

## **CRIME, UNEMPLOYMENT, CORRUPTION AND OSTENTATIOUS LIFESTYLE OF PUBLIC OFFICEHOLDERS IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

In recent times in Nigeria, there has been upsurge in the rate of crime. These crimes are not limited to economic crimes like armed robbery, oil bunkering, internet fraud or kidnapping but include the act of taking up arms against the country as witnessed in the activities of Niger Delta militants, O'odua Peoples' Congress etc. The most recent and deadliest of these groups is the Boko Haram Islamist group in northern Nigeria which has declared total war against the nation. This group within the last three years in Nigeria has killed not less than 5000 people including some foreigners. Currently they are holding captive about 250 female students of Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State. These they kidnapped while they were seating for Senior Secondary Certificate exams. The activities of Boko Haram and other miscreant groups in the country have created a serious state of insecurity in Nigeria and are making governance process difficult for both states and federal governments. This ugly situation is generating a lot of concern both within and outside the country on how best to tackle and end insurgency in the country. The consensus opinion is that the high level of unemployment especially among the youth population in the country is responsible for these crimes. This paper adopted document analysis method to critically unearth the factors responsible for these crimes. It took other factors like corruption and public flaunting of the gains thereof by public officers into consideration. Its contention is that providing jobs for Nigerians is a right step in the right direction but more importantly government must fight corruption especially among those who have found themselves in the privileged position of managing the country's resources if it is to stave-off the revolutionary tension that is gradually building up against the entire system.

**Keywords:** Crime, corruption, insurgency, unemployment, ostentatious.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Crime is a condition every society is faced with. The rate in different countries is a function of the prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances. In recent times in Nigeria, we have seen upsurge in the rate of criminal activities of variegated shades. These range from the common and everyday incidences of armed robbery, fraud commonly known in Nigeria as 419. Aside these, we are witnessing increase in the rate of oil pipeline vandalization, kidnapping, assassination, child-trafficking ritual killings and baby factories that engage teenage girls who are pregnant or are made pregnant and on delivery of their babies are paid-off and their babies sold for whatever purposes.

Today, militancy and terrorism are commonplace in the country. Different groups in the country are fighting for either economic rights or the establishment of their own independent states. The most dreaded of this group is the Boko Haram Islamic group that has declared a state of total war with the Nigerian state. The activities of these groups are hampering the economic, social and even the religious life of the people, creating a serious state of insecurity and making governance process difficult.

The ugly situation has generated a lot of concern both within and outside the country on how best to tackle and end insurgency in the country. The near consensus opinion is that the high level of unemployment especially among the youth population in the country is responsible for these crimes. Attributing high criminal activities to unemployment in the country can be said to be correct given the high rate of unemployment in the country which stands currently at 25%. But unemployment is only a part of the story. The reason why some individuals have taken up arms against their fatherland and declared war on it goes beyond not having jobs.

To cure a problem we must discern the factors responsible for it. Crime in Nigeria is a factor of economic, social and political circumstances. In this paper I intend to investigate the role of poor leadership manifested in corruption that is bedeviling the country and the flaunting and public display of gains of corruption by government officials and their cronies in the rise of criminal activities in Nigeria. Using primary data analysis method, the study of factors that promote crime and solutions to them will be investigated under the following sub-headings:

employment-related or economic crimes; social or conformist-attitude-related crimes and political-motivated or revolutionary-attitude-related crimes.

## 2. NIGERIAN CRIME SCENE

Before delving into the Nigerian crime scene, it is proper to situate and clarify our understanding of the term crime here. Crime generally is a fluid term given its propensity to take different shapes and dimensions as the times, societies and circumstances under which it occurs permit. This been the case, the label of crime and the accompanying social stigma normally confine their scope to those activities seen as injurious to the general population or to the state, including some that cause serious loss or damage to individuals. Those who apply the labels of "crime" or "criminal" intend to assert the hegemony of a dominate population, or to reflect a consensus of condemnation for the identified behaviours and to justify any punishment prescribed by the state against it.

In line with this view, crime is an intentional commission of an act usually deemed socially harmful or dangerous and specifically defined, prohibited and punishable under criminal law (Nirmala and Zegeye, 2006, p.19). A very important component of this understanding of crime here is the aspect that crime becomes crime because the state said so through instruments of law that are clearly and distinctly spelt out. Collaborating this, (Morris, 2002, p.106) held that crime is what society says is a crime by establishing that an act is a violation of the criminal law without law there can be no crime at all; although there maybe moral indignation which results in law being enacted. Our understanding of crime here therefore will include all acts forbidden by the law such as armed robbery, corruption, assassination, cyber crimes, insurgency or terrorism etc.

No society no matter how good its criminal laws are or how effective its security network is, can be said to be crime free. But the rate of crime or the propensity to commit crime in every society is nourished by motivation and opportunity. Where there is high or sufficient motivation, and opportunity exists, crime will likely soar high. This been the case, Nigeria is a fertile ground for crime due to the inapt leadership in the country. The motivation is never lacking as it is provided by the corrupt environment and weak legal system that makes it easy for offenders to evade justice and the opportunity is provided partly by our weak and ever-compromising security network.

Thus, one's sensibilities are daily insulted by increasing news of crime in the country. Take for instance, the following stories from "Gbooza", a social news network. On 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2014 it heralded the following headlines among others:

- Man arrested with human skull
- Boko Haram: People's Hotel to relocate from Bauchi
- I'm just a copper cable thief
- Son from hell, butchers father to death sets body ablaze
- Man stabs friend to death over land
- Mile 2 under –bridge: where victims are raped, robbed.
- Unrepentant convicts: Jailed robbers return 10 years after to kill victim's son.
- Human rights lawyer's "assassin" transferred to special Anti-Robbery Squad.
- Suicide bomber kills five outside Borno Mosque.
- Unabated killings, As Insurgents Ignore Ramadan.
- Kaduna Violence: Over 150,000 flee
- Kano seeks death sentence for alleged bride-killer.
- War in Borno: 50 terrorists killed; colonel, DPO die in battle.
- Troops arrest three terror suspects in Adamawa
- Kidnapped Bayelsa Commissioner's mother released
- Boko Haram: 119 corpses for mass burial in Borno. As troops nab 3 female Boko Haram "Intelligence" officers.

- Another baby factory discovered in Oyo State.
- Child-traffic syndicate nabbed in Calabar: 23 teenagers freed.
- Pastor caught in the act of raping a 12 year old girl

This is the picture of the daily Nigerian crime situation. Thus insecurity to lives and property is at its peak in the country that one fears the society is back to the anarchic state of nature where life is naturally nasty, brutish and short. But what are the factors responsible for this high level of crime.

### 3. CAUSES OF CRIME IN NIGERIA

Sociologists and criminologists have identified three major factors that are responsible for the high level of crime in Nigeria. They include; economic, social and political factors.

#### 3.1 Economically-Motivated Crime

This can also be known as employment-related crime. In every society, unemployment is a factor responsible for certain criminal activities. People who suffer economic disadvantages can feel 'disconnected' from mainstream society and its values and hence may feel less respect for the law. Further poverty in terms of need can also be a factor, particularly in property offences. Nigeria even though a country so blessed has one of the greatest populations of people living under very excruciating poverty because of the brigandage of its leaders, past and present. This has made about 70 percent of Nigerians to live below the poverty line of one dollar per day.

In this scenario, crime is bound to thrive in a population of over 150 million people. Those who have no legitimate means of making ends meet thus resort to petty crime to fend-off hunger. To understand the level of poverty Nigerians contend with one only needs to observe what happens during recruitment exercises organized by various government agencies. A case in point is the botched recruitment exercises organized by the Nigeria Immigration Service in March, 2014. Not less than 20 young Nigerians were stampeded to death when they turned-up for interview for this recruitment. This was due to the uncontrollable army of young people who turned up in their millions for job vacancies that were meant for only about 4000 persons.

Corruption and poor leadership have turned greater majority of Nigerians beggars in their fatherland. No one has captured a graphic picture of the contrasting scenario in Nigeria between the few rich and the many poor more than Patrick Wilmot in an article he entitled "Nigeria in 2006". The rich he held move in expensive imported, air-conditioned limousines and sports utility vehicles through potholed, congested thoroughfares like the rest of Nigerians. But their cars wear tinted glasses and designer foreign perfumes that protect them from the sights and stench of impoverished fellow citizens and from the environmental squalor that often make our cities look like abandoned garbage areas. The rich eat imported delicacies that often make them easy preys to such diseases as gout, diabetes and obesity and often end up traveling abroad for digestive cures and "tummy tucks". In this way, they drain the economy of their own country to promote foreign industries, hospitals, schools and hotels. The poor on the other hand, look like ghosts in an overcrowded, city. They drift like shell-shocked, skeletons across landscapes on the moon. To survive, they are compelled to compete with livestock for chaff and slink all the days of the short span allotted to their miserable lives by the harsh realities of life in Nigeria. If their children survive beyond the age of five they are condemned to face the prospects of poverty, depression and crime (Odey, 2012, pp. 52-53).

In 2014, the gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria has only widened that the picture would be more graphic if Wilmot is to write again today and the prospects of poverty, depression and crime are more pronounced for the young. Poverty related crimes will definitely be reduced if the economic condition is made better for the greater number in this country.

#### 3.2 Socially-Motivated Crime

Here, I have termed this type of crime conformist-attitude-related crime. Socially, people and in particular, their attitude to the law and the authority of the state, are shaped in part by the society they live in. In Nigeria of today, the society's moral fibre is so weak, the public space is infected with high level of corruption and law enforcement is so compromised, these conditions have turned out to be fertile grounds for crime.

Most disturbing is the fact that we live in a society where wealth is glorified not minding the means of its acquisition. The Machiavellian end justifying the means is very much the way of life in Nigeria.

If the various governments that have ruled Nigeria have taught the people anything, it is that hard work no longer pays; that public office is the passport to primitive wealth acquisition and that the more you acquire, the less likely you will be rebuked. The general mentality about public institutions and common wealth in Nigeria is that once one has the opportunity to occupy public office, he should milk the system dry. Common wealth is seen as a war-bounty and as such, what you smuggle home is what you get.

This attitude of winner takes it all to public office and property, one is made to understand did not start today in this clime. Nigerians during the colonial period held the view that the colonists' property (cars, houses, farms etc) is not "our" property. Thus vandalism and looting of public property was not seen as a crime against society. After independence this attitude continued to fester added to the lack of trust for one another among the nations (ethnic nationalities) that make up the country. Each occupier of exalted public office feels he holds it in trust for himself and the people of his ethnic nationality. To this end, he has to plunder public property not knowing when such opportunity will call again. Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent actor in the Nigerian political stage from independence to the second republic, adumbrated this point when he wrote since independence, our governments have been a matter of few holding the cow for the strongest and most cunning to milk under these circumstances everybody runs over everybody to make good at the expenses of others (Awolowo, 1979, p. 25).

Corruption in Nigeria has become the norm rather than an aberration. It is a way of life, a way of doing government business in Nigeria. This accounts for why Nigeria was ranked 139<sup>th</sup> out of the 179 countries in tied with Azerbaijan, Kenya, Nepal and Pakistan (2012 Corruption Perceptions Index - Transparency International).

Corruption is so instituted in Nigeria that people do not hide the gains accruing therefore any more but rather flaunt it with relish. Ostentatious display of the gains of ill-gotten wealth is the order of the day. Gone are days when those who are corrupt hide under different covers in order to escape the long arms of the law. These days corrupt public officers feel like lords who have conquered estates and so proudly display and celebrate their coveted prizes.

Azuka Onwuka lamented the level of degeneracy the nation has slipped itself in when he wrote "My Private Jet is Bigger than Yours" to mockingly depict the progress Nigeria has made in ostentatiousness from the "My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours" of Nkem Nwankwo's novel in 1975. Comparing the Nigeria of today to that of yesterday, he wrote: In the political class, it used to be against the Federal Government's Policy for a civil servant or political office holder to use SUV (Sport Utility Vehicle, emphasis mine) as an official car. The official car in the 1980s, when the ruling political party, the National Party of Nigerians, was accused of profligacy was Peugeot 504 saloon. Later, it was upgraded to 505 saloon, especially for some senior officials. Except perhaps for the office of the head of state/president, Mercedes Benz saloon was not allowed as an official car, even if the holder of the office was using a Mercedes before his election or appointment, because a Mercedes was seen as a sign of opulence and ostentation. Today, however, the regular official car for political office holders is an SUV of a special class. From the Olympian height, the official can literally look down on the people he or she is meant to serve. This cuts across the federal, state or local government levels.

An elected or appointed political office holder is the boss of the people, not their steward. He is privileged and favoured. He has been exalted. Others pray and hope that one day their time will come and they will come to be like such a political office holder. If a political office holder uses a saloon car, it must be such whose price will put fear into the hearts of the common people (Onwuka, 2013, p. 43).

The purchase of two bullet proof cars by the then minister of aviation, Stella Oduah at the rate of ₦255 million (a dollar is equivalent of about 165 Nigeria naira) actually put fears in the rest of Nigerians. And what was more this amount was enough to buy about five of those cars.

The Federal Government of Nigeria that should declare war against corruption has refused to do so. It is seen rather to be tacitly encouraging its officials to engage in corrupt practices. What counts for the authorities is the political affiliation of those accused of sleaze, as they labour to defend the actions of loyal party men and women. Two instances will suffice here. The current minister of petroleum in Nigeria, Deziani Madueke has been accused of spending a whopping 10 billion naira in hiring and maintaining private jets for her use which her office is not constitutionally allowed to maintain in the first place. All efforts to investigate

her by the National Assembly has been stalked in collaboration with Presidency. At the last count, she went to court to obtain an order restraining the National Assembly from carrying out this investigation.

Just very recently (18<sup>th</sup> June, 2014), the Federal Government of Nigeria, through her Ministry of Justice, withdrew the 446.3 billion naira money laundering charge against Mohammed Abacha, son of former President of Nigeria, late Sani Abacha. Earlier on this year, Mohammed was a member of All Progressive Congress (APC) Party, the major opposition party, until June, when he 'cross-carpeted' to People's Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party at the centre. This withdrawal of criminal proceedings was an arrangement to give him a clean bill of health and so pave the way for him to battle the APC as the gubernatorial candidate of PDP in Kano State. The PDP controlled Federal Government wants to snatch Kano state governorship election by all means from the APC, and it does not matter even if this is done at the expense of the fight against corruption of this magnitude.

No high-profile criminal case of embezzlement or official corruption has enjoyed conviction in Nigerian courts in the past 15 years of Nigerian democratic experiment. The only high-profile corrupt public officer in Nigeria to be convicted was former Governor of Delta State, Chief James Ibori and this took place not in Nigeria but in a London court. On Tuesday, April 17, 2013, Ibori was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment by Southwark Crown Court, London, for his crimes in Nigeria. The following properties were confiscated from him.

- ❖ A house in Hampstead, North London, for £2.2m
- ❖ A property in Shaftesbury, Dorset for £311,000
- ❖ A £3.2m mansion in Standton, near Johannesburg, South Africa.
- ❖ A fleet of armored Ranger Rovers valued at £ 600,000
- ❖ A £ 120,000 Bentley Continental GT
- ❖ A Mercedes - Benz Maybach 62 bought for £ 407,000 cash that was shipped direct to his mansion in South Africa.

After the sentencing hearing, Sue Pattern, head of the Crown Prosecution Service Central Fraud Group, said something to the effect that Ibori had made his acquisition "at the expense of some of the poorest people in the world.

This is the situation the youth of this country have to live with. They have no option but to perceive those who occupy public offices as criminals and so feel no qualms when committing crimes since they are not worse than their leaders. Bugged by the philosophy of if you cannot beat them you join them the rest of the people plunder whatever is within their reach. They take to various crimes like oil bunkering, kidnapping, ritual murder, assassination etc. Since these avenues equally provide big money.

The lure of the ostentatious lifestyle, combined with a weak and compromising legal and security system give the Nigerian the impetus he needs to indulge in these crimes.

Thus socially-motivated crimes are not crimes due to lack of employment since the caliber of criminals here are high profile individuals who have good paid jobs. The drive to commit crime is located in the endemic corruption and greed that make those who have to acquire more; the urge to life ostentatiously beyond one's legitimate means and a culture that rewards primitive blind acquisition without troubling to ask if the means is justified.

The danger in our ever-rising materialism and flamboyance is that it encourages crime and erodes our social values. The rise in embezzlement of public funds, bribery, drug trafficking and internet fraud is a sign that more people desperately want to get their own wealth, show it off and be seen to have "arrived". Questions are no longer asked about the source of wealth, even within the family circles or religious circles, both of which used to be the bastions of moral values. As long as money flows, the person making it happen is celebrated and honoured for his "philanthropy", and becomes a reference point. The young man who sees this everyday wants also to be celebrated, respected and honoured with titles and awards in his community - social, religious, or national. Having seen that nobody asked questions or cared about the source of wealth of the "big man", the young man strives to make his own money by any means possible, knowing that nobody will bother to ask questions to him too (Onwuka, 2013, p.44).

### 3.3 Politically-Motivated or Revolutionary Attitude-Related Crime

If the last group is reactionary, here the attitude is revolutionary. Politically induced crime occurs when individuals and organizations oppose certain criminal laws, or even the whole notion of the state in the case

of anarchists, on political grounds. They therefore believe that the law is wrong or unjust and may not feel compelled to comply with the law.

In the Nigerian situation, the case has been more of opposing the state political configuration and sometimes the entire notion of the state. Two factors mainly are responsible for this. One is the prevalent corruption that has alienated a greater percentage of Nigerians making them on-lookers in the economic and political affairs of their nation. Secondly, is the federal political system that has alienated the confederating units in the country and has brought about a sense of disconnect to a greater number of these units making it impossible for them to achieve their aspirations as it seems they are edged-out of the political equation.

On many occasions in recent decades, Nigeria seemed to have reached a crisis point in which a major rethink of its federal structure seemed unavoidable. Each time, however, it has muddled through with minor adjustments because the political process works for those who capture government offices at federal, state and local levels (Joseph, 2014, p.22).

It is for this reason that the deepening regional cleavages, pervasive political discontent, profound economic disparities and militant Islam can no longer be contained by a culture of political racketeering. The situation has given rise to group agitations, formation of ethnic based militias who start-off with genuine agitations but most often vie-off into criminal activities and insurgency. Crime and terror are deployed as means of achieving the group's goals and objectives sometimes and in others it occurs when the group loses focus and becomes a mere criminal gang.

Within the current political dispensation in Nigeria, we have had a lot of groups agitating for one thing or the other. These include: O' Odua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, (MASSOB), Niger Delta Volunteers Force, (NDVF), Egbesu Boys of Africa, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Bakassi Boys, Mambilla Militia Group, aka Ashana – No-case-To-Answer, Boko Haram e.t.c.

These are some of the militant groups that have risen and terrorized the country within the past 15 years. They always spring-up as a revolutionary group against the status quo, where corruption, inept leadership, ostentatious lifestyle, deprivation of the people and official sleaze have become common place. The Niger Delta Volunteers Force (NDVF) and other militia groups in the Niger Delta have a common and genuine cause of fighting the negligence of government and international oil companies that drain the oil in the Niger Delta and leave in their wake environmental degradation, poverty and disease. The Bakassi Boys rose up with the sole aim of fighting criminals in Aba and its environs. Even the then leader of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf gave corruption among other reasons for their terrorist acts.

With time these agitations metamorphose into full blown terrorism, insurgency and other criminal activities like murder and kidnapping. The militia groups in the Niger Delta with time became a gang of political motivated assassins and kidnapers. The Bakassi Boys, from fighting crime turned out to perpetuate crimes like murder, illegal detention etc. The case of Boko Haram which is the deadliest group has become an issue of global concern. Boko Haram is an Islamist fundamentalist group whose goal is to banish western civilization, particularly education and Islamize the entire nation. For about the ten years they have operated in the country they have killed not less than 10,000 persons including foreigners, destroyed various public institutions like police stations, military barracks, banks and scores of primary and secondary schools. They have razed down private homes and sacked whole villages especially in the three North-east states of Adamawa, Yobe and Borno. Their latest act that prompted world out-cry was the abduction of over 250 girls in April, this year (2014) while they were sitting for their Senior School Certificate Exams in Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State. These girls have not been rescued as their where about remains unknown for now.

So from fighting a genuine cause, motivated by political reasons, with the aim of overthrowing an unjust order, these groups deviate and become criminal gangs and terror groups that wreak havoc even on the people they set-out to protect and defend. As Adejoh Momoh observed about the Boko Haram " the group purportedly sprang up in the face of widespread injustice and corruption In Nigeria; unemployment, poverty and the ostentatious lifestyle of the top 1%. As things currently are, it is difficult to understand what the group fights for as it has embarked on the bombing of public places more associated with the bottom 99% (Momoh 2014 p. 37).

## CONCLUSION

In his book *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*, Karl Maier concluded that Nigeria is the largest failed state in the third world. At the turn of the century, Nigeria was home to approximately sixty million youths under the age of eighteen, seething with frustration over the lack of academic and job opportunities that just three decades before appeared to be within reach of their parents (Karl 2001, pp. xx-xxii). They represent Nigerian's equivalent to what South Africa calls the 'lost generation', that huge army of frustrated youth who lack the tools to face the demands of a modern economy .... The blame.... Falls squarely on the shoulders of the people's leaders - corrupt military dictators and their civilian accomplices who over the past quarter of a century have humbled a once proud nation through outright incompetence and greed (Odey 2003, p. 45).

This is the root of the criminal activities unsettling the nation and it has economic, social and political undertones. This paper has argued that solutions adopted to tackling crimes must take into consideration, the factors motivating them.

Economic crimes are poverty motivated and provisions of employment and work opportunities are the right step to curbing them. Socially and politically motivated crimes are induced by the prevailing corrupt atmosphere and the ostentations display of affluence which has become a culture in this country. While politically motivated crimes are means of revolting against a perceived unjust order, socially motivated crimes are means of conforming to an ugly situation which one is not in a position to confront and so takes advantage of by promoting the poor situation because it benefits him.

These cannot be adequately tackled by provision of employment as those who engage in them are more of those who are gainfully employed. Thus we see some bankers, pastors, politicians, top civil servants involve in ritual murder, kidnapping, child trafficking, oil-bunkering, drug trafficking e.t.c. The young man who pushes drugs or kidnaps a person and makes millions of naira cannot abandon his criminal activities for jobs that pay a paltry 18,000 naira minimum wage for the entire month.

Crimes of this nature cannot be tackled like economic crimes because the principal actors, the unseen hands propelling them are not the dregs of the society but millionaires and billionaires who have the means and connection. Terrorism for instance is a capital intensive venture. Agreeing with this view, Okoro Sylvanus submitted that Terrorism has a different motivation away from other criminal acts. Particularly, it does not thrive on grounds of poverty rather it requires billions to thrive and be sustained (Okoro 2012, p. 4).

The solution to this drift to state of anarchy lies in good leadership propelled by those who will first of all purge themselves of greed and vanities; a leadership that eschews and fights corruption, ostentatious and flagrant display of wealth. It requires a total commitment to fight crime of all forms including terror by strengthening law enforcement and criminal justice system. It requires strong institutions devoid of strong men. As noted by (Oyeniya, 2007, p. 45) the key challenge facing the Nigeria state is the absence of strong institutions capable of political and economic empowerment, social justice development, creative institutional designs and capacity building. These values, if they could be instituted in earnest, would undermine the root causes of terrorism and guarantee stability and security in the long run. The right measures must be urgently put in place because right now the nation is seating on a time bomb. When an American intelligence expert, John Negropointe predicted that Nigeria will not last beyond 2015, he had foreseen the insurgency, terrorism and the highly tensed political atmosphere the country is currently witnessing. Right now Nigeria has only about a year left to avert the looming catastrophe or plunge head-long into it.

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