**Review Article**

# Socio-Economic Factors and Urban Insecurity

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**Abstract:** The increasing rate of urbanization being experienced around the world is often touted as an indicator of economic boom without an adequate analysis of how it has become a recipe for insecurity. This paper explores the impact of socioeconomic factors on the increasing level of insecurity in urban areas. The paper further argues that urbanization experienced in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular is often driven by the search of greener pastures by rural youths, without any adequate plans by the government and other policy makers. The concept of insecurity as explored in the paper refers to a state of fear or anxiety from a perceived lack of protection. Using the relative deprivation theory, the paper further argues that when the urban poor compares their situation with those who appear more disadvantaged, there is an increased likelihood for them to take up crime and violence to improve their socioeconomic conditions. Finally, the paper advocated for improved planning of urban centers and the provision of socioeconomic opportunities to ameliorate the conditions of the urban poor as a recipe for reducing the spate of insecurity.
**Keywords:** economic boom, socioeconomic factors, insecurity, crime and violence.

## INTRODUCTION

Urban environments serve as a panacea for the attainment of higher standard of living and have served as a critical component of human development indices since the dawn of the industrial revolution. Urban areas continues to play a pivotal role in the developmental strides of nations and supranational entities (Tabiti, Mohammed & Japheth, 2018). As such recent interest in the transformation of urban spaces continues to dominate public discuss and national interventions. As reported by the United Nations Habitat (UN-Habitat, 2011), more and more humans are migrating to urban areas that for the first time in history, more than half of the world human population (3.3 billion people) lived in urban areas. With this scale of move, it has not only become apparent, but also imperative, to understand that urban areas facilitate growth through the provision of transformational services, communication networks, power generation, water and sanitation service delivery (Musa, 2011).

In a quest to improve the urbanization of cities and countries in the world, several challenges have emerged including urban insecurity. One example that is readily referenced is that of Great Britain, where during the industrial revolution there was massive urbanization of rural areas and the rollout of economic engines to accelerate the standard of living of her citizenry (Engelke, 2012). However, this well-intentioned economic adventures often results in negative side effects including the sprouting of human settlements riddled with crime and violence purposed by the unemployed in an effort to survive in the

competitive urban environments (Szreter, 1997). As more focus at the national and international levels are directed at establishing more urban settlements towards increasing and deepening the gains of globalization (OECD, 2013), it is appropriate to adequately situate the dynamics and nodes of insecurity in urban areas. One strategy for understand this intricacies lies in the development of the drivers of urban insecurity. Within the context of this paper, focus is directed at the socioeconomic factors that drive insecurity in urban spaces.

River state has a number of urban area that has witnessed a spike in the level of insecurity and violence. As a hub for oil and gas activity in Nigeria, the urban areas have witnessed an increased in the influx of people from rural to urban areas (Wosu & Anele, 2010). With a weak state or governmental control, these constitute a mechanism through which there are myriads of nefarious activities in the urban areas. Agwanwo and Bello (2019) have described the state as the epicenter of violence in the Niger Delta region. Unlike in other states in the region, no part of the state is free from violence. However, the level of urban insecurity has triggered a spate of kidnapping, cult violence, armed robbery, and election related violence that has called for a critical analysis of how socioeconomic factors are drivers of the state. The central argument of this paper is that with a a high influx of young people into urban centers, it distorts the existing people and makes urban areas unsafe which in turn contributes to ineffective performance of urban functions.

**Thematic Conceptual Framework**
**Socioeconomic Factors**
Interest on how socioeconomic factors drive inequality in urban areas have been prevalent for much of human history. Over 2,500 years ago, Plato the famous philosopher quipped that "any city however small, is in fact divided into two, one for the rich, the other for the poor. This statement and observations by scholars have shown that there is a remarkable amount of income inequality in cities and urban areas. This observation has been observed in almost every country of the earth, both developed and underdeveloped. Writing about the case of the United States, Glaeser, Resseger, & Tobio (2009) observes that there have been a growing sense of inequality over the years.

With regards to the Nigerian case, Mustapha, Said and Sidique (2019) reported that while there have been a high rate of GDP growth in the country as witnessed from the period of 2006 to 2014, this has not been accompanied by significant increase in the level of poverty reduction. This they attributed to the excessive reliance on primary production activities such as agriculture to the industrial sector. This argument is further drawn from the structural development theorist who observed that in other sub-Saharan countries, the remarkable increase in GDP is not associated with poverty reduction. They conclude that LDCs would tend to benefit more from diversifying their economies from primary subsistence agriculture sector to modern industrial- and service-oriented sectors. Lewis (1954), a proponent of structural change theories, proposes that a large-scale migration from subsistence agricultural sector to modern non-primary sector is important for sustainable economic growth in LDCs. The model assumes that developing countries have surplus labor in the agricultural sector, the marginal product of labor is extremely low; hence, the excess labor from the traditional sector would be put into use in the modern sectors where the marginal product of labor is relatively higher and, thus, create more growth that will continue to use the surplus labor until the entire surplus workers are exhausted. Many countries have experienced structural changes, including Nigeria.

Socioeconomic changes in urban areas in Nigeria follows the same linear progression as the changes experienced in the agricultural sector. Before the 1970s, the main stay for the Nigerian economy was agriculture. With the emergence of oil and gas industry in the early 1970s as the major economic activity, the Gross Domestic Product did not only increased, it also led to a large scale industrialization of services and production. With the attendant level of industrialization, also came the unprecedented movement of people from rural areas to urban cities (Mulenga & Campenhout, 2008).

It has also been reported that the rate of industrialization and urbanization has not resulted in any significant reduction in poverty. Providing historical data, Mustapha et al (2019) reported that urbanization has not translated into any rapid poverty reduction instead the urban poverty incidence became more pronounced and widespread. From their records, it was shown that urban poverty headcounts increased from 19.6 per cent in 1980 to 37.8 per cent in 1985, while the percentage of the rural poor increased from 28.3 to 51.4 per cent. Using more recent data, there was a rise in the total poverty incidence from 54.4 to 69 per cent between 2004 and 2010. The decomposed poverty profile shows that the rural poverty headcount has increased from 63.3 to 73.2 per cent, while the urban poverty has risen to 61.8 from 43.3 per cent during the same period.

While various reasons have been attributed to the differences in the socioeconomic conditions

between rural and urban area, Mustapha et al (2019) opined that there is no much differences between urban and rural poverty rates in Nigeria. However, a detailed analysis of the poverty profile indicates that the growth of the annual average contribution of the urban poverty rates is relatively higher in all the survey periods in spite the disparities in urban and rural income. Furthermore, the composition of GDP indicates that the percentage contribution of the urban industry growth is relatively higher than the contribution of agricultural growth. This finding suggest that poverty and income inequality in the urban area appear to be more resistant to economic growth. This has been attributed to various factors Firstly, rural-urban migration have strained limited public services and facilities (Wosu & Anele, 2010). This has further driven the growth of slums with inadequate access to safe water and other public health facilities, resulting in unhealthy environment and ill-health that worsen the socioeconomic conditions of urban areas. Secondly, the urban income gap between the rich and the poor may slow the impact of poverty reduction programmes. Thirdly, policy changes are likely to have more negative impact on the urban poor than rural poor. This situation further exacerbate the worse socioeconomic reality of the urban areas.

**Insecurity**

To appropriately situate the concept of security, there is a need to understand the meaning of security. Security is a fundamental need of man and therefore the protection of all people in any nation should be assured. Security contributes meaningfully towards the sustenance of life and the development of properties in any society. According to Ebeh (2015), security refers to a state of being protected from danger or anxiety. With this, he argued that for any nation, security connotes conditions of peace, stability, order and progress. On his part, Asad (2007) opined that national security is not only being narrowed to exclusively military term but also has to do with socio-economic and cultural aspects, problems of development, modernization and national integration. In essence, national security has both military and socio-economic constituents, reflecting the protection of the nation state as an entity as well as the safety and well-being of its people.

Having discussed the concept of security, it can safely follow to operationalize the concept of insecurity. While it might appear simple to define insecurity as a state of lacking security (Adejumo, 2011), other scholars such as Cameron and McCormick (1954) conceptualized insecurity as being a fluid term that applies firstly to the individual before the community. In this direction, they argued that insecurity, as well as security, can be distinguished into eight separate but related categories. These are insecurity as a basic drive, insecurity as an emotional response to sudden external threats, insecurity from relatively constant threatening external situation, insecurity from competition or inferiority, insecurity due to threats from within, insecurity as a function of belief systems, insecurity as inimical to the sound development of the personality, insecurity as the cause of certain kinds of attitudes and behaviour.

The above conceptualization of insecurity shows that it can be operationalized from both internal and external sources. Using the approach, Beland (2017, p. 320 defined insecurity as "the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection." As would be used in this paper, insecurity is a collective state of general fear or anxiety originating from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. It is imperative to establish that collection insecurity is a social or political construction. This form of insecurity is distinct from the individual fear and anxiety experienced in everyday life. The product of processes by which groups and individuals learn to acquire or create interpretations of risk. These interpretations provide rules for selecting, ordering, and explaining signals emanating from [the environment]" (Kasperson et al. 2003, p. 15).

Every instance of collective insecurity has an element of threat infrastructure. The concept of threat infrastructure implies that there must be a risk that is interpreted to threaten one or more areas of the collective wellbeing (Birkland, 1997), which can be man-made or natural. The constructivist analysis of collective insecurity must include an examination of the "threat infrastructure" specific to the policy area under consideration, which does not mean that this infrastructure entirely determines the shape that collective insecurity will take. Amidst structural constraints, it is clear that political leaders often play a major role in shaping the perception of collective threats (Beland, 2007).This definition of threat insecurity helps to detail more analytical lines between the structural and perceived aspects of threats, as well as the various characteristics of threats experienced and perceived by citizens. These characteristics include threat stability (episodic versus constant threats), distance (immediate versus remote threats), visibility (prominent versus low-profile threats), and origin (human-made, natural, or hybrid threats). Consequently, the concept of "threat infrastructure" points to the structural elements that actors involved in the construction of insecurity generally take into account.

As the above shows, the sociological conceptualization of insecurity does not just imply the absence of threat, but it indicates a perceived state of fear, either concrete or perceived, and how it impacts on peoples decision and influences on collective policy.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in explaining this theory is the relative deprivation theory. The central argument of this theory is that individuals engage in criminal behaviour and other forms of insecurity when they feel deprived after relating their situation to that of others more affluent than them. When they lack the legitimate channels to increase their affluence, and with access to illegitimate opportunities readily available to them, they turn to crime to reduce their perceived state of deprivation. Some of the legitimate means for increasing affluence includes paid employment and educational pursuit. In most urban settings, the influx of individuals from rural areas often involve those who lack the skills for high paying jobs. Upon arrival in urban areas and the observation that wealth in readily available, they endeavor to use illegitimate to acquire the wealth.

Relative deprivation theory, in one form or the other, has been seen as a possible source of crime in Western societies. The central thesis of theory is that individuals become involved in criminal behaviour because they desire things which other possess and which they cannot gain by legitimate means. Brown (2014) distinguished between two forms of the concept of deprivation which can be termed "actual relative deprivation" and "perceived relative deprivation." Actual relative deprivation occurs when individuals are objectively deprived in comparison with others. This is a common and reoccurring decimal in urban areas. People experience actual deprivation when developmental projects and contracts are continuously cited in a location and others are consistently denied the citing of such projects in their locality. While it is easy to index actual relative deprivation on those who are poor, it is also applicable to people in other socioeconomic groups. No matter which socioeconomic group one belongs to, it is possible for that individual to experience actual deprivation in comparison to more advantaged groups.

The second form of relative deprivation is what Townsend called subjective relative deprivation. Subjective or perceived relative deprivation encompasses the idea of one group being less advantaged than others, it includes the additional factor of those in the less advantaged group comparing their situation to that of others who are better off, thereby recognising their own disadvantage. Comparison could be in any of the infinite criteria for comparison. This could include houses, social services, cars or even fashionable clothes. For example, those who have had a house repossessed and now find themselves renting accommodation, or those who are unemployed after satisfying careers may make comparisons not with others currently in more fortunate circumstances, but with the more favourable position they themselves once occupied.

It is important to note that they can exist actual relative deprivation, but there is no perceived relative deprivation, and vice versa. It is much the same reason why social structures which clearly have a significant, conspicuous and built-in equality of wealth and opportunity can remain stable and unchallenged. Under such circumstances, actual relative deprivation is inherent as some members of the society are, on any objective measure of wealth, substantially better off than others. Yet perceived relative deprivation may not ensue, because those at the less affluent end of the social system are either not making comparisons with those more fortunate, or, having made the comparison, do not feel unjustly deprived. Just as actual relative deprivation can exist without consequent perceived relative deprivation, perceived relative deprivation can occur without actual relative deprivation. By their very nature, perceptions of relative deprivation are subjective and need not be based on the 'real' facts, but on what an individual believes to be the facts. Irrespective of the type of relative deprivation (both actual and perceived), the theory offers a clear perspective of why there is a high level of insecurity in urban areas because it provides for why certain individuals will choose to deviate from societal norms and engage in unlawful behaviour.

**Anatomy of Urban Insecurity in Africa Fueled By Socioeconomic Factors**

The anatomy of insecurity in urban areas has largely been investigated, with global trend in criminal rate increasing over the last 35 years. According to UN-Habitat (2007), for an increase of 100,000 people, crime rate increase from 2300 to 3000. Although, this statistics does not apply to all region, Sub-saharan Africa is one of the region with the highest level of urban insecurity. Urban insecurity is not only limited to crime and violence, but other forms of insecurity including terrorism and ethnic violence. In Nigeria, the problem of urban insecurity has seen the proliferation of cult groups, increased kidnapping and street gangs (Ibrahim, 2010).

Urban insecurity has been classified into various types according to Moser (2014). As part of

the classification, there was a caveat which acknowledged the fluid nature of insecurity as such one form of insecurity can readily be assumed to be another form of crime.

| | Categorization of urban insecurity | |
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| Category | Perpetrator | Manifestation |
| Political | State and non-state actors | Guerrilla conflict<br>Political assassinations<br>Armed conflict between political parties |
| Institutional | Informal institutions<br>State police<br>Private sector | Extra-judicial killings by police<br>Physical or psychological abuse by health and education workers<br>State or community vigilante-directed social cleansing of gangs and street children<br>Lynching of suspected criminals by community members |
| Economic | Organized crime<br>Business interests<br>Delinquents<br>Robbers | Intimidation and violence as means of resolving economic disputes<br>Street theft, robbery and crime<br>Kidnapping<br>Armed robbery<br>Drug-trafficking<br>Car theft and other contraband activities<br>Small-arms dealing<br>Assaults including killing and rape in the course of economic crimes<br>Trafficking in prostitutes<br>Conflict over scarce resources |
| Economic/Social | Gangs<br>Street Children<br>Ethnic violence | Territorial or identity-based "turf" violence; robbery, theft<br>Petty theft<br>Communal riots |
| Social | Intimate partner violence inside the home<br>Sexual violence (including rape) in the public arena<br>Child abuse: boys and girls<br>Inter-generational conflict between parent and children<br>Gratuitous/routine daily violence | Physical or psychological male–female abuse<br>Physical and sexual abuse, particularly prevalent in the case of stepfathers but also uncles<br>Physical and psychological abuse<br>Incivility in areas such as traffic, road rage, bar fights and street confrontations<br>Arguments that get out of control |

The above categorization are more likely to elicit insecurity in urban areas because in urban areas there is a more pronounced income inequality. As per Becker's 1968 seminal model, a wider socioeconomic gap is a recipe for increased involvement in crime. Urban areas offer a glaring display of wealth and how it is spent, unlike in rural area. Furthermore, as Glaeser, et al (2009) reported when there is an apparent level of inequality, which is more likely to be pronounced in urban areas, there is the possibility that people are likely to get involved in criminal and violent acts.

Beyond this, urban areas with the larger number of inhabitants often have a reduced ratio of law enforcement officers to inhabitants which is further contributing factor to the high spate of insecurity. In their analysis of strategies for managing urban insecurity in selected African cities, Chirisa, Bobo and Matamanda (2016) observed that with poor planning and large number of inhabitants, it is relatively difficult for law enforcement officers to push through with their surveillance activities.

Another socioeconomic factor that moderates the rate of insecurity is the social and cultural norm guiding the conduct of the area. As per the argument of Un-Habitat (2007), urban areas in the Middle East and Arab countries, where religious values are powerful forces in encouraging crime and violence, there is low prevalence of crime and violence in the area. On the other hand, parts of the world where both religious and cultural factors, celebrate crime and violence (for example Latin

America), there has been an increase in the insecurity level experienced in such regions (Miethe & Lu, 2005)

Finally, the last socioeconomic factors influencing crime and insecurity considered in this paper is poverty (Dunaway *et al.*, 2000). Poverty undermines the ability of urban inhabitants to provide for their families and to benefit from service delivery in an urban setup and the poor opt for crime as a survival strategy (Miethe & Lu, 2005). Unlike in the rural poor who can engage in subsistent farming to take of their family as well has have access to space for accommodation, the urban poor neither have access to land for agriculture nor land for accommodation. It is therefore an additional burden for them to provide food for their dependents as well as a decent living space for family members (Garcia-Cervantes, 2021). According to research findings provided by Gagne (2015) and UNODC (2013), the homicide rate in Jamaica due to urban poverty was greater than the global homicide rate and this can be attributed to the high rate of poverty. Un-Habitat (2007) further concludes that there is a strong correlation between urban poverty and insecurity, with economic prosperity contributing to low levels of crime rates.

In addition to being perpetrators of crime, the poor are more vulnerable to insecurity and urban crime. It has been observed in most countries that poverty undermines the ability of the poor to safeguard themselves hence they become frequent victims of crime and violence (Smith & Jarjoura, 1988). Results from Levitt's (1999) study, indicate that poor households were 60% more likely to be burglarized than their rich counterparts a situation which Pantaziz (2000) attributes to the vulnerability and lack of resources to secure themselves among the poor. Thus policies and strategies that address poverty and inequality may be adopted in human settlements so that crime and violence will be minimized.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the world matches towards increased globalization, there is a simultaneous trend towards an emergent system of urbanization. With all its fanfare, urbanization is a formidable catalyst for the creation of slums, heightened economic and social strain, increased pressure on physical infrastructure and persistent problems related to transportation, public health, and essential supply chain (food, water, etc.). The inability of cities to cope with the sharp increases of population has also generated crime hotspots, social tensions, and communities' mistrust in local and federal government response, in addition to violent protests. The unequal balance in wealth distribution and the obvious differences in

urban areas is likely to stimulate increased crime and insecurity in these areas. It is therefore important cities and governments develop policies and strategies to cope more effectively with urbanization by formulating and implementing comprehensive solutions and interventions that mitigate the negative effects of urbanization. Based on the above, the following suggestions are made:

- Engage various stakeholders in issues that relate to crime and violence such that the root causes of the crime and possible solutions align with societal values and norms.
- The private sector and government agencies should promote a vibrancy of creative industries as alternative employment platform for urban youth and other crime and violence perpetrators.
- The issue of community policing such as neighborhood watch should be established in order to report incidences of insecurity, crime and violence.

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