts over-
state the number of fatalities, the security forces are notorious for either oversta-
ing or under-reporting the number of fatalities, depending on the context. The
security forces usually give lower fatality figures when reporting to the interna-
tional media, and they present higher fatality figures at home to create the im-
pression that they are living up to their mandates. Hence, reports by the security
forces rarely provide accurate figures and often reveal many discrepancies when
compared with media reports and individual accounts. This makes it difficult to
reliably analyse the trends and patterns of security forces killings nationwide.

In view of the difficulty in arriving at reliable fatality figures, and considering
the fact that one needs a reliable dataset in order to map and analyse trends na-
tionwide, this study explores the patterns and dimensions of killings by the secu-

¹ Ebohon, S.I. & E.U.B. Ifeadi (2012), Managing the Problems of Public Order and Internal security in
Accessed 18 August 2015.
ings in relation to the North and the South. The statistical data was further disaggregated and classified by period in order to analyse patterns of security forces killings during general elections. The concluding section highlights the major findings based on the overall statistical and empirical content of the information and data analysed.

The security forces and incidents of violent deaths

Killings of criminal suspects and innocents citizens by the security forces in Nigeria are reported in the media almost on a daily basis. Historically, law enforcement in the country has been characterized by violence and extra-judicial killings. Since its origin as a ‘consular guard’, whose primary function was to protect the economic and political interests of the colonial authority, the security forces have continued to use excessive force, including arbitrary killings, in their engagement with the civilian population. In the immediate post-colonial period the repressive character of the security forces was heightened as a result of the militarization of internal security during military rule, when the army, police, and paramilitary forces were used to repress and kill people arbitrarily. Since the end of military rule in 1999, successive civilian governments have militarized law enforcement by routinely deploying the army for internal security operations.

Over the years, various Joint Security Task Forces (JTFs) have been created and deployed for internal security duties as a result of the inability of the police to effectively combat the rising wave of organized crime, militancy, and insurgency in the country. Members of these task forces, who are usually drawn from the Nigerian army, navy, air force, police, State Security Service (SSS), Department of State Security (DSS), and immigration and customs officials, often act like occupying forces against the civilian population, killing people arbitrarily. The security forces rarely adhere to legally mandated rules of engagement, and they are known to use excessive force to arrest, detain, and kill anyone who happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

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Although some of the victims are criminal suspects, others are innocent individuals who are killed either because of politics, or extortion of bribes, or other pecuniary reasons. The security forces, notably the police and army, routinely mount roadblocks and checkpoints on major highways in order to forcefully extort bribes from commuters. Forceful extortion of bribes on the highways often results in incidents of accidental or intentional killings. Moreover, security forces often respond to civil unrest, including protests and riots, with excessive force, which frequently results in deaths. It is remarkable that killings by the security forces are often counted as evidence of effective counter-insurgency and policing, as is evidenced in the public display of criminal suspects killed by the security forces. Perhaps the violent character of law enforcement in the country is a reflection of the history and social environment of the security forces. Certainly, the political influence, economic background, and ‘self-esteem’ of the security forces determine their actual behaviour and the level of security they provide for ‘the ordinary people’. Hence, the dynamics of killings by the security forces may be better understood when examined within their changing political, legal, economic, and social contexts.

**Political context**

In Nigeria, ‘national security’ is equated with ‘state security’, and ‘state security’ is viewed as the security of political office holders. Consequently, the security forces are organized and managed to protect the politically influential and the rich by using state violence against other sections of the population. Moreover, certain political values are attached to state violence, especially during elections to public office. Political patronage and the use of political power to gain access to wealth promote political violence. Competition for political power is closely associated with the buying and selling of votes and politically motivated killings during elections. In addition, the so-called security votes - a security fund reserved for the political executive - is often appropriated simply by ‘evoking na-

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The idea of ‘security votes’ implicitly promotes state violence, mostly through the security forces, because it often results in the allocation of more funds to political executives and the security forces. As Howe observed, the character and behaviour of the security forces is largely a reflection of ‘national political structures and values’. Hence, the increasing concern of the political leadership with regime and political survival has resulted in widespread killings by the security forces, with near impunity.

**Legal context**

In law enforcement, security forces use a form of authorized state coercion, but they do so in ‘tense and often emotionally charged interpersonal encounters’ with members of the public. Hence, to avoid abuse of their mandates, security forces are regulated through institutional laws and codes of conduct, including ‘rules of engagement’, while discharging their duties. In Nigeria, however, the law grants the security forces wide discretionary powers. For instance, the Criminal Code Act permits the security forces, notably the police, to use force in the suppression of civil unrest and the arrest of suspects, and to use ‘any reasonable force’ to prevent the ‘escape of an arrested person’; and in the case of serious crime, it permits them to kill the suspect if he/she cannot be arrested by any means. Police Order 237 also permits police officers to shoot detainees and suspects who try to escape or evade arrest.

Police officers are never held responsible for their excesses even though the Criminal Procedure Act stipulates that ‘[a]ny person authorized by law to use force is criminally responsible for any excess, according to the nature and the quality of the act which constitutes the excess’. Weak institutional accountability measures make oversight of the security forces ineffective. Judicial oversight of security forces is weak largely because the leadership of the security forces prefer internal accountability measures to external oversight bodies. For instance, the police and the military forces prefer an ‘Orderly Room Trial’ and a

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17 Force Order No. 237, Rules for Guidance in the Use of Firearms by the Police.

18 Criminal Code Act (1990), 25 (298).

‘Court Martial’, respectively, in trying their erring officers.\(^{20}\) Thus, lack of cooperation from the security forces often frustrates the oversight functions of the courts and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). In consequence, the repressive laws and weak accountability measures reinforce the ability of the security forces to engage with impunity in arbitrary killings.

**Economic context**

Economic factors play a significant role in killings by the security forces in Nigeria. Most security forces violence and killings are driven by vested economic interests. For instance, the security forces have been accused of influencing the continuation of violent instability in the Niger Delta because of their alleged involvement in the oil bunkering business in the area.\(^{21}\) Corruption is widespread in Nigeria, and the security forces, and the police in particular, are among the most corrupt public institutions in the country.\(^{22}\) Funds meant for funding the security forces are often misappropriated by its leadership and by political executives, leaving the forces ill-equipped and demoralized.\(^{23}\) Hence, faced with lack of equipment and very low wages, the security forces indulge in corrupt practices, including forceful extortion of bribes, which often result in human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings. Most security operatives see extortion of bribes as ‘a way to earn a living’, and ordinary citizens are obliged to pay for every service rendered by the security forces.\(^{24}\) Furthermore, the police usually solicit bribes to investigate or discontinue investigation of suspects, and they sometimes kill on behalf of influential individuals.\(^{25}\)

**Social context**

Nigeria is bedevilled by many social challenges that promote widespread killings by the security forces. Poverty and social inequalities can cause ethno-religious conflicts, criminality, and insurgency, all of which result in violent responses by

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the state.26 ‘To restore order’, the security forces often kill more people than are killed at the initial stage of a conflict.27 Hence, killings by the security forces are very common in the areas most affected by ethno-religious violence, criminality, militancy, and insurgency. For instance, arbitrary killings by the security forces were very common in the pre-amnesty Niger Delta because of militant activities, while the imposition of emergency rule in the North-East following the Boko Haram insurgency has resulted in widespread killings by the security forces.

**Mapping of killings by the security forces**

There is hardly any reliable statistical analysis of trends and patterns of security forces killings across Nigeria. This is partly a result of inconsistencies in both official data and media reports on such killings. Reports by the police and other security agencies rarely give accurate figures and reveal many discrepancies when compared with media reports and individual accounts.28 These discrepancies make it very difficult to get the ‘actual number of people killed by the police and other security forces’.29 As a result of the unsystematic recording of crime data, deaths resulting from security forces violence are either under-reported or overstated.30 This inconsistency in body count makes it very difficult to reliably analyse trends and patterns of killings by the security forces nationwide. Statistics about security forces killings in Nigeria simply do not provide reliable information for nationwide mapping and analysis. Consequently, it has become difficult to identify major categories of security forces killings, where and when such killings are likely to occur, and whether such killings are decreasing or increasing.

**Data and methods**

This study is based on data extracted from the Nigeria Watch database and covers the period between 1 June 2006 and 31 May 2014.31 This time frame was

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31 Nigeria Watch. Available at: www.nigeriawatch.org.
chosen because the database started in June 2006, and this study seeks to map and analyse the trends of killings by the security forces over an eight-year period. It should therefore be noted that with the exception of the full years 2007 to 2013, data for 2006 and 2014 should be considered in the light of the stated period when data collation and analysis started and ended. The choice of the Nigeria Watch database is based on the understanding that official data, media reports, and individual accounts are largely inconsistent and therefore unreliable. The security forces, especially the police, either under-report or overstate the number of deaths, depending on the occasion; the press have a tendency to overestimate casualties of security forces violence; and individuals also tend to overstate the number of people killed by the security forces. However, discrepancies in body counts and methodological biases inherent in official data, media reports, and individual accounts are largely mitigated in the Nigeria Watch database, which monitors, compiles, and cross-checks data on violent deaths from several sources for reliability.

The categories ‘security forces’, ‘army’, ‘police’, and ‘other security forces’ were used to search the database. Here, ‘other security forces’ includes all Federal and state governmental security and paramilitary forces, excluding the police, army, and JTFs. The database was also searched through a filter, ‘security forces implication’, which identifies violent incidents where the involvement of the security forces resulted in at least one death. The data generated were categorized into main protagonists (army, police, or other security forces), causes (crime, political issues, religious issues, etc.), and relations (security forces versus religious groups, political groups, communities, and trade unions). Data collated from the database were used to produce charts and security maps and to generate statistics for trend analysis of killings by the security forces nationwide.

The main security institutions involved in killings

In general, the Nigerian security forces - including the army, navy, air force, police, SSS, customs, immigration, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) - exhibit a culture of violence and kill with impunity. They are often responsible for violent deaths whenever they intervene in any violent incident. They repeatedly show themselves unable to maintain law and order in violent conflicts; and the more

33 JTFs are combinations of the police and the army in common task forces that can also include other security institutions. For the sake of clarity, it is here considered that press reports on JTFs refer mainly to the police and the army. These task forces are not to be confused with paramilitary militias called ‘Civilian JTF’ in north-eastern Nigeria.
they intervene, the more people are killed.\textsuperscript{35} In the majority of conflicts where the security forces intervened, they were responsible for causing many deaths. This is worrisome because the interventions of the security forces result in more rather than fewer fatalities. Figure 6.1 shows the trend in the number of deaths caused by the security forces between June 2006 and May 2014.

\textit{Figure 6.1} Number of violent deaths resulting from incidents where the security forces intervened, per year (June 2006-May 2014)

The results show that most of the killings were perpetrated by the police and the army. Between 2006 and 2014, the police caused deaths in 1,560 of 2,694 violent incidents they were involved in, which represents an average of 58\% of their interventions causing deaths. The majority of the fatalities caused by the police resulted from extra-judicial killings. The Legal Defence and Assistance Project of Nigeria recorded 997 and 2,987 extra-judicial killings by the police in 2003 and 2004, respectively.\textsuperscript{36} The proportion is quite similar (60\%) in the case of the army, which killed in 529 out of 880 incidents in which they intervened within the same period. While it is reasonable to argue that most of the killings were caused by the police and the army, other governmental security forces also caused many deaths in their operations. For instance, the ‘other security forces’ have killed in 119 out of 265 (45\%) incidents in which they were involved. From


an annual average of 59% between June 2006 and May 2007, security forces interventions that resulted in deaths peaked at 80% between June 2013 and May 2014. This is not unexpected, because the pattern of killings by the security forces has changed since 2013, following the imposition of emergency rule in the North-East in response to the Boko Haram insurgency. However, the pattern is quite systemic, and one can safely argue that these killings ‘have’ much to do with a general culture of violence and impunity within the security forces’ rather than ‘collateral damage’.  

Many security personnel have also been killed in the course of discharging their duties. Among the security agencies, the police and the army arguably suffered the highest casualty figures. According to Nigeria Police Watch, for instance, a total of 263 police officers were killed on active service in 2009. The majority of the deaths were caused by armed robbers, while others were killed in violent encounters with Boko Haram insurgents. The year 2013 was particularly deadly for the police, as it recorded very high casualty figures among its officers. According to the Police Officers Wives Association (POWA), ‘in the year 2013 alone, 1,585 policemen were killed in the line of duty’. Although the army does not publicize casualty figures among its officers and the rank and file, the Boko Haram crisis has resulted in many soldiers being killed in the fight against the insurgents. In fact, in August 2014, some soldiers who were angry about the high death toll in the army even rebelled against their commanding officer.

Involvement of the army and police in security forces killings

The security forces are usually the major protagonists in all incidents where they cause violent deaths. The majority of incidents where the security forces have killed often involve criminal groups, oil companies, and religious, political, and ethnic groups. A closer analysis shows that more people are killed where the security forces are the major actors. Between 2006 and 2014, for instance, the security forces killed in 2,043 incidents, resulting in 12,078 fatalities. However, it would be too simplistic to assume that the magnitude of killings by the security forces

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forces is the same in all violent incidents where they intervene. Ethno-political and religious conflicts are very common, and the intervention of the security forces in these conflicts causes more deaths.\textsuperscript{41} In law enforcement, the police and other security agencies have a tendency to kill rather than arrest and prosecute criminal suspects.\textsuperscript{42} Although the police are the primary institution responsible for law enforcement and internal security, routine deployment of the army for internal security duties has resulted in cases where their encounters with criminals have caused many deaths. In terms of relationship, more people have been killed in violent incidents where the army is involved.

The internal security operations of the army are usually characterized by high fatalities, resulting from excessive use of force. Figure 6.2 represents the major protagonists in incidents where the army and the police intervened and their corresponding number of deaths. The results show that most fatalities caused by the army or its adversaries are recorded in violent conflicts involving religious and political groups. Of course, the army has killed more insurgents and civilians since its engagement with the Boko Haram Islamic group in the North-East. The ideology of the Boko Haram group makes them both an Islamic and a political group; but if it is possible to differentiate between the two types of group, the army appears to cause more deaths in violent incidents involving religious groups. Besides political and religious groups, the intervention of the army in violent conflicts involving communities within the same period resulted in 1,572 fatalities. This shows that the army is more violent in its engagement with the public than the police and that its intervention in violent conflicts often results in more deaths.

Compared with the army, the relationships between the police and political groups, religious associations, trade unions, and host communities appear less violent. However, the involvement of the police in conflicts involving political groups causes more fatalities. Figure 6.2 shows that between June 2006 and May 2014, fatal incidents where the police intervened resulted in 1,332 fatalities when they involved political groups, 877 fatalities when they involved communities, and 612 fatalities when they involved trade unions. Perhaps the politicization of the engagement of the security forces with civilians is responsible for this pattern of large numbers of fatalities in incidents involving political groups.

\textsuperscript{41} Hill, Nigeria Since Independence.
Main protagonists in incidents where the army have caused fatalities

Since 1999, successive civilian governments have established various military-dominated JTFs, under whose auspices the army is routinely deployed for law enforcement and internal security operations. Unfortunately, the internal security operations of the army are usually characterized by the use of disproportionate force, causing high civilian fatalities. Since 2006, the intervention of the army in violent conflicts involving the police, communities, trade unions, political groups, and religious associations has caused very many deaths. A total of 7,648 fatalities were recorded in 529 out of a total of 880 lethal incidents where the army was involved. This translates to an average of 60% of all army interventions causing fatalities. Figure 6.3 presents the distribution of these incidents over the years under study.

The result shows a noticeable increase in the number of fatalities caused by the army in 2009, 2012, and 2013. The high fatality figures in 2009 can be explained by the deployment of military forces to combat Boko Haram in the North-East and militant groups in the Niger Delta. In May 2009, a combined force of army, air force, and navy personnel bombarded seven communities suspected of harbouring militant camps in Delta State, killing over 500 people. However, there was a downward trend in killings by the army in 2010, with a steady increase in the following years and a peak when emergency rule was established in the North-East in 2013. In April 2013, for instance, approximately 185 civilians were killed in a military operation against Boko Haram insurgents in Borno. Although it appears the army caused more fatalities in 2013, a critical look at 2014 reveals a sharp increase in fatalities within the first five months. The trend is alarming and the number of victims reached a total of 5,045 by the end of the year.

These results do not provide information about the major actors involved in such incidents. However, Figure 6.2 shows that within the period examined in this study, military interventions caused a significant number of fatalities in clashes involving Islamic groups, political groups, and communities, as well as in inter-agency conflicts with the police. The relationship between the army and Islamic groups is particularly deadly. Between June 2006 and May 2014, violent conflicts involving the army and Islamic groups, especially the Boko Haram sect, have caused 3,152 fatalities. The relations between the army and political groups are equally very violent, causing 2,212 fatalities within the same period. While it appears that the relation between the army and Islamic groups is more deadly
than other of its relations, it would be too simplistic to assume that the relation between the army and political groups is less violent, because it is often difficult to differentiate between the two groups. For instance, the ideology of the Boko Haram Islamic sect presents them as both a religious and political group.

Main protagonists in incidents where the police have caused fatalities
Clashes between the army and police are another problem, even if they are less deadly (26 fatalities within eight years). In theory, the involvement of the army in internal security is supposed to supplement the efforts of the police in maintaining public order. It is not to create unnecessary rivalry to the extent of causing fatalities. As the primary institution responsible for law enforcement and internal security, the police actually intervene in many violent conflicts involving diverse groups. Most of these interventions cause fatalities. In 1,560 of 2,704 lethal incidents where it intervened, the police were responsible for killings resulting in a total of 5,851 deaths between June 2006 and May 2014.

Figure 6.4  Number of violent deaths resulting from incidents where the police intervened, per year (June 2006-May 2014)

Figure 6.4 indicates an increasing trend of killings by the police between 2006 and 2009 and a significant decrease in fatalities in 2010. The active involvement of the army in internal security, as a result of the inability of the police to effectively combat the menace of insurgency, is the most likely explanation for the observable decrease in fatalities caused by the police in 2010. A critical look at Figure 6.3 above shows that the sharp decrease in police killings in 2010 was followed by a corresponding increase in fatalities caused by the army in the same year. The army caused 899 fatalities compared with 714 fatalities caused by the
police in the same year. At the time, after the leader of the Boko Haram sect, Mohammed Yusuf, was extra-judicially executed by the police in July 2009, the sect regrouped under a more radical leader, Abubakar Shekau, under whose leadership the group began to carry out more violent attacks, including targeted killings and suicide bombings.\(^{45}\) This development compelled the Federal Government to deploy special military task forces to combat the insurgents, and this significantly reduced the involvement of the police in the counter-insurgency operations in the affected states.

However, killings by the police peaked in 2011, during violent incidents that caused 1,838 fatalities. This translates to a 39% increase from the 714 fatalities in the previous year. Perhaps the significant increase in killings by the police in 2011 may be explained by the fact that it was an election year, and the 2011 general election was adjudged one of the most violent in the history of the country.\(^{46}\) The presidential election, in particular, was followed by post-election protests and riots that degenerated into sectarian and ethnic clashes in which the police intervened. It will not be necessary here to go into the details of killings by the security forces during the 2011 general elections since it is examined in a later section of the study. Furthermore, since 2012 there has been a steady decrease in the number of fatalities caused by the police. Again, a close look at Figures 6.3 and 6.5 shows that the reduction in the number of fatalities caused by the police since 2012 is followed by a corresponding increase in the number of fatalities caused by the army in the same period. Between 2012 and the first five months of 2014, the army caused a cumulative fatality figure of 5,465 compared with 2,541 fatalities caused by the police within the same period. However, this result does not provide detailed information about the major groups involved in incidents where the police caused fatalities. Figure 6.5 examines the relational factors in incidents where the police have caused fatalities.

In terms of fatalities, the relation between the police and political groups when compared with other groups appears to be the most deadly. Figure 6.5 indicates that between June 2006 and May 2014, incidents involving the police and political groups caused 1,332 fatalities compared with 877 and 612 fatalities in incidents where the police confronted communities and trade unions, respectively. Important information in this graph is that the police cause more fatalities in incidents involving political issues than in routine law enforcement. If we assume that one can use the number of fatalities to determine the level of encounter between the police and a particular group, then it can be argued that the police in-

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tervene more in violent incidents involving political groups than in incidents involving communities and criminal groups. The impression is that the police are largely organized and managed to protect the politically influential by using state violence against other sections of the population. It may be the case, however, that the police do not intervene more in political violence, only that their intervention in incidents involving political groups is more deadly.

Figure 6.5 Number of violent deaths resulting from incidents where the police intervened, by type of relationship (June 2006-May 2014)

Regional differences in security forces killings

The causal and relational explanations of killings by the security forces provided in previous sections of this study indicate that the majority of the fatalities resulted from attempts by security operatives to restore public order during crises. Hence, such killings are likely to be more prevalent in regions that are prone to violent conflicts. However, it is important that we analyse the fatality figures across all the states in order to determine the states where the security forces cause more fatalities. A state-by-state analysis of the fatality figures will also enable us determine regional differences in killings by the security forces. A mapping of the number of fatalities caused by the security forces based on data collated from the Nigeria Watch database from June 2006 to May 2014 is presented in Map 6.1. The Map shows that the security forces caused more fatalities in the northern part of Nigeria. During the period under review, however, incidents involving the security forces, causing a total of more than a thousand fatalities,

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were recorded in six states nationwide: Borno, Plateau, Lagos, Delta, Rivers, and Anambra. Furthermore, the majority of these states are located in the South (Lagos, Delta, Rivers, and Anambra).

Map 6.1 Fatalities resulting from incidents where the security forces intervened in Nigeria (June 2006-May 2014)

At the state level Map 6.1 shows that incidents involving the security forces have caused more fatalities in Borno than in any other state. The alarming fatality figure (4,569 deaths) recorded in the state was largely the result of the interven-
tion of the security forces, notably the army, in the deadly Boko Haram insurgen-
ty. The counter-insurgency operations of the army took a very violent dimension
after the imposition of emergency rule in the North-East in May 2013. However,
the security forces, notably the army, also caused hundreds of fatalities in a series
of violent encounters with the Islamic sect before the imposition of emergency
rule. In a widely condemned operation against members of the sect in Baga in
April 2013, the army under the auspices of the Multi-National Joint Task Force
(MNJTF) killed 185 people, many of them civilians. Since the declaration of
emergency rule, the spate of killings by the security forces has assumed a worry-
ing dimension in the state, as the army often issues accounts of scores of insur-
gents killed almost on a daily basis.

In the North-Central region, the intervention of the security forces in the lin-
gering sectarian and ethnic conflicts in Plateau State has caused many fatalities.
The Nigeria Watch database recorded 1,784 fatalities in incidents involving the
security forces in the state between June 2006 and May 2014. The intervention of
the security forces in the mainly ethno-sectarian crises that have occurred in this
state has usually been very violent. In November 2008, for instance, the army
and police caused more than 130 fatalities while repressing ethno-sectarian and
political violence in Jos. In a similar development in July 2012, the security
forces killed more than 20 Fulani militiamen who had earlier attacked some
communities and killed many people, including Senator Gyang Dantong and As-
semblyman Gyang Fulani. The Plateau experience exemplifies situations where
the involvement of the security forces in violent conflicts results in increased fa-
talities.

In the South-West, the security forces have caused more fatalities in Lagos
State than in any other state in the region. Between June 2006 and May 2014,
incidents involving the security forces caused 1,195 fatalities in the state. As the
commercial hub and one of the most populous states in the country, Lagos is a
haven for social miscreants, including armed robbers whose engagement with the
security forces often results in violent deaths. Clashes between smugglers and
customs officers, as well as violent confrontations among personnel of the vari-
ous security agencies, often result in high fatality figures. In May 2011, for in-
stance, soldiers killed four police officers, including a Divisional Police Officer
(DPO) and a Divisional Crime Officer (DCO), to avenge the death of their col-

48 Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) News (2013), Updated Timeline of Boko Haram
December 2013.
2013, p. 34.
50 Human Rights Watch (2009), Arbitrary Killings by the Security Forces, Submission to the Investiga-
league who was killed by policemen at a checkpoint while he was escorting a vehicle conveying goods across the Nigerian border with the Republic of Benin. Although most security forces killings in the state are related to criminals, there are instances where innocent people have been killed either accidentally or intentionally. Many fatalities have resulted from stray bullets fired by security personnel, mostly during encounters with criminal gangs in the state.

In the South-East the majority of the killings by the security forces are related to political and criminal issues, and a greater proportion of this violence occurred in Anambra State. From June 2006 to May 2014, incidents involving the security forces caused 1,150 fatalities in the state. The majority of these deaths occurred in violent incidents involving criminal gangs and political groups in the commercial city of Onitsha. The city is notorious for violent incidents involving the security forces, trade unions, criminal gangs, and political groups.

Apart from criminal groups, the relationship between the security forces and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) has been very violent. From June 2006 to December 2013, clashes between the security forces and supporters of MASSOB caused over 800 fatalities. In June 2006, for instance, 16 people were shot dead when security forces raided MASSOB offices in the state. In a related incident, the intervention of the security forces in clashes between supporters of MASSOB and members of the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) between June and July 2006 caused over 700 fatalities in Onitsha. Perhaps the status of Onitsha as an important trading centre and gateway to the South-East makes it susceptible to violent incidents, which often involve the security forces.

In the Niger Delta region, the involvement of the security forces in violent incidents was remarkably deadly in Delta and Rivers states. The operations of the various security task forces which are mandated to combat militancy, illegal oil bunkering, and piracy in the Niger Delta area have always been very violent. In May 2009, over 500 people were killed in a coordinated attack by a combined team of army, navy, and air force personnel in Gbaramatu kingdom of Delta State. In Rivers State, killings by the security forces are largely related to political issues and criminal activities, including oil wars. In September 2008, for instance, JTF operatives invaded approximately seven communities in search of

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Farah Dagogo, a factional leader of MEND, and killed more than 70 people, including innocent residents.\textsuperscript{55}

Geopolitically, the security map in Map 6.1 shows that the security forces were most violent in the North-East, followed by the North Central, South-South, South-West, and South-East regions, based on cumulative fatality figures. However, Map 6.1 does not provide us with enough information to determine in which place security forces violence is more frequent. Figure 6.6 presents the frequency of incidents where the security forces have caused fatalities in selected states from the six geo-political regions of the country. The graph shows that cases where the security forces cause fatalities are more frequent in Lagos than in any other state. However, based on information shown in Figure 6.6, it appears that the security forces caused fewer fatalities in each violent incident in which they intervened in the state. This implies that although the security forces are usually involved in many violent incidents in Lagos, their intervention results in fewer fatalities when compared with states such as Borno and Delta, where the security forces have caused more fatalities. This may be explained by the fact that the security forces in Lagos avoid extra-judicial killings because they are more scrutinized by human rights organizations. Moreover, violent incidents in Lagos are largely related to criminal gangs, where the police usually intervene, causing fewer fatalities than cases involving the army.

\textit{Figure 6.6} Frequency of security forces killings in selected states (June 2006-May 2014)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure66.png}
\end{figure}

A critical look at Figure 6.6 also shows that killings by the security forces are more frequent in the Niger Delta states of Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers than in the north-eastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, where the security forces are currently involved in the fight against Boko Haram insurgents. The pervasiveness of security forces killings in the Niger Delta may not be unconnected with gang wars, oil bunkering, political violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, and the now abated militancy. The involvement of the security forces in organized criminal and political violence in most states in the Niger Delta often causes more fatalities per incident because the army are usually involved, and they are known for using excessive force.

Although Figure 6.6 indicates the frequency of violent incidents by state where the security forces cause fatalities, it does not provide enough information to help determine the specific security agency that causes more deaths in each state. Figure 6.7 therefore presents the frequency of the involvement of each of the major security agencies in incidents that result in fatalities.

Figure 6.7 shows that killings by the police are by far the most frequent nationwide. With the exception of Bayelsa, Borno, and Yobe states, where there is the strong presence of the army-dominated JTFs, killings by the police are most frequent in every other state where killings by the security forces are widespread. However, there is no major difference in the frequency of killings by the police and army in Plateau State. This may be explained by the fact that the main securi-
ty outfit in the state, the Special Task Force (STF), comprises personnel from both the army and the police force. There are, however, a significant number of killings involving the ‘other security forces’ in Lagos State.

The next section of the study examines some ad hoc case studies to illustrate the trend and patterns of killings by the security forces.

Ad hoc cases of killings by the security forces
Relevant ad hoc case studies will be helpful in illustrating the ‘growing preference among the Nigerian security forces to kill’. 56 Two cases are presented to illustrate how the intervention of the security forces in violent incidents often results in more deaths. Case 1 looks at how the intervention by a team of army and police personnel in a violent conflict between supporters of MASSOB and members of NARTO caused many more fatalities than were recorded at the initial state of the conflict. In Case 2, the study uses two deadly military operations in Baga town and Giwa Barracks, both in Borno State, to illustrate how the security forces use human fatalities to determine the success or failure of their internal security operations.

Case 1: A deadly intervention
In March 2006, dozens of MASSOB activists were killed by the police in Anambra State following a campaign by the group to boycott the 2006 population census. MASSOB was formed in 1999 by a lawyer-cum-secessionist activist, Ralph Uwazurike, to actualize the dream of an independent state of Biafra after the civil war of 1967-1970. However, the anti-government stance of the group often pitched it against the security forces. Clashes between supporters of the movement and the security forces have always been deadly. In one of the most violent encounters between MASSOB and the security forces, many supporters of the group were killed. The crisis started after two weeks of violent clashes between MASSOB activists and NARTO members, which resulted in the burning of two police stations and a major prison in the state. Approximately 200 prisoners were allegedly set free, and scores of people were killed. 57 Both groups accused the other of destroying the prison and releasing the prisoners, and thereafter engaged one another in a proxy war.

Following a series of street battles between the two groups, the police intervened by raiding MASSOB offices in Onitsha and caused many fatalities among members of the group. Subsequently, the Federal Government deployed soldiers

to help the police restore law and order. This was followed by a declaration of a dusk-to-dawn curfew by the state government. During the ensuing violent confrontation between the security forces and supporters of the group, ‘[m]any people found with guns or MASSOB identity cards’ were summarily executed during cordon-and-search operations in Onitsha.\textsuperscript{58} The involvement of the security forces in that violent incident resulted in more deaths by far than were recorded in the initial clashes between MASSOB and NARTO members. At the last count, the intervention of the security forces caused over 700 deaths in the conflict, mainly through summary executions.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Case 2: Killings as a yardstick}

Fatality figures have become a key yardstick used by the security forces to measure the effectiveness of their operations. The police are known to publicly display the corpses of armed robbery suspects as evidence of effective policing. More recently, the JTFs have formed the habit of claiming success in the fight against insurgency based on the number of insurgents they kill in each operation.\textsuperscript{60} Almost everyone killed by the security forces is now classified either as a criminal or an insurgent. In a widely condemned military operation against Boko Haram insurgents in April 2013, soldiers under the auspices of the MNJTF caused an estimated 185 fatalities and devastated the entire town of Baga in Borno State.\textsuperscript{61} The leadership of the MNJTF later claimed that those killed were either Boko Haram members or individuals associated with the sect.

In a similar incident in March 2014, the JTF killed over 200 people when suspected Boko Haram insurgents attempted to release a number of their members from a detention centre in the Giwa military barracks in Borno State. Notwithstanding the high number of avoidable deaths that were caused by the army, the defence headquarters claimed the operation was a success. While commenting on the military operation, the Director of Defence Information, Major General Chris Olukolade, stated that the attack by the insurgents ‘ha[d] been successfully repelled with heavy human casualties on the terrorists’.\textsuperscript{62} As the comment indicates, military operations that devastate entire communities and result in high civilian fatalities are celebrated as accomplished missions. It is worth noting,

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Monguno, H. (2013), Terrorism, Security and Fifth Columnists. \textit{Leadership} (Nigeria), 29 October 2013, p. 34.
however, that both the attackers and the detainees were killed, so even if the attackers were assumed to be insurgents, it is very likely that some of the detainees were innocent civilians. The military authority later admitted that over 1,400 suspected insurgents were held in that same detention centre for many months without trial.  

_Security forces killings during elections_

The involvement of the security forces in the conduct of elections is usually characterized by violence, and killings by the security forces are common. In particular, the police have been alleged to collude with politicians to intimidate political opponents and the electorate in order to influence the outcome of elections. The fact that general elections are conducted periodically also means that killings by the security forces during elections are cyclical. Moreover, the political significance of elections also means that such killings will most likely assume a political dimension. In this regard, this section of the study analyses the 2007 and 2011 general elections in Nigeria in order to determine the pattern of killings by the security forces.

_The 2007 general elections_

The 2007 elections were no doubt among the most violent in the electoral history of the country. Many people were killed in a series of violent incidents before, during, and after the elections. During the electioneering period that preceded the general elections in April of that year, supporters of the major political parties as well as rival factions of the various parties engaged one another in violent clashes that often involved the security forces. The security forces actively intervened in several pre-election, election-day, and post-election violent incidences that occurred between the end of 2006 and April 2007. Within this period, the Nigeria Watch database recorded 29 fatalities caused by the security forces. These fatalities were recorded from 13 violent incidents in which the security forces intervened during the elections. The majority of these deaths occurred during the gubernatorial/state Houses of Assembly and the presidential/National Assembly elections which took place on 14 April and 21 April 2007, respectively. Figure 6.8 presents the percentages of fatalities caused by the security forces before and during the 2007 general elections.

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Figure 6.8 shows that 76% of the fatalities occurred around the election days, while 24% occurred in the pre-election period. It is worth noting, however, that most of the incidents where the security forces caused deaths involved inter-party violence. As soon as the deadline for the return of nomination forms by political parties elapsed on 29 January 2007, the various political parties became enmeshed in violence. The security forces were actively involved in these violent incidents either through official intervention or as personal guards to party stalwarts and candidates during the campaign and elections periods. According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), more than 280 election-related deaths were recorded shortly before the 2007 elections.64

The 2011 general elections

Unlike the 2007 elections, the involvement of the security forces in the 2011 elections was well coordinated. The security forces participated in the 2011 general elections under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES). Through the ICCES the various security agencies were integrated into the security and logistics committees of all the states and LGAs to ensure law and order during the elections. However, the security forces intervention in violent incidents before, during, and after the elections resulted in many deaths. The majority of these killings occurred immediately after the presidential elections. The elections, in which the major presidential candidates came from the predominantly Christian South and Muslim North, led many politicians

to leverage their ethnic and religious identities for political advantage, a situation that resulted in widespread post-election violence in parts of the country. Figure 6.9 presents the percentages of fatalities caused by the security forces during the elections in April 2011 and in each of the three months that preceded the elections that year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Security forces killings during the 2011 general elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.9 Percentages per month of the total fatalities caused by the security forces during the 2011 general elections

Between January 2011, when the electioneering process climaxed, and April 2011 when the elections took place, the security forces killed 25 people in 9 violent incidents where they intervened. Most of the killings took place immediately after the presidential election on 16 April. Figure 6.9 shows that the majority (56%) of fatalities caused by the security forces occurred during and immediately after the presidential election, compared with 44% of the fatalities recorded in the three months that preceded the elections. Inflammatory utterances by some aspirants that had lost the elections resulted in post-election riots, which degenerated into violent assaults, arsons, and killings. In parts of the North, the outcome of the elections, particularly the presidential election, resulted in violent protests, which later degenerated into sectarian and ethnic violence. The intervention of the security forces in the more than three days of post-election violence, especially in the northern cities of Kano and Kaduna, resulted in many fatalities. The pat-

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tern of killings by the security forces during the 2011 elections indicates that the post-election violence was more deadly by far than the election-day and pre-election violence. However, in terms of cumulative fatality figures, the involvement of the security forces in the 2007 general elections was more deadly than in the 2011 elections.

Conclusion

Analysis of the dynamics of security forces killings in Nigeria requires not only an understanding of the role of the security forces as the primary apparatus of state-sanctioned violence; it also requires a knowledge of the general context within which the security establishment operates. Scholarly analysis must recognize the general context, as well as the relational and causal factors that increase security forces killings. This study has established that security forces killings have much to do with a general culture of violence, rather than with the result of accidental deaths or collateral damage. The statistics presented in the paper demonstrate that the majority of incidents where the security forces intervene result in fatalities; and the more they intervene, the more people are killed. The statistics further illustrate that the involvement of the army causes more fatalities per incident, even though killings by the police are more numerous. Further mapping in the paper illustrates that the intervention of the security forces in incidents involving political groups causes more fatalities, but the Boko Haram crisis and the relationship between the army and Islamic groups is the most deadly, causing more fatalities per incident. Lastly, the paper discovered that incidents of killings by the security forces are more prevalent in the southern region but cause more fatalities in the northern region of the country.

References


