



NIGERIA: SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN THE NAME OF SECURITY



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Published by

ACTION GROUP ON FREE CIVIC SPACE

FEBRUARY 2022

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ACRONYMS

AGFCS:	Action Group on Free Civic Space
AML/CFT:	Anti-money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism
BACSDAHR:	Borno State Agency for Coordination of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response
BBFORPEACE:	Building Blocks for Peace Foundation
BEC:	Business Email Compromise
CBN CT:	Central Bank of Nigeria Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism
CBRNE:	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive
CCD:	Centre for Citizen with Disabilities
CCTV:	Closed Circuit Television
CISLAC:	Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre
CJS:	Criminal Justice System
CODE:	Connected Development
CSOs/CBOs:	Civil Society/Community Based Organizations
CSOs:	Civil Society Organisations
CTC:	Counter Terrorism Committee
DATAPHYTE:	Interactive Initiative for Social Impact
DCP:	Deputy Commissioner of Police
DIA:	Defence Intelligence Agency
DIC:	Designated Interested Client
DPP:	Director of Public Prosecutions
DSS:	Department of State Security
EFCC:	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
ESN:	The Eastern Security Network
FATF:	Financial Action Task Force
FIWA:	Federal Inland Waterways Authority
FUNAM:	Fulani Nationality Movement
IAA:	Information Assurance and Awareness
IDPs:	Internally Displaced Persons camps
IED:	Improvised Explosive Devices
IPOB:	Indigenous Peoples of Biafra
ISWAP:	Islamic State West Africa Province
JRI:	Justice and Rights Initiative
JTAB:	Joint Terrorism Analysis Branch
LGBTQI:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
MASSOB:	Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MNJTF:	Multinational Joint Task Force
MOOTW:	Military Operations other Than War
NACTEST:	National Counter Terrorism Strategy
NAFDAC:	National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control
NAPTIP:	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons

NBC:	National Broadcasting Commission
NCS:	Nigeria Customs Service
NDLEA:	The National Drug Law Enforcement Act
NEMA:	National Emergency Management Agency
NFIU:	Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit
NGOs:	Non-governmental Organizations
NIA:	National Intelligence Agency
NIGCOSAT:	Nigeria Communications Satellite
NIMASA:	Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency
NIREC:	Nigeria Inter-Religious Council
NIS:	Nigerian Immigration Service
NLTP:	National Livestock Transformation Plan
NNRA:	Nigeria Nuclear Regulatory Authority
NOA:	National Orientation Agency
NPA:	Nigerian Ports Authority
NPC:	Nigerian Press Council
NPS:	Nigeria Prisons Service
NRC:	Nigerian Railway Corporation
NSCDC:	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps
NSS:	National Security Strategy
OCHA:	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ONSA:	Office of the National Security Adviser
PCVE:	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
RULAAC:	Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre
SARS:	Special Armed Robbery Squad
SCUML:	Special Control Unit against Money Laundering
SSMPA:	Specifically the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act
SSS:	State Security Services
SWOP:	State of the World Population
TIERS:	The Initiative for Equal Rights
TPA:	Terrorism Prevention Act
UN:	United Nations
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's fund
VSI:	Vision Spring Initiative
WIDEF:	World Impact Development Foundation
YEAC:	Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research report, *SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN THE NAME OF SECURITY*, is the third and final part of the Security Playbook Series conducted by 11 members of the Action Group on Free Civic Space (AGFCS). The Security Playbook is a research project that aims to interrogate the use and misuse of the security architecture to narrow the online and offline spaces for civic engagement and democratic participation in Nigeria. This third report examines the exploitation of the festering security challenges in Nigeria to undermine the ability of citizens to speak, associate and organize freely, to mobilise for citizen action and to participate in governance processes.

Most importantly, we are grateful to members of the AGFCS who co-authored and conducted this research, namely: SPACES FOR CHANGE |S4C, Interactive Initiative for Social Impact (DATAPHYTE), Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC), Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE), World Impact Development Foundation (WIDEF), Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre (YEAC), Justice and Rights Initiative (JRI), SB Morgen Intelligence (SB INTELLIGENCE), Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI), Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) and The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS).

Special thanks go to all the research teams that include both full- and part-time staff, field enumerators, research assistants, interns, consultants, volunteers and respondents in the eleven participating organizations. More specifically, our sincere appreciation goes to the following persons who coordinated teams that carried out various research activities across states of the Nigerian federation: Ngozi Nwosu Juba, Tobi Ayodele and Timothy Mboho of VSI, Joshua Olufemi, Oluseyi Olufemi, Ode Uduu and Charles Mba of DATAPHYTE, Omolara Oriye, Ohotuowo Ogbeche, Olufunsho Alufoge of TIERS, Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, Zikora Ibeh, Olusola Oluwafemi, Rejoice Imozemeh and David Olakunle of S4C, Cheta Nwanze, Confidence Mac Harry, Chukwuemeka Okoro and Kunle Sulaimon of SBM INTELLIGENCE, Justin Gbagir Esq, Mark Ibyem Esq, and Alfred Gbagir of JRI, Rafiu Adeniran Lawal, Kola Ibrahim, Stephanie Effevottu of BBFORPEACE, Okechukwu Nwanguma of RULAAC, Fyeface Dumnamene Fyeface, Blessing Rufina Porobunu, Bere Letam Noble and Cosmas Lebatom Gbe Reva of YEAC, Godwin Kingsley and Motojesi Phebian Abiodun of WIDEF, David O. Anyaele, Godwin Unumeri and Humphery Ukeaja of CCD.

Also, special thanks to Lanre Arogundade of International Press Centre, Lucas Koyejo of the National Human Rights Commission Lagos Chapter, Achike Chude of Justice Development and Peace Commission, Cammila Corradin of the Nigeria INGO Forum, Nelson Nwafor of Foundation for Environmental Rights, Advocacy & Development, Dr. Joseph Ekong of Stakeholder Democracy Network, Emmanuel Ikule of Network on Police Reform in Nigeria, Comrade Emmanuel Acha of Enugu State Network of Civil Society Organisations, Nnamdi Elekwachi of Society for Equal Rights and Economic Justice, Tobore Omeh of Eritai Foundation, Samuel Akpologun of Ace and Vanguard Legal Practitioners, Akinsola Ayodele of Per Second News and Niran Adedokun of Torquitise Consulting for sharing practitioner-based interventions and reviews on the preliminary research findings.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is bedeviled by an assortment of security threats. According to Nigeria's National Security Strategy, “the threats are multifaceted and less predictable with blurred boundaries between external and internal risk factors.” A review of Nigeria's performance on the Security Threat Index shows that over a period of fifteen years (from 2007 to 2021), Nigeria has consistently recorded higher than average threat index. The travel advisories issued by Canada, United Kingdom and the United States depict a country troubled by several security threats: terrorism and kidnapping in the North, kidnapping, militancy, maritime crime, and curfews in the South.

The National Security Strategy categorizes the security threats in this way: “terrorism and violent extremism, armed banditry, kidnapping, militancy and separatist agitations, pastoralists-farmers conflicts, transnational organized crime, piracy and sea robbery, porous borders, cybercrimes² and technology challenges. Others are socio-political threats, fake news and hate speeches, environmental threats, public health challenges, economic challenges,³ regional and global security challenges⁵.” Crimes like kidnapping are also perpetrated by terrorists to raise funds through ransoms. Within this array of threats, terrorism and violent extremism rank high on the risk scale and have indeed, received the lion share of attention in terms of strategy, funding and media attention.

In name of curbing insecurity, law enforcement powers have been expanded, while physical and digital surveillance have become routinized. The expansion of policing powers and the routinization of surveillance have provoked an overflow of intended and unintended consequences of law enforcement such as a surge in arrests and detention, use of deadly force to disperse civil demonstrations, censorship⁶ of free speech, internet restrictions, proscription of religious and ethnic agitators, designation of dissenters as terrorist groups and so forth. The legion of security initiatives implemented across the country has increased opportunities for state security agents to misuse and crackdown on civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. All these have been justified by reference to protecting national interest or national security.

While security threats are indeed prevalent necessitating the deployment of counter measures, there is no clear definition of the terms, 'national security' or 'national interest' in the vast number of legal frameworks, statutes and policy directives pertaining to various aspects of defense, intelligence, military and non-military operations. Constitutional provisions also approve the subordination of certain human rights protections in certain circumstances such as in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health, including periods of emergency. Due in part to the lack of definitional certainty and the constitutional authorization for the derogation of certain human rights guarantees in specific situations, securitized responses—often punitive in nature—have been applied to all manner of security threats ranging from ordinary local tensions, ethnic dissensions, communal conflicts up to insurgencies of frightening proportions.

¹ [Nigeria Security threats index - data, chart | TheGlobalEconomy.com](#)

² [Global economy, world economy | TheGlobalEconomy.com](#)

³ [Travel advice and advisories for Nigeria](#)

⁴ [Safety and security - Nigeria travel advice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Nigeria Travel Advisory \(state.gov\)](#)

⁶ [ONSA-UPDATED.pdf \(ctc.gov.ng\) p.8](#)

Our media partners—TheNiche, TheDailyNG, The Guardian, Radio Now, Silverbird Television, Arise News, African Independent Television, Premium Times, New Telegraph— continue to provide invaluable media support that bolster the capacity of the AGFCS to act as a civic space watchdog. We cannot thank these news houses enough for bringing the issues highlighted in the three parts of the security playbook to the forefront of public consciousness.

Appreciations to Lotanna Nwodo, Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri and Ify A. of InfoTrack Consulting for their analytical and editorial assistance, and for synthesizing the dizzying amounts of data gathered during this research project into a unified narrative. The additional reviews by James Savage and Lydia Cocom of the Fund for Global Human Rights enriched the manuscript in technical and substantive dimensions.

The Action Group on Free Civic Space continues to thrive because of the support from the Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR) who have held our hands many times and empowered us to reach the peak of collaborative heights. For this, we are grateful to FGHR for generously supporting this research project. It is our hope that the findings of this study will empower Nigerian citizens, state actors and the civil society with the right levers to push back against the surging restrictions on the civic space in the name of security.

Against this backdrop, this report examines the popular use of the security rhetoric to limit civil society and disenable the environment for active civic participation. It seeks answers to the question: how can insecurity-ravaged states like Nigeria maintain a workable balance between combating violent security threats and protecting civic freedoms? Although nations unanimously condemn organized crimes like terrorism and violent extremism in very strong terms, there is no corresponding consensus regarding the appropriate strategies for the enforcement of counter-terrorism measures. Two different positions, however, stand out: The first underscores respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law as sacrosanct principles that undergird both military and non-military measures deployed to counter terrorist activities. The second position invokes the “doctrine of military necessity”, questioning the applicability of human rights regimes to the activities of military forces exercising their official duties in violent security threats and armed conflict, including counter-terror combat operations. The use of maximum force to quell minor and serious security threats, and the resulting contractions on democratic freedoms, including the massive human rights violations are explained away as “collateral damage” or the “unavoidable by-product of legitimate military action.”

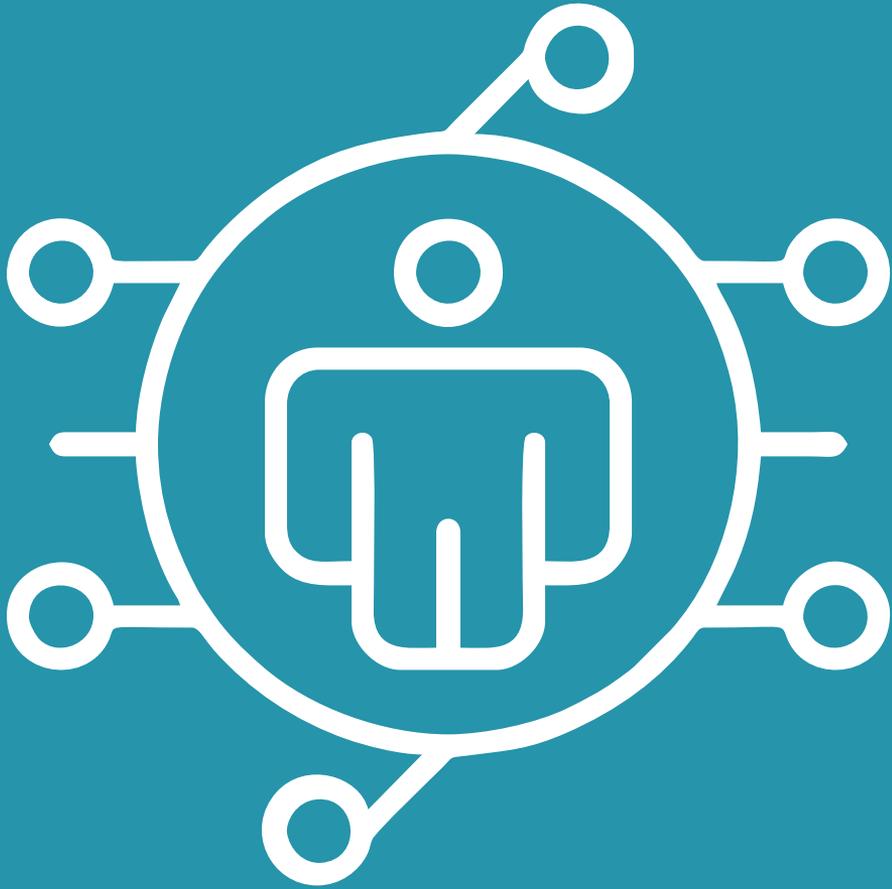
After carefully considering both arguments, this study finds that the traditional and more conventional spaces for civil society have contracted considerably, especially in the last decade. As numerous case studies and documentations in this report demonstrate, fighting terrorism is the most popular justification advanced for the surging restrictions on the activities of civil society actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), humanitarian organisations, political opponents and activists demanding accountability from the government for its human rights failings. Findings further establish the patterns, tactics and enablers of the security-linked restrictions on fundamental freedoms and the civic space in general, underlining how the restrictions arising from securitization are impacting civil society organizations and minority groups. The litany of tactics and legal rules frequently exploited to securitize the civic space and repress the voices of potential challengers appear to be copied from the security playbook of authoritarian regimes intolerant of dissent.

This research reveals a systematic pattern of exercising overbearing governmental power in ways that tighten the traditional and digitalized spaces for civic engagement in Nigeria. Laws enacted and institutions established with the noble intention of maintaining law and order have been given new meanings and weaponized against the citizens in the name of countering terrorism and protecting national security. Citizens, especially civil society actors operating in this type of environment feel repressed and lack the zeal to communicate possible security threats to the government. Civic spaces are impacted when limitations are placed on citizen's rights, constraining their ability to organize, speak and assemble freely.

⁷ Section 45 of the 1999 Constitution

⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 'Human rights, terrorism and counter-terrorism' Fact Sheet No. 32 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf> (accessed on 7 September 2021).

The recommendations in this third part of Security Playbook Series report offer civil society actors with the levers to push back against the continuing misuse of the security paradigm to restrict the civic space and curtail civil liberties. These recommendations, if followed, can help improve the legal and operational environment for civil society by plugging the structural, capacity and legitimacy gaps in traditional intelligence, military, and law enforcement functions and also help increase pressure on both the military and political authorities to uphold their human rights commitments.



CHAPTER ONE

THE SECURITY LANDSCAPE OF NIGERIA



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1.1.0. DRIVERS OF INSECURITY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Northern Nigeria comprises three geo-political zones namely: Northeast, Northwest, and the North-Central also known as the middle-belt. Due in part to the socio-political make-up of the region, the security threats there are often linked to religion, ethnicity, and agriculture. Although Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, it has substantial Christian minorities particularly in the north-central zone. The dominance of Islamic religion in Northern Nigeria is one of the major factors fueling the region's numerous conflicts. About 12 states in the region have instituted Sharia law in their criminal justice system⁹ which applies to all irrespective of the differentials in the religious and moral suasion of the residents. In 2000, thousands were killed in clashes between sharia apologists and non-Muslims opposed to Sharia Law.¹⁰ For instance, the Miss World riot in Kaduna in 2002, triggered by a newspaper article considered by Muslims to denigrate Prophet Mohammed, led to the death of at least 216 people, with Nigeria abandoning the Miss World contest slated to hold in Abuja.¹¹

⁹ [Human Rights and Islamic Law in Northern Nigeria | HRW](#)

¹⁰ [TIMELINE-Ethnic and religious unrest in Nigeria | Reuters](#)

¹¹ [Ibid](#)

Ethnically, Northern Nigeria is dominated by the Hausa and the Fulani. These two tribes have become so socially integrated through religion and intermarriage that they are referred to as the Hausa/Fulani. The Fulanis are predominantly nomadic pastoralists moving across the country with their herds. Although they have their own languages and different cultures, other ethnic minorities in the north particularly in the north-central speak Hausa. Christian religion is popular among these minorities.

Leveraging its huge landmass, agricultural activities flourish in the region, with 83.6 percent of households living in the Northeast declared to practice crop farming while 68.6 percent owned or raised livestock.¹² Agriculture contributes almost 30 percent to the national GDP, second only to oil. Accordingly, land tussles and disparities in farming practices particularly between nomadic herdsmen and sedentary farmers add to the list of tension points in the region. The combination of religion, ethnicity, and agriculture are powerful undercurrents in the recurrent security crisis, including violent clashes among diverse ethnic groups in the region, and account for the resulting fragility, loss of governmental control of vast swathes of territory and social dislocations.

1.1.1. Religious Drivers of Insecurity: Boko Haram, ISWAP and Vanguard for the Defence of Black Muslims

The Boko Haram insurgency tops the list of security concerns in Nigeria. What started as a murky group of an Islamic sect originally formed with non-violent insurgency objectives metamorphosed into radicalism when Mohammed Yusuf, a young civil servant, assumed control of the group. Beyond redirecting the group towards radicalism, he began to refer to the group as the Nigerian Taliban.¹⁴ The sect's switch towards radicalism, including attacks on villagers and police stations, triggered vicious crackdowns from security forces, leading to the death of Mohammed Yusuf.¹⁵

The killing of Mohammed Yusuf marked a major turning point in the activities of the Boko Haram Islamic sect. The group went underground and re-emerged as a terrorist group responsible for various bombings in Northern Nigeria and Abuja including the UN Building Bombing in 2011 which recorded multiple casualties. In 2014, the group kidnapped over two hundred secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State.¹⁶ These incidents quickly earned Boko Haram designation as a foreign terrorist organisation by the United States.¹⁷

Recently, a splinter group of Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), emerged. Together, they form Nigeria's most worrisome security threats. Both groups have as their objective, the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate where 'pure Islam' will be enforced. Boko Haram and ISWAP share similar modus operandi – suicide bombings and kidnappings. Suicide bombing is one of the strategies for advancing their ideologies while kidnapping aids their resource mobilization drive. Ansarul fi Muslimah biladis Sudan also known as Vanguard for the

12

13 [Print 112-B \(govinfo.gov\)](#)

14 Ibid

15 Ibid

16 [TIMELINE: Seven years after Chibok, mass kidnapping of students becoming norm in](#)

[Nigeria | Premium Times Nigeria \(premiumtimesng.com\)](#)

17 [US names Nigeria's Boko Haram and Ansaru 'terrorists' - BBC News](#)

Defence of Black Muslims is the latest entrant into the caucus of deadly terrorist groups operating in Northern Nigeria. The group, also designated by the USA as a foreign terrorist group,¹⁸ parades themselves as the al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel, a former splinter group of Boko Haram in Kogi State that seemed to focus on targets with international significance, claiming to do so in defence of Muslims.

Religion is the thick thread sewing the three major terrorist groups operating in northern Nigeria together. The Nigerian government has repeatedly announced major progress recorded in the war against terrorism founded on religious extremism, having reclaimed territories previously controlled by Boko Haram, ISWAP and Vanguard for the Defence of Black Muslims.¹⁹ However, the prevailing sentiments suggest that Boko Haram and ISWAP remain huge security threats. Heavy censoring of media reportage regarding the military onslaught against terrorists have fuelled massive misinformation, public distrust and suspicion. Substantiated media reports evince that terrorists continue to unleash mayhem and perpetrate atrocities—which are largely undocumented—in their enclaves.

1.1.2. Ethnic/Tribal Drivers of Insecurity: Ethnic Militias

A horde of armed groups in Northern Nigeria are largely ethnic in nature and evolve from the agitations around land, water and livelihood (mostly agriculture). In the Numan, Lamurde and Demsa Local Government Areas of Adamawa State, Fulani and Bachama militias have engaged in internecine violence over land and water. Attacks by ethnic militias are far more commonplace in the north-central part of the country, especially in Plateau, Taraba and Benue States, with the clashes caused by struggles for land and water²⁰ and also as revenge for previous attacks. The major culprit here is Fulani militias who have been accused of incessant attacks in Benue State, where between 600,000²¹ and 1.5 million people²² are reportedly displaced. In Plateau State, the attacks are concentrated in Jos South, Riyom, Barkin Ladi and Bassa Local Government Areas, and have displaced at least 170,000²³ persons. There have also been attacks by Fulani militias in parts of Nasarawa and Taraba States, albeit far fewer and less frequency.

1.1.3. Agricultural Drivers of Insecurity: Fulani Pastoralists

Historically, crop farmers and pastoralists have clashed all over the world. Pastoralists are the visible aggressors since their animals encroach on farmlands, destroying the crops farmers depend on for their livelihoods. Under the Common Law Torts, the principle of negligence or strict liability applies where animals constitute nuisance to neighbours. In other words, animal owners are liable to neighbours for damages caused by their animals. It is instructive to note that the factors responsible for farmer-herder conflicts are diverse and include climate change and rapid urbanisation. Climate change has impacted farming through drought and desert encroachment, culminating in the fierce competition for available land resources. Urbanisation

18 [We wont stop reporting terrorist attacks, media chiefs dare NBC \(punchng.com\)](#)

19 [Nigeria winning war against terrorism Lai Mohammed \(premiumtimesng.com\)](#)

20 International Crisis Group, Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence,

21 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>

22 [Herdsman attacks: Over 600,000 persons displaced in Benue \(Daily Post Nigeria\)](#)

23 [Herdsman Attacks: Benue facing worst humanitarian crisis with 1.5million IDPs Ortom \(Vanguard Nigeria\)](#)

23 [Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence \(Crisis Group\)](#)

is another source of depletion of land for agricultural purposes, forcing farmers and herders to search for land for pasture and farming.

The recurrent frictions between crop farmers and Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria have snowballed into a major national security threat. Nothing has degenerated the farmer-pastoralists rift more than the lack of justice for crop farmers who suffer immense damage from the incursions of Fulani cattle rearers. The lack of consequences for these atrocities has emboldened Fulani herdsmen to unleash mayhem with impunity across states and regions. While the north-central states of Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states are currently the hotbeds of such conflicts,²⁴ pastoralists-farmers conflicts have now spilled over to the southern states,²⁵ catalysing self-determination agitations in the Southwest and the South-east.²⁶

Governmental efforts to resolve the farmer-herder clashes have been grossly inadequate and ineffective. The consistent clampdown on farming communities resorting to self-help when faced with farmland invasions and destruction points to the Nigerian government's unhidden sympathy for the Fulani herdsmen.²⁷ Emboldened by the apparent support of the Federal Government,²⁸ herdsmen operate with an air of impunity, openly brandishing weapons as they wade through communities. Consequently, what began as farmer-herder clashes has evolved from spontaneous reactions to provocations to deadlier planned attacks²⁹ to the extent that Fulani herdsmen have been linked to banditry (discussed below) whose criminal operations are not motivated by farming.³⁰

The Federal Government's widely-resisted attempt to establish cattle colonies for herdsmen across the country is another major pointer to the government's famed favouritism towards herders.³¹ Many states of the federation kicked against the initiative, describing it as a ploy to forcefully snatch indigenous lands for the benefit of armed Fulani herders, who they feared would later unleash terror on their host communities.³² Other programmes like Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) and the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) have suffered similar fate. Some state governments have even banned open grazing within their states.³³ The Federal Government is now seeking to revive long abandoned grazing routes which would require states of the Federation to reserve swathes of lands for thoroughfare by the herdsmen and their cattle. In addition to pushbacks by state governments to the proposal,³⁴ there are several legal shortcomings in the proposal.³⁵

1.1.4. Economic Drivers of Insecurity: Bandits (Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda)

The North-West, Nigeria's largest geopolitical zone in terms of the number of states, has descended into an insecurity-free-for-all over the past five years, particularly in the states of

²⁴ [Stopping Nigerias Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group](#)

²⁵ See: [Communities in South-East groan, as herdsmen take over farmlands \(vanquardngr.com\)](#); [Living under siege of herdsmen in South-South Features The Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News; Five killed as suspected herdsmen attack Ondo community \(tribuneonlineeng.com\)](#)

²⁶ [Sunday Igboho issues fresh eviction notice to herdsmen in South-West \(premiumtimesng.com\)](#)

²⁷ [Enugu community decries arrest of 76 villagers after feud with Fulani herdsmen - Vanguard News \(vanquardngr.com\)](#)

²⁸ [Understanding the Herder-Farmer Conflict in Nigeria ACCORD](#)

²⁹ [Stopping Nigerias Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group](#)

³⁰ [Bandits or herdsmen - The Nation Newspaper \(thenationonlineeng.net\)](#)

³¹ [Interrogating the constitutionality of retracing old grazing routes Features The Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News](#)

³² *Ibid*

³³ [Grazing Routes for Fulani Herders: What the Land Use Act says - Nairametrics](#)

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ [Interrogating the constitutionality of retracing old grazing routes Features The Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News](#)

Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara. Armed groups, popularly called “bandits” (known in Hausa as Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda) by the Nigerian government are responsible for kidnappings along highways, schools and in communities. Like the Boko Haram, bandits utilise kidnappings to mobilize resources for organized crime. Other than for economic gain, bandits operate with no identifiable ideology underpinning their criminal activities. Between 2020 and 2021 multiple kidnappings were perpetrated by bandits involving scores of victims, comprising mainly pupils and students such as: -

- 300 boys from Government Boys Secondary School Kankara, Katsina State on 11 December 2020
- 80 pupils from an Islamic School in Mahuta, Katsina State on 20 December 2020
- 27 students from a government science school, Kagara, Niger State on 17 February 2021
- 317 students from Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State on 26 February 2021
- 27 students from Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka, Kaduna State on 12 March 2021
- 17 students of Greenfield University, Kaduna State on 21 April 2021
- 169 pupils from Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Niger State on 30 May 2021
- 8 students and some lecturers at Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria, Kaduna on 11 June 2021
- 80 students and 5 teachers from Federal Government College, Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State on 17 June 2021.³⁶

These kidnappings have taken a heavy toll on education in Northern Nigeria, the region with the highest out of school children.³⁷ It has been argued that the ability of armed bandits to move multiple victims from their schools to hideouts is an indictment on Nigeria's security agencies who either failed to respond to distress calls or were overpowered by the bandits.³⁸ Despite the intensity and lethality of banditry activities, the government had initially refused to declare them a terrorist organisation; a reluctance criticised by many Nigerians particularly when more benign organisations such as the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria have been proscribed as terrorists. Others attribute the official resistance to declare them terrorist to their origin as cattle rustlers before they morphed into deadly terrorists. Yielding to public pressure, the Federal Government officially designated Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda as terrorist groups on Wednesday, 5 January 2022.³⁹

³⁶ [TIMELINE: Seven years after Chibok, mass kidnapping of students becoming norm in Nigeria | Premium Times Nigeria \(premiumtimesng.com\)](#)

³⁷ [How risk of kidnap became the cost of an education in Nigeria | Global development | The Guardian](#)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ [FG releases official gazette proscribing bandits as terrorists - Nairametrics](#)



Source: Newswire NGR

1.2.0. DRIVERS OF INSECURITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Like Northern Nigeria, the southern region comprises three zones, namely: Southwest, Southeast and South-South. The Southwest zone is populated by the Yoruba ethnic group. In terms of religion, both Christianity and Islam are equally represented in the Southwest. Southeast Nigeria is homogeneously of Igbo ethnicity while the South-South zone is a melting-pot of multiple ethnic groups. The Southeast and South-South are predominantly Christians. Although predominantly agrarian, Southeast is regarded as a trading hub while Southwest is host to major corporations and industries in Nigeria. On its part, the South-south hosts the majority of Nigeria's oil and gas resources, and this is of momentous significance in the Nigerian security discourse.

Unlike Northern Nigeria, the multiplicity of ethnic groups has not been a major trigger of conflicts in southern Nigeria. Even in the Southwest which has a strong representation of both Christian and Muslim populations, adherents of both religions have coexisted without major conflicts and have inter-married among themselves without any significant security impact. The homogeneity in Southwest and Southeast also means that incidents of inter-ethnic clashes are minimal in those zones. The only significant security threat involving ethnicity in the South is the incursion of Fulani herdsmen from the North.

1.2.1. Bias and Neglect as Drivers of Insecurity: Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

Founded by Ralph Uwazuruike in 1999, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was the first pro-Biafra secessionist group formed to reignite Biafran sentiments and champion independence for people in Southeast Nigeria. This movement emerged four decades after the fratricidal Biafran war that lasted between 6 July 1967 and 14 January 1970 which claimed over three million lives.⁴⁰ A splinter group of MASSOB, the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), was later formed in 2012, founded by Nnamdi Kanu a former apostle of Uwazuruike. There are other splinter groups.

Since 2015, the deliberate exclusion of Igbos from high political offices and appointments is widely documented. True to President Muhammadu Buhari's infamous 5% versus 97% speech

⁴⁰ Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, BBC: Remembering Nigeria's Biafra war that many prefer to forget (2020) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51094093>

at a public event abroad,⁴¹ over 32 appointments he made in the early days of his administration did not include any Igbo.⁴² Perpetuating decades of neglect Igbos have suffered in the hands of previous administrations, the south-eastern states where the Igbos inhabit are deliberately excluded from the provision and siting of major public infrastructure. In 2020, Buhari's administration secured parliamentary approval for \$22.7 billion dollars loan from China's Exim bank to deliver major infrastructure projects and critical reforms in agriculture, health, education, water supply, growth and employment generation, poverty reduction and financial management reforms, among others.⁴³ All the five southeastern states were excluded from the projects. Countless security checkpoints and very deplorable conditions of major interstate roads make the region the most-neglected part of the country. Commentators contend that the continuous alienation of people of Igbo extraction from the scheme of affairs in the administration of President Buhari is confirmation of the deep-rooted hatred for the Igbo people by this administration.⁴⁴ This ostensibly explains why agitations for secession have soared in the southeastern region, founded on a shared sense of loss, grief and victimhood.⁴⁵

Non-violent pro-Biafra agitations had been going on in the Southeast region since 1999 traversing the administrations of President Olusegun Obasanjo, through late President Musa Yar'Adua to President Goodluck Jonathan before the election of Muhammadu Buhari as President in 2015. Things took a new turn in 2015 when Buhari came into office and security agencies began to use maximum force to crackdown on the activities of the non-violent group whose only 'weapons', at the time were their regular cell meetings, peaceful rallies, carrying pro-Biafra flags and other insignias and symbols of nonviolent agitation. Their meetings and rallies were violently suppressed often leaving behind blood, sorrow and tears in spite of the group's consistent nonviolence slogan and approach.⁴⁶

The Buhari regime's proscription of the IPOB and designation of the group as a terrorist organization in 2017 further tightened the noose around IPOB's neck. Across jurisdictions, sectors and zones, the justification for criminalizing the non-violent group was questioned especially when the evidently-violent Fulani herdsmen whose members bear deadly weapons and engage in terrorist activities had not been designated a terrorist group and banned by the same government.⁴⁷ Global Terrorism Index named Nigerian Fulani militants as fourth deadliest terror group in world.⁴⁸ Miyetti Allah, the umbrella body of Fulani cattle owners has taken responsibility for some deadly revenge attacks on communities, but the federal government appears to approach the issue more disinterestedly.⁴⁹ The Nigerian government has been known to negotiate with the terrorists for the release of abducted pupils including Chibok girls and over 100 girls kidnapped from a government secondary school in Dapchi, Yobe State in 2018.⁵⁰ Despite official denials, credible reports contradict the government's position and show evidence of large ransoms paid to terrorists.⁵¹

41 Buhari's Statement At The US Institute Of Peace That Made Everyone Cringe(2015) <http://saharareporters.com/2015/07/25/buhari%E2%80%99s-statement-us-institute-peace-made-everyone-cringe-0>

42 Abdulrahman Abdulmalik, Premium Times, *Outrage grows across Nigeria as Buhari's lopsided appointments continue*;

43 Lawrence Njoku, The Guardian, *How Southeast is responding to exclusion from FG's \$22.7bn loan* (2021) <https://guardian.ng/politics/how-southeast-is-responding-to-exclusion-from-fgs-22-7bn-loan/>

44 Kanayo Umeh, The Guardian, *Service chiefs: CSO carpets Garba Shehu for defending exclusion of Igbos in appointments* (2021) <https://guardian.ng/news/service-chiefs-cso-carpets-garba-shehu-for-defending-exclusion-of-igbos-in-appointments/>

45 The Africa Report, EXPEL OR UNITE ~ Nigeria: Resolving the so-called 'Igbo Problem' (2021) <https://www.theafricareport.com/95288/nigeria-resolving-the-so-called-igbo-problem/>

46 Ugwueze, M.I. (2019). Trauma and Memory: Explaining the longevity of the Biafra secessionist movement in Nigeria. *Africa Insight*, 49(2): 56-69.

47 Ugwueze, M.I. (2021). Biafra war documentaries: Explaining continual resurgence of secessionist agitations in the South-East, Nigeria. *Civil Wars*, DOI: 10.1080/13698249.2021.1903781

48 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/global-terrorism-index-nigerian-fulani-militants-named-fourth-deadliest-terror-group-world-a6739851.html>

49 <https://businessday.ng/exclusives/article/buhari-dithers-miyetti-allah-claims-responsibility-plateau-killings/>

50 [TIMELINE: Seven years after Chibok, mass kidnapping of students becoming norm in Nigeria | Premium Times Nigeria \(premiumtimesng.com\)](https://premiumtimesng.com/news/nigeria/75288-nigeria-paid-large-ransom-to-free-dapchi-girls-un-says)

51 [Nigeria paid 'large ransom' to free Dapchi girls, UN says | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News Nigeria The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/11/nigeria-paid-large-ransom-to-free-dapchi-girls-un-says)

51 [Nigeria News Nigeria and World News](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/11/nigeria-paid-large-ransom-to-free-dapchi-girls-un-says)

Another group, Fulani Nationality Movement, FUNAM, also claimed responsibility for the attempted attacks on the Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom in March 2021, claiming that they 'acted on behalf of Millions of Fulani people in 15 countries.'⁵² None of these groups have been proscribed by the Federal Government. The Buhari's government's glaring differential in dealing with different groups across the North and South bears evidence of bias, favoritism, double standards and deliberate agenda to perpetuate injustice.⁵³

In response to the unchecked incursions of the Fulani herdsmen into the Southeast, IPOB formed a security arm, called the Eastern Security Network (ESN). ESN has been accused of stockpiling weapons⁵⁵ and engaging in armed confrontations with security agencies.⁵⁶ IPOB has repeatedly denied these allegations, especially the claims of violent attacks on security agencies.⁵⁷ IPOB also imposed "Sit-at-home" curfews in the Southeast to protest the detention of their leader. On the designated days—every Monday—when Sit-at-home is observed, residents of the five South-eastern states stay indoors or face confrontations with members of IPOB. This has particularly affected commercial activities, education, access to medical services and the liberties of residents, heightening social tension in the region.



An IPOB rally. Source: BBC⁵⁴

⁵² <https://dailypost.ng/2021/03/21/breaking-fulani-group-claims-responsibility-for-attempting-assassinate-ortom/>

⁵³ Chidi Odinkalu (@ChidiOdinkalu) Tweeted: Under @MBuhari, the contrast between @NigeriaGov's weakness with #KillerHerdsmen & #TerroristBandits on 1 hand & its ruthlessness 2wds others on the other is stark & unforgivable. Repression & #HumanRights abuses have in many cases radicalized populations.

⁵⁴ [Nigeria security forces 'killed 150 peaceful pro-Biafra protesters' - BBC News](#)

⁵⁵ [IPOB has stockpiled weapons across Nigeria. Presidency - \(vanguardngr.com\)](#)

⁵⁶ [Troops eliminate 4 IPOB/ESN gunmen, recover arms, vehicles - Vanguard News \(vanguardngr.com\)](#)

⁵⁷ [IPOB Reacts To Arrest Of Suspected Member With 'Arms, Military Uniform' By Nigerian Army | Sahara Reporters:](#)

1.2.2. Bias, Neglect as Drivers of Insecurity: Clamour for a Breakaway Yoruba State

Until recently, the Southwest had not been known to confront the Federal Government, but the unmitigated terror inflicted by the Fulani herdsmen against Yoruba communities triggered a movement seeking a breakaway Yoruba state. Southwestern states had come under relentless attacks by Fulani herdsmen which resulted in the sacking of entire villages, killings, and damages to property. In the face of apparent aloofness by the Federal Government and the handicap of the state government who have no control over the police, Sunday Igboho thrust himself into limelight by giving the Fulani a seven-day ultimatum to leave Southwest. The recent clamour for a breakaway Yoruba State illustrates the dangers of the Federal Government's approach to the Fulani herdsmen crises. Sunday "Igboho" Adeyemo rose to prominence by standing up to "defend" the Yoruba nation against the "killer" Fulani herdsmen who escape justice because they are "close to the federal government".⁵⁸



*Sunday Igboho, source: Vanguard Newspaper*⁵⁹

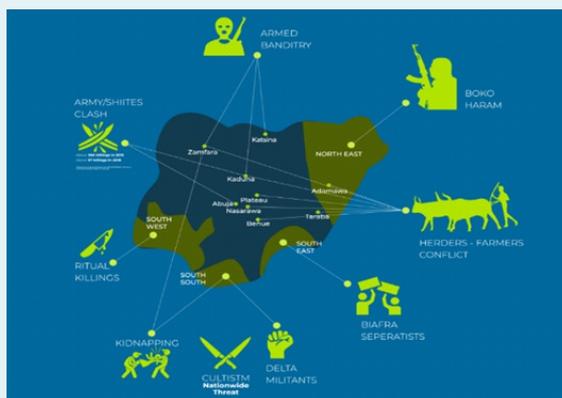
⁵⁸ [Sunday Igboho: The Nigerian separatist who wants a Yoruba nation - BBC News](#)

⁵⁹ [Release Sunday Igboho now, Yoruba nation agitators warn Beninese govt \(vanguardngr.com\)](#)

After the expiration of the ultimatum, Mr. Igboho defied the threats of the State governor as well as an order for his arrest to visit the Igangan community in Oyo State to carry out the eviction. In the ensuing fracas, houses and property belonging to Fulani people in the area were destroyed⁶⁰ His campaigns gradually morphed into loud clamour for a breakaway Yoruba state citing in his manifestos, the neglect by the Fulani-led Federal Government of the Yoruba race. Although he has been arrested in Benin Republic while fleeing Nigeria, his followers remain active in Southwest, and are vigorously campaigning for his unconditional release from Beninois detention.⁶¹

1.2.3. Natural Resource Drivers of Insecurity

Nothing strikes a sharp arrow deep into the heart of Nigeria's unity more than the excessive focus on crude oil, the country's most valuable mineral resource.⁶² Benefits from natural resources are centrally-controlled and shared among states in accordance with a statutorily-defined allocation formula. In exchange for this policy of resource concentration in the center, a derivation benefit of a paltry 13% is handed out to resource-rich states to assuage dissension. Oil spills in the South-South combined with decades of underdevelopment despite humongous oil wealth laid the foundation for the violent militancy activities in the Niger Delta.



*The Insecurity Map of Nigeria. Source: Africanargument.org.*⁶³

Long before Boko Haram, IPOB, Sunday Ogbobo et al, the Niger-Delta emancipation militants held sway as the preeminent security threat⁶⁴ to Nigeria. Famed for attacking oil installations, kidnapping oil and gas personnel particularly expatriates and crippling commercial activities in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, the militants claim to be seeking better living conditions for the oil producing region which has been bedevilled by oil spills and other environmental mishaps resulting in poor health, unemployment and generally low quality of life. Militancy decelerated following an amnesty program implemented by the Yar'Adua-Jonathan administrations, but they remain a latent security threat. Even after the amnesty program, a militant group known as the Niger Delta Avengers emerged in 2016 and focused on vandalizing oil and gas installations, halving Nigeria's oil and gas production.⁶⁵ Eventually, a ceasefire between the group and the government was reached, but the group continues to issue threats. Alleging that "[t]he Nigerian government has continued to pay deaf ears to their demands, the group recently threatened to resume attacks amid rising insecurity and disagreements over the share of oil wealth communities should get." ⁶⁶

⁶⁰ [Insecurity: Houses, cars burnt as Oyo protesters defy Makinde, attack community leader \(premiumtimesng.com\)](https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/local-news/2018/08/18/180818-insecurity-houses-cars-burnt-as-oyo-protesters-defy-makinde-attack-community-leader/)

⁶¹ [Igboho's followers protest in Ibadan - Vanguard News \(vanguardngr.com\)](https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/08/18/180818-igbohos-followers-protest-in-lbadan/)

⁶² Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, *Nigeria's Unity and the Cracks Within*, Chapter Two of Remaking Nigeria; Sixty Voices, Sixty Essays (edited by Chidoo Onumah) 2021, pg 9.

⁶³ [From Boko to Biafra: How insecurity will affect Nigeria's elections | African Arguments](https://www.africanarguments.com/2018/08/18/180818-from-boko-to-biafra-how-insecurity-will-affect-nigerias-elections/)

⁶⁴ [Niger Delta militants threaten to resume attacks on Nigeria's oil installations | S&P Global Platts \(spglobal.com\)](https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/news-articles/2016/08/18/180818-niger-delta-militants-threaten-to-resume-attacks-on-nigerias-oil-installations)

⁶⁵ [Nigeria's 'Delta Avengers' threaten oil installation attacks | Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/article/nigeria-security/nigeria-delta-avengers-threaten-oil-installation-attacks-idUKKBN18018)

⁶⁶ Ibid

1.2.4. Other social vices

Other social vices igniting security concerns include internet fraud (popularly known as yahoo-yahoo), cultism, ritual killings, robberies, drug abuse and so forth. Out of these major social vices, internet fraud has particularly attracted the attention of security agents, prompting the enactment of dedicated legislations like the Cybercrimes (Prohibition Prevention ETC) Act, 2015 to deter and punish such crimes. According to the FBI, internet fraud is the use of Internet services or software with Internet access to defraud victims or to otherwise take advantage of them.⁶⁷ Yahoo boys use several high-profile methods to perpetrate internet fraud such as data breaches, business e-Mail compromise (BEC), denial of service, email account compromise, malwares, phishing and ransomware.⁶⁸

Internet fraud festered across the country, with the yahoo boys leveraging on the advancements in digital technology to exploit the vulnerabilities on digital spaces. In the early 2000s, when cybercrime became more common in Nigeria, security operatives like the Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS) shifted its policing operations to clamping down on Yahoo Boys. Rather than deploying superior technology to investigate crimes and apprehend officers, SARS operatives resorted to profiling young people on the streets, openly harassing and extorting deemed suspicious. Anyone found with a laptop or a smartphone was branded a 'yahoo-yahoo' or internet fraudster. Young people - particularly decently dressed male, with nice wrist watches or dreadlocks - were labeled, searched, detained, tortured and extorted. Some lost their lives.⁶⁹ Youthful anger and pushback against this practice of profiling young people triggered the October 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality in Nigeria.

1.2.5. Conclusion

From the foregoing, insecurity is indeed rife across the country, with no region spared from security challenges. High levels of organized crime especially the rising activities of insurgents and extremist groups like Boko Haram in fragile states in the northern region has provided legal justification for the Nigerian state to adopt militarized responses to defend its national security and territorial sovereignty. The huge differentials, including bias, in governmental responses to different security threats and hostile groups across regions illuminate how protecting national security has equally provided justification for enhanced security measures to be repurposed to achieve other restrictive objectives unrelated to national security. In the next chapter, we examine the national security architecture: the key officials, the institutions and policies/mechanisms in place as well as the potentials for misuse in the name of protecting national security.

⁶⁷ FBI: <https://www.fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/internet-fraud>

⁶⁸ FBI, *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Action Group on Free Civic Space, #EndSARS: POLICE BRUTALITY, PROTESTS AND SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN NIGERIA, 2021, Accessed via <https://closingspaces.org/endsars-police-brutality-protests-and-shrinking-civic-space-in-nigeria/>



CHAPTER TWO

THE NATIONAL SECURITY SETUP



Source: Vanguard News

Traditionally, the Armed Forces of Nigeria and the Nigeria Police bear primary responsibility of protecting the Nigerian people and territories.⁷⁰ This role is further enunciated in the Nigerian 1999 Constitution and the National Security Strategy. Based on the dominant themes in the country's national security threat analysis, the National Security Strategy is focused broadly on all categories of security threats. These include terrorism and violent extremism; armed banditry, kidnapping and militancy; cybercrimes; transnational organised crime; insecurity in other domains; potential threats from Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) agents; and national disasters.

Out of the above threats, terrorism and cybercrimes have their separate national strategy documents and governing legislation. In the same vein, there are dedicated agencies vested with specific statutory powers to respond to terrorist threats. The counterterrorism (CT) laws, strategies and institutions in Nigeria were mostly installed in compliance with Nigeria's international law obligations – as may be mandated by the United Nations and its agencies, and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).⁷¹

⁷⁰ [ONSA-UPDATED.pdf \(ctc.gov.ng\)](#)

⁷¹ Action Group on Free Civic Space, Harms from Abroad: Impact of Global Security Measures on Civic Space in Nigeria (2021) <https://closingspaces.org/harms-from-abroad-impact-of-global-security-measures-on-civic-space-in-nigeria/>

2.1.0. Laws Governing National Security

There are two categories of laws governing national security in Nigeria. The first category includes laws establishing and defining the powers and responsibilities of national security agencies and while the second refers to legislations criminalizing specific security threats. The first category encompasses laws establishing and/or regulating security agencies such as the Nigeria Police, the Armed Forces of Nigeria, The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency, the Nigeria Civil Defence, the Office of the National Security Adviser. In some cases, a piece of legislation can cover both fields, establishing a security agency as well as criminalizing specific crimes. An example is the National Drug Law Enforcement Act (NDLEA) Act which set up the NDLEA and imposed punishment for drug offences.

The second category of national security laws prescribes punishment for specific offences that pose threats to national security. These include counterterrorism legislations such as the Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA), Central Bank of Nigeria Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism Regulations, 2013 (“CBN CT Regulation”), the Money Laundering Act and so forth. Apart from federal legislations, numerous state laws also prescribe stiffer punishment for kidnapping to deter the commission of such crimes within states.⁷²

The first and second categories of national security laws are complemented by the general criminal legislations such as the Criminal Code (applicable in Southern Nigeria) and the Penal Code (enforced in Northern Nigeria). In more cases than not, the specific security laws in the second category have already been covered under the general criminal law legislation. For instance, punishment for violent crimes flagged as national security threats such as armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, vandalization, arson, illegal possession of firearm, are already covered in the Criminal and Penal Codes. However, dedicated legislations governing these crimes were further enacted, reckoning that these general provisions are insufficient to combat the escalating threats they pose to the nation.

An unintended outcome of the proliferation of security laws governing specific offences is the vesting of wide discretion on law enforcement agencies to pick and choose which law to invoke to justify both heavy and light criminal charges. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, criminal conduct, including simple offences, which ordinarily falls within the purview of general criminal legislation may be prosecuted under the TPA or Cybercrimes Act in order to obtain the harshest punishment possible for the accused.

—72—[Senate passes law prescribing life imprisonment for kidnappers](#) [Nigeria](#) [The Guardian Nigeria News](#) [Nigeria and World News](#)

2.1.1. National Security Strategies

As the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the President of Nigeria is the chief of the national security agencies and drives all efforts and strategies on national security. The President achieves this through the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) which, through the various departments, is responsible for intelligence-gathering and the implementation of national security strategies. ONSA resides in the Presidency and is headed by the National Security Adviser who reports directly to the President.

The overarching strategy document on national security is the National Security Strategy (NSS) which touches on all national security threats. Revised every 5 years, NSS seeks to achieve four objectives –

1. to protect Nigerian people and territory;
2. to promote Nigeria's prosperity and sustainable development;
3. promote national unity and peaceful co-existence; and
4. promote Nigeria's regional and international interests.

Any situation conflicting with any of these four ideals is regarded as threats to national security. NSS is complemented by other national strategic documents such as the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy, the National Defence Policy and the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan. Out of these, the most elaborate is NACTEST which drives the overall counter-terrorism efforts of the country.

NACTEST is a service-wide assortment of counter terrorism efforts bordering on the deployment of carrot-and-stick approach in fighting terrorism, which is built around five key streams for the implementation of National Counterterrorism Programmes (NCTP):

- a. **Forestall:** To stop people from becoming or supporting terrorism.
- b. **Secure:** Strengthen protection capacity against terrorist attacks.
- c. **Identify:** Pre-emption through detection, early warning and ensuring that terrorist acts are properly investigated.
- d. **Prepare:** To mitigate the impact of terrorist attacks by building resilience and redundancies to ensure continuity of business.
- e. **Implement:** A framework for the mobilization of coordinated cross-governmental efforts.⁷⁴

NACTEST is coordinated by the Counter-Terrorism Centre (CTC) in the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), and the Centre houses the Joint Terrorism Analysis Branch (JTAB) and the Behavioural Analysis and Strategic Communication Unit in order to enable the ONSA to coordinate intelligence sharing and cooperation amongst agencies. The primary

⁷³ –[NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY 2019 Counter Terrorism Centre \(ctc.gov.ng\)](#)

⁷⁴ NATIONAL COUNTER TERRORISM STRATEGY 2016, –[NATIONAL COUNTER TERRORISM STRATEGY 2016 Counter Terrorism Centre \(ctc.gov.ng\)](#)

responsibilities of the CTC include the development, direction, and implementation of the National Counterterrorism Strategy. The Centre also builds and maintains relationships with non-state actors such as donor agencies and other international actors such as the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, and the United Nations. Although NACTEST has allocated the coordination role to the Office of National Security Adviser (ONSA) CT, it works closely with the military who are in the field combating terrorists. This is consistent with Nigeria's use of the military in fighting sophisticated armed groups.

Another key policy for countering terrorism in Nigeria is the Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE), which is intended to institutionalize, mainstream and coordinate PCVE programmes at national, state and local levels; strengthen the accessible justice system and respect for human rights and rule of law; enhance the capacity of individuals/communities to prevent and counter violent extremism, and recover from violent occurrences; and institutionalise, mainstream and integrate strategic communication in PCVE programmes at all levels. The National Action Plan defines the coordination mechanisms, priority components and the roles and responsibilities of federal ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), states and local governments; expected outcomes and the timeline for the implementation of the plan. The Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism is designed to be non-military in approach, development-funded and employing a whole-of-government approach in its implementation with all levels of government and the various ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) involved.

2.1.2. National Security Agencies

While the Armed Forces of Nigeria oversee the territorial integrity of Nigeria, defending it against external threats, the Nigeria Police focuses on internal security, peace and order. Numerous agencies vested with varying degrees of policing powers complement the roles and duties of the Nigeria Police. A host of intelligence agencies support the national security mandates of both the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police. They include the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Agency (NFIU). These agencies work together to achieve the objectives of the NSS. Overall, a total of 19 ministries and 32 agencies have defined roles and responsibilities in the National Counterterrorism Strategy (NACTEST) to ensure a holistic approach to the implementation of the five streams of the strategy. It can therefore be concluded that Nigeria adopts a pan-agency counter terrorism approach.

While it is beyond the scope of this report to assess the effectiveness of extant national security measures in place, five major gaps are evident:

1. The first is the over-concentration of national security response in the Federal Government of Nigeria. The State governors who double as chief security officers of their respective states lack control over any security agency. During a recent face-off between the Lagos State governor and a mid-level police officer, the officer refused to comply with the governor's orders on the ground that he was acting according to his superiors' instructions.⁷⁵
2. Second, there is no clear rule regulating the interaction between the various security agencies, culminating in the lack of coordination, duplicity, waste of resources and accountability deficits.
3. Third, the country's CT strategies are domiciled in the ONSA, an office that plays merely advisory roles to the President, and lacking statutory executive functions. As such, there is no chain of command linking the ONSA and law enforcement except through the President.
4. As the table below shows, CT responsibilities are fragmented across multiple agencies consistent with the whole of government approach. There is no dedicated ministry with CT mandate, and this creates significant coordination challenges due to regulatory overlaps.
5. Finally, Nigeria's CT strategies seems to be tailored to counter Boko Haram. It is therefore unclear whether stipulate strategies they are effective enough to counter different kinds of terrorist threats and insecurity engulfing other parts of the country.

The most significant challenge worthy of note is the gaps in relevant definitions. For instance, the term, "terrorism" is not clearly defined under the TPA or any applicable domestic and international law document. What amounts to terrorism therefore becomes a political decision. The lack of definition also paves the way for the indiscriminate use of counter terrorism legislation to repress any challenge to constituted authority.

Although this is not unique to Nigeria, exploiting definitional uncertainty to clamp down on critics of the government and opposition figures is commonplace across jurisdiction. Ordinarily, the Fundamental Human Rights provisions embedded in the Nigerian Constitution provide safeguards against abuse of state power, but security agencies often bypass these constitutional protections by invoking Section 45 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. That section approves

⁷⁵ [Police officer engages Sanwo-Olu, flouts order to vacate Magodo estate | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News](#), [Nigeria](#), [The Guardian Nigeria News](#), [Nigeria and World News](#)

that certain human rights may be derogated for national security and national interest purposes. More specifically, Section 45 permits state authorities to derogate from the certain rights only in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health, or to protect the rights or freedoms of others.

The 19 ministries, 32 agencies and civil society organizations with defined roles and responsibilities in the National Counterterrorism Strategy (NACTEST) are listed below:

BOX 1

S/No	Name of Ministry/Agency	Role in NACTEST
1.	Federal Ministry of Agriculture	Contribute to NACTEST by promoting the development of agriculture to attain food sufficiency and generate employment. The Ministry will coordinate with Stakeholders in formulating policies to cover the importation, distribution, and usage of fertilizer products as part of counter IEDs strategy.
2.	Federal Ministry of Transportation	Responsible for national transportation policies and programmes and enhance the security of the transportation system including road, rail, maritime and aviation through continuous response to identified threats and security needs. Adopt a risk management approach and develop measures designed to mitigate vulnerabilities and threats in the transportation system.
3.	Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment	Collaborate with the Ministry of Information, National Orientation Agency (NOA), organized private sector and associations to promote a friendly investment atmosphere and develop trade guidelines that will discourage terrorist financing and illicit transactions.
4.	Federal Ministry of Information and Culture	Work with other stakeholders to develop a communication strategy to disrupt terrorist media campaigns at local and international levels. Develop an Information Assurance and Awareness (IAA) strategy and collaborate with stakeholders to combat the spread of radical extremist messages.
5.	Ministry of Defence	Support NACTEST by appropriately equipping the Armed Forces to face contemporary terrorist challenges. In the event of an attack that may exceed the capacity of civil response, the Ministry can support the Forestall aspect of NACTEST through Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).
6.	Federal Ministry of Education	Support the FORESTALL pillar of NACTEST by providing an enabling environment for education to be free from, and devoid of, any form of extremist ideology. Develop curricula to address needs at the grassroots consistent with national unity and human development objectives. This should include a robust civic education programme in schools. The Ministry will introduce a process where education administrators and practitioners are trained to identify and counsel pupils/students who are at the threshold of being radicalized.
7.	Federal Ministry of Environment	Ensure environmental protection and conservation of natural resources. The Ministry is responsible for dealing with and managing the impact of, terrorist incidents on the environment, plants and animal health, food and drinking water, waste management, farming, fisheries, communities etc. in the event of a terrorist attack.

8.	Federal Capital Territory Administration	Liaise with other security agencies and key federal departments to develop a blueprint for the security and administration of the Federal Capital Territory in line with identified threats and challenges.
9.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	In conjunction with NIA and DIA, the Ministry has overall responsibility for the coordination and delivery of NACTEST overseas. Deploy instruments of diplomacy to enhance the implementation of the NACTEST in all our international engagements.
10.	Ministry of Interior	Support NACTEST by providing oversight for Immigration, Passport Control, Prison Administration and Fire Service. Ensure there is an appropriate upgrade of the entire border security management system, especially for the northern part of the country. Drive the protection of critical national infrastructure.
11.	Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development	Collaborate with state Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development and other stakeholders to ensure the proper provision, coordination and regulation of Psychosocial Support Services to all categories of women, children person with disabilities, families and other vulnerable groups to prevent imbibing terrorist ideologies and help them develop resistance in handling/managing social welfare services for victims in welfare centres/institutions for rehabilitation, reunification and proper reintegration into the society.
12.	Federal Ministry of Justice	Establish a dedicated division/section for National Security that will ensure that there is a significant capacity in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to deal with terrorism cases efficiently, effectively and securely. Partner with relevant institutions to introduce legislation that criminalizes incitement and recruitment in places of religious training and worship. Ensure fair and speedy trial of terror suspects in accordance with the rule of law and develop an integrated criminal justice database. Provide leadership in the development of a seamless and coordinated approach to investigation and prosecution of terror cases among the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) of the Federation, the Police, the DSS, Nigeria Prisons and other Law Enforcement Agencies.
13.	Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources	Contribute to NACTEST as a lead ministry for all petroleum matters. In conjunction with security agencies/services, it is responsible for ensuring the security of the nation's petroleum supplies and distribution of oil and gas) and assets.
14.	Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment	Support NACTEST with efforts aimed at generating employment for Nigerians and drive skill acquisition processes at Federal, State and Local Government levels. This will provide a platform for economic self-actualization among the general populace and the youth as it will go a long way in helping to reduce exposure to the tenants of radicalization.
15.	Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports	The Ministry to develop a comprehensive framework to cater for the needs of underage children and introduce a coordinating mechanism for empowerment programmes in Agriculture, in conjunction with state government through skill acquisition, vocational studies and counselling. In addition, introduce sporting activities in collaboration with Nigerian Prisons, which will provide a favourable platform for engaging Designated Interested Client (DIC), youths and other street children to desist from violent extremism. The Ministry will revive the culture of Community/Town Hall as a veritable tool of engagement to build community cohesion and resilience.
16.	Federal Ministry of Health	In collaboration with the Ministry of National Planning and National Population Commission, put in place mechanisms to strengthen existing health data collection systems. Set up institutions to develop skills for the identification and counselling of vulnerable persons who are at the threshold of being radicalized, including facilities for PTSD nationwide. Provide emergency preparedness and response support to deal with emergencies arising from catastrophic acts of terrorism.
17.	Federal Ministry of Science and Technology	Contribute to the Forestall strand of NACTEST by encouraging the exploration of scientific methods of research and development for CT capabilities. Work in conjunction with the Nigerian Communications Satellite (NIGCOMSAT) to explore how NIGCOMSAT 1 & 2 can be deployed to complement border security.
18.	Federal Ministry of Power, Works, and Housing	In conjunction with other security agencies, ensure adequate security for the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity and speedy restoration of damaged infrastructure as well as set up a backup mechanism in case of terrorism-related breaches.
19.	Federal Ministry of Solid Minerals Development	Contribute to NACTEST by giving information on importation, manufacturing, distribution, sales and handling. It will also assist in the restriction on the movement of explosives and accessories allowed into the country. It will also assist in prevention/reporting on the theft and diversion of explosives and accessories in the country.
20.	Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC)	The Commission is responsible for the regulation of telecommunication services in the country. The NCC is to expand the national call centre for information dissemination to rural communities and re-invigorate and enforce regulations on SIM card registration and monitoring.

21.	Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)	The FRCN is to pro-actively initiate multi-media campaigns with the support and cooperation of relevant stakeholders to inform, educate and enlighten the public on CT initiatives and be carried along at all levels of the workstreams for dissemination of relevant information and awareness creation among the public.
22.	National Broadcasting Commission (NBC)	The Commission is to regulate radio/TV broadcasts, allocation of frequencies as well as the monitoring of transmissions.
23.	Nigerian Communications Satellite (NIGCOMSAT)	The NIGCOMSAT will assist in developing satellite communication links in support of security forces operations. It will also assist some MDAs with spatial data infrastructure for information collation, dissemination, and analysis in support of counter-terrorism activities utilizing existing infrastructures.
24.	National Space Research Development Agency (NASRDA)	The NASRDA will assist in acquiring geo-spatial data via communication satellite in support of security forces operations. It will also assist some MDAs with spatial data information that will help with the development planning most especially in agriculture, water management, census, urban development planning etc.
25.	Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)	The CBN and NFIU are to work closely with the ONSA and other security agencies to monitor unusual/suspicious movement of funds most especially as such movements relate to terrorism financing.
26.	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)	Ensure secure and safe distribution of petroleum products, in conjunction with other agencies and develop a contingency plan for terror-related disruptions. The NNPC will secure the operation of the downstream and upstream sectors of the energy industry.
27.	State Security Services (SSS)	The Department is to serve as the lead agency on information/Intelligence collection/collation on all non-military components of internal security as well as prevention and detection of terror-related activities/crimes. The agency is to reactivate/resuscitate the crime registry for the storage of digital information and collaborate with the Ministry of Information and NOA to develop public enlightenment programs that will sensitize the public. It will also liaise with religious bodies and relevant departments in academia to develop de-radicalization programmes.
28.	National Intelligence Agency (NIA)	The NIA is to serve as the lead agency for external information/intelligence collection/collation and, in conjunction with relevant MDAs, monitor all terror-related activities in the Forestall, Identify and Secure strands of NACTEST.
29.	Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA)	The Agency is to coordinate the CT effort of the DMI, DNI and DA1 and, in conjunction with relevant agencies, is the lead agency for the collation of military-related intelligence within and outside the country.
30.	Nigeria Police Force (NPF)	The NPF is the lead agency for the maintenance of law and order and the prevention and detection of crime. The NPF is the first responder in the five strands of NACTEST with support from other security agencies. It will update the crime registry and store information digitally for easy access. In conjunction with the DSS, NSCDC, NIS, NCS, FAAN, NIMASA, NIA and the Ministry of Solid Minerals, ensure that firearms and explosives are not illegally imported and unlawfully used in the country. In collaboration with DSS, maintain and monitor information on quarries and industrial explosive sites in the country. The NPF is to institute measures to monitor and control the sales, distribution and use of materials that may be used in making IEDs. In collaboration with the National Space Research Development Agency (NASRDA), Ministries of Science and Technology, Finance, Information, and the Military, the NPF shall develop mechanisms to control the activities of cybercriminals.
31.	Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC)	The FRSC is to provide support especially data for the Forestall, Identify and Prepare strands of NACTEST.
32.	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)	In collaboration with relevant agencies, investigate financial crimes, money laundering and terrorist financing in support of the Forestall and Identify workstreams of NACTEST.
33.	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)	Collaborative functions with other security agencies and MDAs to enforce the prevention of the cultivation, production/manufacture, sale, distribution, abuse, importation and exportation of illicit drugs and substances as well as diversion of precursor chemicals for illicit purposes.
34.	Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU)	In conjunction with other relevant financial institutions, the NFIU is responsible for the receipt and analysis of financial disclosures and currency transactions. NFIU will report suspicious transactions and disseminate financial intelligence to competent authorities.

35.	Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS)	NIS controls and monitors immigration activities at all entry and exit points in the country. Complement internal security efforts through effective manning of major entry points as well as the patrolling of borders. Register all foreign house - helps and foreign construction workers in the country and, in conjunction with other agencies, monitor and ensure the control of refugees and refugee camps in the country.
36.	Nigeria Customs Service (NCS)	Collaborative functions with other agencies to support and enforce the prevention of illegal importation of arms and ammunition, illicit drugs including toxic and hazardous substances. The NCS is to provide first -hand intelligence on importation and exportation trends to help contain terrorist threats.
37.	Nigeria Prisons Service (NPS)	Develop capacity for prison personnel and institutions to tackle the issue of de-radicalization of convicted terrorists and those awaiting trials. Equally, develop a mechanism for prison aftercare system for easy reintegration into society.
38.	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)	Assist in the maintenance of law and order and will be the lead agency in emergencies and disasters. Protection of government facilities and oversight functions for private security companies.
39.	National Identity Management Commission (NIMC)	Responsible for the issuance of identity cards (IDs) for eligible Nigerians and legal residence only and maintaining a proper record/database for all categories of persons.
40.	Department of Aviation Security	Lead agency on oversight, safety and security of air travel and ensure periodic review of aviation security protocol. Charge relevant agencies including Federal Airport Authorities with the screening of air travellers and their baggage as well as the need for proper screening in the following air security areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Pre-board screening. ii. Hold baggage screening. iii. Non-passenger screening for restricted areas. iv. Ensure the safety of approaches to airports for safe take-off and landing. v. Ensure the progressive erection of perimeter fences at airports.
41.	Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC)	The Nigeria Railway Corporation (NRC) is saddled with the exclusive legal right to operate rail services in Nigeria. It helps in generating employment, transportation of goods and services. It also helps in preventing the transportation of improvised explosive devices (IED) and other offensive weapons by terrorists in the railway system.
42.	Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA)	The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) governs and operates Nigerian ports that include Lagos Port, Tin Can Island Port Apapa, Calabar Port, Delta Port, Rivers Port and Onne Port. Operations of NPA are carried out under the Ministry of Transport in conjunction with the Nigerian Shippers Council. NPA ensures that terrorists do not import/export improvised explosive devices (IED) and other offensive materials into the country.
43.	Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA)	The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Authority (NIMASA) is responsible for regulations related to Nigerian shipping, maritime labour and coastal waters. The agency also undertakes inspections and provides search and rescue services. It also helps in providing security along our coastal waters against attacks by terrorists that may use our maritime domain to perpetrate such acts.
44.	Federal Inland Waterways Authority	Federal Inland Waterways Authority (FIWA) is established with the primary responsibility to improve and develop Nigeria's "Inland waterways for navigation and to help transport human and material resources. In addition to that, it will assist in preventing the transportation of improvised explosive devices (IED) and other offensive materials that may be used by terrorists.
45.	Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Authority	The Nigeria Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NNRA) coordinates efforts in the peaceful application of nuclear energy in conjunction with relevant MDAs and to prevent radioactive materials from being used for acts of terrorism. The NNRA also regulate radiological protection and nuclear safety to ensure the protection of life, health, property and the environment from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation. It will ensure the safety and security of nuclear materials and enable Nigeria to meet its international obligations on the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.
46.	National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC)	The Agency is charged with the detection of fake drugs and drug money. It will also ensure the importation of genuine drugs and the distribution of safe drugs devoid of terrorist-induced contamination.

47.	National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)	Coordinating agency for disaster management and saddled with the exploration of the imperatives of multi-agency cooperation in emergency management. The NEMA is to provide appropriate leadership and direction to other relevant agencies on CT response matters to ensure resilience. It will ensure that Disaster Response Cells (DRC) are created by respective establishments. It will also coordinate training for stakeholders especially Disaster Risk Reduction related efforts (including NGOs and faith-based organizations) and encourage regular joint training activities.
48.	National Orientation Agency (NOA)	The NOA is to serve as the information hub of government, responsible for the publication and dissemination of government activities. With other relevant agencies, develop security consciousness and situational awareness through concerted media campaigns. Engage with the communities to ensure better security and civic education, promote activities that would engender social inclusiveness and community cohesion. Identify signs of radicalization early and flag these off into early warning machinery. The NOA will embark on a nationwide campaign to promote the installation of CCTV by public and private organizations, individuals, and corporate bodies.
49.	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)	Responsible for the supervision and prevention of child labour, prevent children from being used or sold into slavery, assist victims of child trafficking and combat trafficking of persons who could be exploited for terrorist activities.
50.	Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)	Foster inter-religious harmony among Nigerians and ensure the integration of faith-based organizations into the humanitarian response system in emergencies and terrorist attacks.
51.	Defence Headquarters	Establish a robust CT Unit (Special Operations Force) and coordinate the CT efforts of the Armed Forces of Nigeria. The DHQ is to coordinate and implement the mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) involving the Armed Forces of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and the Republic of Benin.
52.	Office of the National Security Adviser	The ONSA is to provide the requisite leadership role in all national CT efforts and drive NACTEST. It will maintain a comprehensive list of the country's Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and formulate a policy for its protection. ONSA will ensure synergy among the DSS, NIA, the Police, Armed Forces, and other Stakeholders. ONSA is to coordinate and ensure oversight of response units in the respective Services. It is to develop a single and comprehensive database to serve as an information-sharing system for the various agencies. It will also ensure stricter control for the issue of End-user Certificates for arms, ammunition, explosives, CT scanning equipment and other military security-related hardware. In conjunction with other agencies, ONSA will use the media to educate the public on threat levels including the issuance of threat level indicators and liaise with the Services/Agencies towards the mitigation of terrorism threats. It will work out modalities on how the Nigeria-Republic of Niger Joint Border Patrol could be replicated with Chad and Cameroon. It will also develop a benchmarking framework for the evaluation of the implementation and review of NACTEST.
53.	Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)	The Government (ONSA-CTC) is to partner with CSOs in all facets of its CT programme, particularly of the following areas: The Government (ONSA-CTC) is to partner with CSOs in all facets of its CT programme, particularly of the following a. Addressing conditions conducive for the spread of terrorism including, human rights, conflict resolution, rule of law, social, political, and economic issues. The CSOs are to engage in outreach activities and taking proactive steps to address the root causes of terrorism. b. Targeted programmes of cooperation focusing on the promotion of dialogue and tolerance. c. Provide Policy advice and expertise on aspects of preventing terrorism and developing security consciousness and situation awareness through sustained public enlightenment campaigns. d. Mobilization and the sensitization of the public on how to respond to major emergency security situations.



CHAPTER THREE

MISUSE OF SECURITY LAWS TO RESTRICT THE CIVIC SPACE



Source: Vanguard News

3.1.0. What is Civic Space?

According to the United Nations,

“Civic space is the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies. In particular, civic space allows individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including by accessing information, engaging in dialogue, expressing dissent or disagreement, and joining together to express their views.”⁷⁶

In practical terms, the reference to civic space relates to the ability of citizens to exercise their rights in the following ways:

a) Freedom of expression: This refers to the rights of citizens to express their viewpoints, access information, dialogue with people of like minds, and undertake advocacy in respect of state policy or any matter of public concern. This right is generally guaranteed when citizens can speak without fear of retribution. Countries have an obligation protect and facilitate this right.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See OHCHR: Protecting and expanding civic space

⁷⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CivicSpace/Pages/ProtectingCivicSpace.aspx>, accessed 26 September 2021, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

b) Freedom of association: This pertains to the right of citizens to join and belong to groups, organisations, trade unions and associations of their choice to protect their interests in each society. This right must be exercised without the fear of harassment, curtailment, de-legitimisation and deregistration or censorship by state or non-state actors.

c) Freedom of assembly: This includes the right of citizens to gather publicly and privately to express their views, protect their interests and critically advocate on public policies or matters. This right includes the right to participate in peaceful assemblies, meetings, protests, strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations, and other temporary gatherings for a specific purpose.

These rights are cardinal to the openness of the online and offline spaces used for civic and democratic engagement. A country drifts towards authoritarianism when citizens are unable to exercise any or all these rights. In other words, a country with closed civic spaces suppresses the ability of its citizens to assert, enforce and exercise their civic rights and participate in decision-making.

3.1.1. The Nigerian Civil Society and the Civic Space

The civil society serves as a 'watchdog' by challenging and criticising unpopular policies and actions of the government. A Brookings article described civil society as

*“an important source of information for both citizens and government. They monitor government policies and actions and hold government accountable. They engage in advocacy and offer alternative policies for government, the private sector, and other institutions. They deliver services, especially to the poor and underserved. They defend citizen rights and work to change and uphold social norms and behaviors.”*⁷⁸

For a country like Nigeria with multiple social issues like poverty, illiteracy, high maternal and neo-natal mortality, environmental degradation in the oil-rich Niger Delta, exclusion and political corruption, hapless citizens look up to the civil society for succor. Since Nigeria's return to full democratic rule in 1999, non-profits (mostly registered as Incorporated Trustees and operating as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) carrying out different kinds of good works form a very important part of civil society sector, with their activities reaching millions of people, particularly in the areas of education, health, security, agriculture, policy formulation, democracy, governance, gender rights, public rights advocacy, and so forth.⁷⁹ So huge is the non-profit sector that it garnered over \$13.85 Billion in foreign financial inflows to the Nigerian economy between 2015 and 2016.⁸⁰

The advent of social media expanded the frontiers of activism, enabling a vibrant civic space for

⁷⁸ [Civil society: An essential ingredient of development \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/civil-society.pdf)

⁷⁹ SPACES FOR CHANGE, [Unpacking the Official Construction of Risks and Vulnerabilities for the Third Sector in Nigeria, March 2019](#)

⁸⁰ Bamaga Bello (2018): The Challenges of Regulating NPOs for AML/CFT Compliance: A presentation made at the GIABA Regional Workshop on the Development of Effective Frameworks and Structure to fight against ML/TF through Non-profit Organizations (NPOs) from 4th – 6th April, 2018 at Abuja, Nigeria. Bamaga Bello, FNIM is the Director of the Special Control Unit against Money Laundering, pg 4.

ventilating and addressing a variety of issues of national importance. Since the late 2000s, the emergence of new voices and vibrant actors illustrate the thinning apathy levels and the shared commitment of ordinary citizens to demand social, economic and political change. The significant increase in digital literacy and the growing culture of mass-based actions happening online—as exemplified by the #RevolutionNow and #ENDSARS in Nigeria—reflect the shared aspirations of citizens to keep the civic space free from obstructions and ensure all duty-bearers are held accountable. In the same vein, popular culture — and in particular new media art, internet memes and other kinds of humorous visual texts – are amplifying online resistance to politics and dominant cultures.⁸¹ In sum, the range of civil society actors challenging impunity and deconstructing oppressive systems are diverse. They work to instigate change, mitigate hardship, deliver aid and humanitarian assistance, speak, and act for the defenseless, all of which combine to make the world a better place.

A plethora of reports reveal that the Nigerian civic space—which enables the civil society to operate—is rapidly shrinking. In 2018, CIVICUS reported that civil society is under serious attack in 111 countries, almost six in 10 countries worldwide.⁸² This means that repression of peaceful civic activism continues to be a widespread crisis for civil society in most parts of the world, with just four per cent of the world's population living in countries with open space for civil society (civic space).⁸³ This is accompanied by increase in spates of harassment and maiming of human rights defenders. In the same vein, Spaces for Change found that:⁸⁴

The denial of civil and political liberties, surveillance and arrests of bloggers or political opponents, violations of personal or physical integrity rights, restriction of freedoms of expression on mainstream and internet media, are all unhealthy signals that indicate a repressed or closed civil society. When these signals are recurrent, they obstruct public participation in democratic engagement, bringing about an environment of state repression. Obstructions of this nature are reminiscent of the repressive tactics traditionally utilized by military regimes. As evidence would subsequently show, civilian administrations are increasingly, resorting to these tactics to coerce associational and non-associational entities into submission.⁸⁵

In the past, the threats to civic freedom in Nigeria was associated with military regimes. On assumption of power, often attained through bloody coups, military dictators usually began their reign of terror by suspending the operation of the national constitution, in whole or in part, replacing them with military decrees. Civil society groups were common preys, with many activists targeted with physical harassments, arbitrary imprisonments and extrajudicial executions.⁸⁶ Ironically, the return to democratic rule in 1999 did not end the culture of civil society repression. The negative attitude toward civil society organizations (CSOs) continued notwithstanding the handover of political power to democratically elected civilians and the restoration of the suspended constitutional provisions.⁸⁷

81 Somtoo Onuchukwu, Internet Enables Young Nigerians' Political Participation

2016). <https://today.ku.edu/2019/10/18/internet-enables-young-nigerians-political-participation>

82 CIVICUS "People Power Under Attack: A global analysis of threats to fundamental freedoms." Available at <https://www.civicus.org/documents/PeoplePowerUnderAttack.Report.27November.pdf>, accessed 26 September 2021, p. 4

83 *Ibid.*

84 Spaces for Change "Closing Spaces for Democratic Engagement and Civil Society in Nigeria". Available at <https://spacesforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Beyond-FATF-Trends-Risks-and-Restrictive-Regulation-of-Non-Profit-Organisations-in-Nigeria.pdf>, accessed 26 September 2021

85 *Ibid.*, p. 13

86 Spaces for Change "Closing Spaces for Democratic Engagement and Civil Society in Nigeria". Available at <https://spacesforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Beyond-FATF-Trends-Risks-and-Restrictive-Regulation-of-Non-Profit-Organisations-in-Nigeria.pdf>, accessed 26 September 2021, pp. 20-21.

87 *Ibid.*

3.1.2. Categories of Security-based Restrictions on the Civic Space

Restrictions on the civic space are categorized according to the rights violated or the strategy used to impose the restrictions. The categories include violations of the right to free speech, freedom of association & assembly. Other restrictions include politically-motivated attacks on opposition voices, digital/tech surveillance as well as the application of anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) measures on civil society organizations.⁸⁸

Recognizing the potential for state security measures to restrict the civic space, Spaces for Change created an online database to track and document past and ongoing crackdowns on civil society.⁸⁹ The database represents the first step in combating restrictions on the civic space, by identifying and demonstrating the manner, tactics, and extent state actors and their collaborators are limiting civic expression and participation in governance. The persistent and varying approaches employed by state actors to restrict the Nigerian civic space using one or a combination of the tactics are detailed below:⁹⁰

- Forced Disappearances, Unlawful Arrests and Detention
- Unlawful Killings, Physical Attacks, Torture, Degrading Treatment
- Disruption and Criminalization of Protests
- Ban, Sanctions and Fines
- Trials, Prosecution and Persecutions
- Anti-NGO and Restrictive Laws
- Designation as a Terrorist Group
- Violation of Court Orders

The above-listed tactics are typically used to enforce three major types of governmental restrictions, namely: overbroad application of existing laws, restrictive legislations, and non-legal restrictions taking the form of shaming, negative labelling and including the outright proscription of the activities of targeted groups. These categories are not exhaustive, but have⁹¹ been rehashed to highlight the impacts of civic space contractions arising from the multiple security initiatives in different parts of the country.

3.1.3. Overbroad Application of Existing Counterterrorism and Security Laws

The Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA 2011 amended in 2013) tops the list of security laws often used to stifle dissent under the guise of advancing the security agenda. It criminalizes both terrorism and terrorism financing while setting out the powers of law enforcement agents in relation to prevention and the prosecution of the offence of terrorism or terrorist financing. These powers include the powers to search without warrant and to confiscate properties of a suspect, the power of surveillance, power of arrest on reasonable suspicion of a terrorism

⁸⁸ See www.closingspaces.org

⁸⁹ See www.closingspaces.org

⁹⁰ Culled from Closing Spaces Database: <https://closingspaces.org/incidents/?sort=latest>

⁹¹ Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, Confronting Closing Civic Spaces in Nigeria, Issue 26, SUR International Journal on Human Rights, September 2017: page 7; <https://sur.conectas.org/en/confronting-closing-civic-spaces-in-nigeria/>

offence and the power of prosecution. The provisions of the TPA are supplemented by regulations such as the Central Bank of Nigeria's regulation on freezing the assets of suspects of terrorism plus the Cybersecurity Act which contains provisions on cyber terrorism, cyberstalking, etc. Because terms like 'terrorism', 'national security' and 'national interest' are not defined in federal and state security laws, law enforcement agents have latched on to the often vague and broad language in these provisions to overstretch and import new meanings unintended by the legal draftsmen.

Criminal justice legislations are also exploited in this manner. For instance, statutes governing the administration of criminal justice such as sedition, criminal defamation and treason/treasonable felony have been frequently invoked to harass, arrest, detain and prosecute private citizens including civil rights agitators and journalists for very benign activities such as peaceful protests, publication of critical and satirical commentary, and other forms of dissent. Journalists, campaigners, protestors, leaders of ethnic agitation groups, religious and self-determination movements have been particularly targeted in the name of curbing extremism, terrorism and insecurity.

The frequency of attacks on civic actors using security as an excuse portrays a coordinated assault on the civil society. To sustain the security narrative, court orders to release the victims have been serially violated on the grounds that the victims pose security threats. Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) leader in Nigeria, Sheik Ibrahim Zakzaky and his wife, Malama Zeenatudeen were remanded in 'protective custody' of the Nigerian government despite multiple court orders for their release. Even after their eventual release in 2021, their passports remain confiscated.⁹² The clampdown on IMN began in December 2015 when members of the Shiites group participating in a demonstration on a major road in Zaria blocked the convoy of the then Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Buratai and other road users. In retaliation, the Nigerian Army attacked the IMN members, killing about 348 persons.⁹³

According to the Closing Spaces Database, civic actors targeted by the overbroad interpretation of CT and security laws include the following:

1. Journalists and bloggers
2. Self-determination and religious leaders
3. Campaigners and protestors

⁹² Premium Times, TIMELINE: Ibrahim El-Zakzaky's long road to 'freedom', published August 21, 2021; Accessed via <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/477003-timeline-ibrahim-el-zakzakys-long-road-to-freedom.html>

⁹³ Kabir Yusuf, Premium Times, TIMELINE: Ibrahim El-Zakzaky's Long Road to 'Freedom' (2021) <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/477003-timeline-ibrahim-el-zakzakys-long-road-to-freedom.html>

Journalists & Bloggers	Reason for being targeted	Security reason/law invoked	Security agents involved
Jones Abiri	Publisher of a regional weekly newspaper, <i>Weekly Source</i> was arrested in Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital by the State Security Service for allegedly sponsoring militant activities. He was held for two years without access to family or lawyers, and rumours swirled that he was dead. ⁹⁴ The true details that led to the arrest of Jones Abiri are still unknown.	Terrorism Prevention Action. Charged for treasonable felony and terrorism ⁹⁵ and arraigned in court in May 2019 for terrorism, economic sabotage, and fraud.	State Security Services (SSS)
Agba Jalingo	Publisher of <i>CrossRiverWatch</i> was arrested in August 2019 in Calabar, Cross River State and was subsequently remanded in prison for 174 days before being granted bail by the court and set free. ⁹⁶ He had published an article that accused the Cross River State Governor Ben Ayade of diverting N500 million from the Cross River Microfinance Bank.	Criminal Code Act. Charged to court for treason and treasonable felony. ⁹⁷	Nigeria Police Force
Daily Trust Newspaper	In January 2019, a combined team of security operatives stormed ⁹⁸ the Abuja and Maiduguri offices of <i>Daily Trust</i> , a major newspaper outlet, arrested reporters they could find and locked the offices. The news outlet published reports of the military's anti-terror field operations to suppress Boko Haram terrorism in the North -East, exposing gaps in official updates regarding military operations and the scale of attacks in the region.	'National Security'	Nigeria's security services comprising the military, the State Security Service and the Nigeria Police Force
Leadership, The Nation, and Punch newspapers	In June 2014, the military impounded newspapers ⁹⁹ across the country and stopped their distribution because of a story about some of its generals. Leadership newspaper had reported that nearly a dozen army generals and soldiers on lower ranks were being court-martialed for sabotaging the Nigerian government's onslaught against Boko Haram; a report the military denied.	'Routine security check'	The Nigerian Army
Omoyele Sowore	A pro-democracy campaigner and a former presidential aspirant and convener of #RevolutionNow movement, has been in and out of detention. On August 3 2019, he was arrested for calling for a peaceful protest against the Buhari regime, demonstrations which he tagged "RevolutionNow."	Under investigation for suspected ties to terrorism . He is currently facing a criminal charge of treasonable felony.	State Security Service
Emperor Gabriel Ogbonna	He was arrested, arraigned and detained for his online publication dated 18th-19th day of March, 2020 which was critical of the Governor of Abia State. ¹⁰⁰	Cyber terrorism pursuant to the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015	State Security Service

94 [The secret prosecution of Nigerian journalist Jones Abiri \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

95 [Nigerian journalist arrested by armed men \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

96 [Court grants Agba Jalingo bail \(Premium Times\)](#)

97 [Police charge journalist Agba Jalingo with terrorism for criticising Gov Ayade \(The PUNCH\)](#)

98 [Soldiers shut down Daily Trust offices, arrest two staff \(Guardian Nigeria\)](#)

99 [Nigerian military goes berserk, blocks newspapers distribution in Abuja, Lagos \(Premium Times\)](#)

100 Sahara Reporters "Abia Government Arrests, Remands Activist in Prison Custody Over Alleged False Publication." Available at <http://saharareporters.com/2020/04/04/abia-government-arrests-remands-activist-prison-custody-over-alleged-false-publication>, accessed 26 September 2021. The 26 March 2021 charge sheet against the accused reads in part, "That Emperor Gabriel Ogbonna 'M' and others now at large within the 18th-19th day of March, 2020, at 118 Market Road, Aba in the Aba North Magisterial District, knowingly and intentionally published false and threat message on the Internet that Governor Okezie Ikpeazu swore on oath before the ancient Harashima (A Hindu god) to abide absolutely by conditions presented by his predecessor in office and subvert the people of Abia State, that he also signed a document between the former governor of Abia State, Senator T. A. Orji, his son, Hon. Chinedum Orji, that the spirits they worship should deal with him if he fails in his undertaking, a publication you know to be false for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, insult, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred and ill-will against Okezie Ikpeazu, contrary to Section 27(1) (a) and 18(1) of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition Prevention ETC) Act, 2015."

Musa Babale Azare	Mr. Azare's publication on social media in August 2016 criticizing the policies and actions of the governor of Bauchi State. ¹⁰¹	Cyber stalking pursuant to the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015	Nigeria Police Force
Abubakar Sidiq Usman	Arrested on 8 August 2016 for a publication against the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and its staff on his blog. He was released from custody after 3 days.	Cyber stalking pursuant to the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
Godfrey Chikwere	He was arrested in Ebonyi State following a petition by Ebonyi State Commissioner for Information accusing him of false, fake and incisive publication made on 8th of October 2021, "intended to cause fear, cyberbullying, riot crisis and breach of the peace in the state."	"Hate speech, incisive publication and cyberbullying" pursuant to the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015	Nigeria Police Force
Mubarak Bala	A popular Nigerian atheist, humanist and atheist. Since his arrest in April 2021, he is still being held on account of a Facebook post where he stated his reservations about Prophet Muhammad. He is still being held on on allegations of blasphemy.	Causing a public disturbance under Sections 210 and 114 of the Penal Code of Kano State	Nigeria Police Force

Around the world, countries use legal or quasi-legal, bureaucratic, financial, political, and security related methods to contract civic space.¹⁰² Between 2001 and 2018, at least 140 Governments adopted counter-terrorism legislation and such new and multiple legislative and administrative measures are defended by reference to new or perceived threats, or simply to comply with new international requirements.¹⁰³ Consistent with the trends from other parts of the world, it is evident from the table above that the TPA and the federal cybercrimes legislation are the most popular security laws state actors use to suppress dissent. Although the Nigeria's 2015 Cybercrime Law was enacted to create a legal, regulatory and institutional framework for improving cybersecurity and to ensure the protection of the critical national information infrastructure, evidence from the table above demonstrate the ease at which state officials invoke this law to legitimize the arrests of civic actors. The arrests are mostly effected by the State Security Service (SSS) also known as the Department of State Security (DSS), and the victims routinely slammed with charges of terrorism, cyberterrorism and cyberstalking.¹⁰⁴ Other state actors famed for their routine attacks on civic actors are the Nigeria Police Force and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. The primary triggers for state-ordered onslaught on civic actors range from the informal expressions of critical commentary on social media to the publication of news reports considered 'offensive' in the mainstream media. Based on the preponderance on the incidents tracked on the Closing Spaces Database, 'offensive' reports refer to deemed to expose security services' operations and internal affairs.

¹⁰¹ [How Nigeria's cybercrime law is being used to try to muzzle the press - Committee to Protect Journalists \(cpj.org\)](#)

¹⁰² Siân Herbert "Restricting space for civil society." Available at www.gsdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/HDQ1266.pdf, accessed 26 September 2021, p. 3

¹⁰³ Fionnuala Ní Aoláin "Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism". Available at <https://undocs.org/A/74/335>, accessed 26 September 2021, p. 3

¹⁰⁴ Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, Galvanizing Collective Action to Protect Nigeria's Civic Space, published by Shehu Musa Yar Adua Foundation, 2021, <https://yaraduafoundation.org/files/Galvanizing%20Collective%20Action.pdf>

-Self-Determination and Religious Leaders

Self-Determination/Religious Leaders	Reason for being targeted	Security reason/law invoked	Security agents involved
Nnamdi Kanu	Leader of Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) agitating for a break away country for the South -East alleging suppression and oppression of the Igbo people by the Federal Government of Nigeria since the Nigerian civil war. Kanu had been in and out of police detention in Nigeria and subsequently escaped Nigeria, jumping bail in the process, citing imminent risks to his life after law enforcement attacked his home. He was rearrested in 2021 for his broadcasts on the controversial Radio Biafra outlet and also through the social media. ¹⁰⁵	Charged with "terrorism", treason, and perpetuating falsehoods against President Muhammadu Buhari	The Presidency
Sunday Igboho	He leads the movement to establish the independent Yoruba State . The movement began as a reaction to the government's inactions in the face of multiple attacks by Fulani herdsmen in Yoruba communities.	Facing charges of terrorism, possession of firearms and cybercrimes. ¹⁰⁶	The Presidency
El-Zakzaky	The Shiite leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, and his wife Zeenat were arrested in December 2015 and held at an undisclosed location. The Nigerian Army extra-judicially killed over 300 followers of the Shiite cleric.	Charged for terrorism and of being sponsored by Iran to replicate the Iranian revolution	State Security Service (SSS), Kaduna State Government & the Presidency

Sunday Igboho, Nnamdi Kanu and El-Zakzaky and his wife's arrests and their prolonged detention reveal the government's extreme revulsion for religious and self-determination agitations and the resolve of the state to deploy its counterterrorism architecture to suppress their activities. Orders for such arrests usually come from the highest authorities, notably the Presidency,¹⁰⁷ and executed by the SSS/DSS in collaboration with the Nigerian Army. Brazen disregard for court orders are hallmark features of the Nigerian government's response to cases involving self-determination agitators and religious leaders. In justifying the disobedience to court orders for the release El-Zakzaky and his wife, the government of Nigeria declared that their detention was in public interest.¹⁰⁸ In 2021, the El-Zakzakys were acquitted of all charges following a no-case submission.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, a High Court in Umuahia, Abia State, recently ordered the Nigeria Government to issue a public apology and pay the sum of N1 billion to Nnamdi Kanu, for violating the rights of the IPOB leader.¹¹⁰ Nnamdi Kanu remains in detention standing trial for terrorism while no apology has been issued.

¹⁰⁵ [Nigeria: Separatist leader to appear in court for treason trial | News | Al Jazeera](#)

¹⁰⁶ [DSS arraigns two Igbohos aides for terrorism - Punch Newspapers \(punchng.com\)](#)

¹⁰⁷ Referring to the Office of the President

¹⁰⁸ [TIMELINE: Ibrahim El-Zakzaky's long road to 'freedom' \(premiumtimesng.com\)](#)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Dennis Erezi, The Guardian, Court orders Nigeria to apologise, pay 1 billion to Nnamdi Kanu, published January 19, 2022; Accessed via <https://guardian.ng/news/court-orders-nigeria-to-apologise-pay-%E2%82%A61billion-to-nnamdi-kanu/>

- Protestors and Campaigners

#EndSARS Protesters: In October 2020, the activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) gave rise to the youth-led nationwide protests against SARS under the hashtag #EndSARS. To disperse the protests, military forces fired at unarmed peaceful demonstrators. Many were reported dead or injured. As part of its cover-up operations following the mayhem, the government froze the bank accounts of key protest leaders and charged them for violating terrorism financing laws. State actors relied on the provisions of the Section 13(1)(a) and(b) of the TPA and Regulation 31(2)(a) and (3)(b) of the Central Bank of Nigeria Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism Regulations, 2013 (“CBN CT Regulation”) to order the freezing of bank accounts belonging to #ENDSARS campaigners.¹¹¹

As with #EndSARS Protesters, the #RevolutionNow Movement campaigners have always been on the radar of the state security agents. Statements credited to state officials noted that the movement is a “revolution march against the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria” and warned citizens to desist from joining the planned protest whose sole aim is to “force a regime change in the country”.¹¹² According to the Nigeria Police Force, the movement amounts to treasonable felony and acts of terrorism and they will not stand by and watch any individual or group in the society cause anarchy in the land.¹¹³ True to the threat, six protesters were arrested on August 5, 2019—Omoshomio 35 years old, Gabriel Ojumah 51 years old, Juwon Sanyaolu 22 years old, Stanley Anobi 28 years old, Elias Ozikpu 30 years old and Kenechukwu Ukachukwu 25 years old—and charged to court on two grounds of unlawful assembly and conduct that may cause breach of peace, whilst the convener of the movement, Omoyele Sowore faces treasonable felony charges.¹¹⁴

The criminalization and disruption of peaceful assemblies represents the growing evolution of new narratives to legitimize crackdowns on civic actors built on the rhetoric of terrorism. Framing the #ENDSARS #RevolutionNow movements as a push for regime change not only aims to discredit the legitimate grievances of protestors but also taints the peaceful agitations with the same brush used to characterize serious security breaches and felonies such as treason, rebellion or inciting revolt or violence against a lawful authority. These narratives provide justifications for the use of maximum force to suppress peaceful assemblies.¹¹⁵

3.1.4. RESTRICTIVE SECURITY REGULATIONS

Civil society strangulation: There have also been several legislative proposals over the past five years aimed at shrinking Nigeria's civic space but have been justified by their proposers as necessary to strengthen the country's efforts to combat terrorism and insurgency. A classic example is the 2015 “Bill for an Act to Provide for the Establishment of the Non-governmental Organizations Regulatory Commission” known as the NGO Bill. The NGO Bill, introduced at the

111 Nairametrics “#EndSARS: CBN says funds in frozen accounts may be linked to terrorist activities.” Available at <https://nairametrics.com/2020/11/11/endsars-cbn-says-funds-in-frozen-accounts-may-be-linked-to-terrorist-activities/>, accessed 26 September 2021

112 “—#RevolutionNow is treason, terrorism police warn against planned protest | TheCable

113 Ibid

114 [Revolution Now: Nigeria Police carry six protesters go court - BBC News Pidgin](#)

115 Spaces for Change, Unintended Consequences of FATF standards on the NPO Sector and the Civic Space in Nigeria, Policy Brief submitted to the FATF Workstream on Unintended Consequences of FATF Standards (2021).

House of Representatives intended to establish a regulatory commission to supervise, coordinate and monitor the activities of non-governmental organisations in the country. One of the reasons proffered by the backers of the bill is to keep track of funding for the work of non-governmental and civil society organisations as part of a broader effort for combating anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT).

Although Nigeria already has numerous existing laws and regulations related to AML/CFT—such as the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, the Special Control Unit against Money Laundering (“SCUML”) Regulations, and the Central Bank of Nigeria AML/CFT Guidelines)—national security was yet again touted as one of the reasons for introducing the NGO Bill in order to give the government-wide powers to control non-governmental and civil society organisations. The bill was withdrawn from the House of Representatives in 2020 following intense pushback from civil society organizations resisting attempts to strangulate NGOs in the name of national security. Widespread resistance from civil society organizations halted the passage of this bill. Over-burdening NGOs with regulatory responsibilities increases the cost of operating non-profits. The high cost of compliance coupled with the duplicity of regulatory functions results in multiple reporting obligations to different regulators.¹¹⁶

Social media regulation: Although the NACTEST has envisioned how the media can be used to counter-narratives of violent extremism and increase the security consciousness and situational awareness of the public, two bills—'Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019' and 'The Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill'—before the federal parliament seek to criminalize the spread of falsehoods and hate speech. The bills vaguely define what constitute hate speech and the spread of internet falsehood and prescribe punishments ranging from five-year prison terms to death sentence. Whereas the preservation of national security and checking violent extremism are the reasons for introducing these bills, they hold enormous potential to censor free expressions online as well as constrict civic participation on digital platforms.

Criminalization of protests and assemblies: Following the #EndSARS movement, the Nigerian legislature have sought to pass laws that would make anti-government protests “unlawful”. As usual, the proposed statutes lack any objective benchmark for determining what would amount to an unlawful protest. In July 2021, a bill titled “*An Act to Amend the Criminal Code Act, Cap 38, Laws of The Federation of Nigeria, 2004 to Further Preserve the Sanctity of Human Life and Property and to Provide Specifically for Mob Action, Prescribe Punishment and Other Matters*” was introduced at the House of Representatives. The Bill defined unlawful assembly, riot, mob action as follows:

¹¹⁶ Spaces for Change (2021) *ibid.*

(a) When three or more persons, with intent to carry out some common purpose, assemble in such a manner or, being assembled, conduct themselves in such a manner as to cause persons in the neighbourhood to fear on reasonable grounds that the persons so assembled will tumultuously disturb the peace, or will by such assembly needlessly and without any reasonable occasion provoke other persons tumultuously to disturb the peace, they are an unlawful assembly. It is immaterial that the original assembling was lawful if, being assembled; they conduct themselves with a common purpose in such a manner as aforesaid”.

(b) An assembly of three or more persons who assemble for the purpose of protecting any house against persons threatening to break and enter the house in order to commit a felony or misdemeanour therein is not an unlawful assembly.

(c) When an unlawful assembly has begun to act in so tumultuous a manner as to disturb the peace, the assembly is called a riot, and the persons assembled are said to be riotously assembled.

(d) When an unlawful assembly becomes violent as to commit unlawful acts against any person or property, the assembly is called a mob and their violent act is referred to as mob action.¹¹⁷

The Bill proposes 5 years imprisonment for any person found guilty under the Bill. As usual, the bill regurgitates the national security justification. If passed into law, civic actors are deeply concerned about the potential for misuse, especially by criminalizing protest considered by state actors as unlawful.

Securitization of health emergency: The flurry of regulations enacted at the federal and state levels in the wake of the pandemic stipulated adherence to lockdowns, social distancing and other health and safety protocols. While some states adopted harsher methods to enforce the containment measures, some others embraced less stringent means to enhance compliance. The Database of Closing Civic Spaces tracked numerous incidents of high-handedness or the use of disproportionate force against civilians (leading to injury and deaths) by security operatives enforcing the lockdown measures.¹¹⁸ By authorizing security operatives to use force, including military action,¹¹⁹ to enforce the emergency measures, state actors ostensibly handled the pandemic—not just as a public health crisis—but as a security issue.

Though this approach provides the speed and toughness needed to take decisions, the securitization of emergency measures has far-reaching implications for the civic space. For many citizens, the appearance of police and army patrols roaming the streets, mounting roadblocks and checkpoints, prohibiting inter-state travels, banning public protests and gatherings, plus the unprecedented number of arrests and detentions of citizens recorded, are reminiscent of the military regimes of the 80s and 90s when the civic unintended

¹¹⁷ ["Reps bill threatens five-year jail term for unlawful protesters \(vanguardngr.com\)](#)

¹¹⁸ <https://closingspaces.org/tag/covid-19/>

¹¹⁹ Kanayo Umeh, The Guardian, Military on Lockdown: We'll Use Minimum Necessary Force in Enforcement, April 2020: <https://guardian.ng/news/military-on-lockdown-well-use-minimum-necessary-force-in-enforcement/>

consequences of the COVID-19 emergency responses such as income losses, job losses, hunger, unemployment, insecurity and homelessness. The brewing tension between COVID-19 responses and constitutionally-protected civil liberties have led commentators¹²⁰ and groups to conclude that the disease containment measures are reinforcing fears of deliberate governmental clampdowns on civic freedoms using COVID-19 as an excuse [S4C:2020].¹²¹

CONCLUSION

Whether by overstretching the meaning of existing counterterrorism and security laws or by introducing new security laws with more restrictive provisions, one string tying together all the above instances is how counterterrorism, security and emergency laws are routinely overstretching to rope activists and dissenters into the dragnet of counterterrorism. They further demonstrate the ease at which state actors can stretch and apply anti-terrorism regimes to any perceived threat or semblance of collision with constituted authority. In the next chapter, we discuss the major tactics of oppression and conditions that enable state actors to perpetrate inequities and shrink the civic space without consequences in the name of 'national security'.

¹²⁰ Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, COVID-19: The Legality and Limits of the President's Emergency Powers, Premium Times, March 2020: <https://opinion.premiumtimesng.com/2020/03/30/covid-19-the-legality-and-limits-of-the-presidents-emergency-powers-by-victoria-ibezim-ohaeri/>

¹²¹ SPACES FOR CHANGE, COVID-19, Human Rights and the Civic Space in Nigeria, March 2020: <https://spacesforchange.org/covid-19-human-rights-and-the-civic-space/>



CHAPTER FOUR

TRIGGERS, TACTICS AND ENABLERS OF SECURITY-BASED RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA



Source: Premium times Nigeria

In the last decade, state-sanctioned onslaughts on civil society actors have surged, exacerbating pre-existing contractions on the civic space. While CIVICUS downgraded Nigeria from 'obstructed' to 'repressed' in its *People Power Under Attack* 2019 report,¹²² the compilation of evidence presented by other local and international civic space trackers such as the Closing Spaces Database and the Press Freedom Index all point to rapidly backsliding civic freedoms in the country. The Closing Spaces Database finds that press freedom is the hardest hit by state-sanctioned restrictions,¹²³ with journalists and media entities bearing a disproportionate share of governmental crackdowns in the civic space. Corroborating the database records, Nigeria is ranked 115th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index.¹²⁴ The Index conducted by Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders) cited the killings of journalists and campaigns of disinformation as examples of the country's attempts to weaken the press.

122 CIVICUS, *People Power Under Attack*, December 2019. Please see <https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/GlobalReport2019.pdf>

123 <https://closingspaces.org/category/press-freedom/>

124 Today.ng, Nigeria Ranks 115th On Press Freedom Index, published April 26, 2020; <https://www.today.ng/news/nigeria/nigeria-ranks-115th-press-freedom-294593>

Fighting terrorism is the most popular justification advanced for the surging restrictions on the activities of civil society actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), humanitarian organisations, political opponents and activists demanding accountability from the government for its human rights failings.¹²⁵ Labelling activists as 'terrorists', 'spies', 'western agents' sits atop the security playbook used for discrediting the personalities and statements of activists and activist organizations. Successive military and democratic administrations used this tactic to suppress and demonize critics and political opposition, characterising them as threats to national sovereignty and security. In 1997, the Sani Abacha-led administration linked the Nobel laureate and vocal critic, Wole Soyinka, to the bombings in Nigeria's commercial capital, and charged him for terrorism and treasonable offence, a crime that carries the death penalty.¹²⁶ Reminiscent of the oppressive regime of the General Sani Abacha administration, Soyinka was arrested again in 2004 for criticizing the re-election of President Olusegun Obasanjo. In more recent times, civic actors like Omoyele Sowore have been dubbed 'terrorist' for challenging the harsh policies of the present Buhari administration.¹²⁷

The legion of security initiatives implemented across the country has increased opportunities for state security agents to misuse and crackdown on civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. Mounting evidence suggests that the war against insecurity, especially terrorism, places a high premium on stifling dissent and limiting civil society. The litany of tactics employed to neutralize civil society activities range from terrorist labelling, proscription, suspension, license revocations, office raids, disruption of programs, funding restrictions and so forth. The triggers, tactics and enablers of the security-based restrictions on civil society are detailed below:

4.1.0. Disruption of Legitimate Civil Society Operations

In Nigeria, state and federal authorities use an array of strategies to either link activism with terrorism or use the national security refrain to disrupt legitimate civil society operations. Key informant interviews conducted by World Impact Development Foundation (WIDEF) tracked and identified movements and representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) whose operations have been disrupted or negatively impacted by the government's misapplication of the security and counter-terrorism architecture. The table below shares some recent examples of disruption of the legitimate charitable operations of NGOs in various parts of the country:

¹²⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 'Human rights, terrorism and counter-terrorism' Fact Sheet No. 32 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf> (accessed on 7 September 2021).

¹²⁶ Tampabay, Nobel Author Accused of Treason (1997) <https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1997/03/13/nobel-author-accused-by-nigeria-of-treason/>

¹²⁷ ThisDay, Nigeria Back to Repressive Days of Abacha Regime, Says Soyinka (2019) <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/08/05/nigeria-back-to-repressive-days-of-abacha-regime-says-soyinka/>

S/No	CSO Groups	Highlight of Incidence	Agencies Responsible
1	Take It Back Movement	The convener has been arrested several times and charged with treason for spearheading the #Revolutionnow nationwide	The Nigeria Police
2	Connected Development (CODE)	Harassment of community champions for exposing fraudulent constituency issues	The Nigerian Police Force / The Department of State Service (DSS)
3	Concerned Nigerians	A staff of Concerned Nigerians was arrested while leading a protest against alleged bias by security chiefs in the build up to the general elections. He was bailed and then rearrested again after a petition from the then Chief of Army Staff Tukur Buratai.	The Nigerian Police/ The Nigerian Army
4	DEAN Initiative	Threats to the management of the organization for producing a video documentary exposing a community without access to clean water in the Federal Capital Territory	The Nigerian Police Force
5	GRX (Wants to remain Anonymous)	Forced break-in into the office and broke into the car of a staff, carting away a laptop and other vital documents	Department of State Service (DSS)
6	I am Nigeria Initiative	Intimidation calls to call off a planned protest aimed at bringing the government attention to the ongoing killings in Southern Kaduna	Department of State Service (DSS)
7	Justice Rights Initiative	Alleged battery and assault on the executive director for trying to secure the release of the Chairman of Nigeria Bar Association's Benue State Chapter	The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)
8	Neighborhood Care Foundation -Well	Camera was confiscated; members of staff were beaten and threatened with guns for recording a video where some police officers were assaulting a citizen at the front of their office.	The Nigerian Police Force
9	Lawanti Community Development Foundation	Their campaign on free HIV test was terminated. The Police insisted they had to get a letter of consent before they could continue with their campaign.	The Nigerian Police Force
10	Citizens Solution Network	Illegal arrest for issuing a press statement condemning the arrest of protestors	The Nigerian Police Force
11	Unity Migrant Association	A staff member was wrongly accused of fraud and illegally arrested	The Nigerian Police Force
12	Innovation Support Network	Nine (9) staff members were arrested and detained in ICPC custody for no just reason. Their Phones, laptops, and other personal gadgets were confiscated but later released on bail	Independent Corrupt Practices Commission
13	Human Rights Watch and Youth Empowerment Foundation	The police detained a young man and when they went to confirm the reason for the arrest, they were harassed and threatened to stay away from the case, or the case would be changed to a case of kidnapping, and they will be arrested also.	The Nigerian Police Force
14	Citizens Gavel	A lawyer from the organization went to the Police station to legally represent a client. While doing this, matters got escalated and the lawyer was assaulted. He was slapped repeatedly and briefly detained.	The Nigerian Police Force
15	TAP Initiative	Their staff went to the police station to follow up on an issue of a client and the staff was also detained.	The Nigerian Police Force
16	Coalition of Gender Violence Responders -Based	Alleged threat to life and intimidation of the executive director by the Deputy Commissioner of Police because of his involvement in unraveling those behind the alleged rape of a 14-year-old boarding student of Premier Academy, Lugbe, who was raped, which led to her death.	The Nigerian Police Force
17	Arewa Me Too Movement	The convener was arrested by the police with attempts made to gain access to her laptop and mobile phone by force in order to access the sensitive evidence human rights defenders have been gathering to seek justice for victims of sexual violence.	The Nigerian Police
18	Arewa Lives Matter	The chief executive was arrested ahead of the "Stop the Killings and Attacks, Arewa Lives Matter"	The Department of State Service (DSS)
19	BudgIT	Arrest of the Project Tracking Officer for monitoring constituency project, under the directives of Inspector General of Police, IGP, Ibrahim Idris, allegedly based on a complaint by a senator, Mohammed Sani. His phones were seized, and he was denied the ability to speak to his family, organization, or anyone else.	The Nigerian Police
20	Human and Environmental	Harassed, intimidated, and arrested for uncovering the massive bribery, which followed the sale of the controversial OPL 124 oil block, also known as Malabu, following a petition by	The Nigeria Police



REF: **AR: 3000/FCT/X/D9/VOL 62/38** 8th July, 2021

MR. LEMMY UGBHEGBE
Babylove School
Federal Housing Lugbe,
Abuja.

LETTER OF INVITATION

This office is investigating a case of Inciting Public disturbance, wherein your name featured prominently.

2. In view of the above, you are kindly requested to interview the undersigned through the officer in charge of Gender Section, Criminal Investigation Department Abuja today, 8/7/2021.

3. As we await your prompt response, accept my professional courtesies and warm regards, please.

[Signature]
DCP-FOM PAM JOSEPH psc(+)
Deputy Commissioner of Police
Criminal Investigation Department,
FCT Police Command,
Abuja.



**NPF
FCT
COMMAND**

Nigeria Police letter of invitation to Mr. Lemmy Ugbhegbe. Source: [Anonymous]

As the above table shows, targeted attacks on CSOs are carried out by a litany of security agencies such as the Department of State Security, the Nigeria Police Force, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, the Nigerian Army, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and so forth. Arrests by security agencies are usually followed by criminal charges alleging public disturbance and threats to national security. The huge disconnect between the accountability campaigns and the criminal charges filed against civic actors reinforces suspicion of a deliberate witch-hunt with the intention to either silence organized dissent or to protect the interests of powerful persons. By way of illustration, on the 8th of July 2021, Mr. Lemmy Ugbhegbe a gender rights advocate and leader of the coalition of Gender-Based Violence Responders led the campaign to unravel the alleged rape and death of 14-year-old Keren-Happuch Aondodoo Akpagher, a boarding student of Premier Academy, Lugbe. Days later, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) invited Mr. Lemmy to report to the police station to answer charges of public disturbance. The police invite was accompanied with threats and intimidation to call off the #JusticeforKeren protests scheduled to hold on the 9th of July 2021 at the Unity Fountain, Abuja.

Disrupting protests and public rallies organized by civil society organizations (CSOs) pushing for social change, arresting the organizers, raiding their offices, confiscating their equipment, and sponsoring smear campaigns on targeted groups top the list of tactics used to clamp down on civic actors operating under the banner of organized civil society. The December



29th December 2021
The Director General,
Department of State Security Services,
Aso Drive
Maitama
Abuja.

Dear Sir,

INTIMIDATION & PROFILING OF CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS DURING THE YULETIDE

On Monday the 27th of December 2021, Operatives of your agency, the Department of State Security Services (DSS) stormed the premises of our office, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, CISLAC, the National Chapter of Transparency International, TI Nigeria at No 16 POW Mafemi Crescent, Off Solomon Lar Way, Jabi. Laying siege, the operatives demanded to see the Chief Security Officer of the building. On learning about this, our initial thought was that these were individuals masquerading as DSS agents considering the fact that this was not just during the holiday period, but it was on a day declared as a public holiday by the federal government of Nigeria. This thought was further reinforced by the fact that was no prior notice, invitation or pending request from your office regarding any of such visit. However, when we put a call through to the number dropped with our office security personnel, an individual further confirmed that he was an agent of your agency providing details of his position.

Sir, considering recent activities of criminals using official security covers to perpetrate wanton criminalities in the recent past, we want you to use your good office to investigate those who carried out this visit and for what purpose(s). We will also request that you call these operatives to order and charge them to be civil in their approach and not militarize our nascent democracy.

At this point, we cannot jump into conclusion as to the exact reasons behind this gestapo approach; however, this kind of unprofessional visits clearly violates existential rights guaranteed by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and puts the country on a global map of 'bad policing' and seen shrinking voices of citizens demanding for good governance in the interest of all. Visits like these further feed fears that the country is gradually snowballing into autocracy with the regular abuse of powers from those parading themselves as agents of the state.

As an organization, we believe in the rule of law. We have complied with all statutes and thereby have not violated any law. We urge you to use your good office to put an end to this trend of shrinking civic space and the ongoing attempt to weaken democratic institutions to which the civil society community represents an aspect.

We look forward to your immediate intervention.

Yours faithfully,

Auwal Ibrahim Musa (Rafsanjani)
Executive Director, CISLAC

Letter of complaint by Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (the National Chapter of Transparency International Nigeria). Source: [CISLAC]

2021 invasion of the office of the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) by men of the Department of State Services during the yuletide bears further witness to the deliberate shrinking voices of civil society. "Visits like these

further feed fears that the country is gradually snowballing into autocracy with the regular abuse of powers from those parading themselves as agents of the state.", CISLAC stated in a press release.¹²⁸

4.1.1. Anti-rights Groups

The growing trend of using counterfeit groups to attack legitimate civil society organizations is huge source of worry for the non-profit sector in Nigeria. Counterfeit group imitate the activities of legit groups, except that they usually have a pro-government disposition and instigate, or coordinate attacks based on groundless allegations to smear the latter. Recent research by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace identified about 360 of such pro government NGOs in Nigeria whose core role is to curry the favor of the government by

¹²⁸ Sodiq Oyeleke, The Punch, CISLAC kicks as DSS operatives invade Abuja office, 29 December 2021;

chanting the accolades of those in power including the military.¹²⁹ The intention is to undermine the critical works of genuine civil society organizations, while covering up the gaps in governance and shortfalls of government regarding the responsibilities they are mandated to deliver to Nigerians.

According to the said Carnegie report, pro-government NGOs' attacks, whether independently initiated or guided by top officials, provide a useful window into the zeitgeist of Nigeria's ruling elites, revealing which critiques they find most unsettling. They tend to target a similar set of perceived adversaries. These include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for their work on human rights abuses in Nigeria; Transparency International, especially its annual Corruption Perception Index, in which Nigeria consistently ranks poorly; international media organizations such as CNN, the BBC, and Reuters; and anti-government groups such as the Islamic Movement of Nigeria and the Indigenous People of Biafra.¹³⁰

4.1.2. Searches and Surveillance

A recent study chronicled how biometric information and surveillance gadgets either collected or procured in the name of countering terrorism and threats to national security have been used to curtail internet use, arbitrarily surveil and limit the activities of the political opposition, journalists and against civic actors demanding accountability and pushing for social justice.¹³¹ While biometric data and digital surveillance make tracking and arrest of targets much easier, they are used in combination with physical searches and raid of premises. In August 2017, the Nigerian Army conducted a search of the United Nations Compound in Maiduguri, Borno State. It was said to be acting on intelligence that containers of weapons were being ferried into the compound and that the then Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, was hiding in a large house in Maiduguri with a red roof. The UN Compound is informally referred to as 'Red Roof'. It is possible that this popular description led the Army to believe and act on that lead.¹³² The search, described by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as an unauthorised search, yielded no weapons.¹³³

Physical surveillance, including the digital monitoring of campaigners, journalists and activists is a very common and increasingly disturbing trend. Activists have also disclosed that opposition groups have attempted tracking the locations of their safe houses set up to protect marginalised persons fleeing dangerous situations. Other forms of digital surveillance include cyberbullying, the use of fake emails, email monitoring, website attacks, phishing attacks, and hacking into activists' social media accounts. Others include hate mails, posting hateful comments, reporting and facilitating the removal of posts made by activists on social media.

Corroborating these trends, a new report by the Action Group on Free Civic Space, The Security Playbook of Digital Authoritarianism in Nigeria builds evidence of a security playbook of digital

¹²⁹ [Fake Civil Society: The Rise of Pro-Government NGOs in Nigeria - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Action Group on Free Civic Space, The Security Playbook of Digital Authoritarianism In Nigeria;

<https://closingspaces.org/the-security-playbook-of-digital-authoritarianism-in-nigeria/>

¹³² [Nigeria Army Raids U.N. Compound In City At Center Of Boko Haram Conflict \(Reuters\)](#)

¹³³ [Nigeria Army Raid At UN Camp In Maiduguri 'Unauthorised' \(BBC\)](#)

authoritarianism by showing how the massive financial resources, equipment and technologies originally procured in the name of counterterrorism and curbing insecurity have been diverted to monitor the movement of citizens, to track activities of civic actors online, intercept private communications and restrict online civic space.¹³⁴ Not only that, activists are also monitored and intercepted at airports¹³⁵ with some having their passports confiscated. The recent approval of N4,870,350,000 allocation to the National Intelligence Agency to monitor WhatsApp messages, text messages and phone calls shows that the government now takes digital surveillance of citizens more seriously.¹³⁶ While the government claims that this action is to protect Nigerians from cybercrime and terrorism, the timing of the event—which is just few weeks after Twitter ban in Nigeria—makes it doubtful.¹³⁷

4.1.3. Suspension of Aid Groups

Officials commonly express scepticism for NGO funding sources¹³⁸ or blatantly accuse civil society organisations of receiving funds from unscrupulous sources and providing support to terrorist groups. Questioning the source of NGO funding operates as a precursor for the suspension of aid groups or to justify the imposition of restrictions on civil society operations. On December 14, 2018, the Nigerian Army suspended the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) from operating in the North-East, accusing it of training spies to support Boko Haram, thereby sabotaging the country's counterterrorism and counter-insurgency efforts. The suspension was lifted the next day. No further details have been released by either party as to what led to these actions.¹³⁹ Similarly, the offices of Action Against Hunger in Maiduguri and Damaturu, Yobe State were shut down by the Nigerian Army in September 2019, based on allegations of aiding Boko Haram and ISWAP by supplying them food and drugs.¹⁴⁰

In the same week, four field offices of Mercy Corps were closed in Borno State by the Nigerian Army. Although the army never released an official statement with reasons for its actions, newspaper reports quoted sources that said the decision was taken after a driver for the organisation was found with N20 million in cash hidden in cartons of smoked fish.¹⁴¹ The organisations suspended their operations in Borno and Yobe States until November 2019 when the offices were reopened temporarily by the government.¹⁴² In June 2021, the Borno State Government suspended ACTED, an international non-governmental organization, after it was accused of conducting weapons training for its staff with toy guns in a hotel.¹⁴³ ACTED, in its defence, said that the training was a simulation exercise for its staff to be able to deal with threatening situations in the line of their work and to ensure their safety.¹⁴⁴ The suspension is yet to be lifted.

134 Action Group on Free Civic Space, *The Security Playbook of Digital Authoritarianism In Nigeria*; <https://closingspaces.org/the-security-playbook-of-digital-authoritarianism-in-nigeria/>

135 The News, Another Activist, Chido Onuma, Arrested by SSS, published September 29, 2019; Accessed via <https://thenewsnigeria.com.ng/2019/09/29/another-activist-chido-onuma-arrested-by-sss/>

136 The Cable, FG budgets N4.8bn to monitor WhatsApp, satellite phones, <https://www.thecable.ng/fg-budgets-n4-8bn-to-monitor-whatsapp-satellite-phones>

137 Iroanusi, Q. (2021, July 12). Nigerian govt moves to control media, allocates N4.8bn to monitor WhatsApp, phone calls. Premium Times Nigeria. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/473147-as-nigeria-moves-to-control-media-nia-gets-n4-8bn-to-monitor-whatsapp-phone-calls.html>

138 EFCC through the head of its Lagos Zonal Office, Ahmed Ghali; EFCC Charges NGOs, CSOs on Money Laundering, Terrorism Financing <https://www.efccnigeria.org/efcc/news/6738-efcc-charges-ngos-csos-on-money-laundering-terrorism-financing>

139 *Nigeria army lifts ban on UNICEF amid spying allegations* (Al-Jazeera)

140 *Nigerian Army seals Action Against Hunger office, ejects staff* (Premium Times)

141 *Why Nigerian Army closed Mercy Corps offices* (The Guardian)

142 *Action Against Hunger & Mercy Corps Return to Nigeria* (Missions Box)

143 *“-Borno governor suspends INGO caught conducting shooting training Official* (Premium Times)

144 *Suspended French INGO, ACTED clarifies use of toy guns as training simulation in Borno fragile environment* (Vanguard)

4.1.4. “Twitter Ban”

Twitter is one of the most-preferred platforms for civil engagement in Nigeria. Twitter ban was lifted in January 222 days after it was banned by the Federal Government of Nigeria, citing threats to national security and social cohesion. Twitter, the social media microblogging platform was shut down on June 5, 2021, by the federal government after Twitter deleted an inappropriate tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari. The Twitter ban in Nigeria represents the most glaring example of how state authorities use security as an excuse to interrupt citizens' access to information and communication sites perceived to be sympathetic to anti-government rhetoric.¹⁴⁵

While civic groups commended the resumption of civic engagement on Twitter, the harsh consequences the ban has had on the civic space, the economy, and everyday life of Nigerians are far from over.¹⁴⁶ Millions were denied access to real-time and unfiltered information and conversations on governance, undermining press freedom and the online civic space. Twitter ban follows a pattern of repression of civic freedoms online through regulatory initiatives seeking to increase governmental powers to regulate the social media, control the digital spaces, undertake surveillance operations and intrude personal privacy. Whether it is the indefinite suspension of Twitter in Nigeria in early June 2021 or the introduction of Social Media Bill to the Hate Speech Bill, to the proposed legislative amendments to the extant Nigerian Press Council (NPC) Act, and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act currently under parliamentary consideration, all of these demonstrate efforts by successive governments to criminalise information sharing, to sanction and restrict media content and independent reporting that is critical of the government and public officers on both the print and electronic channels.

4.1.5. Threats and Intimidation

Security agencies, particularly the SSS have gained notoriety for making and using threats to clamp down on dissenters. Through its public statements, the SSS sends messages charged with threatening undertones against the press and the civil society. Responding to Rev. Father Ejike Mbaka's May 2021 call for the impeachment of the president, SSS released the following statement:

The Department of State Services (DSS) hereby condemns the unsavoury statements by misguided elements who have continued to threaten the government, sovereignty, and corporate existence of this country. Notable are the unnecessary vituperations and activities of some religious and past political leaders who have either called for forceful change of government or mass action against it. It has been established that the main objective for these is to cause a disintegration of the country...

¹⁴⁵ See Brookings “Nigeria’s Twitter ban is a misplaced priority.” Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/08/11/nigerias-twitter-ban-is-a-misplaced-priority/>, accessed 26 September 2021

¹⁴⁶ Spaces for Change Press Statement, The Punch Newspaper (January 2022) <https://punchng.com/politicians-should-be-held-accountable-on-twitter-says-civic-group/>

While the Service reaffirms its unambiguous support to an indivisible, indissoluble and united Nigerian State in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, it will no longer tolerate deliberate machinations by subversive and hostile groups whose agenda is to throw the country into anarchy so as to serve the interests of their sponsors. Consequently, the Service is assiduously working with other security and law enforcement agencies to ensure the maintenance of peace and internal security of the country.¹⁴⁷

Statements like the above reveal how security agents routinely perceive and reframe criticism of the government as threats to the government, sovereignty and corporate existence of this country. The recurrent use of terms like “incite”, “subversive” in official statements do not only construct narratives of regime change but are primarily designed to shove free expression into the dragnets of punishable offences such as sedition, treason and other serious felonies. These security-drenched narratives, often backed by their limitless CT and PVE mandates, subliminally threaten citizens with arrests and prosecution for terrorism, inciting violence and other criminal charges attracting heavy punishment.

4.1.6. Using Excessive Force against Protesters

The use of excessive force against protesters is not new. The use of force against protesters reached an all-time high under the President Muhammadu Buhari administration where security agencies continue to demonstrate zero tolerance for all kinds of public assemblies, whether peaceful or not. No incident demonstrates the Nigerian government's high-handed response to public assemblies more than the 2020 #EndSARS protests. The post-protests period was characterized by victimization of protestors through arrests, detentions, travel bans, freezing of bank accounts, fines and sanctions on broadcast media stations etc. Twitter ban followed shortly after the #EndSARS protests on the ground that the microblogging site was being used to undermine Nigerian government and the national security. Linking Twitter to the protests, a government official accused Twitter founder, Jack Dorsey, of funding protests which led to death of scores of Nigerians and destruction of properties.¹⁴⁸

4.1.7. Suppression of Self-Determination Movements

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights guarantees the right to self-determination.¹⁴⁹ Agitations for true federalism and the restructuring of Nigeria's governance architecture dates back to the post-colonial era. Nigerian largely retained the centralized colonial system of administration post-independence and has refused to reverse the lopsided federal structure in order to address the perceived marginalisation of constituting units and regions. Restructuring, often used interchangeably with true federalism, means granting the component units, specifically the regions, states and local governments fiscal and political independence over

¹⁴⁷ Premium Times “SSS warns Nigerians against inciting, divisive comments.” Available at <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/459080-sss-warns-nigerians-against-inciting-divisive-comments.html>, accessed 26 September 2021

¹⁴⁸ Guardian. 2021. Twitter founder Dorsey is liable for #EndSARS losses – Lai Mohammed. Guardian newspaper, 15 June, 2021. www.guardian.ng/news/twitter-founder-dorsey-is-liable-for-endsars-losses-lai-mohammed/. Accessed 4 September, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Africa Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, www.achpr.org/legalinstruments, accessed on 27 July, 2021.

their territories. The Nigerian government has consistently used maximum force to crack down on voices calling for the dismantling of the centralised federal system currently in force. Because the socio-economic and political issues feeding grievances have been consistently ignored, calls for restructuring have intensified, aggravated by ethnicity, poverty, underdevelopment and failure of the political class to open the democratic space for genuine political reforms.

The more the federal government is clamping down on proponents of restructuring, the more the agitations are becoming more violent and morphing into self-determination and secession campaigns. Prior to the return to democratic rule in 1999, the military paid lip service to calls for reform and diffused tension using undemocratically-convened national confabs and elections. The agitations spilled over to civilian rule in the form of resource control campaigns in the south-south/Niger Delta, self-determination agitations in the Southwest and Southeast, and the imposition of Sharia law in the north. More recently, the herdsmen-farmers crises across the country escalated the self-determination and secessionist agitations in the south, snowballing into new security threats confounding the nation.

The securitized responses to these agitations have considerably narrowed the civic space, with far-reaching implications on the rights to freedom of association, expression and assembly. Rallies have been criminalized and violently dispersed, with at least one person reportedly killed in one of the rallies in the Southwest.¹⁵⁰ Homes of the leaders of the self-determination group, have been raided on grounds of gun running and treason.¹⁵¹ Since then, self-determination agitations and rallies have seen renewed repression. Self-determination agitators have been arrested,¹⁵² and labeled as criminals, anti-state and political agents.¹⁵³

4.1.8. Neutrality Versus the War against Terror

Nothing has strained relations between Nigerian security forces and the humanitarian organizations more than the adherence to the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality. In Nigeria, organizations rendering humanitarian assistance especially in the conflict zones adhere strictly to the principle of neutrality and impartiality which requires them to abstain from any participation in hostilities and controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature in order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all. By adopting a neutral and impartial stance, humanitarian assistance may reach both populations in distress as well as insurgent groups operating in areas of conflict, which is often perceived by the government as clandestine support for terrorist groups. For instance, the Nigerian Army ordered a forced closure of Action against Hunger (AAH), based on claims alleging that the group has been supplying the Boko Haram insurgent group with food and drugs. AAH has strongly denied these allegations.⁰¹

¹⁵⁰ Oluwakemi Adelagun, Premium Times (online). Woman shot at Yoruba nation agitators. 3 July, 2021

www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-west/471423-woman-shot-at-yoruba-nation-rally.html, accessed 27 July, 2021

¹⁵¹ Chinedu Asadu, The Cable. DSS confirms raid on Igboho's house, declares him wanted. 1 July, 2021. www.thecable.ng/breaking-dss-launches-manhunt-for-sunday-igboho-after-recovering-arms-ammunition-from-his-house/amp

¹⁵² Oluwakemi Adelagun, Premium Times (online). Police disperse Yoruba nation agitators. 3 July, 2021 www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-west/471408-police-disperse-yoruba-nation-agitators.html, accessed 27 July, 2021

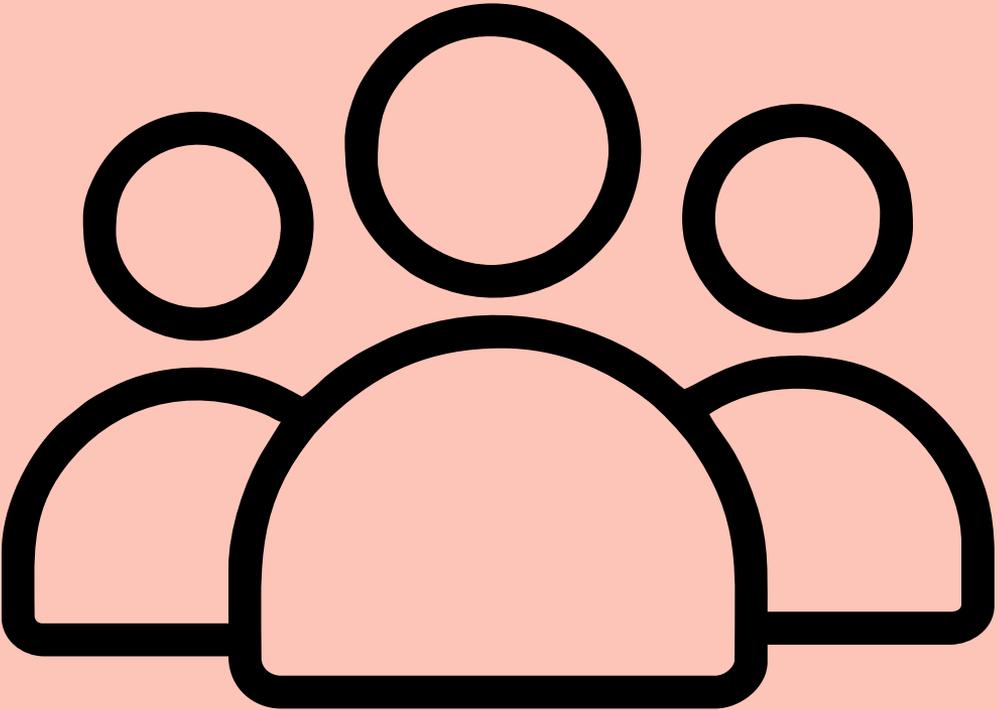
¹⁵³ Dapo Akinrefon, Vanguard newspaper. Igboho: FG, Beninese lawyers battle over extradition in court. 27 July, 2021

¹⁵⁴ www.vanguardngr.com/2021/07/igboho-fg-beninese-lawyers-battle-over-extradition-in-court/amp, accessed 29 July, 2021

⁰¹ https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/#m_-1729748828020224417_ftn1

CONCLUSION

From the above, three consistent patterns of repression of civil society through the exploitation of the security paradigm have been observed. First, the deployment of maximum force including military action to resolve internal strife and simple misdemeanors evince how the counterterrorism architecture is rapidly ousting the criminal justice system. The Nigerian legal system has a plethora of existing legislation that punish speech that cross the red lines of libel, slander, defamation and the like. Yet, authors of critical commentary directed against state actors are frequently slammed with terrorism charges. Secondly, overzealous security forces are exploiting the national security mantra to crush civil liberties, causing unwarranted fatalities, human rights violations and shrinkage of the civic space. In essence, the enforcement of security measures by security forces have inadvertently aided the increase of wrongful arrests, detention of citizens, including denying victims the right to legal representation, timely and fair hearing and ultimately, access to justice. The harsher policing operations are equally resulting in limitations on free speech, association and assemblies. And finally, increased securitization is weakening the oversight functions of other organs of government like the judiciary with a mandate to tame overreaching state behaviour and protect human rights. Nothing has weakened judicial powers more than the ease and frequency with which security agents vested with broad powers defy court orders and use security as an excuse to take away civil liberties. Without strong institutions, especially an independent judiciary, the civic space is under threat and access to justice is limited. All of these trends reinforce fears that security measures are being repurposed to further close space for civil society. In the next chapter, we will look at how these restrictions have impacted on different subsets of civic actors operating within the civil society space in Nigeria.



CHAPTER FIVE

IMPACTS OF NATIONAL SECURITY MEASURES ON MINORITY GROUPS



Source: Nigerian Infopedia

The term, minority, refers to culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct groups coexisting with more dominant groups. Subordinacy to the dominant group is the chief defining characteristic of minority groups.¹⁵⁴ Included in this category are the youths, women, persons living with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+), etc. Though regarded as minority, they are actively engaged in the dispensation of justice, conflict management, defending their communities against marginalization, environmental degradation, exploitation of resources and negative policies of state actors. Although the risks associated with performing these roles may vary across gender, tribal, ethnic, religious and geographical lines, one major commonality is that doing this kind of work increases their vulnerability to repression and harm by state and non-state agents, including corporate actors. The minority groups most impacted by security-induced repression, undermining the efficacy of their civic activism are discussed below:

¹⁵⁴ 2014 State of the World Population (SWOP) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/minority>

5.1.0. The Youths

Historically, campaigns for social change in the country have always been led by trade-student unions, civil society organizations and other organized labour groups.¹⁵⁵ The tides turned with the #EndSARS protests when young people took the nation by storm and coordinated leaderless peaceful protests against police brutality. The emergence of new actors and digitally-coordinated revolts reflect the shared aspirations of citizens to keep the civic space free from obstructions, and ensure all duty-bearers are held accountable.¹⁵⁶ Youth influencers are also becoming increasingly visible as leaders in communities where they carry out social justice interventions, either by serving as brand ambassadors or creating philanthropic organisations.¹⁵⁷

The findings of an 8-man Judicial Panel of Inquiry and Restitution (#EndSARS Panel) found evidence of egregious human rights violations by security agencies, with the youth bearing the highest share of the abuses.¹⁵⁸ Operatives of the Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS) are notorious for extorting, profiling good-looking or well-dressed young people through random police stop-and-searches, stealing, kidnapping, raping young women and carrying out extra-judicial killings. Tired of being stigmatized and profiled as criminals, the youth-led #EndSARS campaign moved from the web to the streets following the shooting of a young man in Delta state by a SARS officer.¹⁵⁹ The video of the killing went viral on the internet, sparking outrage and anger by many young Nigerians who have for several years, endured wanton arrests, harassment, extortion, detention and torture by SARS operatives.

The nationwide protests may have waned, but the crackdowns on protesters have not relented. Numerous underhand tactics employed by state actors to clamp down on #EndSARS promoters and collaborating civil society organizations, include the heightened surveillance and deregistration of civil society watchdogs demanding accountability for the shooting of protesters. In series of news bulletins, SPACES FOR CHANGE further catalogued the tactics and official rhetoric employed by state actors to clamp down on EndSARS protesters.¹⁶⁰ The intensity of the crackdowns tracked by civil society groups raise serious concerns about the mounting repression of civic freedoms in the country while puncturing the sincerity in government's promise to meet the key demands of the youth protesters.¹⁶¹ In turn, the fear of consequences—in the form of intimidation, arrest, detention, heightened security surveillance, bank account freeze, disruption of peaceful protests and use of excessive force by security agents—is not only restraining people from speaking up, but also discouraging other forms of civic action.¹⁶²

The 2014 State of the World Population (SWOP)¹⁶³ report reveals that Sub-Saharan African countries have a proportionally large youth cohort, with half the population in 15 countries

155 Action Group on Free Civic Space (AGFCS), #EndSARS: POLICE BRUTALITY, PROTESTS AND SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN NIGERIA, 2021, Accessed via <https://closingspaces.org/endsars-police-brutality-protests-and-shrinking-civic-space-in-nigeria/>

156 AGFCS:2021

157 Phillip Olayoku, Mapping and Analysis of Protection Mechanisms for Social Justice Leaders in Nigeria, 2020.

158 Report of Lekki incident investigation on 20th of October 2020: <https://closingspaces.org/laqos-state-judicial-panel-of-inquiry-on-restitution-for-victims-of-sars-related-abuses-and-other-matters/>

159 Daily Post: SARS Allegedly Kills Man in Delta, Flees with Victim's Car [VIDEO], October 3, 2020, <https://dailypost.ng/2020/10/03/sars-allegedly-kills-man-in-delta-flees-with-victims-car-video/>

160 SPACES FOR CHANGE newsletter, <https://spacesforchange.cmail19.com/t/ViewEmail/i/1B08C8C897C875B52540EF23F30FEDED>

161 SPACES FOR CHANGE Newsletter, Tracking Crackdown of EndSARS Protesters, November 2020, <https://spacesforchange.cmail19.com/t/ViewEmail/i/1B08C8C897C875B52540EF23F30FEDED>

Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, Galvanizing Collective Action to Protect Nigeria's Civic Space, published by Shehu Musa Yar Adua Foundation,

162 2021, <https://yaraduafoundation.org/files/Galvanizing%20Collective%20Action.pdf>

163. State of World Population 2014: <https://www.unfpa.org/swop-2014>

being under age 18 and living in conditions of extreme poverty. The youth who constitute 70% of Nigeria's voting population hardly participate in voter registration or vote during elections fearing that their votes do not count. Further aggravating this trend, political campaigns and electoral institutions rarely seek their input nor address their social and economic priorities. Clampdowns on social media dominated by young users, criminalization of youth-led protestations, and the profiling of young people as cybercriminals have restricted the participation of the youth in political and economic governance processes. Tackling the sub-region's youth bulge requires the radical intervention of younger actors who can mobilize their peers, exploiting new information and communication technologies to create new wealth, fight against poverty and confront the crises of economic and political governance in Africa.

5.1.1. Displaced Persons

Boko Haram insurgency has left tens of thousands displaced in Northeast Nigeria and has triggered a food crisis affecting about 2.4 million people.¹⁶⁴ Displaced persons bear the brunt of the persistent tensions between state authorities in the North-east and humanitarian aid workers. In December 2021, the Governor of Borno State banned humanitarian and development partners from distributing food and relief materials to tens of thousands of people displaced by conflict.¹⁶⁵ According to the directive:

"No partner organization, either local, national or international, shall henceforth be allowed to embark on distribution of food and non-food items in any of our newly resettled communities across the state."

These bans, often accompanied with suspensions and forced closure of their offices spring from the official suspicion of affiliations between humanitarian organisations and terrorist groups. ACTED, a humanitarian organization, accused of aiding Boko Harm terror group was suspended in June 2021.

The strained relations between the Borno state authorities and aid organizations cascades to neighbouring states in the northeast region. In November 2019, the State Houses of Assembly of the six North-east states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Yobe, Gombe and Taraba introduced a bill, to regulate and coordinate the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Boko Haram-ravaged region of the country.¹⁶⁶ Bills like this underscore the increasing use of legislative measures to impose regulatory controls that sometimes limit civil society activities, preventing help from reaching those in critical need. With the speedy passage of that law in Borno State—Nigeria's Boko Haram most-ravaged state—the Borno state Agency for Coordination of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response (BACSDAHR) was established in December 2019 to coordinate and monitor the activities of all humanitarian and developmental partners, including international and national non-governmental organizations (INGOs/NNGOs) and civil society/community-based organizations (CSOs/CBOs) operating in the state.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ United National High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html>)

¹⁶⁵ ———Nigerian state restricts food aid despite crisis | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News [News The Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News](https://www.guardiannews.com/news-the-guardian-nigeria-news-nigeria-and-world-news)

¹⁶⁶ See Borno State Agency for Coordination of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response Bill

¹⁶⁷ <https://acsdhr.bo.gov.ng/>

Governmental restrictions on the activities of humanitarian organizations in the northeast derive legal impetus from international financial regulations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Standards. Before it was revised in 2016, the original text of FATF's Recommendation 8 stated that "NPOs possess characteristics that make them particularly attractive to terrorists or vulnerable to misuse for terrorist financing." Although FATF has revised Recommendation 8 in favour of a risk-based approach, the sentiment that NPOs are security concerns have festered.¹⁶⁸

5.1.2. Women

Comparatively, women have fared worse than their male counterparts from the impacts of state repression of the civic space. For instance, women in Internally Displaced Persons camps (IDPs) are disproportionately impacted from the ban on the distribution of relief items and other harsh consequences of the Boko Haram insurgency. Specific impacts on women and girls include abduction, forced marriages, rape, slut-shaming, cyber-bullying, and other forms of sexual violence against women. Records show that impoverished women and girls displaced by conflict in the region—lacking access to humanitarian assistance—have turned to prostitution to survive.¹⁶⁹

As of January 2022, the Closing Spaces Database tracked and documented 62 female victims of incidents on crackdowns on the civic space.¹⁷⁰ Female activists are frequently subjected to cyber-bullying, slut-shaming and body-shaming on account of their pulsating activism and massive following on social media.¹⁷¹ One major positive development from the reported incidents involving females is that women are equally at the forefront of civic engagements in Nigeria. Prominent advocates for women and the girlchild have succeeded in rallying both women and men across diverse thematic issues ranging from



Source: Facebook

168 Action Group on Free Civic Space, Harms from Abroad: Impact of Global Security Measures on Civic Space in Nigeria (2021)

<https://closingspaces.org/harms-from-abroad-impact-of-global-security-measures-on-civic-space-in-nigeria/>

169 Ameh Comrade Godwin, Daily Post, Female IDPs turn prostitutes in Borno (2016) <https://dailypost.ng/2016/09/20/female-idps-turn-prostitutes-borno/>

170 <https://closingspaces.org/gender/female/>

171 Action Group on Free Civic Space, The Security Playbook of Digital Authoritarianism In Nigeria; <https://closingspaces.org/the-security-playbook-of-digital-authoritarianism-in-nigeria/>

good government to women empowerment to electoral participation and so forth. The likes of Obiageli Ekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, the Feminist Coalition, DJ Switch, are examples of female activists whose boldness and bravery have strongly stamped women's presence on Nigeria's civic space landscape.

5.1.3. People Living with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities now add to the list of civic actors targeted fiercely for their online and offline social justice campaigns in Nigeria. The arrest of Samuel Gabriel Iwatonaiye, a blind saxophonist, dominated news headlines and shocked the Nigerian civil society community in July.¹⁷² He was among the five human rights activists who wore the #BuhariMustGo T-Shirts to the Dunamis International Gospel Centre (Glory Dome), Abuja, arrested and handed over to the Department of State Services (DSS) operatives. Samuel's ill-health in custody was not enough for the state to release until a Federal High Court in Abuja ordered the release of the five activists in late July.

Majority of PWDs are sedentary and leverage on social media to speak out, maintain online visibility and interact with a global audience. For persons with disabilities, who have limited capacity to escape physical danger or defend themselves from attack, they increasingly now depend on the media to get their messages across.¹⁷³ Consequently, they feel disproportionately impacted by security-based internet restrictions such as Twitter ban, which cuts them off from the social media community where they get news and access a lot of vital care and resources for enhancing their social and economic mobility. Funding restrictions proposed in restrictive legislative proposals like the NGO Bill also holds enormous potential to limit access to resources needed to support advocacy for more inclusion in policy making as well as for countering stigmatisation and insensitivities to the need of persons with disabilities.

5.1.4. LGBTQI+

Historically, persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) face persecutions, stigmatization, marginalization and violations due to widespread homophobia rooted in the socio-cultural norms and beliefs practiced in the country. Homophobia is weaponized into criminal laws, policies, and to dissuade public acceptance of LGBTQI+ rights. After years of successfully pushing back against discrimination, violence and criminalization, the momentum of LGBT+ advocacy continues to reverberate strongly within and beyond the traditional and online civic spaces in response to the multi-layered and widespread injustices meted against people based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. For example, Bisi Alimi who was forced to seek asylum in England after coming out as gay was able to organize a Gay Pride event in Nigeria about 12 years after.¹⁷⁴

172. Action Group on Free Civic Space, Harms from Abroad: Impact of Global Security Measures on Civic Space in Nigeria (2021) <https://closingspaces.org/harms-from-abroad-impact-of-global-security-measures-on-civic-space-in-nigeria/>

173. Disability Rights Watch: Strategies to Counter Shrinking Civic Spaces: The Case of the Disability Movement, <http://disabilityrightswatch.net/strategies-to-counter-shrinking-civic-spaces-the-case-of-the-disability-movement/>

174. ———, [Bisi Alimi Organises First-ever LGBT Event In Lagos](#), Guardian Life, The Guardian Nigeria News, Nigeria and World News

According to him “Never thought that [the event] was going to be possible in Lagos and in Nigeria in my lifetime. We organised a LGBT event and the crowd came out for it, both straight and LGBT, people came out”.¹⁷⁵

Nigerian law—specifically the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013, (SSMPA)—criminalizes same-sex relations. The provisions of the SSMPA are inconsistent with constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights which include the right to life, right to dignity and privacy, freedom from discrimination, freedom of expression and the press, of association, of thought, conscience and religion, among others.¹⁷⁶ This law also prohibits marriages and civil unions between people of the same sex, the registration and sustenance of societies and organisations catering to sexual and gender minorities, and the public show of same sex amorous relationships.¹⁷⁷ Consequently, the mere participation of LGBTQI persons in the civil society increases their exposure and vulnerability to arrests by security agencies. Criminalization of same-sex relations have engendered acts of hostility towards LGBTQI+ persons.¹⁷⁸ While most of attacks and violations are underreported, the police has been listed a one of the major perpetrators of violence against LGBTQIA+ persons in the country.¹⁷⁹

Presently, the foreign exchange policies issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria as well as anti-money laundering provisions provide certain minimum standards of bank signatories and disclosure of source of funds. While this is a measure to curtail illicit financial flows, this exposes LGBT+ organisations and their funders to criminal prosecution.¹⁸⁰ LGBTQI+ NGOs in Nigeria are heavily reliant on foreign donors for their operations. Once they disclose their funders and the reasons for funding, they risk being outed and persecuted for propagating outlawed activities like homosexuality in the country.

Pensioners

Pensioners deserve a worthy mention as civic actors treated so inhumanely in the socio-political spaces. The Nigerian media is awash with reports of pensioners brutalized by security forces during protests seeking payment of unpaid pension arrears.

These protests are not usually successful in convincing state governments to pay pensioners in the first place, but state governments have not hesitated in brutalizing the senior citizens. According to a Guardian Newspaper report, no fewer than 50 hoodlums, flogged and beat up retirees who were protesting against non-payment of their six months outstanding pensions in Owerri, with a view to stopping their demonstration.¹⁸¹ In Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, exactly the same pattern had played out about 4 years prior to the Imo incident. According to the report, “Retirees from the Bayelsa state civil service under the aegis of Nigerian Union of Pensioners were attacked in front of the Government House by thugs allegedly hired by the state government.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ See sections 33 to 45 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended, 2011). See especially section 42

¹⁷⁷ See the SSMPA. See also, TIERS' 2016 Human Rights Violations Report Based on Real or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Nigeria' <https://bit.ly/3dCF2TT>.

¹⁷⁸ The Initiative for Equal Rights, '2015 Report on Human Rights Violations Based on Real or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Nigeria' <https://www.theinitiativeforequalrights.org/resources/1/2015-Report-on-Human-Rights-Violations-Based-on-Real-or-Perceived-Sexual-Orientation-and-Gender-Identity-in-Nigeria-.pdf>.

¹⁷⁹ See TIERS' Human Rights Violations Reports from 2015 to 2020: <https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/resources/ and https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-Human-Rights-Violations-Report-based-on-SOGIE5C.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ See the Central Bank of Nigeria (Anti-money Laundering and Combating of the Financing of Terrorism in Banks and other Financial Institutions in Nigeria) Regulations 2013 <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/out/2014/fprd/aml%20act%202013.pdf>. See also the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act of 2004.

¹⁸¹ ——— Hoodlums attack Imo retirees during protest against unpaid pensions Nigeria The Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News

¹⁸² Nigeria: Thugs Attack Protesting Pensioners in Bayelsa - allAfrica.com

<https://www.thisdaylive.com> › edo... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Edo Pensioners Protest Non-payment of 13 Years Gratuity

12 Okt 2021 — They also protested against the continued deduction of one per cent of their income to the Nigerian Union of Pensioners (NUP) and the ...

<https://tribuneonlineng.com> › pens... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Pensioners stage protest in Osun over unpaid gratuities ...

23 Nov 2021 — The protest which lasted about two hours, saw the pensioners also ... the available top-of-the-range service to its Nigerian subscribers...

<https://punchng.com> › bleak-christ... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Bleak Christmas for Benue, Imo, Ondo, Osun pensioners over ...

19 Dis 2021 — Imo pensioners protest. File: Imo pensioners during a protest ... The spokesperson for the Nigerian Union of Pensioners, Bunmi Ogunkolade, ...

<https://pmnewsnigeria.com> › prote... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Protesting male pensioner collapses, hospitalised in Edo

11 Okt 2021 — The protest was carried out under the umbrella of Association of Retired Civil Servants Welfare of Nigeria (ARCSWON) in Edo State, at the ...

<https://thenationonlineng.net> › pen... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Pensioners protest non-payment of 32 months' pensions - The ...

8 Okt 2021 — Hundreds of retired civil servants, under the umbrella of Nigeria Union of Pensioners (NUP), Benue State, yesterday staged a peaceful ...

<https://dailytrust.com> › amp › 2-w... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

2 women slump as Nigeria Airways pensioners shut down ...

Two elderly women among former workers of Nigerian Airways protesting delay in the payment of their entitlement in Lagos on Tuesday slumped during protests.

<https://www.icimigeria.org> › pensi... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Pensioners protest non-payment of 10-year outstanding ...

23 Sep 2021 — LOCAL Government Pensioners' Association of Nigeria (LOGPAN), Ogun State Chapter, has taken to the state government's secretariat to protest ...

<https://www.tvcnews.tv> › gombe-p... ▼ Zugharia akwukwo a

Gombe pensioners protest non-payment of ... - TVC News

Conclusion

Civic spaces are impacted when limitations are placed on citizen's rights, constraining their ability to organize, speak and assemble freely, making interaction between themselves and with other state and non-state actors difficult. Indeed, all subsets of the civil society are impacted by the surging restrictions on the spaces where they operate, but minority groups are disproportionately impacted when these restrictions push them further behind the spaces for civic engagement. For civic actors, challenging official bias and impunity including human rights violations resulting from the anti-secession and counter-insurgency operations is equally becoming riskier. In turn, the fear of consequences—in the form of intimidation, arrest, detention, heightened security surveillance, bank account freeze, disruption of peaceful protests and use of excessive force by security agents—is not only restraining people from

speaking up, but also discouraging other forms of civic action. Being afraid to lose their daily bread and economic power, many are unwilling to take the risk of confronting constituted authorities or to report and challenge social and economic injustices happening around them.

As this chapter demonstrates, the meaning of terrorism has been so expanded that any disagreement with state actors—by anyone whatsoever—can be equated with terrorism. The specific experiences of minority groups shared above buttress that no one is spared from the attacks on civil society.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUSHBACK



Source: Dnl legal and style

This research reveals a systematic pattern of exercising overbearing governmental power in ways that tighten the traditional and digitalized spaces for civic engagement in Nigeria. Laws enacted and institutions established with the noble intention of maintaining law and order have been given new meanings by the government and weaponized against the citizens in the name of countering terrorism and protecting national security. Citizens, especially civil society actors operating in this type of environment feel repressed and lack the zeal to communicate possible security threats to the government. Victims of crimes are uneager to complain, and underreporting limits the ability of the police to take preventive measures. Below are some of the available opportunities for the civil society to reclaim the civic space and reshape the character and mechanisms for civic participation in governance.

NATIONAL LEVEL ACTION PLANS TO CONSIDER:

6.0. Challenge Government's Interpretation of Section 45 of the Constitution

Civil society organisations can seek categorical declarations from the courts to define the limits of the state's ability to invoke Section 45 of the 1999 Constitution. In this regard, public interest

litigation lawsuits initiated by civil society actors can invite the courts to clarify the exceptional circumstances when derogations from constitutional guarantees can be lawfully invoked by the government or its agencies. It is important to acknowledge that Section 45 aims to limit the enjoyment of certain rights—such as free assembly and free movement—in certain circumstances for the greater good of the country. While this is not essentially a bad law, it is important for the courts to determine the propriety and necessity of such derogations on a case-by-case basis, especially when invoked in the name of national security.

In the past, Nigerian courts have held that Section 45 is not a magic wand the government can use to avoid responsibility for infringing on the rights of citizens.¹⁸³ In the case of *All Nigeria Peoples Party & Ors. v. Inspector General of Police*,¹⁸⁴ the Federal High Court held that the Public Order Act which requires citizens to obtain police permit before holding public rallies cannot be interpreted to erode the freedom of movement and the freedom of assembly guaranteed under the Nigerian constitution. According to the judge:

*"In my view, the provision in section 40 of the Constitution is clear, direct and unambiguous. It is formulated and designed to confer on every person the right to assemble freely and associate with other persons. I am therefore persuaded by the argument of Mr. Falana that by the combined effect of sections 39 and 40 of the 1999 Constitution as well as Article 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the right to assemble freely cannot be violated without violating the fundamental right to peaceful assembly and association. I agree with Mr. Falana that violation can only be done by the procedure permitted by law, under section 45 of the Constitution, in which case there must be a state of emergency properly declared before these rights can be violated."*¹⁸⁵

There have also been unsuccessful challenges to the abuse of Section 45 of the Constitution such as the case of *Attorney General v Okedara*¹⁸⁶ where the Court of Appeal refused to declare Section 24 of the Cybercrimes Act unconstitutional. That section criminalizes messages sent via a computer system considered "grossly offensive, pornographic or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character" or sending and causing messages to be sent knowing it to be false for the purpose of "causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill will or needless anxiety to another".¹⁸⁷ Despite these setbacks, the courts remain the most accessible channels for curbing abuse of power and facilitating judicial reviews of erring state conduct, including the use of Section 45 to justify executive excesses.

6.1. Exploring Partnerships with the Legislature

Civic society organisations can also explore partnerships with progressive lawmakers in the state and federal legislatures to canvass political support against repressive laws and legislative proposals. Leveraging such partnerships, CSOs may also propose bills that counter negative rhetoric and improve the legal environment for civil society. Beyond lawmaking, the Nigerian

¹⁸³ *All Nigeria Peoples Party & Ors. v. Inspector General of Police* (2006) CHR 181

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁶ [Global Freedom of Expression | Okedara v. Attorney General - Global Freedom of Expression \(columbia.edu\)](#)

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*

legislature exercise oversight functions on the executive arm of the government. This avenue can be considered to activate legislative oversight mechanisms to interrogate the weaponization of the CT and security apparatus against the citizens.

6.2. Constructive Engagements with State Actors

For the most part, the activities of the civil society complement and bolster government's efforts. The time has come for the Nigerian civil society to improve public understanding of the third sector's contributions to national development. The contributions of CSOs have been judged mostly by their confrontations with the government on various issues and little searchlight has been beamed on their status as employers, source of international cash inflow, service providers and intermediaries between the government and the people. Building credible data detailing the positive contributions of the civil society to the economy is one way of reversing false narratives about CSOs as well as the adversarial engagements between CSOs and government actors. NACTEST, Nigeria's foremost counterterrorism framework (including the National Security Strategy) recognize the role of CSOs in preventing violent extremism. Civil society participation in the coordination and implementation mechanisms can help balance the deepening polarization of opinions between those for and against the range of measures employed to counter terrorism and restore peace.

6.3. Self-Regulatory Mechanisms

The civil society should evaluate the legitimate concerns of the government and help address them through self-regulation. From all indications, state actors fear NPOs may be hijacked to perpetrate criminal acts in Nigeria – a sentiment that may be attributed to the ill-fated Recommendation 8. It is therefore necessary to reassure the government that NPOs are taking all necessary precautions to protect their integrity. NPOs should develop best practices on various aspects of their administrative, financial and thematic operations, with the input of appropriate government agencies. Having strong governance systems and internal controls in place may also reduce the frequency of the pushback by the government to establish regulatory agencies for Nigerian NPOs.

6.4. Vigilant Advocacy and Capacity Building

Vigilance is key. Vigilant monitoring of policy and legislative spaces have helped CSOs detect the inclusion of restrictive and disturbing clauses in draft statutes. Early detection gives CSOs ample time to launch appropriate campaigns to challenge the initiatives. It was the vigilance of civil actors that identified the various restricting bills—like the Social Media Bill—pending at the National Assembly which culminated in the successful dismantling of those bills. Continuous advocacy is a must. The best time to challenge wrong policies is before they become operational. Once a repressive law is enacted, it usually becomes immediately effective and

would require either judicial activism or a very windy process of repeal to deactivate it. Skills such as leadership, research, communication and political awareness are not only required for politics and business; they are also key to successful campaigns against repression.

6.5. Strong Coalitions and Networks

Forming strong coalitions and networks in order to mobilise resources – people, their time and their money – towards a collective goal is a powerful tool for taming authoritarianism.¹⁸⁸ Forming coalitions offers three major advantages, especially in settings where civic spaces are closing. First, the traditional “strength in number” objective makes the voice louder, making it difficult for the government to single out individual organisations or persons for victimization. This is a strategy the Action Group on Free Civic Space (AGFCS) has consistently used to engage the government on issues touching on national security without attracting any negative repercussions or reprisals. The Action Group on Free Civic Space (Action Group) is a coalition formed by Nigerian NGOs to frontally challenge and address the constantly-shrinking Nigerian civic space. The group works to co-create a unified sector position and voice to defend civic space against security-induced restrictions.¹⁸⁹ As an 84-member group, the Action Group draws from the varying areas of strength of its constituent organisations allowing for a complementarity of skills; for example, whilst one group conducted research, others took that research and transformed it into public outreach work, empowering their constituencies and networks.¹⁹⁰

The group constructively engaged the government, FATF and GIABA assessors during the onsite visit to Nigeria in 2019 for the second Mutual Evaluation of the country's measures against money laundering and terrorism financing. Nigeria was downgraded to a non-compliant rating on Recommendation 8 based on the failure to conduct a proper assessment of risks in the non-profit sector. To overturn this rating, Nigerian authorities scheduled a standalone assessment of risks in the NPO sector and appointed a member of the AGFCS to oversee the risk assessment exercise.

Secondly, forming coalitions improve efficiency as scarce resources are pooled together and maximized and the relative strengths of each constituent organisation can be leveraged. From that efficiency springs unity in communication and positions which is harder to be exploited by the government to sow discord.¹⁹¹ The unity in message makes it easier to identify fake NGOs which are set up to drum up support for the government. Thirdly, forming coalitions create a single point of entry for engagement between civil society and the government and international actors. Coalitions—like the Civil Society Election Situation Room—have become more formidable and difficult to ignore by the government and other policy makers on all election and political campaign matters.

¹⁸⁸ [Global Coalitions published Dec 2011.pdf \(globalcoalitions.org\)](#)

¹⁸⁹ [Spaces for Change: From informal networks and collaboration to the Action Group for Free Civic Space in Nigeria - Closing Spaces](#)

¹⁹⁰ [20-04-09-Spaces-for-Change.pdf \(icscentre.org\)](#)

¹⁹¹ *ibid*

At the international scene, the success stories of coalition of NGOs like the Global NPO Coalition on FATF demonstrates how coalitions can break barriers through coordinated advocacy. The coalition, made up of global and national NPOs including Spaces for Change, was formed to mitigate unintended consequences of FATF recommendations on NPOs. Massive successes have been recorded including the current “Unintended Consequences” workstream by FATF¹⁹² part of which includes mitigating the undue targeting of NPOs by governments using FATF standards. Also, since 2016, the Global NPO Coalition on the FATF has been permitted to nominate four organizations to participate in FATF forums ensuring some human rights/humanitarian presence in the room albeit on ad hoc basis.¹⁹³

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL ACTION PLANS TO CONSIDER

6.6. The Role of Funding Agencies

Governments like US, UK, EU, through their international agencies are major sources of funding to Nigeria. They present a unique, yet delicate opportunity to counteract government's incursions into the civic spaces in the guise of national security. Three paths that have been explored to achieve this goal include:

- **Prevention** through diplomatic pressure from donor bodies, foreign governments and multilateral bodies have been effective in reshaping, mitigating, and preventing the passage of restrictive laws. This approach requires the willingness of the target groups to use their diplomatic channels to exert political pressure on the country. A petition submitted on the UK Parliament's website in the aftermath of the bloody clampdown on #EndSARS protesters garnered over 200,000 signatures. The UK parliament responded by recommending sanctions such as visa bans and asset freezes against persons indicted in the atrocities against peaceful protesters.¹⁹⁴

- **Adaptation** includes assisting local CSOs to develop the capacity to manage new regulations and supporting local CSOs across all development sectors, such as women's economic empowerment, health, democracy, human rights and governance.

- **Continued Support** to civil society, even where space has been severely constricted, both through diplomatic, development cooperation and technical assistance programs.

¹⁹² [Unintended-Consequences.pdf \(fatf-gafi.org\)](#)

¹⁹³ Fionnuala Ni Aoláin “Impact of measures to address terrorism and violent extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders.” Available at <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/HRC/40/52>, accessed 26 September 2021, p. 23

¹⁹⁴ [EndSARS Protest latest update: UK government reply to EndSARS petitions from Nigerians - BBC News Pidgin: –#EndSARS: UK Parliament Wants Nigerian Officials, Security Agencies Sanctioned For Rights Abuses: Channels Television \(channelstv.com\)](#)

6.7. Engaging CT Standard-Setting bodies

CT policies and strategies in Nigeria are usually handed down to the country from international rule making bodies such as the FATF and the UN organs. Engaging these bodies at the policy formulation stage can help ensure that the consequences of the policies in local contexts are adequately considered. The FATF recommendations and most of the resolutions adopted either at the G7 or UN level are adopted without the inputs of developing countries. Resolutions made without adequate inputs of developing countries cannot take local contexts and realities in these regions into account. Poor implementation of international CT norms at the national level has given rise to the proliferation of repressive laws enacted under the guise of operationalizing CT policies.¹⁹⁵

Recently, FATF sent out signals that it is willing to engage the civil society on the unintended consequences of its standards on NPOs. This is an opportunity to address the detrimental effects FATF Standards are having on the civic space. In this regard, constant engagement with the UN Special Rapporteurs relevant to the effects of CT and security on human rights is key, in order to provide feedback from the field to UN policymaking organs.

6.8. Context-specific Rules on Neutrality

While neutrality, humanity and impartiality are core imperatives of humanitarian assistance, it is important to ensure that the application of these principles do not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute. Official suspicion of affiliation between humanitarian organizations and terrorist groups is premised on fears that charitable support may reach hostile groups, absent adequate control measures. The creation of safe spaces and mechanisms for inclusive deliberations is necessary to enable the Nigerian government and humanitarian groups mutually develop context-specific guidelines that ensure that the modalities for the delivery of life-saving assistance to those in need do not clash with counterterrorism measures. This will allow for the development of context-specific rules on aid delivery that support national counterterrorism objectives and also satisfy the requirements of international human rights and humanitarian law.

¹⁹⁵ [CP_258_Carothers_Closing_Space_Final.pdf \(carnegieendowment.org\)](#)

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