



Received: 19-11-2024  
Accepted: 29-12-2024

## International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

### Navigating Insecurity and Migration Trends in Nigeria, (2019-2023)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2025.5.1.3633>

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#### Abstract

Nigeria has confronted a multitude of security challenges in recent years, including the Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, and the rise of banditry, which have significantly impacted the country's population. These security threats have compelled large-scale internal displacement and migration, leading to complex social, economic, and political consequences. This study explores insecurity and migration patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023. The study adopted the Integrated Theory of Forced Migration and data were sourced from secondary sources such as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Displacement Tracking Matrix, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and National Population Commission (NPC), International organizations' reports and databases, such as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

(IDMC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Academic research publications, policy briefs, and civil society organizations. The data collected were analyzed with content analysis and the findings revealed that, the far-reaching consequences of insecurity on migration patterns include increased Displacement. the disruption of livelihoods and economic activities, the strain on public services and infrastructure in host communities, and exposure to human trafficking and exploitation. Thus, the study concluded that addressing the underlying causes of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality, and ethnic/religious tensions, will be key to alleviating the humanitarian crisis and promoting long-lasting solutions for displaced populations.

**Keywords:** Banditry, Boko Haram Insurgency, Farmer-Herder Conflicts, Human Trafficking, Internal Displacement, Insecurity, Kidnapping, Migration Pattern, Nigeria, Poverty

#### Introduction

Nigeria has faced numerous security challenges recently, significantly impacting its citizens' migration patterns. The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, clashes between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt region, and other forms of violence have all contributed to population displacement and migration within and from the country. According to a report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Nigeria had over 2.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as at the end of 2019, many of whom were forced to flee their homes due to the Boko Haram insurgency (IDMC, 2020) <sup>[30]</sup>. Adewale (2021) <sup>[5]</sup> noted that the Boko Haram crisis has led to increased rural-urban migration in the northeastern states as people seek safer havens in urban areas. Furthermore, the conflicts between farmers and herders, particularly the Fulani herders, have also contributed to migration patterns in Nigeria. Odo and Nwankwo (2020) <sup>[42]</sup> examined how these conflicts have forced farmers and pastoralists to seek more secure areas to practice their livelihoods, leading to displacement and migration. Akinyemi and Akanle (2018) <sup>[13]</sup> investigated the relationship between insecurity and international migration from Nigeria, finding that the Boko Haram insurgency and other security challenges have driven some Nigerians to seek refuge in different countries. Nigeria has encountered many security challenges in recent years, profoundly impacting its citizens' migration patterns. The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, conflicts between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt region, and other forms of violence have all contributed to significant population displacement and migration, both within the country and internationally. This study examined the trends of insecurity on migration patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023, drawing on the existing scholarly literature and recent data.

Several studies have examined the various security threats and their influence on internal and international migration. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast Nigeria has been a significant driver of internal displacement and migration within the country. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the Boko Haram conflict has led to the displacement of over 2.7 million people in Nigeria as at the end of 2019 (IDMC, 2020) <sup>[30]</sup>. In their study, Onuoha (2020) <sup>[46]</sup> and Odo and Nwankwo (2020) <sup>[42]</sup>, found out that the attacks, killings, and destruction of communities by Boko Haram have forced many individuals and families to flee their homes and seek refuge in more secure areas, often leading to rural-urban migration patterns. The conflicts between farmers and herders, particularly the Fulani herders, in the Middle Belt region have also contributed to significant population displacement and migration. Odo and Nwankwo (2020) <sup>[42]</sup> found that the violent clashes between these two groups have led to the forced displacement of both agricultural and pastoral communities as they seek safer areas to practice their livelihoods, and this has resulted in the migration of individuals and families within the region and other parts of the country.

Beyond the Northeast and Middle Belt regions, scholars have also examined the impact of bigger security challenges, such as kidnappings, communal clashes, and banditry, on international migration from Nigeria. Similarly, Akinyemi and Akanle (2018) <sup>[13]</sup> observed that the country's persistent insecurity has compelled some individuals and families to seek refuge in other countries, leading to increased international migration, particularly to neighboring countries and Europe.

Existing studies have also highlighted the socioeconomic, demographic, and contextual factors that have shaped migration patterns in response to Nigeria's various security threats. Factors such as age, gender, economic status, and access to resources have influenced individuals' and households' ability to migrate in the face of insecurity (Onuoha, 2020; Akinyemi & Akanle, 2018) <sup>[46, 13]</sup>. However, the existing literature reviewed mainly focused on the period preceding 2019, hence there is a need for more current empirical evidence on the impact of insecurity on migration trends in Nigeria during the 2019-2023 period. This study addresses this lacuna and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationship between security and migration in the Nigeria.

### Theoretical Framework

Castles' Integrated Theory of Forced Migration provided a comprehensive approach to understanding the complex drivers and dynamics of forced displacement and migration. This approach aligned well with the context of Nigeria's security challenges and their impact on internal mobility. According to Castles (2003) <sup>[20]</sup>, the critical elements of the Integrated Theory of Forced Migration include:

**Macro-level factors:** Political, economic, social, and environmental conditions that create the structural causes of forced migration, such as conflict, persecution, natural disasters, and development-induced displacement.

**Meso-level factors:** These are the intermediate-level factors that mediate the macro-level conditions and the individual's decision to migrate, such as the role of social networks, institutional and organizational structures, and access to information.

**Micro-level factors:** These are the individual, household, and community-level factors that shape the decision-making process and the experience of displaced people, including personal characteristics, household dynamics, and community-level coping strategies. The migration process encompasses the movement of displaced people, the experiences during transit and upon arrival in host communities, and the interactions between migrants and host societies. The outcomes of forced migration: These include the socioeconomic, political, and cultural impacts on both the displaced populations and the host communities, as well as the long-term consequences for development and sustainability.

The Integrated Theory of Forced Migration provided a holistic framework to analyze the complex interplay between macro-level security threats, meso-level institutional and social factors, and micro-level individual and household considerations that shape the patterns and experiences of internal displacement and migration in contemporary Nigeria.

### *Analyzing Insecurity and Migration Patterns in Contemporary Nigeria from 2019 to 2023 through the lens of Castles' (2003) <sup>[20]</sup> Integrated Theory of Forced Migration:*

**Macro-level factors:** The security challenges in Nigeria during this period were mainly motivated by the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, farmer-herder conflicts across the Middle Belt region, and the rise of banditry and kidnapping in different parts of the country (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014 <sup>[43]</sup>; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). These prevalent conflicts, combined with economic crises and environmental degradation, have generated the structural conditions for forced displacement and migration. Under the Meso-level factors, The character of social networks, community-based organizations, and local governance structures has been central in expediting the impact of security threats and assisting the movement of displaced populations (Abubakar & Yamadi, 2013) <sup>[2]</sup>. The presence and effectiveness of these intermediate-level institutions has influenced the scale, destination, and integration of internal migrants in host communities. Also in the Micro-level factors: factors such as nearness to conflict zones, access to resources, household composition, and livelihood strategies has informed the decision-making process and experiences of displaced people (Adewale, 2016; Ibeanu, 2020) <sup>[6, 27]</sup>. The changeable coping capacities and flexibility of displaced populations have contributed to the differences in migration patterns.

**The migration process:** The movement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and rural-to-urban migrants has been characterized by disruptions, hardships, and susceptibilities during transit and upon arrival in host communities (IDMC, 2021 <sup>[29]</sup>; IOM, 2021). Challenges such as restricted access to essential services, lack of livelihood opportunities, and social pressures have informed displaced people's integration and long-term consequences.

**Penalties of forced migration:** Mass displacement and migration determined by insecurity in Nigeria have had significant impacts on the social, economic, and political changing aspects of both the origin and receiving communities (Akinola & Tella, 2013; Isiugo-Abanihe & Obono, 2019) <sup>[12, 37]</sup>. These include stress on urban infrastructure and public services, disruption of local

economies, and possible social and political tensions.

### Materials and Methods

Secondary data from Textbooks, Journal articles, Government reports, and statistics from agencies such as the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and National Population Commission (NPC), International organizations' reports and databases, such as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The data generated were analyzed using content analysis.

### Results and Discussions

#### *The trends of insecurity on migration patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023*

The trend of insecurity and migration patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023 has been consistent and worrisome in terms of increase in internal displacement and disruption of population movements. The Boko Haram insurgency has continued to be a major source of insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern region of the country.

The ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern region of Nigeria has been a significant driver of internal displacement. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), "Nigeria documented more than 2.7 million new displacements linked with conflict and violence in 2019, one of the highest figures globally" (IDMC, 2020) [30]. This trend has persisted, with the IDMC reporting that "the number of people displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria remained high, with over 2.9 million people displaced as of the end at 2021" (IDMC, 2022:7) [28]. In 2019, Boko Haram carried out numerous attacks, including the killing of at least 30 people in Borno state (Adebayo, 2019) [4]. The group's activities have displaced millions of people and disrupted the lives of countless Nigerians (UNHCR, 2022) [58].

#### Displacement due to Boko Haram Insurgency:

The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria has led to the displacement of millions of people. In 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that over 2 million people had been displaced by the conflict in the Lake Chad region, which includes parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (UNHCR, 2019) [59]. As of 2022, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria due to the Boko Haram conflict is estimated to be over 2.2 million (UNHCR, 2022) [58]. Intensification of farmer-herder conflicts: The ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders, mainly over access to land and resources, has also contributed to increased internal displacement and migration patterns within Nigeria. A study conducted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) found out that "the farmer-herder conflicts have displaced hundreds of thousands of people and disrupted the lives of millions" (ICG, 2020) [31]. Clashes between farmers and herders have escalated in recent years, leading to widespread violence and insecurity in various parts of Nigeria. Clashes between farmers and herders have also led to significant displacement of people in various parts of Nigeria. In 2019, the International Crisis Group reported that the farmer-herder conflict had displaced over 300,000 people in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria (International Crisis Group,

2019) In 2021, at least 88 people were killed in communal clashes between farmers and herders in Plateau State (Aljazeera, 2021) [10].

These conflicts have disrupted agricultural activities, displaced communities, and contributed to a worsening humanitarian crisis in affected regions (Mercy Corps, 2019) [38].

This trend has continued, with the ICG stating that "the farmer-herder conflicts have become one of the deadliest security challenges confronting Nigeria, resulting in the displacement of over 300,000 people in the first half of 2021 alone" (ICG, 2021) [33].

According to (Mercy Corps, 2019) [38] the displacement of communities has disrupted their livelihoods and access to essential services, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in affected areas (Mercy Corps, 2019) [38].

Upsurge in kidnapping and Banditry: The rising incidence of kidnapping and banditry along major highways in Nigeria has disrupted the movement of people and goods, leading to disruptions in economic activities and supply chains. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) stated that "the rise of kidnapping and banditry on the major highways in Nigeria has increased, disrupting the movement of people and goods" (ACSS, 2021) [8]. This tendency has continued to escalate in frequency and scale of kidnapping incidents, causing general fear and disrupting transportation networks (ACSS, 2022) [9].

Banditry and kidnapping for ransom have become widespread in various parts of Nigeria, particularly in the northwestern and central regions.

In 2022, the abduction of over 100 students from a school in Kebbi state highlighted the persistent threat of kidnapping in the country (BBC, 2022) [18].

These criminal activities have disrupted economic activities, undermined security, and caused significant distress among the affected communities (Sahara Reporters, 2023) [55].

Kidnapping of School Children: In December 2020, over 300 students were abducted from their school in Kankara, Katsina State (BBC, 2020) [19].

In February 2021, over 300 schoolgirls were kidnapped from their school in Jangebe, Zamfara State (Al Jazeera, 2021).

#### Kidnapping of Travellers and Commuters:

In May 2021, over 30 people were kidnapped from a bus in Sokoto State (Premium Times, 2021) [50]. In July 2022, over 20 people were abducted from a highway in Kaduna State (The Punch, 2022) [53]. In January 2023, several people were kidnapped from a train station in Kaduna State (Channels Television, 2023) [21].

Kidnapping of Oil Workers and Expatriates: In October 2019, two oil workers were kidnapped in Bayelsa State (Vanguard, 2019) [54].

In November 2022, three expatriate workers were abducted in Ondo State (The Guardian, 2022) [51].

In January 2023, five oil workers were kidnapped in Rivers State (Punch, 2023) [52].

The rise of banditry and kidnapping for ransom in parts of Nigeria has also led to the displacement of people, and the fear of being targeted by bandits has forced some communities to flee their homes, seeking safety in other areas (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Communal clashes and ethnic tensions: Ongoing communal clashes and ethnic tensions in various regions of Nigeria have also contributed to internal displacement and migration

patterns. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2021) <sup>[56]</sup>, over 2.1 million people were internally displaced in Nigeria due to communal clashes and insecurity as at 2021. This trend has remained persistent, with the OCHA emphasizing that the protracted nature of the communal conflicts in Nigeria has led to continued displacement and disruption of lives and livelihoods (OCHA, 2022) <sup>[57]</sup>.

The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the vulnerabilities of migrants and displaced populations in Nigeria. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that the COVID-19 epidemic has aggravated the existing vulnerabilities of migrants and displaced populations in Nigeria, exposing them to increased dangers (IOM, 2021) <sup>[36]</sup>. This development has continued, revealing that 'the pandemic's economic and social impact has amplified the suffering of displaced and migrant communities in Nigeria' (IOM, 2022: 63) <sup>[35]</sup>.

The above trends has had significant consequences for affected communities and the country, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the underlying causes of insecurity and support the displaced populations.

### ***The Impact of Insecurity on Migration Patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023***

The Impact of insecurity on migration patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023 are as follows:

#### **1. Humanitarian Crisis and Displacement:**

- The rise of insecurity, particularly due to the Boko Haram insurgency and other armed conflicts, has led to a massive humanitarian crisis in Nigeria (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014) <sup>[49]</sup>.
- Millions of Nigerians have been displaced from their homes, with many seeking refuge in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps or neighboring countries (Mustapha & Salihu, 2017) <sup>[40]</sup>.
- The displacement of people has resulted in a breakdown of social structures, disruption of livelihoods, and increased pressure on limited resources in host communities (Olajide *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[44]</sup>.

The persistent insecurity triggered by factors such as the Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, and communal clashes has led to a significant increase in internal displacement within Nigeria. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Nigeria recorded over 2.7 million new displacements associated with conflict and violence in 2019 alone (IDMC, 2020) <sup>[30]</sup>, and 2.9 million by 2021 (IDMC, 2022) <sup>[28]</sup>.

#### **2. Rural-urban migration:**

The instability and violence in rural areas have driven many Nigerians to seek refuge in urban centers. A study by the International Crisis Group (ICG) found that "the farmer-herder conflicts have displaced hundreds of thousands of people and disrupted the lives of millions, leading to a significant rural-to-urban migration" (ICG, 2020) <sup>[31]</sup>.

#### **3. Disruption of livelihood and economic activities:**

- Insecurity has had a severe impact on Nigeria's economy, as it has disrupted trade, investment, and economic activities in affected regions (Akande *et al.*,

2019) <sup>[11]</sup>.

- Businesses have been forced to close or relocate, leading to job losses and reduced economic productivity (Alao *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[14]</sup>.
- The cost of security measures and the diversion of resources to address insecurity have placed a significant burden on the government's budget, reducing funds available for social services and development projects (Eme & Anyadike, 2013) <sup>[23]</sup>. Insecurity has severely impacted Nigerians' livelihoods and economic activities, particularly in the agricultural sector. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) reported that the rising incidence of kidnapping and banditry on major highways in Nigeria has discouraged the movement of people and goods, thereby disrupting economic activities and supply chains (ACSS, 2021) <sup>[8]</sup>.

#### **4. Political Tensions:**

- Insecurity has undermined the government's legitimacy and its ability to provide basic security and services to its citizens (Eniola & Akintunde, 2014) <sup>[24]</sup>.
- The diversion of resources and attention to address security challenges has hampered the government's ability to focus on other pressing issues, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development (Onuoha, 2014) <sup>[47]</sup>.
- Insecurity has also fueled political tensions and contributed to the rise of secessionist movements, as some groups feel that the government is not doing enough to protect their interests (Ering & Akpan, 2016) <sup>[25]</sup>.

#### **5. The strain on public services and infrastructure:**

The influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into urban areas has significantly strained the public services and infrastructure of host communities. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted that the dense population of the internally displaced in Nigeria has overwhelmed the capacity of host communities to provide basic services and support (OCHA, 2021) <sup>[56]</sup>.

#### **6. Exposure to Human trafficking and exploitation:**

Insecurity and displacement have increased the vulnerability of Nigerians, particularly women and children, to human trafficking and exploitation. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that "the COVID-19 pandemic has also worsened the existing vulnerabilities of migrants and displaced populations in Nigeria, exposing them to heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation" (IOM, 2021) <sup>[36]</sup>.

#### **7. Disruption of social cohesion and community ties:**

- Insecurity has eroded social cohesion and trust within communities, as people become more suspicious of their neighbors and less willing to engage in communal activities (Alozieuwa, 2012) <sup>[16]</sup>.
- The breakdown of social structures has led to a rise in crime, including kidnapping, armed robbery, and human trafficking, further exacerbating the sense of insecurity (Eme & Anyadike, 2013) <sup>[23]</sup>.
- The trauma and psychological impact of living in a state of constant fear and uncertainty can have lasting effects on individuals and communities (Chukwuma &



Akinola, 2016)<sup>[22]</sup>. The displacement of people due to insecurity has also led to the disruption of social cohesion and community ties, which can have long-term consequences for social and political stability. The ICG report highlighted that "the farmer-herder conflicts have eroded social cohesion and trust between communities" (ICG, 2020)<sup>[31]</sup>.

### 8. Regional Instability:

- The spillover effects of insecurity in Nigeria have contributed to regional instability, as armed groups and criminal networks operate across borders (Ewi & Aning, 2006)<sup>[26]</sup>.
- The influx of refugees and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have exacerbated tensions in neighboring countries, posing a threat to regional security (Oyewole, 2015)<sup>[48]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Examining the impact of insecurity on migration patterns in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023, has revealed a deeply concerning situation. The escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping and banditry, and communal clashes have all contributed to a significant increase in internal displacement and disruption of population movements within the country. These security challenges have had far-reaching consequences, including the Humanitarian crisis and displacement, disruption of livelihoods and economic activities, the strain on public services and infrastructure in host communities, political tensions the heightened vulnerability of displaced populations to trafficking and exploitation, and the erosion of social cohesion and community ties and regional instability.

These enduring security issues underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated efforts to address the root causes of insecurity and support the affected communities.

Failure to do so will lead to continued displacement, disruption of social and economic systems, and the perpetuation of the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

The Government should:

- Improve security measures and strengthen the capacity of security forces:
- Increase the deployment of security personnel and improve coordination between various security agencies to effectively combat the Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping, and communal clashes.
- Provide security forces with adequate training, equipment, and resources to enhance their operational capabilities and responsiveness.
  - Implement robust intelligence-gathering and information-sharing mechanisms to identify and address emerging security threats proactively.
- Address the root causes of insecurity:
  - Implement comprehensive conflict resolution and peace building strategies to mediate and resolve the underlying drivers of conflicts, such as competition over land and resources, ethnic and religious tensions, and socioeconomic inequalities.

- Invest in inclusive and sustainable development programs that address the socioeconomic grievances and inequalities that contribute to the emergence of armed groups and social unrest.
- Promote dialogue and reconciliation between communities affected by conflicts to rebuild trust and social cohesion.
- Strengthen support and protection for displaced populations:
  - Enhance the capacity of the government and humanitarian organizations to provide adequate shelter, food, healthcare, and other essential services to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities.
- Implement robust measures to prevent and respond to human trafficking and exploitation, mainly targeting women and children among displaced populations.
  - Facilitate the safe, voluntary, and dignified return or resettlement of IDPs, focusing on restoring their livelihoods and reintegrating them into their communities.
- Improve coordination and collaboration among stakeholders:
  - Foster more muscular coordination and information-sharing among federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as with international organizations and civil society, to streamline the humanitarian response and address the complex challenges of internal displacement.
  - Engage with local communities and traditional leaders to better understand the unique needs and dynamics of the affected regions and incorporate their perspectives into designing and implementing interventions.
- Mobilize adequate and sustained funding from the government, international donors, and the private sector to support long-term solutions for addressing insecurity and its Impact on migration patterns.

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