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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

CRISIS OF NATIONAL VALUES AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: ETHICAL GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND SUSTAINABLE STABILITY

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Abstract

The consolidation of democracy in developing states remains deeply intertwined with the moral and normative foundations. While national security strategies have predominantly emphasized military and coercive responses to threats such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, banditry and mass kidnapping in the North-West, farmer – herder conflicts in the middle belt and militancy in the Niger Delta, limited attention has been given to the underlying crisis of National values that perpetuates these challenges. This study interrogates the nexus between the value erosion of and national security in Nigeria arguing that insecurity is not solely a function of weak security architecture but also of normative decline within the polity. Drawing on a theoretical triangulation of the Social Contract Theory, Institutional Theory, and the Human Security framework or approach, the article contends that the erosion of integrity, accountability, rule of law, civic responsibility and national cohesion has significantly weakened state legitimacy and undermined governance effectiveness. Relying on qualitative analysis of secondary data, including policy reports and scholarly literature, the study finds that systemic corruption, identity-based politics, youth unemployment and institutional fragility both reflect and reinforce moral decay, thereby intensifying violence, distrust and socio-political instability. The paper concludes that sustainable national security in Nigeria requires more than military interventions; it demands ethical leadership, comprehensive civic re-orientation, institutional strengthening and inclusive governance reforms aimed at rebuilding public trust and fostering durable democratic stability.

Keywords: National Values, National Security, Democratic Consolidation, Corruption, Insurgency, Human Security, Governance.

INTRODUCTION

The stability and sustainability of democratic governance are closely linked to the moral and normative foundations upon which a state is built. In Nigeria, the fast erosion of national values such as integrity, accountability, patriotism and respect for the rule of law has contributed significantly to governance failures and persistent insecurity. Increasingly manifest are weak institutions, widespread corruption, declining public confidence and trust, persistent security threats across different regions of the country. These and many more raise critical questions about the relationship between ethical governance, democratic consolidation and national security.

Contemporary discourse on national security has traditionally focused on military



capability and intelligence, territorial defence and the protection of state sovereignty. However, modern studies increasingly recognize that internal governance failures and moral decay within political and social institutions are the real threats to national stability. Huntington, (1991), asserts that the sustainability of democracy depends not only on institutional frameworks but also on underlying political culture that shapes the citizens' behaviour and expectations. Similarly, Ekeh, (1975), argued that the dualistic moral structure in Nigeria has historically contributed to corruption and the weak civic responsibility where public institutions are perceived as detached from communal moral obligations.

The current security landscape of Nigeria is the direct consequence of its ailing and failing National Values. The different forms of security crisis experienced in different parts and regions of the country, collectively threaten the political stability and economic development of Nigeria. Security challenges are often tackled through military responses; scholars argue that the security issues are rooted in deeper structural and normative failures within the state (Ake, 2001, Suberu, 2007).

The legitimacy of the Nigerian state is further weakened by endemic corruption and patronage politics. Prebendalism a term adopted by Richard Joseph (1991), conceptualizing the political system in Nigeria where public officers appropriate and amass private wealth. This erodes public trust, undermines institutional effectiveness and political instability and widens economic inequality. The perceived ineffectiveness of governmental institutions weakens the social contact between the state and society creating a fertile ground for violence and insurgency. Furthermore, socio-economic factors such as youth unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are causal factors of youth restiveness when there is perceived exclusion, injustice and deprivation.

This study therefore interrogates the relationship between the crisis of national values and national security in Nigeria. It underscores how unethical governance and erosion of civic norms contributes to insecurity and democratic fragility. Deriving theoretical background from Social Contract Theory, Institutional Theory and Human Security Framework, the study query and seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how value decline undermines governance and national stability. Furthermore, it argues that to achieve sustainable security in Nigeria, beyond military intervention, there is an urgent need for the overhauling of the value system through ethical leadership, institutional reforms and renewed commitment to national values that promotes accountability, equality, inclusiveness and democratic consolidation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the crisis of national values and its implications for national security in Nigeria requires a multidimensional theoretical approach. This study integrates Social Contract Theory, Institutional Theory and the Human Security Framework to provide a comprehensive analytical lens. These frameworks collectively explain how normative decline translates into weakened legitimacy, fragile institutions, and heightened insecurity.

Social Contract Theory and State Legitimacy

Social Contract Theory provides the foundational normative basis for examining governance and security. Classical theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau conceptualized the state as deriving legitimacy from the consent of the governed. In contemporary political theory, Rawls (1971), modernized the Social contract theory making it more acceptable by emphasizing justice as fairness and central to sustaining political order. In the same vein, Gauthier (1986), offered a neo- Hobbesian view where morality stems from rational self – interest.

In the Nigerian context, the social contract implies that citizens surrender certain freedoms in exchange for protection, justice, and public goods provision. However, when



corruption, impunity, and selective justice dominate governance processes, citizens perceive a breach of this contract. This breach manifests in declining trust in public institutions, non-compliance with state authority, and, in extreme cases, support for alternative violent actors.

Empirical surveys reinforce this perspective. Afrobarometer (2020) reports low levels of public trust in the police, judiciary, and legislature in Nigeria. Such distrust weakens the normative foundation upon which security cooperation depends. Where citizens do not perceive the state as just or accountable, intelligence-sharing declines and informal or vigilante justice mechanisms emerge.

Thus, Social Contract Theory helps explain how erosion of national values particularly justice, accountability, and fairness undermines state legitimacy and contributes to insecurity.

Institutional Theory and Normative Alignment

Institutional Theory, particularly as articulated by North, (1990), posits that institutions consist of both formal rules (laws, constitutions) and informal norms (customs, values, beliefs). Institutional effectiveness depends on alignment between these formal and informal components.

In Nigeria, while the Constitution provides for rule of law, separation of powers, and accountability, informal norms such as patronage politics, prebendalism (Joseph, 1987), and ethnic favoritism often override formal rules. This normative misalignment produces weak institutional performance. Fukuyama (2014) argues that political order rests on three pillars: state capacity, rule of law, and accountability. When corruption becomes normalized, institutional autonomy weakens, and enforcement mechanisms deteriorate. This institutional fragility reduces the effectiveness of security agencies, anti-corruption bodies, and judicial systems.

Institutional Theory therefore provides a structural explanation of how value erosion—particularly normalization of corruption and nepotism—undermines governance performance and weakens national security architecture.

Human Security Framework

The Human Security paradigm, introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (1994), shifts the focus of security from territorial defense to individual well-being. It encompasses economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. In Nigeria, insecurity is multidimensional: insurgency, unemployment, communal violence, and corruption all undermine human security. Sen, (1999) argues that development and freedom are intrinsically linked; deprivation and injustice generate insecurity.

Institutional Theory

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performance and weakens national security architecture.

The crisis of national values—manifested in corruption, inequality, and intolerance—reduces access to opportunities and weakens human security. When citizens feel excluded or marginalized, grievances intensify, creating fertile ground for insurgency and criminality (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). The Human Security framework therefore connects normative decline with structural insecurity outcomes.

Theoretical Synthesis

The integration of these frameworks provides a holistic explanation:

Social Contract Theory explains declining legitimacy.

Institutional Theory explains weakened governance capacity.

Human Security Framework explains multidimensional insecurity outcomes.

Together, they establish that the crisis of national values in Nigeria is not merely moral but structurally consequential for national security.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design which is appropriate to explain data sourced from secondary sources. And the study seeks to examine complex socio-political phenomena. Data were obtained from a wide range of secondary sources including academic journal articles, government reports, policy documents and publication from international organizations. These sources provided deep insights into the relationship between governance practices and security challenges in Nigeria. Thematic data analysis was employed in this study. This approach involves identifying recurring themes and patterns within the literature relating to the subject matter – governance and insecurity. The synthesis of these themes provides a comprehensive understanding of how the crisis of national values contributes to national security challenges in Nigeria.

What are the National Values of Nigeria?

The National values are enshrined in the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) specifically section 23. The identified national values are:

Discipline

Integrity

Dignity of labour

Social justice

Religious tolerance

Self-reliance

Patriotism

Asides the seven core values recognized and enshrined in the constitution, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other agencies promote additional and complementary values such as honesty, respect for elders and the aged, communal solidarity, hospitality and hard work. The National Policy on Education (NPE): The National Values Curriculum (NVC) which was approved in 2004 to be taught in all basic classes (1-6) and the primary focus was on such values like honesty, contentment and justice. The National Ethics and Integrity Policy (NEIP) which was developed by the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2020. This policy was used to strengthen the seven recognized constitutional values including additional elements like human dignity and professionalism. Most recently, in 2024/2025, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) approved a new National Values Charter which outlines the social contract between leadership-(the promise of good governance and dividends of democracy) while the citizens- (law abiding and civic responsibilities). These values are further emphasized in the National anthem and the National Pledge. Finally, the National Orientation Agency frequently

carry out sensitization and campaigns on the core values of citizens sometimes referred to as “7 for 7” campaign. The custodian and agents of socialization identified are the family, schools, teachers, religious bodies and government.

Historical Roots of Value Crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria’s value crisis has historical antecedents. Colonial administration prioritized extraction over nation-building, fostering ethnic segmentation and weak national identity (Ake, 1996). Post-independence military regimes further entrenched authoritarian norms, corruption, and centralized patronage networks (Joseph, 1987).

Joseph, (1987) concept of “prebendalism” explains how public offices became instruments for private wealth accumulation and ethnic favouritism. This practice normalized corruption and undermined meritocracy, eroding institutional integrity.

The study reveals that the crisis has profound implications on governance, national security, cohesion and stability. The gradual erosion of ethical norms within the public institutions and society has largely contributed to the persistent insecurity across the country.

Corruption, Ethical and Security Governance Deficit

Corruption remains a central manifestation and it is visible in the very fabric of Nigerian governance structure. Rose-Ackerman (1999) stated that corruption distorts public policy and weakens state capacity. Ake (2001), argued that corruption in many African states is not merely an administrative problem but a structural feature of the political economy. Corruption undermines democratic governance through the diversion of public resources held in trust by public office holders, eroding public trust and weakening public institutions. Transparency International consistently ranks Nigeria among countries facing significant corruption challenges; this is a reflection of a deep structural weakness in accountability mechanisms and governance institutions.

Misappropriation of defence funds has directly affected counter-insurgency operations. Agbiboa (2013) links Boko Haram’s resilience partly to governance failures and corruption within security institutions. When security budgets are mismanaged or diverted, operational effectiveness declines, emboldening insurgent groups. Onuoha, (2019), opined that corruption within the security sector is manifest and contributes to inadequate training, poor equipment and weak intelligence coordination.

Furthermore, corruption undermines citizens' trust in governmental institutions. Public perception that political leaders prioritize personal enrichment over national interest, this deepens political cynicism and discourages citizens' participation in political activity and governance. The decline of trust, citizen’s resort to alternative authority or security structures such as militias or vigilante groups (Suberu, 2007; Osaghae, 2015).

Ethno-Religious Polarization, Social Fragmentation and National Cohesion

Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Africa, with over 250 ethnic nationalities and multiple religious groups. While diversity can enrich the national culture and social life, political elites utilize this through manipulating the polity, spotting differences to mobilize support and consolidate power. Horowitz (1985) argues that ethnic divisions destabilize plural societies when political elites manipulate identity for electoral gain. Nigeria’s multi-ethnic structure, combined with politicized religion, has intensified polarization. The consequences of polarization of the polity or identity politics are evident in several security conflicts in Nigeria such as communal clashes, farmer- herder conflicts and sectarian violence. Politicians exploit these divisions to advance group interests.

The Boko Haram insurgency, while ideological, thrives on socio-economic grievances and regional marginalization (Agbiboa, 2013). Farmer–herder conflicts reflect competition over scarce resources, exacerbated by weak governance and declining trust in state



institutions. Without shared national values emphasizing unity and tolerance, identity politics undermines social cohesion and fuels insecurity.

Youth Unemployment, Marginalization, and Socio- Economic Discontent

Nigeria has one of the largest youth populations globally. High unemployment and poverty contribute to criminal networks and extremist recruitment. The inability of the economy to gainfully employ its teeming workforce has given rise to widespread frustration, resentment and social discontent. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics fingers youth unemployment as one of the most pressing socio - economic challenges in Nigeria. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) demonstrate that economic deprivation increases conflict risk. Cybercrime often referred to locally as “Yahoo Yahoo,” illustrates normalization of unethical behavior. Furthermore, when societal narratives glamorize and idolize illicit wealth, value systems deteriorate further. This moral decline contributes to reputational damage and economic insecurity.

The link between unemployment and insecurity also reflects broader governance challenges. Weak economic planning, corruption, and inadequate investment in education and skill development limit opportunities for productive employment. Without meaningful reforms aimed at inclusive economic development, the cycle of unemployment and insecurity is likely to escalate.

Democratic Governance, Institutional Fragility and Weak Rule of Law

The fragility of institutions in Nigeria remains a critical factor in the security challenges faced by the country. Strong and effective institutions are necessary in enforcing regulations, maintaining law and order and ensuring accountability in governance. Many governmental institutions are plagued by bureaucratic inefficiency, capacity constraints, and political interference.

Diamond (1999) emphasizes that democratic consolidation requires strong institutions and accountability. However, Nigeria’s electoral processes have often been marred by irregularities, vote buying, and violence. Levitsky and Way (2010) warn that weak democratic norms enable hybrid regimes because when institutions are weak or poorly enforced, individuals are most likely to engage in opportunistic behaviour such as corruption and abuse of power.

The display of political impunity by the political elites and powerful actors are visible evidence of weak institutions. These are able to evade accountability for corrupt practices and human rights violations. Judicial delays and politicization of security agencies undermine rule of law. When citizens perceive selective justice, confidence in the judiciary as well as democracy diminishes, potentially fostering unrest.

Media, Globalization, and Moral Value Decline

Globalization and digital media have reshaped value systems. While technology enhances civic engagement, it also spreads misinformation and materialistic narratives. Putnam (2000) notes declining civic engagement in modern societies. In Nigeria, social media has amplified ethnic tensions and political misinformation, complicating security management.

Beyond institutional and economic factors, the crisis of national values also reflects a broader decline in civic responsibility and ethical norms. Scholars such as Ekeh, (1975) argued that the colonial legacy created a dual moral structure in many African societies. Citizens often demonstrate strong moral obligations within their ethnic or communal groups while exhibiting weaker commitments to public institutions. This duality contributes to the normalization of practices such as bribery, nepotism, and favoritism in public life. When citizens perceive public institutions as illegitimate or disconnected from communal values,

they may feel less obligated to adhere to civic norms such as paying taxes or obeying laws.

The decay of civic values also affects democratic participation. Voter apathy, electoral violence, and political intolerance are increasingly common features of Nigerian politics. These trends undermine democratic consolidation and weakening of democratic institutions to address national challenges effectively.

Rebuilding national values therefore requires more than institutional reforms; it also requires sustained civic education and ethical leadership capable of promoting a culture of accountability, patriotism, and social responsibility.

Empirical Indicators of Value Crisis and Insecurity

Persistent insurgency in North-East Nigeria (Agbiboa, 2013)

Rising banditry and kidnapping

Increased cybercrime prosecutions

Low public trust in institutions (Afrobarometer reports)

High perceived corruption levels

These indicators suggest a correlation between normative decline and insecurity.

Toward a Value-Based Security Framework - Recommendations

Civic Education Reform

Almond and Verba (1963) stress civic culture's role in democracy. Revitalizing civic education can strengthen patriotism and ethical consciousness.

Institutional Accountability

North (1990) and Fukuyama (2014) emphasize strengthening rule of law. Anti-corruption agencies must operate independently.

Inclusive Governance and Social Justice

Sen (1999) links development to freedom. Addressing inequality reduces grievances fueling insecurity.

Ethical Leadership

Leadership by example rebuilds trust and reinforces social norms (Fukuyama, 2014).

DISCUSSION

Nigeria's security challenges reflect deeper moral and institutional weaknesses. Military expenditure alone cannot resolve insurgency or banditry without addressing governance deficits. Ethical governance enhances legitimacy, encourages citizen cooperation, and strengthens security institutions. The crisis of values undermines the social contract, weakens democratic consolidation, and fosters instability. Restoring national values is therefore not merely a moral project but a strategic security imperative.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the crisis of national values is deeply intertwined with Nigeria's national security challenges. Corruption, identity politics, youth unemployment, institutional fragility, and declining civic responsibility collectively undermine governance effectiveness and weaken state legitimacy. Addressing Nigeria's security challenges therefore requires a comprehensive approach that integrates ethical governance, institutional reforms, and socio-economic development. Military responses alone cannot resolve the structural factors driving insecurity. Sustainable national stability depends on rebuilding public trust in institutions, promoting national values that emphasize accountability and civic responsibility, and implementing inclusive policies that address socio-economic



inequalities. Ultimately, democratic consolidation in Nigeria will depend on the ability of political leaders and citizens to collectively reaffirm the moral and ethical foundations necessary for effective governance and sustainable national development.

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