



### Urban Dynamics and Insecurity in The Age of Digital Technology In Nigeria

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**Abstract**

*The opening years of the twenty-first century were characterized by various form of security challenges in Nigeria which ranges from ethnic violence, religious crises, violent extremism, banditry, and kidnappings to mention but a few. All these aforementioned constitute or comprise the nature and trends of urban violence especially in Nigeria. However, in recent times, digital technology has been used or is been used by different agents of the underworld as well as other social movements to communicate violence, and transmit uncensored videos and audio either for genuine grievances against the state or existing social structure or for propaganda and to further create fear and insecurity in the minds of their targeted audience and those of the general public. This paper seeks to explore the conveniences or otherwise of the use of digital technology and also unearth some of the urban dynamics and drivers of insecurity in the age of digital technology. The capacity of digital technologies to spread incitement to ethnic hatred or public order offense, to promote religious and ethnic-based intolerance, and to consolidate identity-based schisms that are capable of stirring up conflicts offline, is unsurpassable. The complex and compelling interconnection of the heterogeneous set-up that is Nigeria's social fabric, can promptly trigger conflicts. When driven by digital technologies, these happen at much faster rates. This is quite obvious from the #Endsars protest, the campaigns against the Fulani herdsmen, as well as Boko Haram insurgency and Banditry. For this paper, the terms ICT and digital technology will be used interchangeably.*

**Keywords:** Urban Dynamics, Insecurity, Digital Technology



## **Introduction**

There have been various calls for the use of ICT tools to tackle security problems in Nigeria. Computer Warehouse Group Plc (CWG) and Huawei have jointly advised the federal government to deploy Internet Protocol surveillance as a technological solution to insecurity challenges facing the country. The greatest contemporary challenge to national security is the insurgency orchestrated by the Islamic sect called Boko-Haram. Not until 2009, insurgency and its concomitant effects (both emotional and physical) were alien to Nigeria. Nigeria, most especially, the North Eastern regions of the country; and recently in Kano, Kaduna in the North Western States, Plateau State, and Abuja in the North Central where there has been a ceaseless terrorist attack. The problem led to the Federal Government's declaration of a state of emergency in the three affected states in North Eastern Nigeria in 2012. The Government has recently further sought the assistance of foreign nations that are technologically developed such as the USA, France, Britain, Israel, and others to tackle the menace of Boko Haram insurgency. The persistence of insecurity has been claiming precious lives of citizenry and government efforts to tackle the problem through various menial methods and approaches such as the use of police, military, vigilante and local hunters seem not to be yielding success. But deploying technology, through the use of ICT devices such as computers, internet, mobile phones, close circuit television (CCTV), surveillance cameras, social network analysis, biometry surveillance, data mining, satellite imagery, and IP devices, the satellite would produce the desired results." Another strong argument is that besides its speed, technology-driven surveillance and intelligence gathering cost less in terms of men and logistics.

## **The Evolving Urban Landscape and Its Impact On Security In Nigeria**

Urban sprawl, the rapid and uncontrolled expansion of urban areas into surrounding rural landscapes, presents a significant challenge to many developing nations, including Nigeria. This phenomenon, characterized by low-density development, car dependency, and a lack of integrated planning, has far-reaching implications for social, economic, and environmental well-being. Urban sprawl often leads to the fragmentation of communities and the erosion of social cohesion. As cities expand rapidly, the distance between residential areas and commercial centers increases, making it difficult for residents to access essential services and engage in community activities. This isolation can contribute to a sense of anonymity and a decline in social control, creating an environment conducive to criminal activity. Thus, the inability of the government to expand



digital infrastructure like surveillance cameras and CCTVs has made it easy for the upsurge of insecurity especially in the nearest ungoverned areas of the cities. This development has made it somehow seamless for perpetrators of crime to embark on their nefarious activities without much hitches.<sup>i</sup>

In essence, sprawl often strains existing infrastructure, leading to inadequate policing, poor street lighting, and limited surveillance capabilities. This can create opportunities for criminal elements to operate with impunity. For example, the proliferation of informal settlements, often located on the fringes of sprawling cities, can become havens for criminal activities due to their lack of proper infrastructure and governance.

Urban sprawl<sup>ii</sup> can exacerbate poverty by increasing the cost of living and limiting access to economic opportunities. As cities expand, the demand for land increases, driving up property prices and making housing less affordable for low-income residents. This can force them to relocate to the peripheries of the city, where they may face limited access to employment, education, and healthcare.<sup>iii</sup>

Moreover, sprawl often leads to inefficient land use, with large tracts of land being used for low-density development, while essential services and infrastructure remain inadequate. This can hinder economic growth and create barriers to employment, trapping residents in a cycle of poverty.

Addressing the challenges posed by urban sprawl in Nigeria requires a multi-pronged approach that involves:

**Improved Urban Planning:** Implementing comprehensive urban plans that promote compact, mixed-use development, and prioritize public transportation.

**Investing in Infrastructure:** Investing in infrastructure such as roads, public transportation, and social services to ensure equitable access for all residents.

**Promoting Affordable Housing:** Implementing policies that promote the development of affordable housing options within cities to prevent the displacement of low-income residents.

**Strengthening Community Engagement:** Fostering community participation in urban planning processes to ensure that the needs and concerns of all residents are taken into account.



Enhancing Law Enforcement: Strengthening law enforcement capabilities and improving community policing strategies to address crime in sprawling urban areas.

By addressing these issues, Nigeria can mitigate the negative impacts of urban sprawl and create more equitable and sustainable urban environments for all its citizens. In doing this, the government and urban planners must address the rise and increase in informal settlements.

Informal settlements, also known as slums or unplanned urban areas, are a significant feature of Nigeria's urban landscape, housing millions of people. These areas often suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure, including roads, sanitation, and electricity, but the absence of digital technology infrastructure and limited access to security services compound the insecurity faced by their residents. In these communities, crime and violence are rampant, and residents are often left vulnerable without the support of formal security structures or modern technological resources to protect themselves.<sup>iv</sup>

Many informal settlements lack reliable internet access and mobile network coverage, which are vital tools for modern security systems. Digital technologies such as surveillance cameras, emergency response systems, and mobile-based crime-reporting apps are virtually inaccessible to people living in these areas.

For instance, while residents in more developed parts of cities may use the internet via their mobile phones or apps to report crimes or access immediate help, those in informal settlements often lack the infrastructure to benefit from such services. This results in a delay in the response to emergencies and reduces their ability to report or track crimes effectively.<sup>v</sup> Without access to digital platforms, informal settlement residents are less able to communicate with authorities or security personnel. This isolation increases the risk of criminal activity going undetected and unaddressed.

In areas with inadequate digital infrastructure, there is a lack of surveillance systems (e.g., CCTV cameras or drones) to monitor public spaces. These technologies are often deployed in more affluent neighborhoods where they help deter criminal activity and allow law enforcement to respond more quickly. In wealthy neighborhoods, CCTV cameras are used by both private and government entities to monitor streets, deter crime, and assist in solving cases. In contrast, informal settlements are rarely covered by such surveillance, leaving them vulnerable to criminal activities such as theft, assault, and gang violence. The absence of surveillance systems in informal settlements



means that criminals can operate more freely, knowing that there is little chance of being monitored or apprehended.<sup>vi</sup> This creates a dangerous environment for residents, who are often forced to rely on informal or community-driven security measures, which may not always be effective.

### **The Role of Digital Technology In Security Threat**

Digital technology can be referred to as Information and Communication Technology. This is an electronic tool, systems, devices, and resources that generate store, or process data. Examples include social media, multimedia, and mobile phones. In other words, information and communication technology is the use of computers and other electronic equipment for storing, analyzing, and sending out information that is necessary for the purpose of acquiring and sending out information, ideas, skills, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and feeling to bring about particular changes in an individual.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is grappling with numerous security challenges, including insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and cybercrime. While digital technology has contributed to national development in various sectors, it has also emerged as a tool for exacerbating security threats in Nigeria. The role of digital technology in security threats is multifaceted, as both malicious actors and security agencies leverage these technologies for various purposes.<sup>vii</sup>

Digital technology has revolutionized many aspects of life, offering unprecedented connectivity and access to information. However, this technological advancement also presents a new set of security challenges, particularly in Nigeria. While digital tools can be powerful instruments for enhancing security, they are also exploited by malicious actors, exacerbating existing threats and creating new vulnerabilities.<sup>viii</sup> One of the most significant ways digital technologies contributes to insecurity in Nigeria is through the widespread use of social media platforms. Social media has become a powerful tool for communication, but it has also been exploited by criminal groups, insurgents, and terrorists for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination of attacks. Groups like Boko Haram and ISIS have used platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to spread extremist ideologies and recruit young people to join their cause.

The unregulated flow of information on social media platforms enables these groups to spread fear and misinformation, which can lead to public unrest. In some instances, rumors or fake news propagated via social media have caused panic, led to violence, and undermined trust in security institutions. For example, during the



height of the Boko Haram insurgency, false reports about military movements or terror attacks would often spread quickly on social media, escalating the situation and complicating efforts by law enforcement to manage public safety.

The use of digital technology by non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, poses another significant threat. These groups utilize online platforms to recruit new members, plan attacks, and disseminate propaganda. They leverage encryption technologies to communicate securely and evade detection, making it difficult for law enforcement agencies to monitor their activities.<sup>x</sup> The Nigerian military and law enforcement agencies face the challenge of combating these groups online due to the encrypted nature of their communications. Many terrorist organizations use encrypted messaging services such as Telegram to evade detection by security agencies.<sup>x</sup> This makes it difficult for intelligence agencies to monitor and intercept communications, posing significant challenges to counter-terrorism efforts. For example, Boko Haram's use of video messages distributed through online platforms is one such method the group uses to gain attention and incite fear. In one notorious instance, the group released a video showing the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from Chibok, which they used to rally support for their cause. The same applies to various bandits and kidnapers who deployed encrypted communication networks to communicate, maim, and threaten anyone on their watch list. In essence, digital technology has aided and facilitated various kinds of terrorism so much that it is difficult to assess the level of damage to both lives and properties. What is more worrisome is the fact that Nigerian security agencies have not been able to deploy advanced digital technology both software and hardware to track, intercept, and dislodge terrorists and bandits. This is unexpected for a twenty-first-century military establishment.

### **Nigeria's Security Agency and Digital Tools in Fighting Insecurity**

Security and Crime are major issues at all levels, globally, regionally, and nationally. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) compiled a Global Peace Index (GPI) for the year 2014 with data collated by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). The GPI is an attempt to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness, factors examined include; levels of violence and crime within the country and external relations such as military expenditure and wars. The GPI ranks 162 countries, covering 99.6% of the world's population. Disturbingly this year, Nigeria ranked 151 out of 162 countries.<sup>xi</sup> The types of security issues now plaguing Nigeria not only include corruption, human trafficking, drug abuse, murders, kidnapping, and burglaries but also



the recurring spate of hapless killings and kidnappings in the Northern parts of Nigeria by the Boko Haram Sect that was designated by the United States as a terrorist organization in November 2013. In the past, Nigerian law enforcement agents were at least able to contain most of the security challenges they were faced with.<sup>xii</sup> The situation today is different with the availability of Internet-based data-exchange applications. While in the past, law enforcement was confronted with mostly physical and traditional paper-based evidence and reports, today the vast majority of discovered material is digital. Offenders are increasingly using network services to disseminate and carry out criminal activities.<sup>xiii</sup>

The World Summit on the Information Society's Declaration of Principles advocates the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as tools to promote sustainable development and people's quality of life.<sup>xiv</sup> Consideration of the use of ICTs to combat Nigeria's serious security problems represents an important area for harmonization and collaboration amongst various Government bodies and security agencies in the country. Crime and security issues transcend borders, and it must be recognized that as a country with diverse ethnic and religious groups, these issues necessitate collaboration in technology deployment, and human capacity building in the use of ICT and financial resources. It must also be recognized that the use of ICTs for the effective treatment of crime and security concerns does not stop with the police force or army, but extends to the judiciary and the court systems.<sup>xv</sup>

Nigeria faces significant security challenges, including terrorism, banditry, and kidnapping. To combat these issues effectively, the country is increasingly turning to digital tools and technologies. Recent initiatives by various ministries highlight the importance of integrating digital solutions into security operations. For instance, Nigeria's former Minister of Interior, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, emphasized the necessity of digitalizing intelligence gathering and monitoring processes<sup>xvi</sup>. He noted that modernizing operations is crucial for addressing the country's security challenges effectively. The Ministry is working on implementing an Electronic Data Management System to enhance operational efficiency and data management across its agencies. The former minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Prof. Isa Pantami, while in office also identified integrated digital technologies as vital for tackling insecurity. Technologies such as autonomous drones, artificial intelligence (AI) for interpreting satellite images, and AI video surveillance are being considered to support law enforcement agencies. These tools aim to improve data utilization in crime prevention efforts.<sup>xvii</sup>



To buttress this effort and leverage digital skills as a tool to curb insecurity in Nigeria, the Nigerian Internal Security and Public Safety Alert System (NISPSAS) mobile app was launched to facilitate intelligence gathering and prompt responses to security threats. This app is part of a broader strategy to leverage ICT in addressing various dimensions of insecurity. The initiative aims to encourage citizen participation in reporting suspicious activities through a user-friendly platform.

The Nigerian government and its security agencies have struggled to effectively harness Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in combating insecurity, particularly against the backdrop of increasing threats from bandits, kidnappers, and Boko Haram. Despite the proliferation of digital tools, these groups have continuously utilized smartphones, the internet, and social media platforms to orchestrate their inhumane activities, showcasing their arsenals, captives, camps in the interior of forests they occupied, and atrocities seamlessly and fearlessly, yet the security agents find it difficult to even track or intercept them using the available software or hardware as the case may be.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this situation is how these criminal organizations leverage technology to communicate and coordinate their operations. For instance, bandits often use encrypted messaging apps to plan attacks and share information about potential targets. They also utilize social media platforms to display captured victims, instilling fear in communities while simultaneously promoting their prominence. This digital presence not only aids in recruitment but also enhances their operational efficiency, allowing them to evade law enforcement efforts.

More so, the Nigerian government's inability to track these online activities has been compounded by weak cyber security measures and inadequate legal frameworks. Reports indicate that government databases have been compromised multiple times, exposing sensitive information that could be exploited by criminals.<sup>xviii</sup> The lack of a strong data protection infrastructure has made it difficult for authorities to monitor or respond effectively to these threats. For example, despite having one of the strongest data-protection policies in Africa, Nigeria's enforcement mechanisms remain severely lacking.<sup>xix</sup>

Corruption within the government and other security agencies further complicates the issue. Resources intended for cyber security are often mismanaged or diverted due to procurement fraud and favoritism, leading to substandard security systems that fail to protect critical data. This culture of impunity not only undermines public trust but also



creates an environment where criminal elements can operate with relative freedom. It is important to stress at this juncture that while the potential for ICT to enhance security in Nigeria exists, the government's failure to implement effective strategies has allowed bandits and terrorists to exploit digital platforms for their gain. Addressing these shortcomings is crucial for restoring safety and security across the nation.

### **Problems Of Information and Communication Technology On National Security In Nigeria**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) poses both opportunities and challenges to national security in Nigeria. While ICT facilitates communication, data sharing, and economic growth, it also presents vulnerabilities like cyberattacks, data breaches, and the spread of misinformation. These threats can disrupt critical infrastructure, undermine national security, and erode public trust. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including robust cybersecurity measures, digital literacy programs, and legal frameworks to protect citizens and national interests in the digital age. These are some of the problems or challenges of ICT as it affects national security in Nigeria.

Poor funding and utilization of ICT equipment: The problem of poor funding and bad utilization of funds can be seen in the light of government and NGO's not providing adequate money to purchase necessary equipment and gadgets needed to pursue security.<sup>xx</sup>

Poor governance and corruption: Our leaders have not been able to do anything about the high level of corruption in the country and this is affecting ICT and security in the country. The government has not been able to invest much to tackle internet-related fraud and insecurity. Bandits and other non-state actors are taking advantage of the government's shortcomings in this aspect.

Unpatriotic conduct of security personnel: Most of our security personnel are not devoted to their assignment due to poor incentives/motivation, while others are not properly educated but made it to the recruitment stage. Thus, this poor education has affected their patriotism such that they feel tempted at any given opportunity to compromise. Loyalty to the nation is being eroded by some of the security personnel.

Poor and erratic power supply: The epileptic and sinusoidal nature of the power supply has been a great and concurrent problem affecting the ICT usage for national security.<sup>xxi</sup>



Inadequate competent manpower: Competent manpower in the country is not enough to handle ICT. Also, some drift out of the country in search of greener pastures in overseas countries has negatively affected ICT usage and operations in the country.

Poor infrastructural development and ICT Tools: The nature of the infrastructure e.g. road, railway, and air etc. are nothing to write home about and this does not create room for ICT development as a tool for security. Where there seem to be ICT tools that would enhance the fight against insecurity, they are inadequate or overstretched to meet the demand at a given time and place. For instance, the machine used for tracking individuals through their mobile phones, when such a need arises is usually not enough. Often the police would have to send information to their national headquarters in Abuja to track someone in say Kano or Maiduguri just because state police commands either do not have any or the ones they have cannot contain the demand in their respective commands or state.

### **Information And Communication Technology As A Tool For Fighting Insecurity**

There have been various calls for the use of ICT tools to tackle security problems in Nigeria. Computer Warehouse Group Plc (CWG) and Huawei have jointly advised the federal government to deploy Internet Protocol surveillance as a technological solution to insecurity challenges facing the country. The greatest contemporary challenge to national security is the insurgency orchestrated by the Islamic sect called Boko Haram. Not until 2009, insurgency and its concomitant effects (both emotional and physical) were alien to Nigeria, most especially, the North Eastern regions of the country; and recently in Kano, Kaduna in the North Western States, Plateau State, and Abuja in the North Central where there have been ceaseless terrorist attacks. The problem led to the Federal Government's declaration of a state of emergency in the three affected states in North Eastern Nigeria in 2012<sup>xxii</sup>. The Government has recently further sought the assistance of foreign nations that are technologically developed such as the USA, France, Britain, Israel, and others to tackle the menace of the Boko-Haram insurgency. The persistence of insecurity has been claiming precious lives of citizenry and government efforts to tackle the problem through various menial methods and approaches such as the use of police, military, vigilante and local hunters seem not to be yielding success.<sup>xxiii</sup> But deploying technology, through the use of ICT devices such as computers, internet, mobile phones, close circuit television (CCTV), surveillance cameras, social network analysis, biometry surveillance, data mining, satellite imagery, and IP devices,



the satellite would produce the desired results." Another strong argument is that besides its speed, technology-driven surveillance and intelligence gathering cost less in terms of men and logistics. Reports show that the United States and some countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and even Africa are taking proactive steps at checkmating threats to their national security by latching onto revolutions in ICT. Nigerians watched in amazement how America deployed its security system to track down the April 13, 2013 Boston Marathon bombers. Similarly, in less than five minutes the images of the two men who hacked down a brave soldier on London Street on May 22, 2013, appeared on television screens around the world. There were no guesses in those scenarios, which make many Nigerians disturbed by the many cases of unresolved high-profile crimes in the country. The role of ICT in tackling crime in modern times cannot be overemphasized going by the modern tactics deployed by the Western world in tackling crimes.<sup>xxiv</sup> The solution to the nation's insecurity challenges lies in science and technology such as the use of satellite technology to monitor the activities of the insurgents. But of course, the cause of the crisis must be identified.

It is important to note that digital technology served as a tool for combating security challenges without much recourse to military warfare. Unfortunately, the story is different in Nigeria as different agents of the underworld i.e. terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, etc made use of mobile phones before, during, and after unleashing their usual mayhem or crime without being apprehended, tackled, or neutralized. In essence, insecurity and other crimes are freely and conveniently committed with the aid of digital technology. Hence, digital technology has not been properly utilized in Nigeria to be able to fight or trace any form of crime.

Security threats, concerns, and other challenges in the country are multi-dimensional in nature and scope. Traditionally, crime and security establishments throughout Nigeria have operated largely bureaucratic, paper-based institutions which have stifled the process of information sharing, it is therefore important to recognize that the traditional ways of meeting the challenges need to be expanded to encompass new non-traditional threats. The use of ICT is slowly emerging as one response to critical issues faced in the country. As such a number ICT implementations are beginning to take shape in response to incidents that have affected the country which will lay the foundation for further evaluation of regulatory mechanisms for handling crimes in the country some of them include: Automated Fingerprinting Information Systems (AFIS) e.g. the introduction of the fingerprint authentication system during JAMB examination registration and election process, Mobile Banking, Global System for Mobile



Communication in almost all parts of the country, Use of Geographic Information Systems, e-commerce etc.<sup>xv</sup> Also, various sectors of the crime and security forces have been moving toward the implementation and use of ICT technology such as the Public Security Communications System (PSCS) to install CCTV cameras in Lagos and Abuja, to monitor crimes and address criminality to assist the police their efforts. However, there is a question/problem of the sustainability of these ICT interventions /projects after their introduction. Most of the qualified ICT professionals who can handle them prefer to migrate to more developed countries.

However, despite these developments the use of digital technology has not yielded positive results in the fight against insecurity. Some experts and pundits think that it is the lackadaisical attitude and whimsical greed of those directly or indirectly involved in this fight that has prevented a positive result in this regard. What is obvious is how impossible it is to kidnap someone in say Canada or China using a Smartphone or any of the encrypted means of communication to negotiate ransom seamlessly without the authorities being able to track and intercept the actors and arrest them subsequently. Hence there is a need to investigate why despite the billions of naira budgeted yearly to curb and halt the security challenges facing the country, the situation has continued unabated.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, therefore, one can rightly conclude that the use of ICT in fighting insecurity has not been properly done since these bandits as well as other non-state actors have continued to flaunt their videos depicting the kind of atrocities they commit. This means the application of ICT in this war is inadequate. Therefore, since the issue of defense and national security is vested in the hands of the government, there is an urgent need for the government to hold its security agents responsible for the lingering insecurity and anyone found wanting should be brought to book with immediate effect to serve as a deterrent to would-be violators. More so, the government needs to engage experts who specialize in the use of digital technology to further train our security personnel and ensure their effectiveness. Beyond the procurement of arms and ammunition, there is a need to invest heavily in digital technology both software and hardware that is vital and useful for this fight. However, much needs to be done in the aspect of individual data collection and preservation to be able to monitor and curb crime and other related offenses. The paper also observed that the spate of insecurity and crime in the age of digital technology in Nigeria is worrisome and alarming.

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