



ASSESSMENT ON THE IMPACT OF INSECURITY ON CHURCH GROWTH IN NORTH CENTRAL GEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was carried out to assess the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the Church in North central Geo-political Zone of Nigeria. The objective of the study was to assess the level of physical destruction on the church members and the church as an institution. The total population comprised of Christians in six states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) that made up North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria was 12,020,405. One thousand, six hundred and fifty-seven (1,657) respondents were randomly sampled to represent the total population. Descriptive survey design was used for the study and two instruments were employed to collect data: Questionnaire and Interview. The finding revealed that, the physical growth of the has reduced in population as a result of destruction of humans, church structures and relocation. The study recommends that, protection of Christians and their property should be a paramount thing to the government and any one that violates such should be punished as the law stipulates so as to serve as a deterrent to others; and also, all property of churches that were looted, vandalized, burnt and destroyed should be rebuilt or compensated by the government and wealthy Nigerians.

Key Words: Psychological Wellbeing, Insecurity, Church Growth

Introduction

Different scholars have established the fact that, there is insecurity in Nigeria and the world at large. This is because no one is secured and sure of his or her safety presently. Among the scholars that share their views concerning the existence of global insecurity include: Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robara (2013), state that, the world is not secured because of the absence of protection and safety it is experiencing while Udoh (2015) opines that, Nigeria's situation is being characterized with fear or anxiety due to the absence of protection. Also, Pam (2012) and Thurson (2016) affirm that, the level of insecurity globally may end many countries ungovernable. Poling (2013) asserts that, Nigeria is experiencing a great danger or threat as a result of insecurity.

The issue of insecurity has become a global challenge, as seen by the activities of the terrorist group that bombed the American World Trade Centre in 2001. This episode is still fresh in the memory of many people due to the massive destruction of innocent lives and hard-earned property. Some of the deadly terrorist groups in the world that destroy human lives and property, set back in social, economic and national development and were a threat to peace includes: Revolutionary Army Force of Columbia, the Nexalite in India which fought the Upper Class to overthrow the government, Irish Republican Army in Europe which emerged from Irish Volunteers in 1913, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Bhattacharyya, 2016).

Similarly, African continent was not free from experiencing insecurity threats from terrorist groups like Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Al-Shabaab in Somalia which fought for civil wars and such wars paved room for rebel groups that terrorized societies and various governments of African nations. Some of the motivational factors liable to the activities of these terrorist groups could be accredited to religious and faith base, struggles for power, economic and resource control, depending on the continent, country, region, state and community. The activities of the terrorist groups that breed insecurity is not strange. This is because their activities have

been in the past, but such activities were not too deadly and pronounced like what is obtainable in the world today (Solomon, 2012 & Sige, 2015).

Insecurity has become a burning issue that has attracted daily discussion by many Nigerians. It is a subject of discussion captured on social media, newspapers, radio stations and television houses almost on a daily basis. Insecurity has threatened the relatively world peace. Hardly does a day passed without hearing cases of killings, bombing, kidnapping and herders' conflicts presently. The state of insecurity is making people an unsafe and are constantly in tense situation.

Nigeria as a nation that enjoyed relatively peace also tested this insecurity challenge ranging from civil war in 1967-1970, ethno-religious conflicts, Niger Delta Militants, Maitastine group which operated more in Adamawa, Borno, Kano, and Yobe states between 1980-1985. The country has experienced set back in physical and human development as a result of the activities of terrorists, particularly in the affected states. As those parts of the country were yet to be fully relieved from the activities of the above-mentioned terrorist activities, then came another deadly terrorist groups: like Boko-Haram, kidnapers and herders' conflicts with farmers. These terrorist groups today threaten the peace of the citizens through bombing, kidnapping, incessant conflicts and killing of innocent souls on a daily basis.

The activities of Boko-Haram, Kidnapping and Herders conflicts began in 1996, but became more pronounced in 2003. Though, kidnapping and herders' conflict with farmers began earlier, they became rampant in 2006. The Boko-Haram terrorists and herders' conflicts were mostly found in North Eastern States while kidnapping in Niger Delta region of the country. Today, they have increased their deadly activities in North Central Geo-Political Zone. The terrorist groups are adopting different strategies like incessant attacks and suicide bombing in business areas, government settings and Churches. One of their cardinal objectives is to establish an Islamic state and government in Nigeria, and the only way of actualizing their dream is to fight anyone that opposes them. They are against any form of western education.

Christianity in Nigeria dates back to 15th century when the Portuguese introduced Christianity in Benin and Warri. By 1893-1907, the missionaries made concerted efforts to see to the planting and spread of Christianity to other parts of Nigeria despite the harsh climate and other constituted factors. Looking at Christianity from the beginning, people reluctantly denounced their traditions for the new faith until later, they started to embrace it. Penetration of Christianity and establishment of churches in North Central Zone took a gradual process with slow human and physical structures (Peter, 2019).

Mission work in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria dates back to 19th century and this led to the emergence of Churches through the works of Rolland Bingham, Walter Gowans, and Thomas Kent in 1907. The Sudan United Mission (SUM) joined the Serving in Missions (SIM) formerly Sudan Interior Mission whose works concentrated in Benue, Plateau, Ilorin and later, other parts of the zone. This period was characterized by missionary activities. The missionaries who came were trained and really prepared, though many experienced unfavourable climatic conditions. Though, there was language barrier that resulted in the use of interpreters and the missionaries themselves learning the indigenous languages, trained Nigerian Ministers started to emerge, churches and later, schools and hospitals were established. More importantly, baptism was administered to the converts as an indelible mark for the new faith they had embraced and the old ways they had forsaken (Christian Association of Nigeria, 2020).

Between 2000-2008, the expansion and increase of churches, numerical strength of members and structures was high compared to what it is at this present dispensation. The region experienced an influx of church growth in the social, numerical, physical, psychological, economical and religious/moral aspects. There was numerical strength of churches, members and physical structures with relative peace enjoyed between Christians and non-Christians until 2009. Similarly, there was healthy competition by almost all denominations in the establishment of churches and physical structures with branches all over.

North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria was carved from Northern Nigeria and it comprises of six (6) states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), making a total of seven (7), namely: Kwara, Plateau, Niger, Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa and Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). With the coming of Christianity in the region, the numerical strength of Christians were as follows: Benue had 81% Christians while Kogi had 51.3%

Christians, Kwara had 41.7% Christians, Nasarawa had 51.7% Christians, Niger had 45% Christians, Plateau had 73.3% Christians while FCT had 55.3% Christians. This gives a total population of twelve million, twenty thousand, four hundred and five (12,020,405) Christians with twelve thousand, two hundred and thirteen (12,213) local assemblies that registered with Christian Association of Nigeria (Peter, 2019 & Christian Association of Nigeria, 2020). The above figures clearly indicate that, Christians are more populated in the zone than other religions like Islam and adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR).

Furthermore, on the aspect of existing physical developmental projects (structures), the region is blessed with tourist centres, educational institutions, factories, industries, financial institutions and solid minerals which are owned by the government and some by private individuals and Churches. The zone had experienced relative peace, human and physical development until 2009. Currently, the opposite is being experienced where insecurity is phasing away the trust, care, and love that bind people together irrespective of tribal and ethno-religious affiliation. With the emergence of terrorists and their deadly activities from 2009, the region seems to be witnessing a decrease in the expansion of churches, human and physical structures. It is this development that motivated the study on “Assessment on the Physical Impact of Insecurity on Church Growth in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria, 2009-2019”.

Statement of the Problem

The role of the Church in national development particularly in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria cannot be over-estimated. As the church was expanding numerically in human and physical structures, then the emergence of deadly insecurity forces like Boko-Haram, Kidnappers, Herders conflicts destabilized the relative peace that used to be enjoyed. From 2009-2019, Global Peace Index (2021) reported that, over 20,000 lives have been lost, millions of people displaced, thousands of innocent Nigerians kidnapped and several Churches burnt with property worth millions of naira. This has subjected the Church to danger, pains and penury which has become a source of worry and concern to the Church in the zone. Apart from the above, Christian farmers are under the danger and threats of facing incessant attacks and invasion of their farmlands by herders, leading to the destruction of their agricultural products and lost of lives.

With the prevailing situations bothering the Church in the zone, the Federal Government in collaboration with the States and Local Governments who are the custodians and defenders of lives and property of her citizens claimed to have made possible efforts within their power to address the problem but to no avail. Despite the mechanisms put in place by the governments to end the insecurity challenge through sending of military and paramilitary agencies to the affected areas, yet, the persistent rate of insecurity is increasing on almost a daily basis. With the lost of confidence in the government in addressing the plight of insecurity for her citizens in the zone, church communities now are finding means of combating the challenge of insecurity within their power in minimizing the menace through the establishment of local security groups such as Vigilantees groups, request for police, civil defense and military personnel has not solved the insecurity challenge.

The Church is passing through hard times because terrorism that breeds insecurity is spreading like a wild fire against it. There is no week that passes without the occurrence of cases of unknown gunmen taking the lives of Church members on the streets, Church premises, apart from the cases of Churches and property being burnt and destroyed in the zone as a result of terrorist activities. The prevailing situation keeps on increasing every day. The continued challenges of insecurity is making Christians, Clergy and lay members, young and adults in rural and urban settlements across the zone express their fears, worries and concern for lack of protection by the government. The persistent insecurity in the areas of study prompted this study of assessing the physical impact it has on Church growth.

Objective of the Study

This study is aimed at assessing the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

Research Question

The research question is that, what is the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference on the views of single and married Christians about the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

Impact of Insecurity on Church Growth

Physical impact has to do with various destructions that insecurity has caused the affected churches and their communities by physical killings, destruction of structures, kidnapping and all forms of physical fatalities. Akorede et al. (2022), Akorede et al., (2023), Burton (2016), Bukari (2017), Avweromre (2018), Ikenga and Efebeh (2019) and Achumba et al. (2019) contend that, insecurity has destroyed several physical developmental structures, apart from killing and kidnapping globally.

Chepchirchir and Mberia (2019) share the same views with Avweromre (2018) because about 1,047 Christians were killed in 2017 in some parts of the country, apart from properties destroyed worth millions of naira. They add that, a Pastor and his family in a community were asked to denounce Christ and when they did not, they were butchered like animals while the church was burnt. Also, several hospitals have been vandalized by terrorists. They stress that, many people are forced to migrate to more secured localities for the safety of their lives, thus, leaving their hard-earned property.

Also, Avweromre (2018) subscribes to the opinions of Jacob (2018) that, insecurity has caused a great challenge in many communities in Nigeria where the burning of houses, churches and kidnapping of Clergy, people and school children became business of the day. Lokoko (2019) asserts that, there were churches that had a population of not less than one thousand (1,000) but today they are not up to four (400). Also, churches in Nigeria that had not less than 500 members during worship are now having less than 100 members during service as a result of insecurity threats. In the same vein, Mendose (2016) gives a picture of how the Maitastine terrorist group negatively affected so many churches in Maiduguri, Yola, Kano and Bauchi respectively. As a result of the activities of Maitastine, many people were killed and some fled from the affected communities and that affected the church numerically. Also, the economic strength of the church and members' religious and moral obligations was equally affected.

Okechukwu (2017) shares that, many churches in Northern Nigeria have lost valuable materials like schools, structures, worship Centres, hospital facilities, documents, vehicles, houses, farm products, apart from those brutally killed, kidnapped, tortured and displaced in different IDPs. In the same vein, Ikenga and Efebeh (2019) observe that, the impact of insecurity has led to millions of people, old and young fleeing their homes. With the emergence of insecurity in 2009, violence has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians in the entire country and forced millions of people to flee their homes and become internally displaced persons.

On the other hand, Mikailu (2022) shares the same views with Ndamson (2021) and Gunde (2022) that, today in Nigeria, insecurity has become a lucrative business where money is gained by some individuals without accountability. He stresses that, there are people in government who are promoting it directly or indirectly and may not want it to be addressed. He adds that, in some Christian communities, new churches have been built and donated with facilities for the betterment of their lives by some philanthropists and NGOs.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design and the target population are Christians from six states and Federal capital Territory (Abuja) that made up North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. A stratified random sample population of 1,764 respondents out of 12,020,405 was used for the study. A structured questionnaire and scheduled interview were the instruments employed for data collection. The data analysis was based on the responses from 1,657 respondents. The data was analyzed using Version 20 of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive data analysis was adopted using frequencies and simple percentages for demographic variable, mean scores for research question and independent sampled t-test for testing the hypothesis. The mean scores for the items were based on four-point Likert scale and the midpoint average for decision for items or variables was fixed at 2.50. This implies that, a mean score of 2.50 and above indicates agreement (positive response) with the suggested notion of items while mean score of below 2.50

implies disagreement (negative response). The information from the interview was used as supplementary data in the analysis. The hypothesis was tested with t-test statistics at 0.05 levels of significance.

Results and Discussions

The results are presented according to the demographic variables of the respondents based on marital status, research question and hypothesis.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Single	1,104	66.63
Married	553	33.37
Total	1,657	100.00

Table 1 reveals that, 1,104 (66.63%) of the respondents were singles while 553 (33.37%) were married. The distribution of respondents with regards to marital status shows that, the singles and married were fairly represented.

Research Question:

The research question is that, what is the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Views of the Respondents on Impact of Insecurity on the Physical Growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Some members were forced to migrate to more secured localities, thus reducing the church population	603	490	348	216	2.80
Some Christian communities have been destroyed, thereby reducing the membership of the church	711	531	303	112	3.11
Some local church assemblies were given projectors for the promotion of God’s work	162	213	1,127	155	2.31
Insecurity has led to the destruction of church buildings, thereby restricting gatherings during church programmes	591	743	163	160	3.07
Some Christian churches were built and donated with hospital facilities as a result of insecurity	97	389	909	262	2.19
Some church members have been killed, thereby reducing church population	861	390	269	137	3.19
Some church members acquired more vehicles and donated to the church for evangelism	109	223	1,243	82	2.22
Some members have been kidnapped, thus, affecting the membership size of the church	801	620	192	44	3.31
Closing down of some local church assemblies affect church growth	451	509	453	244	2.70
Cumulative mean					2.77

Decision mean = 2.50

Results in this table shows the mean responses of 2.80, 3.11, 2.31, 3.07, 2.19, 3.19, 2.22, 3.31 and 2.70. The cumulative mean value is 2.77. This value is above the mean value of 2.50. This implies that, despite the physical gains by some individuals, insecurity has negatively impacted the physical growth of the church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference on the opinions on single and married Christians about the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

Table 3: Views of Single and Married Christians about the Impact of Insecurity on the Physical Growth of the Church in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

S/N	Variables	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error	Df	t-cal	t-crit	P
1	Single	1104	2.7016	0.60123	0.01809	1655	1.44	1.96	0.23
2	Married	553	2.7201	0.62215	0.02645				

Calculated p > 0.05, calculated t < 1.96, at df 1655

Results of the independent sample t-test statistics in table 3 reveals that, there is no significant difference on the views of single and married respondents about the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the church in the study area. The reason is that, the calculated p-value of 0.23 is higher than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value 1.44 is lower than 1.96, at df =1655. This means that, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted and retained. The physical growth of the church has reduced in population as a result of destruction of humans, church structures and relocation.

Discussions

From the finding of the study, it was observed that, there was no significance difference in the views of single and married Christians about the impact of insecurity on the physical growth of the church. The study revealed that, the physical growth of the church has reduced in population as a result of destruction of humans, church structures and relocation. This finding strengthens the assertion of Achumba, Igbomereho, Akpor- Robara (2013), Burton (2016), Bukari (2017), Avweromre (2018), Ikenga and Efebeh (2019) who maintain that, insecurity has destroyed several physical structures, apart from global killings and kidnapping.

In the same vein, Chepchirchir and Mberia (2019) share the view with Avweromre (2018) and Jacob (2018) that, about 1,047 Christians were killed in 2017 in some parts of the country, apart from property worth millions of naira destroyed. It was buttressed that, a Pastor and his family in a community were asked to denounce Christ and when they did not, they were butchered like animals and the church was burnt and several hospitals were vandalized.

The above finding agrees with the views of Okechukwu (2017) that, many churches in Northern Nigeria have lost valuable materials like schools, structures, worship centres, hospital facilities, documents, vehicles, houses, farm products, apart from those brutally killed, kidnapped, tortured and displaced in different IDP camps. In the same vein, Ikenga and Efebeh (2019) observe that, the impact of insecurity has led to millions of people, old and young fleeing their homes. With the emergence of insecurity in 2009, violence has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians in the entire country and forced millions of people to flee their homes, thereby, becoming internally displaced persons.

Some Christian communities, churches, structures and property were either burnt, bombed or destroyed, thereby, affecting Christian gathering during church programmes. In their submission, the respondents expressed their concern, fears and worries on what the future of the church would be in the region if the menace is not addressed (Interviewee, 2,5,6, 7,8,9,11,15,16,17,19,24,26,30,34,37,39,41,43,44 and 45). This is in line with the observation of Lokoko (2019) who states that, Christian communities and churches have become like deserts because many were either bombed, burnt or destroyed with property worth millions of naira.

Interviewee (4,13,21,27,33 and 42) reported that, many Christians were forced to migrate to more secured localities for the fear of being attacked, thereby, leaving their communities and churches almost empty. This report concurred with the view of Mendose (2016) who states that, the killings and destruction that led to the relocation of members to more secured places, resulting to the closing down of some churches can be equated to how the Maitastine terrorist group negatively affected so many churches in Bauchi, Kano, Maiduguri and Yola respectively. Destruction of humans and infrastructures such as burning of Christian communities, churches, business centres, houses, closing down of some churches have led to unmeasurable lost of lives and property and this has affected the growth of the church.

On the other hand, Mikailu (2022) shares the same views with Ndamson (2021) and Gunde (2022) that, today in Nigeria, insecurity has become a lucrative business where money is gained by some individuals without

accountability. He stresses that, there are people in government who are promoting it directly or indirectly and may not want it to be addressed. He adds that, in some Christian communities, new churches have been built and donated with facilities for the betterment of their lives by some philanthropists and NGOs.

Conclusion

Based on the finding in this study, it can be concluded that: destruction of humans and infrastructures such as burning of Christian communities, churches, business centres, houses, closing down of some churches have led to unmeasurable lost of lives and property and this has affected the growth of the church.

Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Protection of Christians and their property should be a paramount thing to the government anyone that violates such should be punished as the law stipulates so as to serve as a deterrent to others.
2. All the property of churches that were looted, vandalized, burnt and destroyed should be rebuilt or compensated by the government and wealthy Nigerians.

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