



Ubiquity of Inequalities and Criminalities in Nigeria: The Struggle for Survival amidst failure in Governance

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Abstract

The work is an exploration of the Nigeria intricate relationship of crime and inequalities, focusing on the failures in governance and social disorganisation. Presenting a link of how endemic corruption around political and public office holders has increasingly disorganised social systems, encouraging the culture in our everyday life. Analysis was drawn on dialectical issues of crime in the country making illustrations with socio-economic disparities, orchestrating further crimes and social deviations. Examined institutional mistrust and lack of economic opportunities, propelling disorganisation and a feeling of marginalisation where groups resort to crime for survival. The underlying causes of criminality and inequality. The work adopted relative deprivation and social disorganisation theory to analyse the research problem. The historical research design was adopted for the work, consulting extensively from secondary data and the new paper review. The research outcome provided conclusive evidence that evidences that inequalities and failure of governance is the cause of ubiquitous criminalities in Nigeria. The study recommended that government and policymakers should develop targeted interventions that reduce inequality and deprivation, this will definitely reduce crimes to the barest minimum in the Country.

Key Words: Criminalities, Governance, Inequalities, Insecurity, Social Disorganisation.

Introduction

Crime as a social phenomenon is on an increase with each passing years, with countries ranking higher when compared to previous year's crime indexes, major cities also has recorded more than 50 per-cents as recorded in the Crime Index by Cities 2024. According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics 2024, Nigeria is second to South Africa with the Crime Index of 66.2. The manner in which crime and criminality is on an increase in all sectors of the Nigeria society is mind-troubling. This is evident in daily crime reports, ranging from corruption, terrorism, drug use and abuse, robbery, stealing, rape, kidnapping, cyber fraud, and others. (Oluwaleye, 2021; Sasu, 2024; Punch, 2024; Michael, 2024). Ademola (2024) reported, 'In the beginning of the year 2024, 15 individuals were reportedly adopted in Abuja.' This is shocking even in the capital city, the government seat of power, housed with all sorts of government security apparatus. Punch (2024) reported over 2,140 Nigerians kidnapped in seven

months (January–July); abductors took over N389 million from 62 victims, and this has affected a record of 24 states, according to a police report. A total of 2,140 abductors statistics go as follows: January 193, February 101, March 543, April 112, May 977, June 97, and July 117.

Makurdi (2024) also reported a case of a convicted five-man criminal gang known for terrorising commuters on the busy Otukpo-Enugu highway in military uniforms. Their mode of operations was kidnapping, murder, rape, and robbery. In October 2024, a Divisional Police Officer (Agbarho, DPO) was reportedly killed in a tensed gun battle while on rescue mission with robbers/kidnappers as its counterpart from Orhorho Okpe, escaped death with bullet wounds as other officers sustained injury in Delta State (Ogunyemi, 2024). The Chairman of the Nigeria Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Ola Olukoyede, averred that the occurrences of cybercrimes are increasing on a daily basis.



Further, victims recorded a loss of over \$500,000,000.00 just in 2022 alone, and suspect conviction record of 3,455 from 2022 to 2023 (Odeniyi, 2024).

Rape cases, especially of children, continue to rise in Nigeria, with government and non-governmental bodies trying to curtail the surge (HumAngle, 2020). In Nigeria, Lagos State alone in five years had a statistical report of sexual and gender-based violence cases amounting to the tune of 24,009; statistical reports show that cases rose steadily, from 3,446 in 2019 to 6,389 in 2023 (Ojuroungbe, 2024). Corruption is another crime that is so endemic in Nigeria; Mr. 'Victor Muruako' CEO, Nigeria Fiscal Responsibility Commission, maintained, "The two challenging acts that are keeping the country from attaining a greater height are the phenomenon of corruption and lack of account-able personnel holding political and public offices. Suggesting, Nigeria will only witness growth if proactive efforts are made to halt the practices of corruption (Folorunsho-Francis, 2024). In recent times, the two most high-profile corruption cases are those of former Kogi State Governor Yahaya Bello and immediate Delta State Governor Ifeanyi Okowa, both amounting to the tune of over 2 trillion Naira (Adeyemi, 2024).

Adebayo (2013) Crime at all levels creates fears; society dreads it; it instills fears among citizens; and it produces pain and loss of lives and property to victims and their families. For any society to witness meaningful forms of social stability and development, the dread of crime must be curtailed at all levels. One of the major reasons attributed to heightened criminality in Nigeria, as postulated by many scholars, is the phenomenon of unemployment among youths (Oluwaleye, 2021). Indeed, chronic youth unemployment is evident in the thousands of graduate youths produced every year with no jobs for the majority of them (Ajaegbu, 2012; Adebayo, 2013). No doubts, youth unemployment is very reflective, as different tertiary institutions graduate many of the youths annually without any meaningful institutions to accommodate them as a workforce. The syndrome of underemployment or

unemployment is a propeller to criminality. Remember, as the saying goes, 'an idol mind is where the devils work' (Adebayo, 2013).

The Concept of Crime and Criminality

The concept of crime is used in different forms within the general disciplines of social science, producing a paradigm shift and change at different levels depending on the political and sociocultural situation. Thus, those variables are determinant factors in defining crime and its constituents. However, a more general definition and mostly used in the fields of sociology, criminology, and criminal law: a crime is an act or an omission of an act that offends the criminal law and is sanction-able by the criminal code, and society frowns at it. Going further, Tambari and Imoh-Ita's (2016) conceptualisation will be adopted: "A crime is an act that causes injury to a community, society, or the state in addition to some individual or individuals, calling it "a public wrong." In the opinion of Önel Dölek and Adeleke (2023), the wrongdoing acts include actions and inactions against the law, the state, society, and lastly individuals, such as murder, theft, vandalism, trafficking in humans, and terrorism. These said crimes might be committed as a result of individual motivations or purely an orchestration within the frame of group organisation. For instance, a police officer instigating illegal arrest just to solicit bribery; on the other hand, within the confines of an organisation are situations where a community coerces its members to vote for a particular candidate during an election.

Osawe (2015) portrayed crime/wrongdoing as an "illegal act, unlawful action that includes breaking the law; corruption considered unacceptable; an act that's despicable, impulsive, and regrettable. To Adebayo (2013), a crime related to an infringement of rules, regarded by social members as unacceptable, and endorsing possible measures to prevent such infringement. Onimajesin, Mutalib, and Muslim (2024) portray the nature of such infringement to incorporate burglary, kill, assault, car burglary, burglary, extortion, bribery and debasement, nourishment and medicate corruption, betting, sneaking,



human trafficking, capturing, medicate trafficking, cash washing, web trick, progressed expense extortion (419), and other illicit activities. This is the picture of the nature of wrongdoing in Nigeria. Sheriff Deputies (2016) reported that 7 out of 10 Nigerians are perplexed about getting to be the cause of wrongdoing.

The concept of Inequalities

Inequality or inequalities in plural form is not an iron-cast construct but subjectively defined, depending on the present social reality and the perspectives within which the definer views the concept. Thus, this makes the concept ambiguous, as many tie different meanings to the concept, especially in regards to their political, cultural, and social relations. However, in the simple sense, 'inequality' is the unequal and unbalanced distribution of values or opportunities among societal members. For instance, a majority without power in politics can be sidetracked by a minority with political power; ones with wealth but lack affluence can unequally be shortchanged by those with charisma and affluence. Within a multiethnic group faction, a minority group with power can suppress a majority. A good case is the Northern elite seeing themselves as the political hegemony and the kingmaker in Nigeria. Moving away from the group paradigm, inequality is applicable within individual relationship dynamics (IMF, 2024). There are situations where the rich, especially those with political power and wealth, forcefully or at best transiently oppress those who are financially challenged in society; this is very glaring in the Nigeria situation.

Dissecting the concept of inequality in a broader and encompassing light, one most sees the concept within a flow of overlapping 'economic, social, and spatial paradigms. 'Economic inequality' is the unequal distribution of economic resources revolve around the variables of income and wealth; 'social inequality' is the structural strictures put in place to ensure that opportunities are unequally distributed, thereby favouring some few persons or group of persons; and 'lastly, 'spatial inequality' is the distribution of valuable infrastructural development within the framework of rural urban disparities (IMF, 2024).

It's true that these identified inequalities can interject and intersect cumulatively to produce a holistic form of inequality in practice across time, space, and place.

There is no one particular inequality measurement in place, but to a large extent, one that has been widely used among the community of scholars is the 'Gini Coefficient'. It possesses different levels of indicators ranging from 0-100, showcasing those with the higher scores bearing the higher degree of inequality. One thing is very clear: the G-C is scientifically calibrated in such a way to produce an analytical comparison across all nations of the world without any biases. It can also measure from region to region, city to city, urban to rural, and rural to rural. However, there are some identified weaknesses in the use of the G-C, as it has shown disadvantages in accounting for differences in the areas of household income, changes in life span, and population change.

The Spate of Inequality in Nigeria

A report by the Nigeria's Human Development Index stood at 0.534 in the year 2022; this witnessed a decline from 0.535 in 2021 and a peak in 2019 recording 0.538. In 2018, Nigeria's Gini coefficient was reported as 35.1, based on the 2018-2019 Living Standards Survey. Also in the 2022 World Bank Report, it was established that over 40% of the Nigerian populace live below the poverty line (NGN 137,430 per person per year). The unequal distribution of income and resources is a factor that has affected the ranking, pushing it relatively lower when compared to its GNI per capita ranking. Additionally, the 2022 multidimensional poverty index, which considered variables such as education, health, living standards, and unemployment, recorded a huge statistical figure of over 63% (133 million people) of the Nigerian population as poor in the real sense, while the poverty index is 38.9% in 2023 with over a record (87 million people), and the 2024 had been projected to increase by 34.8% (NBS, 2024).

One can deduce that low unemployment and high inflation are attributing factors to the recent growing poverty. Afrobarometer reported 46% in



2020 that living conditions went very or fairly bad. It witnessed an increase to 84% in 2022, orchestrated coupled with the Russian-Ukraine crisis, affecting wheat and fertiliser production costs and the years increment in petroleum products, which has affected prices of products at all levels. The minimum wage of NGN 30,000 per month just changed to NGN 70,000, and many governors are yet to implement it. Moreover, many Nigerians work in the informal sector, where such rules don't apply. Violent conflict and climate change—including damaging floods in parts of the country in 2022—undermine the agricultural sector and threaten the livelihoods of Nigeria's numerous small-scale farmers, estimated to count about 70% of the population, as well as food security more generally. Structural inequalities between northern and southern states and urban and rural areas persist. In addition, inequality across gender lines remains stark, with women structurally marginalized. Nigeria's 2021 score on the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index is 0.680, making it one of the worst performers in sub-Saharan Africa.

The above-identified problems inform the administration of the criminal justice system and process. The officials of the justice system define crimes in relation to class, social status, and other social inclinations. The powerless are arrested and subjected to cruelty and torture, especially as they lack the financial and educational capabilities and awareness to understand that their rights have been infringed upon. Those with economic power easily buy their way out; a clear case is that of Bobrisky, who was allegedly accused of bribing its way out of a money laundry case instituted against him by the EFCC, a case later withdrawn and reduced to a lesser charge, eventually led to lesser conviction in terms of punishment (6 months imprisonment). Furthermore, the conviction of just six months witnessed the exchange of values in the form of bribery by the prison authority, in which he was later taken to a hotel to serve the prison term. Politicians interfere in cases of interest; this is a mere case of electoral violence that culprits are never investigated (Uchenna, Obiagu, Ifeanyichukwu, Abada, 2023).

In the 2023 election, a known member of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and a close ally to the present Nigerian President (B. A. Tinubu), 'MC Oluomo,' was caught on camera issuing threat "any person voting against the APC should better stay at home." That is the height of the political impunity enjoyed by those with political affiliation; they escape the law. Police harass and extort citizens (youths/juveniles) on a daily basis, a major instigator to the EndSars of 2020. They give flimsy excuses that they are 'internet fraudsters' without any form of investigation (Ulo, 2021). The criminal statistics reflect the powerless and weak who could not afford justice, suffer the consequences of their actions not because the law enforcement officials are actually doing their jobs but because money and values couldn't exchange hands, and have no political or media affiliations.

Class and Inequality: A nexus

The work on 'The Rough Necks and the Saints' conducted by William Chambliss in the 1970's was an eyes-opener that class is an important factor to the definition of crime and the procession and interpretations of the criminal law and procedures. Defining crime within the frame of social inequalities and class interest, considerable factors should be focused on the administration of criminal justice. Addressing class and inequality is a pointer to Sutherland's (1949) theoretical postulations of 'white collar crime': crimes committed by the rich and powerful with the reasons to further their wealth. Sutherland maintained that these crimes are committed by persons of high respectable positions and responsibilities. However, it asserts that both classes actually commit similar crimes, but what differs is the mode of interpretation and methods of prosecution within the confines of the crime justice administration.

Administered in criminal court, blue collar crimes, sometimes referred to as street crimes, are punished with harsh and stigmatising sanctions, even when the proceeds of such crimes are relatively of lesser value, for instance, stealing, burglary, and drug use. For purpose of clarity, see recent reports of persons jailed just for petty



crimes; on June 21, 2024, a magistrate court in Isabo-Abeokuta sentenced Mr. Kazeem Salami to one-year imprisonment for stealing food items not less than a value of NGN1,000 (National Record, 2024). Also on September 23, 2024, the Magistrate Court in Osogbo convicted one Mr. Sunday Ejoh to six months imprisonment for stealing three tubers of yam not valued at NGN3,000 (Obarayese, 2024). Many of these cases overflag the crime statistics and showcase the biased nature of the criminal justice personnel and institutional discrimination. Further contrasting, white collar crimes are often administered in civil court or administrative hearings, sometimes escaping convictions; another instance is punished with mild sanctions even when huge sums of value are involved.

Most of all these crimes committed by the upper class are hardly prosecuted and sometimes swept under the carpet; just recently, Punch Nigeria reported a case of an assault and threats against an e-hailing (Bolt) driver by a lawmaker, Alex Ikwechegh, a disturbing abuse of power and an affront to the dignity and rights of all Nigerians. Also, Ogundipe reported a case of a Nigerian senator, Elisha Abbo, caught on camera physically assaulting a woman at an adult toy shop in Abuja. The EFCC maintained that cybercrime suspects got a larger share of the 3,455 convictions recorded by the EFCC in his one year in office, and politicians and public office holders are hardly convicted. Politicians like Governor Ifeanyi Okowa of Delta and Yayah Bello, who had been alleged to have embezzled over 2 trillion Naira, walked the street free (Odeniyi, 2024). Ahmed Idris, the former Nigerian accountant general to the federation, alongside three others (Godfrey Olusegun Akindele, Mohammed Kudu Usman, and Gezawa Commodity Market and Exchange Limited), on a 14-count charge of stealing and criminal breach of trust to the tune of N109,485,572,691.9, has no meaningful judicial outcome since 2022 (EFCC, 2022).

The two past EFCC chairpersons(Ibrahim Lamorde, 2012-2015 & Abdul Rasheed Bawa, 2021-2023) who had been alleged to be corrupt are walking freely. Nigeria's former national

security adviser, Sambo Dasuki, who was arrested allegedly for defrauding the federal government over 2 billion dollars in military arms deals, has been politically quashed. The former CBN governor, Godwin Emefele, who is facing numerous corruption charges, will soon walk the streets free either through political bargaining or plea bargaining. The former Director of NDDC, Tuoyo Omatsuli, who was alleged to have embezzled N3.6 billion, and Governor James Ibori of Delta State, who was cleared of all corruption charges but was convicted in the United Kingdom. These are all high-profile cases that left hanging due to the political implications, social inequalities, and class interest.

The State of the Nation and Fail State Syndrome
Situations where the political and economic systems of a nation no longer stand functional constitute, among other things, the definition of a failed state. Knowing the demarcation between failed states and weak states is important, as the concept is used pejoratively. Although the condition which leads to weak state, may not be far from a failed state, except that they are more intensified later. Underhill (2014) identified three basic elements of failed states. The first deals with the issues of its inability to protect its territories and borders. The next is the loss of legitimacy, which is manifested in the internal collapse of law and order; evidence that there is no effective or transparent governance. Lastly, a weak state is known on the basis of failure to fulfil its basic functions. The first and most basic function of a state is security, in terms of lives and property.

The situation where the state loses potential control over its territorial sovereignty, citizens face challenges that might impair their lives by factors that produce tension and hostility, halt or deprive them from daily business activities, prevent the citizens from enjoying and accessing basic needs of life and access to service delivery, and produce the consequences of a clear indiscreet political and economic disenfranchisement of the people. In summary, "three indicators abound to understand the situation of a state towing towards the direction of failure, with focus on the lags in the functions of



security, politics, and economics” (Denis, 2023; Underhill, 2014).

Having understood what a failed state is in principle, it is necessary to juxtapose the state of the nation side by side with those factors so identified to have a clearer picture of the situation. Nigeria is underdeveloped because of the many problems that have caused its backwardness. Such problems include endemic corruption, poverty, unemployment, criminality and insecurity, ethnic bigotry, and the like. One pointer to these problems is as a result of weak institutions (Denis, 2023). These institutions empowered to uphold societal core values are thus becoming accomplices to the central issues. Given this precarious situation, the world now rates Nigeria in terms of corruption, moral degradation, kidnapping, terrorism, insurgency, et cetera. The avalanche of these ills presupposes failure in the Nigerian polity and leadership structure. In fact, in Rotberg's (2002) opinion, Nigeria bears the marks of a failed state, with indicators such as rising criminality, political violence, ethnic and religious hostilities, the battle of secession, weak institutions, deterioration and/or insufficient infrastructure, the inability to collect taxes without undue coercion, a collapsed health system, rising levels of infant mortality and declining life expectancy, declining levels of GDP per capita, widespread preference for non-national currencies, basic food shortages, and starvation.

Theoretical Framework

Relative deprivation is a psycho-socio theory that is adopted for this work because it provides adequate explanation on how individuals and groups internally juxtapose their situations to those of others within a reference group framework. A feeling of acceptable status of one's self as satisfactory can be achieved; otherwise, perceived frustration as a result of discontentment is also judged unsatisfactory on internal juxtaposition. One of the leading proponent models, Ted Robert Gurr (1970), linked relative deprivation to political violence. He argued that “when people perceive a disparity between what they have and what they believe they deserve, it

can lead to collective violence.”

Social disorganisation is a theory in sociology that explains the breakdown of social structures and institutions in our society, leading to increased crime and deviance. Granting linkages on how social forces, such as poverty, inequalities, discrimination, and deprivations, contribute to weak solidarity and to disorganisation. Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942); one of the leading proponents models was adopted for this study because it places emphasis on how social disorganisation within societies contributes to crime. They used empirical data to show that areas with high levels of poverty, inequalities, discrimination and deprivations, immigration, and family disruption had higher crime rates, even when controlling for the ethnic composition of neighborhoods. The application of both theoretical models to this study is very apt, as they explain the linkages and how inequalities can produce a sense of deprivation and can eventually exacerbate an upsurge in criminality, which can in turn lead to social disorganisation.

The Synergy between Inequality, Crimes and Failed State

The issues of inequality, crime, and the failing state in Nigeria are interrelated, with each factor influencing and exacerbating the others. This synergy can be understood through various perspectives, including socio-economic disparities, governance failures, and security challenges. The World Bank (2020) reported that inequality triggers affect Nigerians, particularly the youths, reflected in wealth distribution, access to education, healthcare, job opportunities, and basic substance. Niger is the country with the highest number of those living below the poverty line, with a record number of populations of over 40% (World Bank, 2020).

The poverty report with regards to economic disparity is enough to breed a sense of deprivation and resentment, causing a crime upsurge just as a means of survival. The raising cry of hunger in the land is a reminder that poverty orchestrated through the veil of raising inequality and social deprivation from all sectors of the nation's social,



political, and economic legitimate means to survival has failed, thus people seek for illegitimate means to survival in the economic reality. Just this year alone (2024), the country witnessed two major protests: one in August, the 'Hungary Protest,' and the second, the 'End Bad Government Protest,' in October. Many took to the street to voice out that they are hungry, poor, and unemployed, maintaining that they couldn't even feed themselves and their families. Media commentators and social analysts have pinpointed the various causes of the economic hardship, including the removal of fuel subsidies, floating of the currency (Naira), high levels of corruption, failures of infrastructural development, and increasing hikes in taxes (Akintaro, 2024; Okoli, 2024).

Crime in Nigeria can be partly attributed to the socio-economic conditions that inequality creates. The lack of adequate employment opportunities and social services pushes disenfranchised individuals toward crime (Oluwaleye, 2021). Research shows that high levels of inequality correlate with increased crime rates, as marginalised groups may resort to theft, robbery, or even violent crimes to address their socio-economic hardships (Nte, Nte, Featherstone & Eyengho, 2024; Bourguignon, 2001). The challenges of governance more prominent today are corruption and maladministration made possible through failures of weak institutions.

The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2021) says corruption at all levels has negated public services and development retardation and orchestrated economic inequalities. One of the problems with governance failure is weak institutions producing citizen mistrust for state actors and their managed institutions and can push citizens to organise protests, increasing crime and violence (Purwono, Esquivias, Rohmawati, 2023). High inequality leads to increased crime; the state's inability to effectively manage crime contributes to perceptions of failing governance; and this failure perpetuates further inequality. Institute for Economics and Peace (2021), reporting the Global Peace Index, maintained highlights that

Nigeria faces significant challenges associated with violence, which stifles economic growth and exacerbates social inequities. The government's strategies for preventing crime and violence are usually brutal in nature, showing military force and brutality. These strategies lead to increased tensions between the state and citizens, perpetuating a cycle of violence and insecurity. Excessive use of state force by uniform men goes with the implication in numerous human rights abuses, further deteriorating the relationship between the state and its citizens (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Ulo, 2021)

Methodology

The research adopted historical design focusing mainly on primary and secondary data, from textbooks, journal articles, newspapers reports and internet materials that are relevant to the research subject of interest. The cumulative of analysed data informed the basis of generalizations.

Conclusion

Crimes have become a ubiquitous reoccurring decimal in the Nigerian state; this phenomenon is reflective in major regions of the country, including rural and urban areas. These crimes include armed robbery, murder, and kidnapping; most of the incidences usually flow with indiscriminate killing and heighten destructions of lives and properties. Most of the perpetrators of these crimes are youths without jobs, from poor backgrounds, and some come from disadvantaged classes in society and are sometimes used as tools by the elite class. These crimes are sometimes attributed to wide income disparities, a wide gap between the rich and the poor. The study deduced that there is a closer link between inequality, criminality, and social disorganisation—a situation that is orchestrated as a result of deprivation and will definitely produce a sort of ubiquitous criminality in all regions of the country, and if urgent measures to combat this menace aren't put in place to manage the situation, a full-blown failed state isn't farfetched.



Recommendations

If Nigeria must survive the struggle, she must accept and implement the following recommendations to a logical conclusion.

She must start by accepting that inequality orchestrated by deprivation and marginalisation leads to increasing crime; the state's inability to effectively manage inequalities and heightened spread of poverty have contributed to the presence of a failing state. By recognising the interconnections between inequalities, deprivations, criminalities, and failures in government producing disorganisation, policymakers can now develop targeted interventions that reduce inequality and crime, ultimately leading to a more stable and equitable society.

This is better achievable by addressing the phenomenon of youth unemployment and underemployment; job creation is assured through industrialisation and creative education (entrepreneurship skills). Class and income inequality reflective at the institutional level, especially in the area of selective and discriminative systems of the criminal justice administration, criminal law and procedures law must also be addressed.

Sanctions in the form of punishment for crimes must be taken seriously, especially among top political officeholders, which should be used as a secondary deviant to deter others. Achieving this, the judiciary at all levels must be granted independence at all levels. Lastly, families, religious organisations, and communities must raise awareness to reignite the teaching of family, community, and moral values that has held Africans together for long because the criminal is a product of a family and community.

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