

When Fear Becomes an Industry

By Okiwelu Azed P

There comes a point when a nation's greatest tragedy is no longer the violence itself but the normalization of that violence.

Nigeria appears to have reached that point. Over the years, insecurity has remained one of the country's most persistent crises. Terrorists, bandits, kidnappers and other violent criminal groups continue to operate with disturbing audacity. They attack communities, occupy forests, abduct schoolchildren, impose levies on rural populations and sometimes communicate their demands with a confidence that suggests they have little fear of the state. In some instances, negotiations with these groups have left many Nigerians wondering whether criminals now command an influence that should belong only to government. This painful reality raises difficult but unavoidable questions. How does a country with one of Africa's largest armed forces and annual defense budgets running into trillions of naira continue to struggle against criminal groups that should ordinarily possess neither the resources nor the organization to challenge the authority of the state? Why do these violent organizations continue to expand despite repeated assurances that they have been degraded?

Why are those responsible for massacres and kidnappings of innocent citizens sometimes described in conciliatory language as 'our brothers' rather than being treated simply as enemies of the Nigerian people?

These are uncomfortable questions but they are legitimate questions. When they remain unanswered, suspicion flourishes. Many Nigerians have come to wonder whether insecurity is merely a national challenge or whether powerful interests have found ways to profit from its persistence. While there is no conclusive evidence that insecurity is deliberately sustained as state policy, the perception refuses to disappear because too many people appear to benefit while ordinary citizens continue to suffer and die. Whether through corruption, institutional failure or vested interests, the impression has steadily grown that insecurity has evolved into an ecosystem from which political and economic gains are extracted. Every prolonged crisis creates beneficiaries. There are persistent concerns that insecurity has become a convenient cover for the illegal exploitation of Nigeria's vast mineral wealth. Criminal violence often forces communities to abandon their ancestral lands, leaving mineral-rich areas vulnerable to illegal mining. While national attention is fixed on kidnappings and killings, valuable natural resources may be extracted outside lawful regulatory processes, depriving the nation of legitimate revenue while enriching criminal networks and their collaborators. The security sector itself has not escaped public scrutiny. Over the years, allegations of diversion of defense funds, procurement irregularities and obsolete or inadequate military equipment have repeatedly surfaced in public discourse. Whenever resources meant for the welfare and equipment of security personnel are compromised, the consequences extend far beyond financial misconduct. They weaken the fighting capacity of those who daily confront heavily armed criminals and ultimately place both security personnel and innocent civilians at greater risk.

Politically, prolonged insecurity also creates incentives that deserve closer examination. Escalating violence often leads to increased security votes, emergency expenditure, foreign assistance and additional borrowing. Such measures may be justified during genuine national emergencies but they must be accompanied by transparency,

accountability and measurable results. Otherwise, citizens are left with the painful impression that while insecurity continues to worsen, public expenditure continues to rise without corresponding improvements in their safety.

Beyond criminality lies another challenge that demands careful attention: violent extremist movements seeking to impose ideological or religious agendas through force. Across parts of the Sahel, governments continue to confront armed groups driven by extremist interpretations of religion. Nigeria must remain vigilant against every attempt to undermine its constitutional order through violence or intimidation. At the same time, that vigilance must never become an excuse to stigmatize entire religious communities. Criminals must be identified by their crimes, not by the faith they falsely claim to represent. The Constitution guarantees every Nigerian the freedom to practice religion peacefully and that principle must remain inviolable.

Ultimately, the greatest victims of this vicious ecosystem are ordinary

Nigerians. Farmers abandon their fields for fear of abduction. Children struggle to learn in environments overshadowed by violence. Travelers pray simply to reach their destinations alive. Families mourn loved ones while businesses collapse and communities empty. Women suffer unspeakable abuses and countless innocent lives are cut short. Every day insecurity persists, another Nigerian pays the price. The consequences extend far beyond the battlefield. Investment declines. Agricultural production suffers. Livelihoods disappear. Communities become displaced and national unity is steadily weakened. Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that those who pay the highest price receive the smallest reward: the farmer who can no longer cultivate his land, the student whose education is interrupted by fear, the trader whose business collapses, the security officer risking life with inadequate equipment and the child who grows up believing that fear is simply another part of

citizenship. These are the casualties whose names rarely dominate the headlines.

No civilization survives when violence becomes ordinary. No democracy endures when citizens lose confidence in the state's ability to protect life. Security is not a favour government dispenses. It is the first obligation of government. Every other promise becomes meaningless when citizens cannot sleep safely in their homes, travel freely across their country or pursue honest livelihoods without fear. Nigeria does not merely need larger defence budgets. It needs leadership that places the sanctity of human life above political convenience. It needs professional security institutions, effective intelligence, transparent defence procurement, accountable governance and an uncompromising commitment to justice. Above all, it needs the political will to dismantle every structure that allows violence to become profitable. For whenever violence becomes an industry, fear inevitably becomes a currency. That is the moment every nation should fear.

Until every Nigerian can sleep without fear and travel without anxiety, the fight against insecurity remains unfinished. A nation that truly values the lives of its citizens must ensure that criminals fear the state more than citizens fear criminals.

