

## Approaching Security in a Religiously-Divided Nation: The Current Nigerian Situation

Nneka Ifeoma Okafor & Christian Nnabuike Onoja\*  
Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

\*Corresponding author: christian.onoja@unn.edu.ng.

### Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to assess the security situation in Nigerian socio-political atmosphere within religious lines. The method used in this research paper is purely philosophical which comprises phenomenological, analytical and evaluative methods. The data used are gathered from journals, books, newspapers and the internet. It seems true to hold that one of the main threats to the nation's unity and development is insecurity of lives and properties. Almost every part of the nation, especially in the North, is being ravaged by insecurity in an unimaginable proportion. There are unprecedented occasions of wanton killings and kidnappings across the country allegedly orchestrated by bandits and terrorists. But there is high level of intelligent speculation that this gory situation seems to be spurred by religion and religious sentiments. The government who should be at the vanguards of the fight against insecurity seems inert or insensitive. This could be explained by the fact that those who are the victims of this mayhem seem to come from a certain region of religious profession—and so seem outside the care of the government. The paper concludes that for there to an improved security situation, the nation has to adopt a perspective which should accommodate every religion. When there is a religious inclusivistic approach across the nation with an air of secularism, then the security problem fueled by diversity in religion shall be arrested.*

Keywords: Security, Religion, Diversity, Violence, Inclusivism, Terrorism, Secularism.

### Introduction

This paper is set to address the security situation in Nigeria. This is because security is at the heart of every nation without which there will be no peace, unity and progress. In Global Terrorism Index published by Institute for Economic and Peace (IEP) (2021), Nigeria is the third most terrorized country in the world, after Afghanistan and Iraq. The implication of this is that Nigeria is being ravaged by insecurity in an unimaginable and alarming proportion. The fate of the country, since the last 10 years, has been in the hands of Boko Haram insurgents. On daily basis, the statistics of the mayhem that these “unholy” citizens of the land commit continue to skyrocket. It also challenges the security situation that the actions of the bandits within the few years have added to the worry and fear that pervade the poor masses. But it is not only the poor masses that are the victims. Affluent members of the nation, including politicians have also “benefited” from the worrisome situation. It is the sole responsibility of the government, which is enshrined in the constitution, to guarantee the security of its subjects. However, the case of present Nigerian government

makes the above claim challenging and questionable. It is quite correct that the government has been making conscientious efforts to combat insecurity. However, such approaches she undertakes are ineffective, largely because the root cause of the problem has not been unearthed. In our considered opinion, and as this paper demonstrates, the root cause of the insecurity situation is largely religious. Any measure distilled by the government should take the phenomenon of religion seriously.

In addition, the current agitation for secession and disintegration taking place across the country seems to be motivated by the pervasive insecurity. The two religions— Islam and Christianity—practiced mainly in the North and South respectively seem to be incompatible. Therefore, there is speculation that the current insecurity that the country suffers is religiously inclined. In the Northern part of the country, for instance, those who are majorly the victims of this situation largely come from one religious persuasion (Egwu, 2020; Martin, 2021). Martin (2021) reports that at least 3, 462 Christians were killed in the first 200 days of 2021. Since January 2021, close to 300 churches have been attacked, closed or destroyed. It becomes worrisome again that these people may feel that they are not under the care of the government. However, this is not to claim that the Muslims are not also victims of insecurity. In 2001, Boko Haram began as a mere peaceful Islamic splinter group in the north. They only turned violent in 2009 when their leader Mohammed Yusuf was extra-judicially killed by the Nigerian Police. In seeking revenge, their target was the Police, the military and the local politicians who were all Muslims. Initially, the war was against Muslims who were not considered by the group to be all that orthodox (Adamolekun, 2013).

Worthy of note is that the insecurity situation to a large extent impedes the level of development and economic growth in the country. And so the need to curtail the menace is of paramount importance. Almost all the resources which should be channeled towards development are used in the fight against terrorism, insurgency and banditry. In this paper, we move to assess the security situation, particularly along religious lines. We hold that most insecurity challenges bedeviling the country are as a result of differences in religious practices. The paper is divided into five sections after the introduction. In section one, we exposed the concept of security and then analyzed the security situation in the country. In line with the security situation, in section two, we paid close attention to the operations of the Boko Haram insurgents and that of the bandits. Section three looked at the problem of religious diversity and the challenge it poses to the unity of the country. In section four we examined critically the actions of the government in its attempt to curb the ugly situation. The final and section five was dedicated to distilling well-argued panacea for the problem of insecurity. The paper concludes that for there to be peace, development and general sense of security in the country, there should be the application of religious inclusivism coupled with religious secularism, good and responsible leadership and citizenship across the nation.

### **Literature Review on Security and Security Situation in Nigeria**

The word security is but an all-encompassing terminology. It has a varied meaning depending on the context of application. The term security could mean food security, financial security, personal security, energy security, environmental security, cyber security,

national security. In the opinion of Nnoli (2006, p.1) [national] security is reducible to any activity which a state undertakes for its own benefit. He highlights range of activities which a state embarks on for the sake of fostering security: “in the name of security, great empires have been founded and relentlessly expanded, hegemonic wars have been waged, economic self-sufficiency has been sought after, ... great religious and ideological crusades have been launched.” He might be right if we see security from the angle that a nation which is trying to ward off enemies is being security conscious *externally* and a nation which is fighting disintegration, secession; to maintain peace is being security conscious *internally*. For the purpose of this paper, the word security would be limited to national security whose meaning also encompasses all the other forms of security (Nnoli, 2006, p.1). According Nosiri & Ohazurike (2016, p.216), national security covers such areas like economic security, food security, personal security, community security political security, etc. In the course of this research work, the terms security and national security would be used interchangeably. What is then security?

Security is variously taken to be a state of being secure which readily translates to freedom from danger, poverty, threat, etc. Hornby (1995) as cited by Afolabi (2016, p. 1) takes security to mean protection which readily connotes all the activities involved in protecting a country, building or person against attack, danger, etc. It also means defence of a country—a definition which inclined us to equate security with national security. The reason is that it is generally the sole duty and responsibility of a nation to provide all forms of security to the masses. National security involves a national government working autonomously to protect its citizens from threats. We are also committed to the view that security is a question of “physical survival.” This is exemplified by the very fact that a country which is not able to provide for the sustenance of its citizens cannot be said to be secured. Most times, insecurity situations escalate simply because the masses do not feel that the chances of survival are anywhere obtainable. They may take laws into their hand thereby reducing the scenario to “survival of the fittest”. Basically, it is either they fight the government or fight themselves, that is a question of “war of all against all.” Again, where there is no chance of survival, there is no chance of development. This is mainly because for a country to be developed, it is demonstrable that it has the wherewithal of projecting the survival of its citizens. The difference between developed countries and undeveloped ones is that the chances of survival are higher in the former than in the latter. In the views of Nnoli (2006, p.8) security is closely related to the outcome as well as the cause of development and good governance. All the same, Omede & Omede (2015, p.120) opine that national security is a premise for national economic growth and development. This is because, according to them, peaceful nations attract foreign investors while the domestic investors freely operate the economy with little or no tensions and apprehensions. The essence of this point is to show that security is but an all-encompassing phenomenon. When we remove security, a nation collapses. A critical reflection on what is happening now in Nigeria is a revelation that security is at the centre of governance. It is the life blood of a working, developed nation.

In Nigeria, national security has been degrading and this has posed a threat to the unity of the nation. In the North East, we have terrorism and insurgency ravaging the nation; in the south we have other sorts of illegal activities like kidnapping, banditry etc. which make life uninhabitable for the poor masses. It is bemoaning to say that Nigerian security situation is at its worst. Here we look critically at terrorism and banditry which we believe are the two major indices of insecurity. Included in this indices, but offshoot of the above two, are kidnapping, communal clashes etc. Again, according to Egbefo (2016, p.14), “the present state of security crisis in Nigeria is very worrisome. By its very composition and nature, the Nigerian nation-state seems to be prone to some forms of insecurity, assassination, ritual killings, armed robbery, pen robbery, kidnapping, ethno-religious violence, suicide bombings, arsons, floods, food shortage, unemployment, illiteracy, ignorance, poor or bad leadership.” In the views of Walter Lippman, a nation is said to be secured if and only if it is not in any situation of losing its core values, lives and properties of the citizens including its liberty and sovereignty. This sort of definition makes it clear why security is the sole responsibility of the government for the very fact that it recognizes one of the dominant characteristics of the government, namely, sovereignty. In this light, therefore, national security requires maintaining the survival of the nation-state through the use of economic, military and political power and the exercise of diplomacy. The definition of security given by the former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo makes Lippman’s view more eloquent. According the statesman, the objective of Nigerian national security is to strengthen the Federal Republic of Nigeria, advance her interest and objectives, to contain instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth and improve the welfare and wellbeing and quality of life of the citizenry. But has this objective been achieved? The answer is a resounding no, otherwise, the need for and urgency of this paper wouldn’t have arisen. We now turn to what we have identified as the core indices of national insecurity.

### **Terrorism, Banditry and other indices of Insecurity**

There are many causes of insecurity in Nigeria. However, terrorism and banditry appear to be most prominent and overwhelming. This sort of stand is compatible with the spirit of this research which tends to depicts insecurity as being spurred by religious sentimentality. The terms terrorism and insurgency are different but often times most authors use them interchangeably. Terrorism is variously taken to be a military strategy exploited by a certain group of people by changing a country’s political situation through spreading of fear with the purpose of achieving their group interest (Yuval Harari, 2018). For Hornby (2000) as cited by Omede and Omede (2015), terrorism is the use of violent action in order to achieve political aims or force a government to act. It is a tactic and strategy, a crime and a holy duty, a justified reaction to oppression and inexcusable abomination (Omede & Omede, 2015, p.121). To the perpetrators of acts of terrorism, terrorism is a “legitimate” act for achieving a *legitimate* end. There are nine factors which Omede and Omede (2015) strongly believe characterize terrorist activities. However, only four will be highlighted here since others seem subsumed under them. They include, among others, that terrorism involves: 1) the use

of unlawful violence with the disposition that violence would usher in a better system; 2) the use of unlawful and assorted dangerous weapons; 3) goals that might be political, religious or ideological; and 4) deriving financial and military supports from national and international loyalists.

In Nigeria, when the word “terrorism” is mentioned, what readily comes to mind is the Boko Haram sect in the North partly because it fulfils all the four conditions outlined above and it is the root cause of insecurity in the region. It defeats one’s imagination that Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a secessionist movement, could be proscribed and labeled a terrorist organization in 2017. However, the speculation was that it was a political ploy devised by the state to silence the quest for secession. That being the case, we think that it is a “category mistake” to see IPOB or any other secessionist group as a terrorist organization simply because they possess none of the (four) indices outlined above as defining terrorism. Reacting to the above characteristics of terrorism, we observe that the first suffers from “misplaced accent.” This is because it makes a tacit distinction between “lawful” violence and “unlawful” violence. When is “violence” said to be lawful and when is it said to be unlawful? We hold that violence ceases to be violence if it is “lawful”. After all, to be lawful means to be recognized and appealing to both the government and the people. To modify it we identify terrorism as the use of violence in their target, wherein violence is “the use of power to harm another, whatever form it takes” (Afolabi, 2016, p.24). Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations are reputed to use violence in carrying out their dastardly act. Now, with respect to their goals, Boko Haram’s own tends to be less political. In their agitations, there is no clear political demand they advance. Here one may argue that their goals are religious cum ideological. For instance, the literal interpretation of Boko Haram is that western education is evil (Udounwa, 2013, p.2). It seems plausible to argue that once education is effaced in the country, then their mission is achieved and there would be no more terrorism. The idea is that western education is dangerous to their core Islamic teaching and when it is out of the way, they would be able to freely enthrone Islamic religion. Their target, in any form, is to Islamize the country at the cost of her security (Umaru, 2013). With respect to the last characteristic, it is widely argued that the insurgents have “sponsors” across the nation and beyond (Umaru, 2013; Idris, 2021). If this is not the case, why is it that these unscrupulous fellows operate at levels that overcome the might of the Nigerian government? It would be possible that those who sponsor them share the same ideology with them.

In his reflection on terrorism, Yuval Harari (2018) observes that terrorism by its very nature is a “puny matter.” His general claim is that the terrorists employ a formidable strategy, namely creation of unnecessary fear across the people, which tends to make their place in the society quite prominent. By calling terrorism a puny matter, one may be inclined to hold that Harari seems to be trivializing a phenomenon that has held and is still holding the Nigerian nation hostage for a good number of years now. Though he uses facts and figures to establish that the terrorists achieve less than what is projected on the media and the fear they spread, we think he under-represents the heavy impacts these fellows have caused particularly in Nigeria. He maintains that the atrocities and injuries inflicted on us by the

terrorists are far less than the ones caused by some natural and other man-induced disasters. According to him, we are much more provoked and agitated at the news of terrorist attacks that kill less number of people and “cannot inflict much material damage on their enemies” than the news of accidents or outbreak of disease that kill greater number. For instance, he observes that:

Since 11 September 2001, every year terrorists have killed about fifty people in the European Union, about ten people in the USA, about seven people in China and up to 25,000 people globally (mostly in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria). In contrast, each year, traffic accidents kill about 80, 000 Europeans, 40, 000 Americans, 270, 000 Chinese, and 1.25 million people altogether. Diabetes and high sugar levels kill up to 3.5 million people annually while air pollution kills about 7 million people (Harari 2018).

Harari’s insistence is that people fear terrorism more than sugar, and governments tend to lose elections because of “sporadic terror attacks” rather than because of chronic air pollution. He argues that terrorism does less harm than other problems. For him, “terrorism is a military strategy that hopes to change the political situation by spreading fear rather than by causing material damage. The operating word here is “fear,” hence his injunction, “don’t panic” (Harari, 2018).

However cogent Harari’s articulation is, one can fault his line of reasoning in three ways, and as it appertains to Nigerian security situation. First, one may hold that terrorism is one that is mostly politically and religiously motivated and so the government has greater level of control over it. Accidents and diseases are less in governmental control as compared to insurgency. Second, that terrorists can kill more than accidents and diabetes if they have the chance, and sometimes they do. Third, that in case of Nigeria, terrorism has affected the security situation and put the development of the country on hold. The fear and the material damage are almost equal. Since 2013, Boko Haram has maintained high operational tempo and carried out kidnappings, killings, bombing, and other forms of violent attacks on the Nigerian populace (Country Reports on Terrorism, 2013). An estimated number up to 36, 000 persons have been killed by the insurgents since they started in 2009 (Obiezu, 2021). Thousands of people have also been displaced. Our argument here, as against Harari’s, is that terrorism is as great and bemoaning a matter as the trouble it has caused globally and particularly in Nigeria.

Banditry is a type of crime that is carried out by a certain group of people with little to no identity which mostly involves threat and use of violence. Their crimes range from extortion, robbery, kidnapping and murder. Though banditry is as old as the emergence of criminal activities among humanity, it is a recent phenomenon in Nigerian insecurity parlance. About six to seven years ago, banditry has not gained popularity as it has this time. According to Idris (2021), the recent spate of banditry-related violence began in 2014 with cattle rustling activity. But the matter took an unprecedented dimension in early 2016 when the bandits started killing local miners in Zamfara rural areas. At present, the attacks affect the entire North West region, if not the entire nation. The tragedy caused by these bandits are

innumerable, including the massacre of thousands of villagers, raping of women, villages being destroyed and deserted, farm produce being destroyed, property being stolen, and civilians having ransom to pay for the kidnap of their relations. The activities that characterize it are not far removed from those of insurgency. The only thing remarkable about them is that they do not have identity and do not have organized group like terrorists (Adelakun, 2021). However, speculation has it that banditry is a twin brother to insurgency for the very reason that their operation seems motivated by religious interests. Again, they carry their atrocities in the bush and in the rural villages and so the bandits might be cattle herders in disguise. The spate of their operations has contributed tremendously to insecurity situation in the nation. For instance, since their attacks are targeted mostly at farmers, nobody is courageous enough to farm, and this has contributed to the astronomical increase in prices of goods—thereby leading to food insecurity.

Apart from Boko Haram insurgency and banditry, other indices that heighten insecurity in Nigeria include the activities of other ethnic militias such as the Niger Delta Militias in South-South and the recent operation of the “unknown gun men” in the South-East. These also take up such activities like kidnapping, arson, rape, armed robbery, ritual killings, etc. According to Njoku (2019), the Middle Belt region of Nigeria too has encountered prolonged violent clashes between the predominantly Christian farmers and the mostly Muslim cattle herders. The main contention of the conflicts is the dispute over access and rights to land and water resources. These conflicts are not necessarily new; they took a frequent and violent dimension in 2015. In 2018, more than 2,000 people were killed. The dispute basically revolves around ethnic and religious tensions.

### **Religious Diversity and Insecurity in Nigeria**

Many people largely hold that the out-of-control nature of insecurity in Nigeria has some religious undertone (Omede & Omede 2015; Afolabi 2016; Egbefo 2016; Williams 2018). What informs them to hold this as an article of faith is that those who carry out terrorism and banditry, including kidnapping and other forms of insecurity-related acts, seem largely drawn from one religion. Whereas those who fall victims of this mayhem are from an entirely different religion. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation (Afolabi, 2016; Okonjo-Iweala, 2018; Akah & Ajah, 2019) and the constitution, in recognition thereof, gives everybody the freedom of religion and worship. It becomes worrisome why Nigeria is being torpedoed by religion and religious practices. According to Seyi Awofeso as cited by Odey (2000, p.7), “history completed its conspiracy on Nigeria by giving her two world religions: Christianity in the South and Islam in the North.” According to Odey, these two religions are disparate in that while Christianity is “progressive” as it looks up to New York, London and Rome; Islam is rather “static” and looks up to Sudan, Egypt and Mecca. The assumption here is that while a Christian country fosters development, a Muslim one retards it. But this is absolutely false because most purely Islamic countries are developed countries. Think of United Arab Emirates; think of Turkey; think of Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc. Apart from these two dominant religions in Nigeria, there are other forms of religious practices such as paganism or African Traditional Religion (Omede & Omede, 2015; Akah & Ajah, 2019). (Akah and Ajah prefer to designate the latter as “Tribal Religions”. Their argument for

this is that there was no single [traditional] religion that was strictly practiced by all Africans; what obtained was a certain tribe practicing a given religion/ritual as it pleased them.) But the impact and place of Christianity and Islam especially in the politics of the country have made their place much more prominent than the rest. At any rate, the complexity of the country is mainly religious than geographical (Okojo-Iweala, 2018, p.xvi). According to Okojo-Iweala, the country is divided between Muslims and Christians. While the northern region is occupied by Muslim with “an important Christian minority,” the south is predominantly Christian with Muslims as the minority.

Given that religion is the main cause of socio-political problems in Nigeria, Odey (2000, p.17) has asked very pungent, penetrating and pertinent questions including but not limited to: which religion is causing so much pain for Nigeria? Which religion is using God’s name to cause mayhem and spill blood in this country? Which religion is responsible for breeding intolerant and narrow-minded lunatics who have neither respect for other religions nor for the sanctity of human life? Generally, which religion causes Nigeria sundry socio-political problems? Who fights for God in the name of religion? To an average Nigerian who is undergoing any form of distress as a result of the pervasive insecurity, somewhere in Southern Kaduna, Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba and Benue, etc., the answer is very easy and relatively straightforward. But we do not consider any religion as the answer to these questions without deep analysis.

The ultimate aim of every religion is reverence to and worship of the God. Every religion propagates peace, unity, and the spirit of brotherhood and where these are lacking among the believers, “the aim of religion is defeated” (Odey, 2000, p.17). In addition, all religions make the claim of advocating peace and harmonious existence. Even the literal meaning of Islam is “peace”. If this is the case, and which is entrenched in their religious dogmas, then it is wrong to think that the answer to the above questions is Islam. Christianity too is known for teaching peace: *when you are struck on the right cheek, turn the left cheek*. Religion is expected to be an avenue of unity between man and God, and between man and his fellow man. But this is vastly not the case in Nigeria because religion is used to justify man’s unity with God and his animosity with his fellow man. According to Umar (2013), religious sentiments have been used to justify almost all situations in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, one may be forced to ask why religion is a problem in Nigeria. Why is it a means through which atrocities are committed? These questions take us back to the previous ones that Odey asked. One reply is that in Nigeria, political appointments are made based on religious affiliation not on the basis of meritocracy and the vaunted “federal character”. Another related response is that security is meant for a certain religious group, not all Nigerians. Even the Nigerian civil war has more religious undertone than politico-economic. According to Akah & Ajah (2019, p.166), most of the religion-induced destructions of lives and property in Nigeria take place in the northern part of the country which is dominated by the Muslim. It is as a result of this that most people point out that Muslim is the religion which seems to answer the above questions (Odey, 2000). However, this is far from the truth because “here in Nigeria [and in other places, like the US], we can honestly point to the lives of many devout



Muslims who are peace-loving men that will leave no stone unturned to ensure that Nigerians live in peace and harmony as far as religion is concerned” (Odey, 2000, p.18). For instance, in 1987, the then military governor of Kaduna State, Abubakar Umar, reacting to the occasions of religious violence and crisis in the state, was reputed to have said: “we are fully aware of the fact that we are living in a society that is not only multi-cultural and multi-linguistic but which is also multi-religious. Consequently, it becomes absolutely imperative for people to exercise some ‘religious tolerance’ when dealing with one another. In effect, I have said it on numerous occasions in the past and I will repeat it now that there is no religion that I know of in this world that advocates violence.... I feel ashamed to associate myself with ‘Muslims’ who perpetrate this havoc.” (Odey 2000, p.45, emphasis is mine). There are other Muslims who do condemn the excesses of “Muslims” that kill in the name of religion. Muhammed Buhari during his regime as the military head of state has told Nigerians that Nigeria is a country for all Nigerians and nobody has the moral justifiability to deprive another the right to live in Nigeria. This sort of position makes it plausible that there is no part of Islamic teaching that encourages the use of violence (even in propagation of its message of peace).

However, despite these peace-loving Muslim faithful, there is an intelligent speculation that some people “operating under the aegis of Islam have caused pain for this nation and for the non-Muslim population whom they brand as *infidels* that must either be converted or killed” (Odey, 2000). These are fanatical or extreme Muslim faithful who have been indoctrinated to believe that the more they kill non-Muslims, the nearer they are to heaven. The world, for them, is divided into two: you are either a Muslim or you are not (Yuval, 2018). Not to be a Muslim is to have signed one’s death warrant. One begins to imagine which verse of the Quran these “Muslims” get such teaching from that spurs them to relish the spilling of blood for religious purposes.

The official name of Boko Haram is “Jama’atu Ahl As-Sunna Li-D’ awati Wal-Jihad.” This in Arabic translates to “People committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teaching and Jihad” (Umaru, 2013; Udounwa 2013). The intention of this group is predominantly to carry out a holy war (Jihad) and have Nigeria Islamized. They believe in the union of state and religion and so they advocate making Nigeria an Islamic state that should be administered by Shari’ah. This is mainly the reason it is correct to reason that they are not pursuing any political goal but religious one. In their very disposition, they do not accommodate any thought for secularism. For them, “the imposition of secularity amounts to a cultural affront and an attempt to relegate Muslims to the position of second-class citizens” (Umar 2013, p. 24). If this is the mission of this sect, one may be inclined to ask if the same hold for the bandits that have sent cold chilled down the spine of the average Nigerians.

We have succeeded in demonstrating that the division of the Nigeria is more religious than geographical. The division is between Christians (and other religious persuasions) and the Muslims across the nation. As we shall see in the section following, on the role of the government, we hold that why these agents of insecurity have not been defeated is that the quest to Islamize the country may not likely be limited to the intentions of the terrorists and

the bandits. At any rate, with respect to the “success” of their operation, they may have strong “political” backup.

### **The Nigerian Government and Insecurity**

In section one, we stated that it is the sole responsibility of the government to bring about national security. The deep question that demands honest answer is whether the government is actually “responsible” enough. If yes, is the responsibility all-encompassing? Are there some citizens of the country who are to enjoy the care of the government while others are not? A little but engaging reflection will show that the government has been putting so much efforts to curb the menace, but the efforts are inadequate since insecurity is still the order of the day. We merely reiterate that religion is a dominant contributing factor to the insecurity situation. This is because, the present Nigerian government seems to be dominated by one religion, Islam; when stretched again, by one region—i.e., the North. It was a shock that in the 1990’s, one of the tensions that punctuated Babangida’s administration was a “mop-up exercise” where all his service chiefs were Muslims. In a reaction, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Northern Zone, wrote: “since the Babangida Administration came to power, it has unashamedly and in utter attempt for national unity manifested its naked discriminatory religious posture through overt and covert acts of patronage and preference for Islamic religion” (Odey 2000, p.35). In the present Buhari’s regime, almost a similar incident takes place. This is why it is held that the Buhari’s regime lacks political inclusion (Yahaya, 2018). The assumption is that those who suffer from the ills of insecurity are majorly the Christians. For instance, Abankula (2021) writes that International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law reported that within a space of 18 months, 620 Christians were killed in Southern Kaduna by mostly armed Fulani herdsmen. An estimated 3, 462 Christians have been killed by Nigerian Jihadists, Fulani herdsmen and *state actors*, across the country but mostly in Kaduna, Taraba and Benue, including Adamawa, Yobe, Niger and Zamfara States. Again, of all the 110 school girls that were abducted in Dapchi in Yobe State on 19 February 2018, Leah Sharibu is still in the custody of Boko Haram insurgents for the very reason that she refused to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Muslim. The Fulani cattle herders have become not only prominent but also a nightmare in the present Nigerian nation. It is often times held that the armed Fulani herdsmen are the same as the bandits. They kill, maim, rape, and burn down people’s residence. It is also held that the bandits are Boko Haram members in another form but with the same agenda. While Boko Haram killed over 4000 Christians in 2014, the Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen accounted for 1,229 Christian deaths (Abankula 2021).

Why has insecurity orchestrated by banditry, insurgency and other indices, not been arrested by the State? Who are the sponsors of these callous men that kill indiscriminately all in the name of religion? Omede & Omede (2015, p.124, italics is mine) point out that continued religious crises are as a result of religious intolerance, the *weakness of government* to provide effective security as well as her *inability* to follow due process in identifying and punishing culprits. According to Umaru (2013: 2) given the global jihadist movement, there is the likelihood that Boko Haram might be receiving support from other jihadist movements

in Africa and elsewhere. This brings into light an observation made by Nosiri & Ohazurike (2016, p.215) that the ineffective control and management of Nigeria's national border plays enormous role to the exacerbation of insecurity situation. In their opinion, the infiltration of terrorists is a corollary of poor border security. This is because some Boko Haram members come from other neighbouring countries of Chad, Cameroon and Niger. With respect to border security, the government has to be blamed for the irrepressible operations of the insurgents. Again, a question which hangs on the lips of every well-meaning Nigerian is who provides arms to these Jihadists and herdsmen? And why is it that the government does not want to disarm them? Onuoha, Okafor and Femi-Adedayo (2021) observed that porosity of borders and *complicity of state actors* facilitate their access to arms and ammunition. According to Idris Mohamed (2021), some have even accused the government of sponsoring insecurity indirectly by paying ransoms to kidnappers of school children in the North. According to this perspective, a government serious about tackling the issue would not pay any money to criminal-armed groups in the form of ransom for kidnappings. If the accusation is true, then we return to our initial hold that those who sponsor terrorism and banditry might likely have the same agenda. The incidence and prevalence of rural banditry in northwest Nigeria raises a fundamental question about the government's ability to govern effectively. The state security machinery has so far failed to tackle the scourge of banditry. This failure stems from a lack of political will and operational challenges (Okoli, 2019). In addition, it could be that the government is able but not willing. Why should government be using public treasury to be paying bandits and kidnapping? Is it to deter or to encourage them? At any rate, there is an *epistemological gap* between the government's agenda and the entire populace.

### **Beyond Religious Tolerance and Inclusivism: Towards a Solution**

The solution to the problem of insecurity in Nigeria is thorny but not impossible to come by. We hold that the solution does not need a peripheral measure; hence, we first identified the root cause which in our considered opinion is "religion". Solutions regarding the problem of insecurity orchestrated by religious diversity have been strong advocacy for "mutual tolerance", "religious tolerance" or "religious dialogue" (Nwanaju 2003, 2012; Adamolekun 2013; Ogbuehi 2016; Sulaiman 2016). We do not subscribe to the framework upon which "tolerance" is anchored. To tolerate someone or something roughly means to accept or allow it inasmuch as you do not agree with it or it is annoying to you. In this context, one would understand religious tolerance as the ability or willingness to allow the existence of a system of belief that you do not like or you do not agree with because it is not compatible with yours. We do not believe that there is any religion which should be *tolerated* because no religion is superior to the other (Akah & Ajah, 2019).

The principle of religious inclusivism has it that there are different religions and different approaches to the worship of the Supreme Being and all the approaches are true. This principle is different from religious exclusivism which is the view that there is only one God and one way to him. This one way could be Islam or Christianity or Buddhism. What this theory upholds is that if Islam is the true way, then all other religions are wrong and need to be disbanded. But this is not true; there is no *one* way to God. Thus, we advance that we hold

on to religious *inclusivism* not tolerance. This can be achieved when we teach our faithful in their respective worship places that their practice of religion should recognize the practices of other religions. At any rate there is no one way to the Supreme Being. God, whatever name one chooses to call him, is a personal being, capable of revealing himself in different ways. If this approach is adopted, it will solve the problem emanating from religious diversity. However, its ideal may be far less accommodating by every religion. In this wise, we also hold on to religious secularism as the more modest approach.

Secularism is erroneously understood as absence or negation of religion. In this understanding, secular people were thought to be atheists. However, according to Harari (2018) "secularism is a very positive and active world view which is defined by a coherent code of values rather than by opposition to this or that religion." Secularism is happy and comfortable with "multiple hybrid identities." He then highlights six ethical codes or ideals which define the spirit of secularism: truth, compassion, equality, freedom, courage and responsibility. He acknowledges that these principles are not exclusive of secularism because they are upheld by other religions of the world; however, what is remarkable about secularism is its disposition to question the "truth" which other religions may hold as absolute; and its insistence on the separation of religion from state control. To achieve this, Akah and Ajah (2019, p.175) advance for "responsible leadership and citizenship".

A careful reading of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended in 2012) would reveal that Nigeria is a pronounced secular country. For instance, in section 38, it states that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief." The implications of this are that: Nigeria has no state religion to which every Nigerian must profess; no religion in the country should force its creed on non-adherents and; no one who decides to change from one religion to the other should be mistreated (Akah & Ajah, 2019, p.169). These authors observe something quite fundamental. According to them, "the constitution is conspicuously silent on the punishment to be meted to anyone or group who goes against these dictates..." (169). In their very opinion, this silence is a lack and the root cause of the success of religious crises that taunt the country.

From the foregoing, we make the claim that Nigeria should amend the part of the constitution bordering on freedom of religion with reference to the nature of punishment to be meted to anybody that flouts the provision of the constitution. In the meantime, the government should arrest and prosecute anybody who is caught in the acts of terrorism, banditry and other security-related operations. What the government does by reintegrating "repentant Boko Haram members" into the society is counterproductive. Let the law take its course.

All the same, we hope that insecurity can be solved if the government strengthens border security which will stop the infiltration of terrorists from the neighboring countries and also smuggling of arms into the country.

### **Conclusion**

Security situation in present-day Nigeria is one that should bother every well-meaning Nigeria. Not only that the country is experiencing retrogression and underdevelopment, but

also the unity of the country is being challenged to greater extent by this menace. The cry for secession is one borne out of the growing helplessness that the government cannot protect the lives of the citizen. In trying to answer the question as to the “success” and escalation of terrorism, banditry and other insecurity-related activities, we stumbled upon the imagination that religion is at the center of this all.

Nigeria is a multi-religious and a “religiously intoxicated” country. But it is disheartening to realize that the more religious we are the more amoral we become. In our attempt to proffer a lasting solution to the problem of religious diversity, we placed religious inclusivism side by side with secularism. We did this on purpose. We feared that secularism might be understood as meaning absence of religion. But we do not wish to hold that Nigeria can be a “religious-less” country—this is by its very nature is an impossibility. Our position is that where inclusivism fails, secularism would offer the immediate alternative. They are not even exclusive—a thorough going religious person could be a good secularist once he upholds the principle of truth, compassion, courage, equality, responsibility, freedom, among others. We equally noted that these principles above all need responsible leadership and citizenship. Apart from solving the problem of insecurity through the propagation of inclusivism and secularism across the nation, we identify some other measures through which an end to insecurity can be achieved. It is our conceived opinion that border security should be strengthened to avert the infiltration of terrorists from the neighbouring countries into Nigeria. It will also checkmate the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the country. Above all, those who are caught in the act of terrorism, banditry and religious violence of any kind should be made to face the law squarely.

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