

## **Migration Conundrums In Nigeria: Towards Peace And Security For Strategic Co-Existence**

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### **Abstract**

*Politicians in Nigeria have accused migrants of causing security conundrums. This resulted in the securitisation of immigration to rationalise the 2019 closure of land border policy to mitigate in Nigeria. This study sought to analyse peace and security challenges affecting migration in Nigeria in search of strategic co-existence. Relying on qualitative research based on secondary sources of data and content analysis it was argued that regarding immigration as a security threat moves it from the political concern of a low priority to that of a high priority regardless of the attendant economic benefits associated with the political economy of migration. It was revealed that migration securitisation through strict border management represents the political elites' interests in the country yet better strategic pathways for co-existence could be explored. It is concluded that immigration should be de-securitised by dealing with causal inland factors and other foreign factors unrelated to migration.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, migration, peace, security, conundrums, migrants.

### **Introduction**

Migration is concerned with people moving from their habitat of origin to a place outside the boundaries of their origin, and this could be involuntary or voluntary (Oucho & Williams, 2019). The migration conundrums are generally not pre-set, owing to different stages of insecurity that could occur, to inhibit the migrant's motive to relocate (Aghedo & Osu<sup>1</sup>mah, 2015). The contemporary migration discourse in Nigeria is challenging the government, development, humanitarian actors and academics to view migration differently given the changing migration narrative. Migrants have been portrayed negatively instead of being viewed as development agents in their host country or their country of origin (Oucho & Williams, 2019). The 1885 demarcation of borders in Africa by colonialists was catalytic to triggering the recent border-related conflicts, breeding intolerance and xenophobia between migrants and the host communities. Since colonialism, momentous events have challenged the rhetoric concerned with nationalism and shaped regional and national policies for migration in Africa. In West Africa, cross-border trading is common, particularly in Nigeria, which has a huge population of more than 170 million people (Oucho & Williams, 2019). Countries that share borders with Nigeria are actively involved in cross-border trade with border communities of Nigeria. However, the economic and social benefits accumulated correspond to the increasing security threats like trafficking of narcotics, human trafficking, illegal imports, and the proliferation of light weapons and small arms. Nigeria's land border closure in 2019 was driven putatively by the quest to deal with the increased inflow of drug trafficking, smuggling of small

arms, foreign fighters and some prohibited goods into the country (TG, 2020). Apart from the veiled justification by the government predicated on security and economic reasons, the closure of the border was somewhat intended to profile immigrants and securitisation of migration (Ogbonna, Lenshie & Nwangwu, 2023). While the Nigerian government showed incapacity to have the territorial integrity of the country secured and safety guaranteed, some state actors found comfort in the border and migration securitisation with the land border closure used as a cover-up for failed state management of internal security (Alumona et al., 2019). To reduce the migrant influx weakening national security in Nigeria, the Buhari administration directed the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) to insulate the border against migrants (Agbakwuru, 2021).

### **The political economy of migration**

Migrants tend to have great expectations, which may not easily be realised at the destined place, hence, the frustrations and disillusionment that arise (Creighton, 2013). A migrant initially expects to get a decent job for urgent sustenance as they search for better job prospects. Migrants usually consider the possibility of being employed in the host country but overlook the potential blockades that may stop them from accessing their desired jobs (Oucho & Williams, 2019). More often, they disregard evaluating the labour market ahead of moving about. Some labour markets may not allow migrants, because of existing limitations like shrinking labour market and government controls. Since migrants are forbidden to use visitor visas to work in most countries, some migrants resort to criminal pursuits to generate income for their families back home (Menjívar & Lakhani, 2016). The resolution to migrate is associated with predetermined expectations particularly that of being accepted by host countries. However, when it comes to forced migration, the resolve is usually abrupt to flee from famine, death, and other grave conditions (Haug, 2008). The period taken by a migrant to acclimatise to a new location influences how soon they get integrated into society. Yet in other cases, host communities do not cordially receive migrants. As such, these migrants become alienated from the host population and debarred from socio-economic activities (Ediev, Coleman, & Scherbov, 2014). It is broadly contended that when countries collaborate economically, conflict is likely to occur indicating that migrants could be peace ambassadors, furthering the worth of neighbourliness and firming integration (Oucho & Williams, 2019). The logic behind states' economic integration is for countries to have integrated markets through migrants. However, forced migrants may not contribute meaningfully unlike volunteer migrants because of violent conflict's psychological effect on their valuable capacities. Both forced and voluntary migrants add to the cultural diversity through a social interface, which may be repelled or accepted by the host communities. Therefore, their interactions may be instrumental to conflict or development. Those countries that entice migrants from different geographical areas are inclined to appreciate various cultures that improve the community, even though not every culture is acceptable by host communities. Outside the negative migration effects on host populations, in some cases, the host community immensely benefits from the migrants owing to cultural assimilation and the introduction of newer economic traditions (Skeldon, 2001).

### **Migration due to climate and resource competition in Nigeria**

Migration induced by climate, resource competition and displacement are noticeable among the causes of armed violence in Nigeria's northwest region (Ojo, Oyewole & Aina, 2023). The conflict triggered by natural resources like water, land and grasslands between farmers and nomadic cattle herders due to climate change is a major driver of violent conflict. The crisis of land usage between the Fulani pastoralists and Hausa farmers that created a malicious disagreement between the northwest ethnic groups was a contributory migration factor (TDP, 2021). The increase in population that caused competition for resources and less effective dispute management of land escalated conflict in Nigeria's northwest areas (Barnett & Murtala,

2021). All these have caused conflicts between farmers and herders in the region. Some of the main causes were the Zamfara state's resolutions to clear wide forests and pasture reserves in the Gidan Jaja areas and Kuyanbana forest for farming purposes (DT, 2021). This policy left several Fulani hamlets forced to migrate between Maradun and Dansadau up to Zurmi. The cattle herders of Fulani origin were previous victims of extortion and hostility from corrupt police, farmers, district heads, farmers and a weak system of justice in these areas way before the enactment of the policy to evict pastoralists (Ojo et al, 2023). The net effect of such conditions created a security threat through the extremism of a frustrated, deprived, dispossessed and fragmented group of the Fulani people (DT, 2021).

### **Weak management**

The institutional weakness of the state and federal government in the management of forests, and the failure of local authorities to manage local affairs, provide opportunities for armed banditry to use ungoverned areas for their criminal activities and capacity building (Tar & Safana, 2021). Moreover, bandits have taken advantage of the ineffective and weakening security situation across Nigeria to continue their programme. The weak security system, particularly the alleged extortion by police has made people get involved in armed banditry instead of seeking justice. Weak management of the border compounds Nigeria's challenges in its security design (Tar & Safana, 2021). This has led to an increase in the trans-Sahel weapons, human, and drug trafficking and indirect effects of violent conflict (Ojo et al, 2023).

### **Migrants' peace and security conundrums**

Various security conundrums have affected the economy of Nigeria and caused hardship and fear among people (Ogbonna & Nwangwu, 2023). The magnitude of onslaught and offensives by violent groups in the country on migrants has made Nigeria one of the most threatened areas for migrants groups to stay. For instance, in 2015 the combative herdsmen mostly from the Fulani people were ranked as the fourth most threatening group worldwide given their scale of offensives towards migrants (GTI, 2015). The Human Freedom Index published in 2020 reveals that Nigeria sat at 131<sup>st</sup> position out of 162 states concerning the safety and security of migrants (Vásquez & McMahon, 2020). In the same vein, the Global Terrorism Index of 2022 puts Nigeria as the 6<sup>th</sup> most dreaded country by migrants worldwide (GTI, 2022). While this 2022 position is a relatively minor improvement compared to the previous country's ranking, alerts of terror from intelligence and security agencies in the world usually indicate that Nigeria stands as the world's most dreadful place for migrants to live or visit (Vanguard, 2022; Okoli, 2022). As observed by Hassan (2022), more than 61,865 inhabitants lost their lives in Nigeria in the past decade due to different kinds of violent conflict. The practice of profiling immigrants for purposes of security conundrums in Nigeria and the application of biased immigration policies is experienced as well across the world, especially in the US and Europe (Ejdus & Rečević, 2021). State actors submit that the huge and spongy borders in the area of northern Nigeria provide unrestricted access to migration into Nigeria and cause havoc to the citizens (SR, 2022). This partially informs why the government of Nigeria imposed serious border restrictions with Niger, Cameroon, Benin and Chad from August 2019 to the end of 2020 (Kwarkye & Matongbada, 2021). More than a year of border closure, to address the inflow of arms trafficking and extraterritorial armed forces in Nigeria did not bring the expected results; instead, there was continued experience of damages from different types of threats. Nigeria's proclivity to externalise the driving factors for the rising security conundrums facing the country never got much attention from the academic side. However, there is abundant literature about the underlying causes and effects of the different conflicts devastating Nigeria. This subsumes the spread of light weapons and small arms (Tar, 2021), the presence of large tracts of ungoverned areas (Lenshie, 2018), the militant reactions by the state of Nigeria (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014), state fragility and bad governance (Lenshie et al., 2022), and the

machination by the Nigerian elite (Mbah et al, 2017). Although this extant literature is quite instructive, it has not given much attention to how the securitisation of border governance and migration affect the increasing insecurity wave in Nigeria.

### **Strategic co-existence pathways for migrants and host communities**

It is prudent to sensitise migrants and host communities to diminish any undesirable perceptions and issues that may develop between these two groups. The peaceable coexistence of host communities and migrants has been a matter of concern, especially to the international community, when migrants are identified as refugees coming from some neighbouring countries. Some refugees from conflict-ridden countries occasionally restart conflict in host countries, particularly if they migrate together with their adversaries. If the conflict restarts, it distresses the host communities a lot more than the conflicting local ethnic groups that they may be primarily worried about. The determination by host communities to maintain peace should be to address the conflict through different ways of sensitisation using posters, television, radio and other forms of communication that are used to convey messages to society. It is prudent to adopt a sustainable association between the host communities and migrants to guarantee nonviolent co-existence. The two communities should appreciate cultural values and norms cognisant of their differences in case conflict occurs based on such differences. For communities that host refugees, they should be considerate of the refugees' needs noting that the refugees would have suffered traumatic experiences. This could be helpful to the host community to understand better and embrace migrants acknowledging the differences embedded in their value systems. Most of the economic migrants choose to stay in places where they expect to improve their income and support their families back home. However, refugees have no such privileges to make choices when staying in some other country. Instead, they are persuaded to stay without much liberty for their economic welfare in their host communities. In most cases, migrants fail to consider the host communities' cultures before deciding where to stay, hence the resentment that emanates from being rejected and disrespected due to cultural norms and non-compliance with traditional systems and values. For example, during the Ramadan epoch in Abu Dhabi, migrants were disallowed to gulp any liquid in the public glare because the Muslims fasted. Some migrants could be uncomfortable with such canons, particularly in very humid conditions, where migrants are not acclimatised to such conditions and become thirsty.

It is imperative to develop harmless migration customs at a regional and national level. Based on the UN Global Compact on Migration, measures should be instituted to evaluate better pathways of migrating and promote reliable migration. There already exist international guiding principles and frameworks, which are useful for regional economic communities and governments to apply when mainstreaming migration into their practices and effectively governing migration. Key international conventions and frameworks for consideration to shape the approach or policy for regular and safe migration should include but not be limited to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is explicit in Article 2 that everybody should enjoy all the freedoms and rights provided in this Declaration, regardless of sex, race, language, sex, political, religion, origin, birth, property or other form of status. The other treaty that protects the migrants' rights and for consideration is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Solutions to the integration of migrants, social cohesion and diversity particularly in Nigeria and Africa in general rely on the political will of governments to embolden bilateral relationships between the nations.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the migration conundrums in Nigeria in an attempt to ensure peace and security for strategic co-existence between the migrant and the host community. The study revealed that externalising the underlying factors of the growing insecurity in Nigeria has permitted originators of securitisation to be masked in issues of migration and shift attention from how border management ineffectiveness has adversely affected national security. The securitisation of migration to portray migrants as answerable to the country's insecurity is for political expediency serving government interest. The securitisation of migration, which gave rise to the closure of the land border to reduce the pervasive security conundrums in Nigeria, is a profound and clear matter of politicisation. Even though migrants could be seen partly as distant causes of the country's insecurity, the government had to securitise migration on the pretext that liberal democracy dictates that people who need to be protected against security conundrums by the state quickly believe the narrative that migrants are responsible for causing insecurity. The proclivity of state actors to ensure they externalise the insecurity causes in Nigeria shoulders the blame on them for their inability to safeguard state integrity and good governance. The sovereignty of a state is an authentic measuring index for Nigeria's capacity and this cannot be guaranteed by border governance securitisation and the securitisation of the immigrants in Nigeria. The security leadership should bypass and directly face both the external and domestic causes of the country's insecurity. Most people in African countries should be aware of the multilateral and bilateral protocols ratified by their countries. In the absence of such knowledge, migrants will be unaware of opportunities available to them, which could reduce preventable migration, and curtail conflicts caused by the scarcity of resources in host communities.

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