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### The Nexus between Organised Crime, Insecurity, and Poverty in Nigeria: An Exploratory Analysis

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*Organised Crime,  
Insecurity,  
Poverty,  
State Failure Theory,  
Institutional Theory.*

This study examines the complex interaction among organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria, aiming to identify key dynamics and suggest targeted interventions. A qualitative research approach was adopted, and it utilised interviews, focus groups, and observational studies to gather primary data from law enforcement personnel, government officials. The study shows that government failure, weak institutions, economic volatility, and corruption exacerbate conditions conducive to organised crime and insecurity. High unemployment rate and social inequalities intensify these challenges. Community resilience measures, such as vigilante groups and mutual aid systems, have surfaced as important coping mechanisms, however, they also pose potential threats. The paper emphasises the need for governance and institutional reforms, recommending policy interventions including improved public service delivery, stringent anti-corruption measures, judicial and law enforcement reforms, economic diversification, and fortified local governance. The study's limitations encompass its qualitative character and its concentration on Nigeria, hence avenues for further research.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria possesses significant economic potential, a diverse and large population, and a wealth of natural resources. However, the country grapples with ongoing challenges stemming from widespread insecurity, entrenched poverty, and organised crime, all of which collectively hinder economic development and social stability. Organised crime, insecurity, and poverty are interrelated problems that are intricately woven into Nigeria's historical, social, and economic framework. Nigeria's complex political history, marked by extended military dictatorship, erratic democratic government, and widespread systemic corruption, has significantly undermined institutional efficacy and governance quality (Adepoju, 2005). Since gaining independence in 1960, the nation has experienced many military coups, a tragic civil war, and persistent state conflicts, significantly affecting governing frameworks and institutional stability. This instability has enabled criminal networks to exploit inadequate governance frameworks, thereby solidifying organised crime as a substantial sociopolitical and economic issue that enhanced poverty and crime in Nigeria (Ebobo and Akujobi, 2022).

Nigeria exemplifies a paradox of wealth in the face of poverty. Although Africa's largest economy, rich in natural resources such as oil and gas, the nation continues to suffer from pervasive poverty. Recent estimates from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2022) reveal that over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty threshold. This enduring poverty is mostly ascribed to economic mismanagement, pervasive corruption, and inequitable resource allocation, resulting in substantial socio-economic

inequalities and hindering sustainable development (World Bank, 2022).

Organised crime in Nigeria includes several illegal operations such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, cybercrime, and financial fraud. These criminal organisations use Nigeria's strategic location, population susceptibilities, and systemic institutional deficiencies. Drug trafficking has become more widespread, with Nigeria recognised as a major transit and destination point for narcotics, exacerbating corruption and violence (UNODC, 2020). Cybercrime, an emerging criminal domain, not only undermines Nigeria's global standing but also robs legitimate economic sectors of essential investment and stability (Eze, 2020).

Insecurity, evidenced by insurgency, banditry, abductions, and community strife, impedes Nigeria's progressive progress. The Boko Haram insurgency, primarily concentrated in the northeast, has caused significant human suffering, the displacement of millions, and considerable economic devastation (International Crisis Group, 2021). Banditry and abductions in the northwest, along with community violence in the Middle Belt, have exacerbated national insecurity, highlighting underlying socio-political grievances and resource-driven conflicts (Eneji and Agri, 2020). Poverty serves as both a catalyst and a result of organised crime and instability. Economic marginalisation and restricted access to public resources have entrenched communities in cycles of poverty and despair, rendering them susceptible to exploitation by organised criminal entities. Limited economic prospects, especially for the youth and underemployment, strengthen the correlation between poverty and crime (UNODC, 2020).

In addition, globalisation has exacerbated this connection as it offers prospects for economic expansion but subjects the country to international criminal syndicates and transnational organised crime. Nigerian criminal syndicates exploit worldwide connectivity to expand their illegal activities globally, complicating crime control for national boundaries. The global economic framework has unintentionally intensified local economic inequalities, heightened poverty, and stimulated organised crime and instability (Shelley, 2014; Rodrik, 1997). Environmental deterioration, especially in the Niger Delta region, introduces a significant aspect to the crime-poverty-insecurity nexus. Illicit oil bunkering and illicit mining have caused substantial ecological harm, undermining local livelihoods and intensifying poverty and social instability (Siro, 2016).

The resulting environmental deterioration not only reduces agricultural output but also incites disputes over dwindling natural resources, prolonging a cycle of violence and economic distress (UNEP, 2011). Addressing organised crime, insecurity, and poverty necessitates extensive and diversified government measures. Enhancing institutional structures, especially judicial and law enforcement organisations, is essential for reinstating governance credibility and efficacy. Furthermore, targeted economic policies emphasising diversification, job creation, and equitable resource distribution are essential for disrupting the poverty cycle and diminishing vulnerability to criminal recruitment (Uzoh and Nzekwe, 2025). Recent studies highlight the effectiveness of community-driven strategies in tackling local insecurity and socio-economic inequalities. Community policing, local economic cooperatives, and participatory governance models have proven effective in bolstering community resilience, fostering sustainable development, and boosting security outcomes (Shelley, 2014 and Vambe, 2017)

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The correlation among organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria has garnered heightened academic interest owing to the severity and longevity of these issues, despite numerous official efforts. Nigeria, despite its abundant natural resources and significant human capital, confronts a multifaceted array of issues that prolong socio-economic instability and obstruct sustainable development. Comprehending these problems necessitates a multifaceted examination informed by existing knowledge. Organised crime is described as consistently coordinated illicit acts conducted for profit, power, or influence (Shelley, 2019). Nigeria has gained prominence in transnational organised crime, notably in drug trafficking, human trafficking, cybercrime, and arms smuggling. Research by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) indicates that Nigeria functions as both a transit hub and a destination for narcotics, mostly due to its geographical position and permeable borders, which intensify drug consumption and motivate local conflict. The research further emphasises that the illicit drug trade in Nigeria fosters violence, corruption, and economic inefficiencies. Cybercrime has escalated significantly in Nigeria, propelled by greater internet access and increasing youth unemployment (Zayyad, 2022). Cybercriminal actions, commonly known as "Yahoo Yahoo," have caused considerable economic losses, tarnished Nigeria's international reputation, and imposed severe obstacles to foreign direct investment. Zayyad (2022) contends that cybercrime has transformed into a structured and difficult operation, appealing to teenagers disenchanted by economic adversity and social exclusion. Adepoku (2005) contend that poverty and unemployment affect human trafficking, rendering vulnerable groups more prone to exploitation. Human trafficking networks capitalise on institutional deficiencies, corruption, and socio-economic vulnerabilities to recruit, transport, and

exploit victims both locally and globally (IOM, 2020).

Nigeria's security dilemma, marked by insurgencies, banditry, kidnappings, and community violence, is intricately linked to organised crime. The insurgency of Boko Haram, situated in Northeastern Nigeria, exemplifies the escalation of insecurity through organised crime networks. The International Crisis Group (2022) emphasises that insurgent organisations like Boko Haram fund their activities through organised crime, including kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking, and illegal trade, hence intensifying regional instability. Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria further illustrates the connection between organised crime and insecurity. Poverty, widespread in Nigeria, serves as both a catalyst and a result of organised crime and insecurity (World Bank, 2022). Chronic poverty arises from systemic economic inequalities, corruption, and inadequate governance.

Institutional fragility impairs the confluence of organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria. Institutionalism Theory posits that robust institutions are essential for maintaining stability, mitigating crime, and fostering socio-economic progress (North, 1990). Nigerian institutions have traditionally been plagued by inefficiencies and corruption, undermining their ability to execute fundamental government responsibilities, uphold the rule of law, and deliver important public services (Adepoju, 2005). The inefficiency of the judiciary continues to be a major issue. Nigeria's organised crime syndicates exploit global banking systems, international trade routes, and communication networks to extend their criminal operations beyond national boundaries. The transnational aspect hampers domestic law enforcement, as criminal networks take advantage of international regulatory deficiencies (UNODC, 2021).

Economic globalisation has exacerbated internal economic inequities, which indirectly contribute to

crime and insecurity. Although globalisation has fostered affluence in specific areas, numerous Nigerians continue to experience economic marginalisation, intensifying poverty and rendering vulnerable communities subject to exploitation by criminal organisations (Rodrik, 2020). Environmental degradation associated with organised crime, like oil theft and illicit mining operations, exacerbates the relationship. Illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta region inflicts significant ecological harm, undermining Indigenous livelihoods reliant on agriculture and fisheries. (Ajodo and Walter, 2014) Suggest that these environmental disturbances exacerbate poverty, intensify community conflicts, and increase local insecurity, illustrating the complex interrelations of environmental degradation, poverty, and organised crime.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, communities in Nigeria exhibit resilience by establishing informal security measures. Local vigilante organisations and community-oriented security initiatives frequently arise in reaction to perceived or actual governmental inadequacies. These groups, although offering immediate security assistance, present dangers of extrajudicial violence and human rights violations, potentially eroding state authority and generating further security challenges (Ekanem and Emejulu, 2024). Studies demonstrate that well-regulated community policing methods can markedly enhance local security outcomes and augment state security initiatives (Kpae and Adishi, 2017). The current literature stresses the complex interplay of organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria.

Although prior research effectively highlights economic, socio-political, and institutional aspects, there is a paucity of comprehensive empirical qualitative analysis from stakeholder viewpoints. Moreover, most of the research is either quantitative or concentrated on crimes or places, resulting in deficiencies in the thorough qualitative examination of these interconnected phenomena. This study



employs an exploratory qualitative methodology to gather comprehensive insights from many stakeholders, aiming to elucidate the interconnections of these processes and provide contextually relevant solutions.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The state failure theory asserts that a state's incapacity to execute essential functions, including upholding law and order, delivering public services, and managing resources efficiently, can generate a vacuum that fosters organised crime and instability. From this viewpoint, state failure constitutes not only the lack of governance but also a profound inability to execute essential functions required for managing violence, administering justice, and safeguarding individuals and property (Rotberg, 2004). In Nigeria, indicators of state failure are evident in the government's persistent incapacity to mitigate corruption, secure borders, and avert diverse internal conflicts, consequently creating an environment conducive to the proliferation of criminal groups. This theoretical framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis of how governance shortcomings exacerbate the fundamental issues of insecurity and economic instability inside the nation.

**Institutional Theory:** Conversely, it emphasises the significance of institutions, both formal and informal, in influencing economic and political results. North (1990) highlights those institutions, whether formal and informal, function as societal rules or, more precisely, as human-engineered restrictions that influence human interaction. The efficacy and integrity of political and economic institutions in Nigeria, such as the court, police, and regulatory organisations, are pivotal in influencing crime rates and the resilience of the economic system. Fragile institutions frequently result in ineffective governance, hence intensifying poverty and fostering an environment favourable to organised crime. This idea emphasises the significance of strong institutions that can establish

order and resolve conflicts through equitable and efficient methods.

The selection of state failure theory and institutionality theory as foundational frameworks is crucial for analysing the intricate dynamics among organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria. Each theory presents distinct perspectives on the systemic concerns involved, facilitating a systematic analysis of the underlying elements that contribute to these interconnected challenges and proposing viable mitigation methods. The significance of State Failure Theory is particularly pronounced in the Nigerian setting, where governance challenges have traditionally engendered extensive instability and disorder. This theory elucidates the challenges faced by the Nigerian state in efficiently enforcing law and order, delivering important public services, and managing economic resources to enhance public welfare.

In states severely impacted by Boko Haram's insurgency, the lack of a robust governmental presence has facilitated the proliferation of extremist factions and impeded economic development, consequently heightening the vulnerability of impoverished populations to recruitment by these groups (Rotberg, 2004). Furthermore, the State Failure Theory clarifies how a collapsing state fosters conditions conducive to the proliferation of organised crime. The inadequate enforcement of laws and the widespread corruption in Nigerian official institutions enable criminal operations, including oil bunkering, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. These activities are not only indicators of state failure; they also exacerbate destabilisation and erode public confidence in the government's efficacy. The significance of Institutionalism Theory lies in its enhancement of State Failure Theory by emphasising the influence of institutions on economic and political outcomes. Inadequate institutions not only fail to deter crime but also intensify poverty by destabilising economic stability and growth. The inadequacy of the court

system and the absence of strong regulatory frameworks enable criminal organisations to function without consequence, diverting resources that could be allocated for public development (North, 1990). This theory provides a framework for answers by emphasising the necessity of fortifying institutions to enhance governance and economic management. Fortifying the judiciary, augmenting governmental transparency, and developing the capabilities of regulatory agencies are essential measures for stabilising Nigeria's socioeconomic landscape. Enhancing institutional robustness will enable Nigeria to more effectively enforce laws, implement economic programs, and consequently diminish crime and poverty.

Incorporating State Failure Theory and Institutionalism Theory offers a thorough framework for this research. This research examines the role of state failure in facilitating organised crime and how weak institutions sustain insecurity and economic instability, providing detailed insights into the cyclical nature of these difficulties in Nigeria. This theoretical framework leads empirical study and frames the interpretation of data obtained through fieldwork. It facilitates a comprehensive examination of how particular elements of state failure and institutional fragility are experienced and perceived by diverse stakeholders in Nigeria, including government officials, security personnel, local community members, and crime victims.

The research uses these theories to offer an understanding of the interplay of organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria. This knowledge is essential for formulating focused, efficacious solutions that tackle the fundamental causes of these issues rather than simply their manifestations. Furthermore, the theoretical framework underpins the formulation of policy suggestions and a deep understanding of the institutional and structural modifications required to cultivate a more stable, secure, and prosperous Nigeria. The theoretical frameworks of these theories are crucial for

analysing the interrelated challenges confronting Nigeria today. This research will provide vital insights into effective governance and development methods in Nigeria by examining the roles of state functionality and institutional integrity in alleviating organised crime, insecurity, and poverty. These insights will guide policymakers and international stakeholders in developing actions that are both strategic and sustainable, facilitating Nigeria's progression towards enhanced stability and prosperity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research approach aimed at examining the interrelated phenomena of organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria. This approach seeks to reveal the fundamental mechanisms and wider ramifications of these interconnected challenges by assessing the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. The methodology uses interviews, focus groups, and observational studies, each designed to elicit from persons directly impacted by or engaged in resolving these difficulties. The essence of the data collection procedure entailed executing 40 comprehensive interviews with a varied group of people. The selected number was to guarantee extensive representation and to attain data saturation. The participants were deliberately chosen for their familiarity with or knowledge of issues pertaining to organised crime, instability, or poverty, so as to ensure the study encompassed a diverse array of knowledgeable viewpoints.

Residents from States characterised by high crime rates and poverty were purposely selected to offer perspectives on everyday experiences and community-level effects of insecurity and economic distress. Law Enforcement Officials (15): This cohort comprised police officers and security staff, providing insights into the difficulties of addressing crime and preserving public order. (10) Government officials: Interviews with these participants elucidated the policy and administrative dimensions of combating organised crime and poverty.

Representatives from (10) NGOs provided insights on grassroots initiatives and the ramifications of international assistance. Experts and Academics (5): Scholars and subject matter experts offered theoretical and contextual evaluations on the issues. Interviews were executed in a semi-structured approach, enabling a flexible yet thorough examination of each participant's perspectives and experiences. This strategy effectively enabled participants to articulate deep personal narratives and professional insights, hence enhancing the data's depth. Participants were advised of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. All data were securely maintained and accessible solely to the researcher from the study to safeguard participant privacy.

**Focus Groups:** We organised focus groups to enhance the interview data through group dynamics and collective insights. Each group comprised 6-10 people, organised by common qualities such as occupation, promote open and pertinent discussions. A skilled moderator employed a systematic discussion guide to facilitate dialogues while permitting complete involvement. This method facilitated the acquisition of varied perspectives and the analysis of group dynamics, enhancing the comprehension of individual interview data. In addition to the verbal data, observational studies were performed in several public and communal environments characterised by high crime rates, economic difficulties, or both. These observations assist in contextualising and validating material obtained from interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis and data transcription from all sources were simplified by NVivo software. This method facilitated a methodical coding and thematic development process, ensuring a thorough and meticulous investigation of the intricate data set. Themes uncovered through various data gathering methods were cross-validated and synthesised to create a comprehensive grasp of the challenges involved. This method not only enhanced the empirical data but also ensured that the conclusions were rooted in

the real-world experiences of individuals most affected by these significant concerns.

## RESULTS

The significant role of the government's dearth in promoting organised crime and insecurity in Nigeria has become a prominent topic in contemporary literature. According to Ugoani (2020), the primary indicators of governance failure in Nigeria are the inadequacy of public service delivery, pervasive corruption, and institutional incompetence. Interviewees identified inadequate public services as a contributing factor to the increased susceptibility of communities. A seasoned officer made the following statement:

*'The state consistently fails us, our security forces receive insufficient funding, our infrastructure deteriorates, and healthcare and education are scarce, particularly in rural areas.'*

The absence of viable alternatives leads individuals to engage in criminal behaviour. Adeola and Adebisi (2020) argue that the state's chronic failure to provide fundamental infrastructure, healthcare, and education significantly affects the Nigerian economy. This sentiment is shared by many who have resorted to organised crime as a means of survival. The pervasive corruption in government institutions, which undermines the authority of the state and allows criminal groups to operate freely, also reinforces the crime/poverty connection. Nigeria's persistently low ranking on corruption perception indexes is indicative of the prevalence of bribery, nepotism, and misappropriation in its public sectors (Transparency International, 2023). As per a government official:

*'Corruption remains our biggest hurdle. Criminals often collude with corrupt officials, facilitating their operations and undermining our enforcement efforts.'*

This is consistent with research that demonstrates how corruption undermines the capacity of society to resist organised crime by sowing seeds of distrust between citizens and state institutions and undermining the government (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021). Security vulnerabilities are among the most critical factors that facilitate the proliferation of organised crime. The icemaker interview yielded several key insights, including:

*'Our security agencies are ill-equipped and poorly trained. Criminal groups have better resources and often better intelligence than our security forces.'*

This is consistent with the findings of Odoma (2019), which indicate that the Nigerian security services are not operating at their maximum potential due to the inadequacy of funding, training, and honesty. The security situation is swiftly deteriorating because of these issues. In theory, the preservation of social and economic stability, the prevention of corruption, and the enforcement of the rule of law are all contingent upon the existence of robust institutions (North, 1990). The justice system in Nigeria is defective, which exacerbates criminality and insecurity. Judicial inefficiencies, including corruption and delays, have long enabled criminal elements to evade justice, thereby further undermining the rule of law. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the court system, as indicated by a community leader: 'Criminals often escape justice because they can buy their freedom. Our judicial system is too slow and too corrupt' According to Odoma (2019) research, organised crime's survival is significantly facilitated by ineffective justice systems, which undermine deterrence and promote impunity. Nigeria's crime and insecurity issues are significantly exacerbated by the country's high unemployment and destitution rates. Almost 40% of Nigerians are impoverished, and youthful individuals are particularly susceptible to criminal networks due to unemployment (Ank 2022). Interviewees identified unemployment as a

significant factor contributing to an increase in criminal activity. According to a village chieftain in Northern Nigeria:

*'The youth have no jobs and no opportunities. The easiest path for them is joining gangs or criminal networks. Poverty pushes them directly into crime.'*

This perspective is corroborated by research that establishes a direct correlation between unemployment, low income, and increased susceptibility to organised crime (Adekoya and Razak, 2016). Moreover, economic marginalisation renders individuals more susceptible to recruitment by criminal networks that offer temporary financial incentives, thereby diminishing resilience and raising community vulnerabilities. Nigerian criminal networks are exploiting the expanded global interconnectivity that has resulted from globalisation to expand their operations, thereby altering the dynamics of organised crime in the country. According to reports, criminal organisations in Nigeria are engaged in human trafficking, cyber fraud, and drug trafficking, and they employ global infrastructure to facilitate these crimes (UNODC, 2021). A specialist who was interviewed stated:

*'Globalisation has helped criminal networks more than the state. Borders are porous, and crime networks operate internationally with ease.'*

These views are consistent with those of Blau and Blau (1982) who contend that globalisation exacerbates domestic vulnerabilities by increasing exposure to illicit markets worldwide. Therefore, it is evident that, in the era of globalisation, the successful combat of organised crime necessitates the development of domestic institutional capacities and international cooperation. Environmental degradation, which is the result of illicit activities such as illegal oil bunkering, significantly exacerbates poverty and insecurity. Illicit oil production has decimated ecosystems, uprooted



populations, and exacerbated poverty in the Niger Delta, all of which have contributed to an increase in crime and violence in the region as noted by Okafor (2020). This issue was brought to the attention of the public by a community activist from the Niger Delta:

*'We are destroying our environment, when individuals are unable to cultivate or fish, they turn to crime as a means of subsistence.'*

Okafor, who supports this assertion, posits that the environmental damage caused by organised crime weakens community resilience by exacerbating poverty and insecurity. Many Nigerian communities have resorted to vigilante groups and other forms of self-help security in response to government inaction. The outcomes of these informal arrangements have been inconsistent, with some interviewees commending their capacity to address security deficiencies and others expressing apprehensions regarding extrajudicial activities and violations.

*'Vigilante groups help protect us, but sometimes they create more problems, becoming gangs themselves.'*

Although community-based organisations may provide temporary security, there is potential for instability because of the absence of formal supervision (Okoro, Oko and Okon, 2024). International organisations (IGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offer an additional layer of assistance; research indicates that NGOs are instrumental in the provision of humanitarian aid, education, healthcare, and poverty reduction (Olaoye, 2025). However, their interventions are not perpetual. Stakeholders have emphasised that NGOs fulfil a need that the government has, but they have also stressed the necessity of more comprehensive, community-driven strategies to prevent dependence. In focused group discussions (FGDs), most participants identified inadequate public services and infrastructure as significant contributors to

organised crime. According to a respondent from a Kano village, the primary causes of organised crime and insecurity were identified by FGD participants as inadequate public services and infrastructure.

*'The government is notably absent in our town. The availability of clean water, healthcare facilities, and school facilities is limited. The steady flow of money that crime can generate is one of the factors that attracts young individuals to it' (FGD, Kano, Male, Community Leader, March 2023)*

Research indicates that individuals are more susceptible to crime because of inadequate public infrastructure, which exacerbates their socioeconomic status (Aliyu, 2022). The sentiment that corruption is the primary cause of insecurity and crime was expressed by a participant in Abuja, and it was shared by all categories. 'Corruption is widespread' In corrupt environments, organised crime networks proliferate due to the erosion of trust and the ineffectiveness of state institutions, as opined by Aliyu (2022). A participant from Yobe State raised the fundamental issue of insufficient security agencies, stating:

*'Security forces demonstrate their unreliability by either reacting slowly or not at all in response to an attack. Communities are left vulnerable because of the repeated attacks of outlaws.'*

This is consistent with the conclusions of Okolie et al. (2019), who maintain that Nigeria's security institutions are inadequate, which exacerbates criminal impunity and insecurity. According to FGD, the primary causes of organised crime are unemployment and economic inequality. An adolescent from Lagos elaborated:

*'With no job opportunities, many young people like me feel crime is our only way out. Unemployment pushes people to desperation.'*

This is corroborated by the research of Olayemi and Adegbite (2023), which demonstrates that youthful

individuals are more susceptible to recruitment by criminal organisations because of their unemployment. Numerous participants in the focus group discussed the subject of poverty and its correlation with crime. According to a respondent from the state of Rivers,

*'Poverty makes people desperate. Criminal gangs exploit our poverty to recruit our youths. Crime becomes a means of survival.'*

These conclusions are corroborated by recent publications from the World Bank in 2022, which emphasise the significant extent to which poverty increases vulnerability to organised crime. The focus groups revealed a variety of viewpoints regarding vigilante organisations. A participant from Lagos stated: 'Without vigilantes, we would be defenceless. They protect us better than the police'. Conversely, one Plateau participant harboured reservations: 'Vigilantes often go too far. Sometimes they become the problem rather than the solution, leading to human rights abuses. These muddled conclusions are substantiated by Alemika and Chukwuma (2004), who acknowledge the vigilante's effectiveness while cautioning against potential human rights violations.

The FGD participants acknowledged the contributions of NGOs, but they also underscored the obstacles they encounter. A comment was made by one of the Borno participants: **'NGOs provide immediate help like food and healthcare. But once they leave, we are back to where we started'** Olayemi and Adegbite (2023) raise comparable concerns regarding the inadequacy of protracted institutionalism beyond emergency measures.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a comprehensive examination of the complicated interplay between poverty, insecurity, and organised crime in Nigeria. By amalgamating these discoveries with the theories of institutionalism and state failure theory, the reader may gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of these problems and devise practical

solutions. The State Failure Theory, Rotberg (2004), posits that insecurity and organised crime thrive when states neglect their fundamental obligations, including the provision of public services, the maintenance of law and order, and the preservation of economic stability. The results of this study demonstrate that the state's incompetence in Nigeria exacerbates the issues of poverty, crime, and violence.

It further posited that socioeconomic characteristics of public services and infrastructure, which are components of governance, exacerbate the persistent resource theme. The state's inadequate provision of healthcare, education, and pure water exacerbates poverty and establishes an environment conducive to crime. The distribution of resources and the implementation of transparent governance systems to prevent corruption and mismanagement are critical in addressing these concerns, as are socioeconomic differences. Improving these services is one approach to mitigating the socioeconomic disparities that lead individuals to engage in illicit behaviour.

The prevalence of corruption in the public sector and the police force has been a significant impediment to effective administration. Collaboration between authorities and criminal organisations erodes public confidence in government institutions, thereby facilitating organised crime. Policy initiatives should prioritise anti-corruption initiatives. We can achieve this by strictly enforcing anti-corruption laws, establishing independent oversight agencies, and promoting transparency and accountability among public officials. These reforms would bolster the legitimacy and efficacy of state institutions, in addition to the criminal's focus on operating with impunity.

The study looks at the effectiveness of law enforcement in maintaining security. It is imperative to increase the capacity of enforcement opportunities by enhancing financing, training, and resources. Additionally, this theory underscores the

necessity of systems that are devoid of political interference and corruption to facilitate effective crime prevention and law enforcement, all of which are essential in the fight against organised crime.

Institutional theory is concerned with the impact of established institutions on economic, governmental, and societal processes (North, 1990). Weak institutions undermine the rule of law. Judicial resources are indispensable in the context of the battle against organised crime, as they facilitate economic opportunities.

The ineffectiveness and corruption of Nigeria's legal system significantly impede the fight against organised crime. The corrupt and ineffective judiciary in Nigeria is a significant factor in deterioration of organised crime. The ineffectiveness and corruption of Nigeria's legal system significantly impede the fight against organised crime. Corruption and incompetence in Nigeria's tribunals significantly impede anti-crime initiatives. Ensuring accountability and prompt, equitable case adjudication is crucial in strengthening judicial institutions. The rule of law can be fortified by the state through the implementation of comprehensive judicial reforms that prioritise public trust, accountability, and transparency in the justice system, as well as the delivery of justice.

Economic instability and elevated unemployment rates are the primary factors contributing to crime and insecurity. It is essential to establish policies that aim to diversify the economy and generate employment opportunities. There should be investment in non-oil industries, including agriculture, industry, and technology, to diversify the economy. Our objective is to enhance the employability capabilities of vocational training and education organisations to reduce their susceptibility to recruitment by illicit enterprises. The economy's stability and expansion can be improved by strengthening the economic institutions that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The results show that communities frequently establish vigilante organisations or other forms of self-help when they feel unsafe. Even though these organisations provide some protection, there is a risk of exploitation and increased instability among them. By fortifying local government institutions and encouraging community participation in decision-making processes, it is feasible to enhance local security dynamics and empower communities. A policy priority should be the efficient delivery of services by local administrations. It is imperative that community leaders participate in the planning and execution of development and security projects.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

This paper provides a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the interrelated issues associated with organised crime frameworks. This paper employs institutionalist theory and state failure theory as analytical frameworks to investigate poverty and inequality in Nigeria. The study employs a variety of qualitative research methodologies, including numerous in-depth interviews. Disparities and observational studies are necessary to understand the multifaceted perspectives of the numerous individuals who are affected by these issues. An unequal society fosters crime and insecurity, which in turn perpetuates destitution. The government gives significant weight to the statements made by academicians. The government's ubiquitous influence is the primary focus of these results, particularly in the areas of institutional openness and insufficient public services. These results demonstrate efficiency on a global scale. Pervasive corruption in Nigeria severely compromises institutional performance, as the cautious evaluation emphasises. Micro-corrupt institutions and inadequate service delivery exacerbate security concerns and organised crime. Corrupt officials and a lackadaisical government contribute to the development of criminal networks, exemplifying part-organised crime. Transparency International emphasises pervasive corruption in Nigeria and its

detrimental impact on the country's institutions in its 2023 corruption assessment. Additionally, secondary data from Reuters (2025) demonstrates that institutional corruption significantly undermines governments by perpetuating poverty and insecurity, despite recent efforts by anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria to restore governance.

The study's findings that poverty is a significant contributor to the proliferation of organised crime are consistent with the assertions of Osungboye and Adesanmi (2024), who contend that low incomes induce vulnerable individuals to resort to criminal activity as a means of survival. According to participants in the states of Lagos and Rivers, youth unemployment and destitution are the primary factors driving criminal behaviour among young people, particularly in the areas of drug trafficking and banditry. Edet (2024) provides additional detail to this perspective by contending that individuals are more susceptible to recruitment by criminal networks when they are impoverished and have limited employment opportunities. Criminal networks can proliferate and infiltrate every aspect of Nigerian society because of this economic vulnerability.

Researcher discovered that drug use substantially elevated the probability of banditry and organised criminal violence, as well as other forms of violence and insecurity. Aina (2024) contends that the use of drugs among Nigerian bandits leads to an increase in aggressive behaviour, which further corroborates the well-established correlation between drug misuse and criminal violence. The results were corroborated by participants from Zamfara and Kaduna, who stated that the insecurity and violence in the communities are significantly influenced by the substance usage of criminals. Another common thread that permeated all the focus groups was the connection between institutional shortcomings and feelings of insecurity. A considerable number of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the judicial system, asserting that its corruption and

delay severely restrict the ability to enforce the law. Dullahi reinforces these stakeholder perceptions and exacerbates the already precarious situation by emphasising that criminal impunity is maintained by corrupt and feeble institutions in Nigeria's judiciary and law enforcement. This allows organised criminal activity to thrive.

Environmental degradation, which is primarily the result of illicit activities such as oil bunkering and illegal mining, significantly exacerbates poverty and instability in resource-rich regions such as the Niger Delta. Agwanwo and Bello (2019), who conducted a comprehensive analysis of the environmental effects of illicit resource extraction, contend that environmental degradation contributes to community deprivation by increasing the vulnerability of locals to criminal recruitment. This is in line with what Okafor-Yarwood (2020) says about how environmental crime and instability keep happening by focusing on crimes that keep the economy unstable and cause trouble in the region. The findings indicate that the management of organised crime in Nigeria is becoming increasingly challenging because of globalisation.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that managing organised crime in Nigeria is significantly more challenging because of globalisation. According to the United Nations Security Council (2022), globalisation facilitates the growth of transnational criminal networks, which in turn facilitate the transnational activities of Nigerian organised crime groups. In the same vein, respondents emphasised the consequences of globalisation, noting that it not only creates new opportunities for economic growth but also increases individuals' vulnerability to organised crime. Rodrik (1997) contends that globalisation presents opportunities that criminal networks in Nigeria exploit, thereby complicating efforts to ensure national security, necessitating increased capacity within local law enforcement and stronger international cooperation. In the presence of crime and insecurity, vigilante organisations and other informal security systems



exhibit intricate dynamics and resilience. Siro (2016) emphasises that informal security arrangements can be both beneficial to communities and detrimental to stability due to the extrajudicial tactics they employ; this phenomenon is well-documented in the literature. Some members of the community praised the immediate defensive value of vigilantes, while others were concerned about their propensity to perpetrate human rights abuses. These members had conflicting feelings about vigilantes.

Furthermore, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international assistance groups significantly influence communities that are battling poverty and insecurity. Nevertheless, respondents did acknowledge that assistance frequently results in dependency and provides only temporary relief, and they did underscore their limitations. According to the participants, local governments, foreign agencies, and NGOs should collaborate to establish resilient, self-sufficient community institutions that can effectively address poverty and insecurity.

The results indicate that the judicial and law enforcement systems are inefficient, corruption is widespread, and public service delivery is significantly lacking. The atmosphere is conducive to the development of organised crime, which, in turn, exacerbates poverty and insecurity because of administrative deficiencies. Research has demonstrated that the absence of fundamental services and infrastructure, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions, exacerbates economic inequality, animosity, and marginalisation. Insecurity and organised crime are exacerbated by a variety of factors, such as high unemployment rates and economic instability. When presented with opportunities, a substantial number of individuals, particularly young people, resort to illegal activities as a means of generating income. The unequal distribution of resources and wealth exacerbates poverty and social isolation. The research did uncover instances of communal unity and fortitude, despite the presence of these challenges. When the

government is unable to provide adequate protection, citizens must resort to local initiatives, such as vigilante organisations and mutual aid networks. However, these informal systems are not without their risks, including the potential for power abuse and heightened instability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon integration with the theoretical frameworks, the study's findings yield numerous policy recommendations:

1. Invest in infrastructure development and ensure equitable resource distribution to address socioeconomic inequalities and enhance public service delivery. Open governance methods must be implemented to prevent corruption and mismanagement.
2. To combat corruption in the public service and law enforcement sectors, it is imperative to implement anti-corruption measures, including the enforcement of more stringent anti-corruption legislation, the establishment of independent oversight agencies, and the promotion of transparency and accountability in public office.
3. Enhance the efficiency of security agencies by providing them with additional funding, improved training, and additional resources. This will also be beneficial to law enforcement. Ensure that the law enforcement and court systems are free of political interference and malfeasance to foster public trust and support.
4. Advocate for Judicial Reform: Ensure that cases are resolved in an equitable and timely manner, reinforce the judiciary's independence, and implement comprehensive reforms that prioritise accountability and transparency.
5. Promoting Economic Stability and Job Creation: Diversify the economy and create employment opportunities by investing in non-oil industries, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology.

6. Engage community leaders in the design and implementation of security and development projects and enhance the capacity of local governments to deliver services efficiently. Encourage community involvement in decision-making to fortify local communities.

**Avenue for future research:** Investigating theoretical developments in the conceptualisation of the organised crime-insecurity-poverty nexus can improve academic debate. By including multidisciplinary viewpoints, leveraging sociology, political science, economics, criminology, environmental science, and international relations, future studies should deepen theoretical frameworks. This would improve theoretical models by offering better analytical tools to grasp how different components interact, affect one another, and generate more general societal results. More research on the function and efficiency of NGOs and foreign assistance interventions in resolving the poverty-crime-insecurity nexus is also vital. Particularly with an eye on dependency issues and community empowerment, research could assess the long-term viability and sustainability of NGO activities. Comparative research evaluating several NGO strategies across areas could provide information on effective methods for juggling local government improvement with long-term capacity-building and rapid humanitarian initiatives.

**Contribution to knowledge:** This work adds to the body of knowledge by offering thorough qualitative research, stressing contextual specificity, community dynamics, and stakeholder viewpoints. Examining the multidimensional connections between organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria fills a significant gap left by earlier research, mostly using quantitative methods or separate thematic analysis. The knowledge gained from stakeholders deepens the body of research and offers a complex picture of how governance shortcomings and socioeconomic vulnerabilities interact to create criminal activity and insecurity. Furthermore, underlining the important roles of

poverty, institutional weakness, corruption, and global connectedness in maintaining the link between organised crime and insecurity, therefore exposing important leverage areas for policy interventions. Emphasising the critical need for institutional strengthening, thorough anti-corruption programmes, sustainable economic policies, and integrated community-based security frameworks, this study provides pragmatic policy implications for Nigerian policymakers by clarifying these complex interactions.

Therefore, future studies should thus build on the results of this exploratory investigation by using strict quantitative techniques, longitudinal frameworks, comparative regional analysis, technology explorations, environmental assessments, and more advanced theoretical reflections. Such multifarious and multidisciplinary approaches would improve the knowledge of the junction between organised crime, insecurity, and poverty in Nigeria, therefore promoting lasting solutions and adding value to both scholarly literature and policy development.

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