

# Ethno-Religious Identity and Intergroup Relations

## The Informal Economic Sector, Igbo Economic Relations, and Security Challenges in Northern Nigeria

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Nigeria operates a multidimensional and complex system in which ethnicity and religion have found expression in a competitive environment to exclude other groups. This study aims to examine how ethnicity and religion underlie the hostility and violence in the economic relations between Hausa-Fulani and Igbo people in northern Nigeria. Using documented evidence, the study argues that economic relations between Igbo people and Hausa-Fulani ethnic group have remained unpalatable since the 1960s, and it is associated with the gregarious, assertive and domineering nature of Igbo people in the informal economic sector of northern Nigeria. Democratic revival in 1999 generated new dynamics of ethnic and religious intolerance against Igbo people, especially with the violent transformation of Boko Haram since 2009. Boko Haram violence not only scuttled businesses, but also led to the destruction of lives and properties in which Igbo people incidentally have been victims in most parts of northern Nigeria. Despite the security challenges Igbo people have remained to continue with their businesses in northern Nigeria.

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## **Introduction**

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As Robert Kaplan noted in 1994, Nigeria today has become increasingly ungovernable due to ethnic and religious cleavages. The northern Nigeria Muslims are worried about the dominance and control of southerners in the economic sector of northern Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Egohosa Osaghae credited the Igbo people as an ethnic group which have dominated the informal economic sector in Nigeria. In northern Nigeria, since the 1970s, Igbo people have dominated informal economic activities in the enclaves of Kano and other parts of the region.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Tony Osborg affirms that the Igbo people are the drivers of the indigenous manufacturing sector of the economy with little or no patronage from the government of Nigeria, yet they immensely contribute to non-oil sector revenues in contemporary Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

Juwon Orugun and Akeem Nafiu revealed empirically that over 74 per cent of investments in Lagos are owned by the Igbo people; the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and foreign investors share the remaining 26 per cent.<sup>4</sup> In monetary terms, they have investments worth about 300 trillion naira in Lagos, 600 trillion naira in Abuja, 10 trillion nairas in Kano and Kaduna States, and over 5 trillion nairas in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, and the Plateau States, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Globally, the Igbo people are reckoned as one of the most enterprising ethnic groups in Nigeria. Since the end of a three-year-long brutal civil war in 1970, they returned to settle almost in every part of northern Nigeria for business purposes. It is believed most enclave communities in northern Nigeria cannot survive without the entrepreneurial presence of Igbo people. There is the feeling that no non-indigenous people are safe in any community in northern Nigeria without Igbo people inhabiting it.<sup>6</sup>

The Hausa-Fulani ethnic group and Igbo people have a long history of economic relations. Haruna Suleimuri revealed that economic relations between Hausa-Fulani and Igbo people, for example, resulted in the cattle trading community at Umuahia in Abia State in about 1895.<sup>7</sup> Economic relations between these ethnic groups further strengthened and expanded under colonial rule,<sup>8</sup> when Igbo people massively migrated to other parts of the country, especially northern Nigeria where colonial activities were concentrated. After independence, economic relations between these ethnic groups became unpalatable.<sup>9</sup> During

this period, the northern political class started becoming afraid of Igbo economic dominance in the region.

In the early 1960s, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of Northern Nigeria was quoted describing the Igbo people as ‘...more or less a type of people, whose desire is mainly to dominate everybody. If they go to the village or a town, they want to monopolise everything in that area. If you put them as a labourer, within a year, they will try to emerge as the headman of that labour camp, and so on.’<sup>10</sup> Deducing from the statement, some people believed that Bello expressed hatred against Igbo people,<sup>11</sup> while other people believed that it was rather a description of their doggedness in competitive fields of human endeavours.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not the statement was misunderstood, it generated fear, hatred, and hostility against Igbo people.

The Hausa-Fulani people expressed concern over economic dominance by Igbo people in northern Nigeria. This translated to the northernisation policy, enforced by the regional government of northern Nigeria. Simply put, it was an indigenisation policy aimed at excluding people whose origin was not from within northern Nigeria. However, from every ramification, the policy favoured northerners (Hausa-Fulani Muslims) over other Nigerians generally. In an interview by a foreign media, Bello was quoted as saying: ‘In fact, what it is, is a northerner first. If you can’t get a northerner, then we take an expatriate like yourself on contract. If we can’t then we can employ another Nigerian but on contract, too.’<sup>13</sup> From this context, Nigerians whose ethnic homelands were not within northern Nigeria could not merit employment in the service of the northern regional government. Also, he was quoted speaking of Igbo people in 1953, that:

We cannot fight to dispense off white masters only to be ruled by new black masters called Ibo. Even here in the north, they run the post office, railways, civil service and they have taken up all the shops we create. Call them Ibo, but you can also call them Zionists, but we shall not relinquish the estate of our fathers to such wretched people who have never had an administration before.<sup>14</sup>

Since the informal economic sector was opened to all, the Hausa-Fulani could not do otherwise. The Igbo people have penetrated and overtaken the enclave economies of Hausa-Fulani people in northern Nigeria. This was enhanced by the associational economic structure developed by Igbo people, which was not readily a part of the prac-

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tice among the Hausa-Fulani people. The consequences were ethnic revulsion and hostility against Igbo people.<sup>15</sup> Isaac Albert states that perceived economic deprivation and frustration among Hausa-Fulani people in Kano led to violence against Igbo people, where many were killed and their investments burned and/or looted.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Kate Meagher affirms that their dominance in the informal economic sector at many times triggered ethnic riots in northern Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> Political instability associated with ethnic misgivings led to a coup and subsequently, a civil war. After the civil war in 1970, they returned.<sup>18</sup>

About five decades after the civil war, Igbo people have continue to confront similar security challenges they confronted during the pre-civil war period in northern Nigeria, because of the perception that they have monopolised profitable sectors of the economy to the disadvantage of Hausa-Fulani Muslims.<sup>19</sup> Jibrin Ibrahim argues that the vibrant informal economy sector controlled by Igbo people have always enabled them to fix prices unilaterally on commodities purchased by Hausa-Fulani people. They drain off their money and reduce them to utter poverty and street beggars.<sup>20</sup> Kate Meagher also states that the vulnerability of Igbo people to violence stems from their successes in businesses such as auto parts and building materials amongst others.<sup>21</sup> With the enforcement of Sharia law in 1999 and Boko Haram violence since 2009 the security situation in northern Nigeria deteriorated.<sup>22</sup> The current insecurity in northern Nigeria reminds Igbo people of their bitter experiences before and during the civil war.<sup>23</sup>

Fundamentally, the quest of this study is to understand how Igbo people have fared with Hausa-Fulani people while doing businesses and the security challenges they confront in northern Nigeria. This article is structured into five sections. After introduction, the first section is to understand the intersection between ethnicity, religion and intergroup relations in Nigeria. The second section is about Igbo people, their migration and economic relations outside their enclaves. The third section discusses the experiences of Igbo people in the informal economic sector, their economic relations and the ethnoreligious aggression they confront. The fourth section examines how ethnoreligious identities play out in the Igbo economic relations with the Hausa-Fulani people and their experiences with the Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria. The fifth and final section is the conclusion and recommendations.

## Understanding ethnicity, religion, and intergroup relations in Nigeria

Studies by Fearon and Laitin are instructive to understanding the consequences of deploying negative ethnic and religious identities in intergroup relations. Between 1945 and 1999, they identified about 58 civil wars, averaging 51 per cent of the civil wars across the world accounted for by manipulation of ethnic and religious identity.<sup>24</sup> Ethnic and religious manipulations remain eminent in most parts of Africa.<sup>25</sup> Ethnicity and religion are the most ferocious variables of intergroup relations in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country with more than 250 ethnic groups, speaking over 500 languages with the Igbo spoken dominantly in the southeast, Yoruba in southwest and Hausa and Fulani languages dominating the northern Nigeria, respectively. Christianity and Islam are two major religions evenly divided between the north-south territories of Nigeria.<sup>26</sup> To Osaghae and Suberu, Nigeria is deeply divided along the fault lines of ethnicity and religion.<sup>27</sup>

In the political arena, ethnic and religious groups are mobilised by political elites as powerful instruments to achieve certain goals, which could be for their interests, cronies, ethnic and/or religious groups.<sup>28</sup> Osaghae puts it aptly that in Nigeria ethnic identities or differences are mobilised in the events of competition, conflict, and cooperation.<sup>29</sup> The same situation applies in the case of religious mobilisation. Often, scarcity of resources and the closing in of competitive social, economic and political spaces, group marginality and grievances based on ethnic and religious identities, greed and competition for resources, as well as inherent primordial sentiments or hatred, mutually and exclusively reinforces negative mobilisation of ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria.<sup>30</sup>

Fundamentally, ethnic and religious mobilisations were early in the politics of Nigeria. What today constitutes Nigeria previously consisted of diverse ethnic groups and settlements organised in the forms of chiefdoms, kingdoms, chiefdoms, nations, and communities with varying political and religious arrangements. The scramble and partition of Africa amongst colonial powers altered the existing ethnic and religious organisations and led to the introduction of new social, economic and political structures to serve some specific colonial interests. Toward the end of colonial rule in Nigeria, while struggling for independence, the various ethnic and regional political classes mobilised separately to agitate for independence. Political consciousness amongst these peo-

ple was based on ethnic and religious identities. The pattern of political organisations and speeches from leaders of major political parties in the Nigeria's First Republic were indications of the crystallization of Nigeria along dangerous ethnic and religious fault lines.<sup>31</sup>

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Although religion was not as important as ethnicity to the political classes of southern Nigeria, it was a major determinant of intergroup relations in northern Nigeria. After independence, ethnicity and religion became central factors in policymaking and implementation during the First Republic in Nigeria. Barely eleven days after independence the *Parrot Newspaper* of 12th October 1960 alleged that Bello stated: 'the new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather Othman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We must use the minorities in the north as willing tools and the south as conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us and never allow them to have control over their future.'<sup>32</sup>

In the same manner, Nnamdi Azikiwe was reported to have stated in 1953 that: 'You may ask me to agree that if the British left Nigeria to its fate, the Northerners would continue their uninterrupted march to the sea, as was prophesied six years ago? ...the Eastern Region has never been subjugated by any indigenous African invader. ...the Easterners will defend themselves gallantly, if and when they are invaded.'<sup>33</sup> He was quoted earlier in 1949, as saying:

It would appear that God has specially created the Ibo people to suffer persecution and be victimized because of their resolute will to live. Since suffering is the label of our tribe, we can afford to be sacrificed for the ultimate redemption of the children of Africa. ... Is it not historically significant that throughout the glorious history of Africa, the Ibo is one of the select few to have escaped the humiliation of a conqueror's sword or to be a victim of a Carthaginian treaty? ... Instead, there is a record to show that the martial prowess of the Ibo, at all stages of human history, has rivalled them not only to survive persecution but also to adapt themselves to the role thus thrust upon them by history, of preserving all that is best and most noble in African culture and tradition.<sup>34</sup>

The foregoing assertions pride the prowess of Igbo people in competitive market environments, not only in northern Nigeria but also across the country and Africa at large. The pattern of regional, ethnic and religious-oriented political rhetoric amongst politicians, es-

pecially in northern Nigeria, contributed to violent conflicts. In most circumstances, it was the Hausa-Fulani Muslims against other ethnic groups, particularly those considered as migrants in northern Nigeria. Sir Obafemi Awolowo was critical of the northern elites for percolating violent conflicts, thus:

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There has, of late, been a good deal of sabre-rattling in some parts of the country. Those who advocate the use of force for the settlement of our present problems should stop a little and reflect. I can see no vital and abiding principle involved in any war between the North and the East. If the East attacked the North, it would be for revenge pure and simple. Any claim to the contrary would be untenable. If it is claimed that such a war is being waged to recover the real and personal properties left behind in the North by Easterners two insuperable points are obvious. Firstly, the personal effects left behind by Easterners have been wholly looted or destroyed and can no longer be physically recovered. Secondly, since the real properties are immovable in case of recovery of them can only be using forcible military occupation of those parts of the North in which these properties are situated. On the other hand, if the North attacked the East, it could only be to further strengthen and entrench its position of dominance in the country.<sup>35</sup>

In effect, northern Nigeria has remained a major problem to the Nigerian statehood, and the actions of the people called northerners have continued to be deleterious on the pattern of intergroup relations, particularly between Igbo people and Hausa-Fulani Muslim in contemporary Nigeria. After the civil war, no lesson was learned as in 1978 the Hausa-Fulani Muslim representatives to the Constitutional Review Conference continued the old trend of promoting religious identity. At the conference, they wanted the extension of Sharia law beyond family law. This was protested by the Christian delegates. A compromise was, however, reached to establish Sharia courts in States with a majority or significant Muslim population and the Sharia law should be restricted to Muslim family and inheritance.<sup>36</sup>

In the 1980s, particularly in northern Nigeria, ethnic and religious violence have become unprecedented. This period witnessed ethnic and religious crises, particularly the Maitatsine crisis in Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, and the defunct Gongola States (now, Taraba and the Adamawa States). The return to civil rule on 29 May 1999 brought new dy-

namics in the manifestations of ethnic and religious violence. Since 2002, northern Nigeria has been experiencing ethnic and religious violence, mainly between Hausa-Fulani Muslims and the Christian population in northern Nigeria. Because ethnicity and religion have politicised, every conflict in northern Nigeria finds interpretation in that context. The consequences of modelling every conflict to take ethnic and religious dimensions have been deleterious for intergroup relations in Nigeria.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Igbo people, migration and economic relations**

The Igbo people consist of an ethnic group which speak Igbo as their native language. They populate southeast Nigeria called the Igbo land. Historically, Igbo people have developed entrepreneurial skills before imperialism and colonialism were implanted in Nigeria. In the Igbo land, specific families were associated with some specific entrepreneurial skills, such as hunting, farming, blacksmithing, basket weaving, fishing, and other related artisanship. Because of different skills, it was easy for Igbo people to engage in trade relations amongst themselves within respective communities, across communities, and with other communities outside the Igbo land. Chinua Achebe's fictional works captured the reality of entrepreneurship and contempt for indolence among Igbo people in the Igbo land during the pre-colonial era.<sup>38</sup>

In the Igbo land, serious attention was given to young people to ensure their future was not compromised. The elders encouraged young people in seeking entrepreneurial skills and specializations in areas of comparative advantage. As part of the effort, the apprenticeship system was developed and sustained through which young people received training under tutorship of the elders in trades of their own choice. The apprenticeship system has defied decades of challenges confronted by Igbo people in Nigeria. The successes recorded by Igbo people in Igbo land was determined by the number of young people successfully trained, graduated and supported to be self-propelling, self-reliant and self-dependent.<sup>39</sup>

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land had reached the zenith before the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in Nigeria. With trans-Atlantic slave trade, the dynamism of economic relations in Igbo land transformed to meet new ends. The Aro Igbo people recognised as one of the industrious Igbo sub-group became arrowheads in slave trade system by relating with the Europeans along the coastal belt up



to 1901.<sup>40</sup> With the establishment of British Consuls at the Bights of Benin and Biafra, and at the Oil Rivers, the slave trade system suffered serious setbacks, because Igbo land had become a protectorate under the United African Company.<sup>41</sup>

The pre-capitalist economic system in Igbo land declined remarkably under colonial rule. Okwudiba Nnoli posits that the industrial revolution in Europe contributed immensely to the decline as young Igbo people shifted attention from concentrating on their pre-capitalist economic system to the colonial economy. More so, agricultural activities in the Igbo land also declined due to soil depletion. This situation forced young Igbo people to migrate out of Igbo land.<sup>42</sup> The pattern of migration amongst Igbo people was non-linear. Dmitri van den Bersselaar revealed that “in 1921, only 3,000 Igbo people were resident in northern Nigeria, while their number rose to 12,000 in 1931. In 1953, the number of Igbo people in northern Nigeria was estimated at 127,000, while over 57,000 were living in the west, almost 32,000 in Lagos and 10,000 in neighbouring British Cameroon (administrated as part of Nigeria).”<sup>43</sup>

In the 1950s, the number of Igbo people in northern Nigeria was far more than their population in the west, Lagos and British Cameroon combined. The population of Igbo people in northern Nigeria was on the increase up to 1967, but fell drastically, if not totally during the civil war.<sup>44</sup> Recent studies by Okwudiba Nnoli puts the population of Igbo people at 30 per cent, signifying that since the end of the civil war, relatively few Igbo people returned to northern Nigeria.<sup>45</sup> Those who returned consisted of main returnees, progenies of returnees and a few other people who have never been to northern Nigeria. Several decades after the civil war, Igbo people are still treated with contempt, hostility and hatred, and often, they suffer violence in northern Nigeria.

Northerners, particularly Hausa-Fulani Muslims consider Igbo people as strangers despite their long period of residence and economic contribution in northern Nigeria.<sup>46</sup> Generally speaking, the stranger is not native. Native are indigenous people whose ethnic homelands are traceable to the regions where they reside. The stranger and native questions are political identity questions and they relate to politics of place, space, and identity. Mahmood Mamdani posits that native finds belonging to a place, space and identity defined ethnically within an ancestral area they call their own. Ancestral areas endow the native with the customary right as an indigenous group. The stranger is a set-

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tlar and has no customary home, authority and right within the community of residence.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, Igbo people from every ramification were not to enjoy equal rights with the natives in northern Nigeria.

To Toyin Falola, native and stranger identities never existed, instead, it was colonialism that created such classifications through the divide and rule system in Nigeria. The post-colonial state in Nigeria constructed administrative, social and political systems based on ethnic and religious distinctions. It also introduced the logic of indigene and non-indigene to exclude other ethnic groups in Nigeria. As it was throughout the country, in northern Nigeria not only were other Nigerians the non-indigenous population, they were residents in stranger quarters called *Sabon Gari* to separate them from the indigenous population. Falola further stated that the practice of distinction based on ethnicity and religion did not only render integration difficult but also created suspicion and hatred directed at the stranger population in northern Nigeria.<sup>48</sup> In the same way, it negatively affected the informal economies between the Hausa-Fulani ethnic enclaves and Igbo people resident in *Sabon Gari*.<sup>49</sup> The lack of linkages brought untold social and economic hardship to both Igbo people and Hausa-Fulani Muslim population in northern Nigeria.

Okwudiba Nnoli states that during the Second World War there was pervasive scarcity, inflation and food rationing, which also seriously affected the economic relations between Igbo people and Hausa-Fulani Muslims. The result was the increasing level of competition in trade, job seeking, and residential quarters. Later, it generated ethnic and religious rifts between them due to the prominence of Igbo people in the informal sector of the economy in northern Nigeria.<sup>50</sup> To Hausa-Fulani Muslim people, the Igbo people had cultivated a possessive attitude, taking over nerve centres of trade and commerce in most cities of northern Nigeria. Therefore, they were capable of dislodging the Hausa-Fulani Muslims economically and politically, and of course religiously, should they not be prevented by any means.

Like with the control of the informal economic sector, political radicalism led by the likes of Azikiwe constituted serious challenge to northern political class during the eve of independence. Azikiwe's radical-liberal nationalist bloc encountering the Bello's conservative nationalist bloc reinforced political contradictions in Nigeria. The northern political class felt they were politically disadvantaged, they decided to boycott the 1945 general strike considered to have been championed

by the Azikiwe's radical group. The behaviour of the northern political class led to riots with deleterious effects on Igbo people in northern Nigeria and also affected inter-regional trade between southeast and northern Nigeria.<sup>51</sup>

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### **Informal economic sector, Igbo economic relations, and ethno-religious aggression**

The dominance of Igbo people in the informal economy and civil service of northern Nigeria warranted their description by Bello, as a people always expressing domineering spirit in a competitive environment. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim people could not compete favourably with Igbo people. Bello felt as a counter it was necessary to raise the consciousness of the people of northern Nigeria, particularly the Hausa-Fulani Muslims to take up the responsibility to control whatever they perceived to be rightfully their possessions. The anxiety expressed over Igbo people dominating the informal economic sector in northern Nigeria was not without some political undertones.

The struggle for political power at the centre and the continuous desire by Hausa-Fulani Muslims to exercise hegemony over non-Hausa-Fulani people in northern Nigeria was attributed as a reason for the manipulation of the people's sentiments, which usually finds interpretations and expression in religious identities. The sentiments of the people were directed particularly at the Igbo people, whom Bello describes as the 'new black masters'. Contrarily, Frances Pritchett describes some of the outstanding qualities of Igbo people and contradictions that eventually capped with the civil war.

According to Pritchett, there followed an outmigration of Igbo from the crowded southeast into the more sparsely populated Muslim north. Generally, the Igbo had embraced western education while the northerners (Hausa-Fulani) had resisted it. The northerners viewed with distaste this perceived invasion by their industrious southern countrymen. Thus, with a series of ineffectual leaders rushing to grab power at the centre, and an overly aggressive military eager to step in, the political situation exploded with a military coup in the late '60s. A horrible massacre of Igbo people then took place in the north. Those who survived fled south to the homeland, where a secessionist movement, known as the *Biafrans* (sic) arose under the leadership of Odumegwu Ojukwu, *declared for themselves the Republic of Biafra, that federal government crushed between 1967 and 1970* (sic).<sup>52</sup>

After the civil war Igbo people returned to northern Nigeria based on the promises by the General Yakubu Gowon's regime. Three basic reasons explain why Igbo people returned to northern Nigeria. Firstly, the civil war has rendered them losers of everything; they needed to be rehabilitated to find new means of livelihood. Secondly, before the civil war Igbo people have invested heavily in northern Nigeria, they needed to reclaim their investments, if they were intact, and thirdly, they needed to re-establish their foothold on the informal economic sector of northern Nigeria. As applauded was the federal government policy to reintegrate Igbo people in Nigeria was, the Hausa-Fulani people did not again treat Igbo people as equals – a people they collectively struggled, negotiated and secured for the independence of Nigeria from the British colonial rule on 1st October 1960.

The integration programme was received with mixed feelings amongst Igbo people. However, it was an alternative never to forgo, given the effects of the civil war on their livelihood. As part of the integration program, Haruna Poloma stated that:

General Gowon declared a general amnesty to all Biafran troops, which exonerated them from prosecution for treason and other war crimes and offences (no victor, no vanquished). Many soldiers who fought on the Biafran side were reabsorbed into the federal armed forces after the war. An opportunistic review of the career progression of a few of the reabsorbed officers, which remains a matter of public record today... General Gowon's compassion, mercy, and kindness were not limited to fighting soldiers alone. He undertook the resettlement of displaced persons and rebuilding physical facilities in the east. Ex-Biafran civil servants, who were in the public service at the regional level, were permitted to report to their new States for reabsorption, while those at the federal level were also eligible for reabsorption into the federal service if they so desired. Each returning civil servant in the east received salary advance as "mercy pay" along with three weeks leave to enable them to settle down after the war.<sup>53</sup>

Federal government's benevolence was not much appreciated because Igbo people felt the entitlements paid to them never corresponded with the losses incurred during the civil war. Only 20 pounds was given to each of them, without considering their respective social, economic and political status and losses each suffered as a result of the civil war.<sup>54</sup> Ken Nnamani chronicled that:

In a sampling survey of 5,000 persons conducted by the Onyike Tribunal of Inquiry, a total number of losses estimated at over 9 million (Nigeria) Pounds were recorded. Of this amount, landed property such as houses numbering 2,607 amounted to £4,154,652, while the cost of 586 vehicles amounted to £435,851. Added to this figure is the cost of stock-in-trade valued at £2,046,522, cash worth £741,784 and personal effects estimated at £1,644,709. In Kano alone, where the highest number of Igbo people lived, about 2,000 houses situated in Sabon Gari (“stranger quarters”) with an average value of £4,000 each amounted to 8 million Pounds. The loss of personal effects in the same Kano was estimated at £3.2 million. Documented evidence also shows that Igbo people owned 7 large chemist shops valued at £70,000. The value of hotels including stock and equipment was valued at £180,000. Off License Beer Parlours and over 150 provision stores were valued at £50,000 and £75,000, respectively. Furthermore, according to documented evidence taken from Traders’ Union Membership in Kano, about 10,000 stalls valued at £30 million were also lost.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, most Igbo people who were in the civil service of northern regional government returned only to discover their positions were occupied by northerners. The regional government found no need to reinstate them but preferred to regard them as people who voluntarily resigned their appointments.<sup>56</sup> Suffice to state that amidst several unresolved problems, northern extraction in Nigeria military continued to rule after the civil war. Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe identified some specific consequences suffered by Igbo people after civil war to include:

- Seizure of the multi-million Igbo capital asset in Igwe Ocha/Port Harcourt and elsewhere.
- Comprehensive sequestration of Igbo liquid asset in Nigeria (as of January 1970), bar the £20.00 (twenty pounds) doled out to the male surviving head of an Igbo family.
- Exponential expropriation of the rich Igbo oil resources from the Abia, Delta, Imo, and Rivers administrative regions.
- A blanket policy of non-development of Igbo land.
- Aggressive degradation of socioeconomic life of Igbo land.
- Ignoring ever-expanding soil erosion/landslides and other pressing ecological emergencies particularly in northwest Igbo land.

- Continuing reinforcement of the overall state of siege of Igbo land.<sup>57</sup>

Many Igbo people (because of the poor treatment they received) decided to abandon the civil service of northern Nigeria and concentrated on entrepreneurship. To enhance their entrepreneurship, Igbo people strengthened their market structure in Onitsha, Anambra State and industrial base at Aba in Abia State. This market structure and industrial base grew to become industrial economic hubs in Nigeria. The strategy reinforced their control of the informal economic sector in northern Nigeria.<sup>58</sup> Acknowledging the control of the informal economy sector and contribution of Igbo people to revenue generation in Kano, Kabri Tsakuwa stated that if Igbo people had remained in southeast Nigeria, 'only God knows what Kano would have become'.<sup>59</sup>

### **Ethno-religious identity, Igbo economic relations, and Boko Haram violence**

Since 1999, northern Nigeria has significantly become a hotbed of security challenges. The dimension of security challenges in contemporary northern Nigeria is defined mainly by religious identities. Violence led by an Islamist group called Boko Haram remains one of the major security challenges northern Nigeria is facing. Although it emerged in 2000, Boko Haram became violent in 2009 when its leader Sheikh Mohammed Yusuf was killed by Nigeria Police Force. It transformed into a more deadly jihadist group when Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (a Christian from the Ijaw minority ethnic group) was elected president in 2011.<sup>60</sup> Boko Haram has ideology and operational tactics similar to the Maitatsine of the 1980s that killed many people in Kano, Kaduna, Gombe and Gongola States.<sup>61</sup> The emergence of Boko Haram coincided with the introduction of Sharia law in Zamfara State by the former Governor, Alhaji Ahmed Sani Yerima (now, Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). The sect started operating originally from Damaturu, Yobe State before moving to Maiduguri, Borno State in northeast Nigeria.

The imposition of Sharia law and subsequently, the emergence of Boko Haram have been perceived as the creation of the northern political class to protest political marginality in the power equation and regional economic marginality since 1999 in Nigeria. Martin Uadiale asserts that:

The ascendancy of sharia was used as a bargaining chip by the north, which was losing political influence and relevance in the Nigerian federation. To reassert the region's influence, its dominant class employed Sharia as a negotiating chip for a new national pact among contending national forces. One of the triggers of Sharia advocacy in some northern Nigerian States was the resentment of being at the periphery of Nigerian politics and its power configuration. There was a time when the northern political leaders held powerful political positions in Nigeria and others when the northerners accepted their economically marginal position. However, with the federal elections of 1999, the balance of power shifted to the south without a marked transformation in the economic marginality of the north. Hence, the politics of Sharia advocacy were part of a protest against regional economic inequalities in Nigeria.<sup>62</sup>

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A widely held opinion is that the cause of Boko Haram violence is a high level of mass poverty in northern Nigeria.<sup>63</sup> In this connection, Susan Rice asserts that poverty has the potential of not only putting a country at high-risk of insecurity but also put faraway countries at similar risk.<sup>64</sup> Taking poverty as a unit of analysis, the UN Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index in 2017 showed that 46 per cent of Nigeria's population lives below the national poverty line. Northeast Nigeria where Boko Haram operates is one of the worst parts of the country with poverty indices scaling 76.8 per cent.<sup>65</sup> In 2010, the National Bureau of Statistics rated the northwest and northeast as geopolitical zones with the highest poverty indices. The northwest poverty indices stood at 77.7 per cent while the northeast poverty indices stood at 76.3 per cent, respectively.<sup>66</sup>

Consequently, the prevalence of insecurity in northern Nigeria is justifiable. No matter its plausibility, poverty thesis cannot sufficiently explain the security challenges of Boko Haram type in Nigeria. It is pertinent to ask why northern Nigeria is the poorest region in Nigeria. The region has produced some of the richest military and political elites in Nigeria, majority of these people Hausa-Fulani Muslims, constituting the few people who have governed the country for over three decades. Majority of them while in control of government plundered the national resources, yet northern Nigeria is still the poorest. It is rather conceivable that both northern military and political elites are

responsible for the poverty and insecurity in the region for political and economic gains. Senator Shehu Sani stated that Boko Haram violence has made some powerful people in Nigeria and abroad 'war entrepreneurs.'<sup>67</sup> In Nigeria, 'war entrepreneurs' consist of the governing and non-governing elites, who make merchandise of security issues in Nigeria. The governing elites serving as war entrepreneurs benefit from 'security vote' (which is not accounted for to anybody or institution) and from international humanitarian assistance from their respective states. The non-governing elites who serve as war entrepreneurs, only benefit from contracts such as the supply weaponry and war machinery. Because of the benefits they make usually at the expense of their people, they do not want security challenges to be mitigated. War entrepreneurs abroad consist of Nigerians in the diaspora, foreign governments, and State actors and violent non-State actors in and from other countries. They benefit directly or indirectly from the contracting weaponry to the State or rebels in exchange for valued resources. The resources which they benefit can be in kind or the form of cash or psychological satisfaction of natural craves for war, or as a way of exhausting the regime in power. Because of the enormous benefits war entrepreneurs get, they will always make war difficult to mitigate in Nigeria. This explains why Boko Haram insurgency has survived more than a decade despite counter-insurgency operations in Nigeria.

Religious fundamentalism is another factor plausible for understanding the Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria. Bala Usman noted that because of how deeply religious fundamentalism is entrenched, it has become hostile to democratic progress in Nigeria.<sup>68</sup> The impact of Boko Haram violence is greatly felt among the people in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram rendered President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration ungovernable and contributed to his defeat in the 2015 presidential election. The United Nations Human Rights Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) revealed that Boko Haram violence has killed almost 100,000 people and has uprooted about 2.4 million people, of which over 1.9 million people are displaced internally in northeast Nigeria.<sup>69</sup>

The Boko Haram violence has been feared much among Christians, especially the Igbo people. Many native Christians and moderate Muslims have been killed by Boko Haram. In many circumstance, Igbo people are victims of the Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria,



Table 1. Islamic fundamentalist attacks on Christians in northern Nigeria

S/No.	Year	Frequency of Attacks (FOA)	Percentage of FOA
1	2014	53	17.67
2	2013	37	12.33
3	2012	75	25.00
4	2011	69	23.00
5	2010	18	06.00
6	2009	04	01.33
7	2008	02	00.67
8	2007	04	01.33
9	2006	07	02.33
10	2005	05	01.67
11	2004	12	04.00
12	2003	04	01.33
13	2002	08	02.67
14	2001	02	00.67
	Total	300	100.00

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Source<sup>74</sup>

for example they have witnessed their economic activities halted, businesses looted, worship centres attacked, and eventually, their people killed by the Boko Haram insurgent group. With regards to Boko Haram attacks on Christian worship centres, Benjamin Maiangwa and Ufo Uzodike noted that ‘often in the incidences, the Igbo people who attend the majority of Pentecostal and Catholic Churches were the primary target’.<sup>70</sup> The National President of National Union of True Igbo Movement (NUTIM), Dr Samfo Nwankwo complained of the killing of Igbo people by Boko Haram insurgent group, especially the Madalla Christmas bombing.<sup>71</sup> Because of the killing of Christians by the Boko Haram insurgent group, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) asked the former US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton in 2012 not to visit Nigeria. According to CAN:

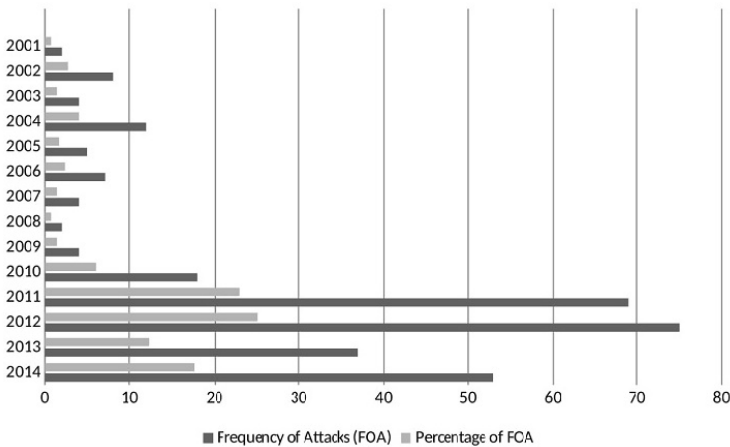
Out of the 137 religious-motivated violent incidences tracked, 88.3 per cent were attacks on Christians, 2.9 per cent were attacks on Muslims, attacks on security agents were 4.4 per cent, sectarian clashes were 2.2 per cent and extra-judicial killings

were 2.1 per cent. The US Terrorism report of 2011 indicates a total of 136 terrorist attacks in Nigeria. It is inconceivable; therefore, that Muslims were the primary victims of a Jihad group whose intent is to Islamize Nigeria. This year 2012 alone, there have been 49 insecurity incidences of which 80 per cent have targeted Christians.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, the Religions for Peace website revealed a total of 300 attacks by Boko Haram on the Christian population in northern Nigeria between 11 September 2001 and 24 September 2014.<sup>73</sup> The attacks by Islamic fundamentalists, including Boko Haram violence on the Christian population, are presented in table 1 showing the year, frequency of attacks and the percentage of attacks undertaken by the Boko Haram insurgent group.

The data in Table 1 is reduced graphically in figure 1 to show the seriousness of attacks by Islamists fundamentalists. The graphic presentation shows that the frequency of attacks started becoming high in 2010 and reached the peak in 2011 and 2012. There was a fall in the rate of attacks in 2013. However, the violence against Christians substantially increased in 2014 with different magnitude of impacts across the States in northern Nigeria. The data on the attacks of Boko Haram insurgent group on Christians exclude destruction of properties and the impact of the violence on the economies of Christians in northern Nigeria.

Figure 1: Level of attacks by Islamists on Christians in northern Nigeria



Source<sup>75</sup>

Corinne Dufka and David Cook asserts that although the basic goal of Boko Haram has been to create a Caliphate in Nigeria with Sharia as its governing principle, it shifted focus to attack Christian population as one of the core value of its violence. Boko Haram violence, as David Cook explains, is divided into three categories:

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- 1) attacks against local Christians in Boko Haram's core operating area of Borno and the Yobe States and the adjacent State of Bauchi;
- 2) major suicide operations or bombing attacks of high-profile Churches in Jos in Plateau State and the capital of Abuja;
- and 3) minor operations against Church or para-Church personnel throughout the north and "middle belt" regions of Nigeria. These operations represent a fairly major shift in the goals of Boko Haram, which are still squarely Nigeria-focused, and represent the opposition of certain elements of the Muslim north to the spread of Christianity in the region.

According to Dufka, besides religious dimension of Boko Haram violence, ethnic group identity also forms the core basis of Boko Haram operations.<sup>76</sup> Also, Cook agrees that ethnicity also explains in part the pattern of Boko Haram violence. Amongst the people of southern Nigeria, the massive population of Igbo people spread across northern Nigeria is opposed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, Boko Haram insurgent group and other extremist groups.<sup>77</sup> Over the years there has been resentment against Igbo people for their role in the spread of what Cook describes as 'aggressive proselytization of Christianity'.<sup>78</sup>

Boko Haram perceives the spread of Christianity as being responsible for the marginalisation of Muslims and the undermining of the effort to create an Islamic State.<sup>79</sup> This perception is widely held among Hausa-Fulani Muslims in northern Nigeria, and it explains why Christian population and their worship centres, particularly Catholic and Pentecostal Churches where the majority of Igbo people worship are often attacked during religious crises.<sup>80</sup> Emeka Umeagbalasi reported over 510 Igbo people were killed by the Boko Haram insurgents in different parts of northern Nigeria between January 2011 and January 2012.<sup>81</sup> The attacks on Igbo people are presented in table 2. Suffices to state that although in several Boko Haram violence, not all Igbo people were victims or their properties exclusively singled out for destruction, but incidentally, they constitute a larger victim population segment.

Table 2: Some Boko Haram attacks involving Igbo people in northern Nigeria

<i>CEJISS</i> <i>1/2020</i>	<b>S/ no</b>	<b>Date of incident</b>	<b>State of incident</b>	<b>Incident and casualties</b>
	1.	8 January 2011	Plateau State	Boko Haram attacked and killed about 1000 people at the Dilimi and Bauchi Road, Jos. In the incident, about 400 Igbo people were killed.
		16 June 2011	Abuja, FCT	Boko Haram suicide bomber with the intention of killing the Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Ringim was intercepted by a Policeman of Igbo ethnic group at the entrance of the Nigeria Police Force headquarters in Abuja. He died in the process.
	2.	25 September 2011	Niger State	Gunmen entered the Madalla market, killing five traders of Igbo ethnic group, who could not recite the Holy Quran.
	3.	22 December 2011	Niger State	Six Igbo people were killed by the Boko Haram along with several other Christian worshipers attending a mass at the St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla in Suleja, Niger State on the eve of Christmas.
	4.	25 December 2011	Niger State	Boko Haram attacked worshipers on Christmas Day at St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla, Suleja in Niger State, killing several worshipers and injuring many of them. About 50 Igbo people were killed in the incident.

- |     |                 |               |  |
|-----|-----------------|---------------|--|
| 5.  | 5 January 2012  | Gombe State   | At one of the Deeper Life Bible Church services in Gombe state, Boko Haram attacked worshippers. In the incident, about eight Igbo people were killed among several members of the Church.                 |
| 6.  | 5 January 2012  | Adamawa State | About 16 Igbo people were murdered at the Christ Apostolic Church, Yola in Adamawa State. On the same day, Boko Haram killed 27 additional Igbo people who were mourning their death.                      |
| 7.  | 6 January 2012  | Adamawa State | Boko Haram gunned down 12 Igbo people holding a community meeting in Mubi, Adamawa State.  |
| 8.  | 11 January 2012 | Yobe State    | Suspected members of the Boko Haram at a filling station in Potiskum, Yobe State, opened fire on a commuter van full of Igbo passengers leaving the north. Four of the passengers killed were Igbo people. |
| 9.  | 16 January 2012 | Borno State   | Boko Haram attacked and killed five Igbo people in their homes in Maiduguri, Borno state.  |
| 10. | 3 June 2012     | Bauchi State  | A group suspected to be Boko Haram attacked Christian worshippers, killing 15 people, 8 of which were Igbo people.   |
| 11. | 17 June 2012    | Kaduna State  | Boko Haram killed over 50 people in a suicide mission. About 31 Igbo people were killed in the incident.   |

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12.	8 August 2012	Kogi State	Boko Haram attacked a Church in Okene, Kogi State, killing several Igbo people among other worshippers.
13.	3 October 2012	Adamawa State	Boko Haram attack in Mubi town in Adamawa State killed 46 people; about 26 were Igbo people.
14.	18 March 2013	Kano State	Boko Haram killed 80 people and about 65 people were injured in a bus bombing. Substantial numbers of Igbo people were killed and injured in the incident.
15.	6 July 2013	Yobe State	Boko Haram carried out a school shooting killing 42 people. About 24 people killed in the incident were Igbo people.
16.	29 September 2013	Gombe State	Boko Haram attacked College of Agriculture, Gujba in Gombe State. 18 out of 40 students killed in the incident were Igbo people.

Source<sup>82</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Boko Haram also attacked State institutions, which attracted the attention of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to declare a state of emergency in Borno, Plateau, Yobe and Niger State, respectively. The insurgent group proportionately reacted by declaring a three-day ultimatum for Christian population to convert to Islam or leave the northern Nigeria.<sup>83</sup> The non-Muslim population, particularly Igbo people were parts of the primary target of the Boko Haram insurgent group. In reaction to the state of emergency, Monica Mark stated that Boko Haram declared their intent to extend their frontiers to other parts of Nigeria to prove their military capability to Nigeria government.<sup>84</sup> With the declaration accompanied by action, many Igbo people started leaving the region to return to Igbo land. Some of the Igbo people relocated to dominantly Christian-populated States within northern Nigeria, while other Igbo people demonstrated resilience by staying back despite the violence. The Boko Haram vio-

lence crippled effective economic relations in northern Nigeria. The insurgent group created an acute obsession and prejudice toward Muslims and Islam among non-Muslim population in Nigeria.

In today's northern Nigeria, Igbo people are a vulnerable population. Their vulnerability stems from the fact that they are not only Christians, but an ethnic group which possess great entrepreneurial skills and dexterity with which they edge-out the Hausa-Fulani Muslims in the informal economic sector of northern Nigeria. This assertion is affirmed by Alhaji Mohammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, the Sultan of Sokoto, when he stated that Igbo people are vulnerable to violence, but not because they belong to the Igbo ethnic group. They are attacked by miscreants because they are entrepreneurially skilful. In most circumstances, it leads to the burning of shops and looting of their properties.<sup>85</sup> In 2016 a Christian Igbo businesswoman was beheaded over accusations of blasphemy against the Holy Prophet of Islam in Kano State. The accusation was found not to be true. The Muslim man was a shop owner next to hers in the market, and practically, was not happy with her business prowess in the competitive marketplace. The beheading of the woman was acted based on Islamic religious injunction, but the cause of consequences was strictly economic pursuit of her business neighbour. Religion was used to eliminate her control of the business environment which he considered an albatross to his business as a Muslim and perhaps an indigenous group in Kano State.<sup>86</sup> Several similar incidences have been evident in most Muslim dominated States in Nigeria.

Although religious manipulation is prevalent in motivating conflicts in northern Nigeria in which Igbo people fall victims, their ethnic identity also exacerbates their security challenges in the region. This is sustained by the civil war memories in which Igbo people were the major actors and victims.<sup>87</sup> Several decades after the civil war, the situation has not changed remarkably for Igbo people, who are still experiencing ethnic hatred, hostility, and violence in every sphere of human endeavours in contemporary Nigeria. The Hausa-Fulani people find Igbo people not worthy of gaining their trust, let alone entrusted with political and economic power in Nigeria. The intolerant experiences of Igbo people have continued despite their unrivalled contribution to the **non-oil sector revenues** in Nigeria.<sup>88</sup> This climate of ethnic intolerance explains why Igbo people always resort to pan-Igbo nationalism and secessionism in Nigeria.<sup>89</sup>

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## Conclusion and recommendations

The article has examined the experiences of Igbo people in northern Nigeria. The investigation affirmed that Igbo people substantially populate the northern Nigeria. They also control and contribute to the informal economic sector of the region, with positive impacts on the non-oil sector revenues of northern Nigeria and Nigeria at large. The control of the informal economy and the enormous contribution of Igbo people in northern Nigeria have been marred by intertwining security challenges since the end of civil war. Several decades after, particularly with democratic revival in 1999, Igbo people started to grapple with similar security challenges. Although the magnitude of the challenges differs in contemporary time, they have not been without negatively affecting their economic relations and continuous resilience in an atmosphere of social, economic and political uncertainties in northern Nigeria.

With Boko Haram violence since 2009, the experiences of Igbo people have become more prevalent. In the tides of Boko Haram violence and other related insecurity, Igbo people have remained entrepreneurially skilful and resilient in their businesses in northern Nigeria. They are still exercising dominance in the informal economic sector of northern Nigeria. In an atmosphere of ethnic and religious cleavages, Igbo people are concerned about the ethnic and religious prejudices, hostility and violence they have continued suffering in different parts of northern Nigeria. The security situation Igbo people confront reinforces the pro-Biafra secessionist movement in contemporary Nigeria.

In this context, both States and Federal Governments are required to do more in terms of security governance as it is their primary responsibility to protect lives and properties of the people. Government must also engage in national reconciliation process and habitual re-orientation across the country to educate and inculcate the spirit of inter-ethnic and inter-religious cohesion, receptiveness, acceptability and tolerance among Nigerians. The roles of traditional rulers, religious elites, and community leaders are paramount in abhorring the ethnic cleavages and religious animosity among subjects and followers to achieve the prospect of national integration. Rather than feeling that Igbo people are exploiting and dominating the economy of northern Nigeria, the northern Hausa-Fulani Muslims should view their economic relations with Igbo people as one that is capable of contributing to the revenues and development of the enclave communities in the region.





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