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# Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined the effectiveness of government security responses to conflicts and their implications for human rights in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Focusing on Akuku-Toru local government area in Rivers State, Isoko-South local government area in Delta State and Eket local government area in Akwa-Ibom State, the study assesses the awareness and effectiveness of government security actions, its impact on conflict dynamics, and its role in regional stability. It adopted the cross-sectional research design and data were gathered using the survey method through the questionnaire instrument. With a total of 100 respondents absorbed as participants, the study focused on factors contributing to conflict escalation as perceived by the community and identifies government initiatives that have successfully de-escalated the conflict. The findings reveal a prevalence of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and freedom of speech restrictions, associated with these security responses. While some government actions positively influence conflict reduction, the study noted that the intricate challenges of balancing security measures with human rights preservation in conflict-prone regions were key factors to the tenacity of conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Conflict Dynamics, Human Rights, Niger Delta, Security Responses*

## **Introduction**

The Niger Delta, located in the Southern part of Nigeria, has long been mired in a multifaceted conflict driven by ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and economic disparities, primarily centered around control of its substantial oil and gas resources (Akpan, 2019). While Nigeria became a significant oil producer and exporter after the discovery of oil in the mid-20th century, the region's inhabitants did not experience commensurate development (Osumah & Osumah, 2021); instead, grievances and conflicts emerged. Notably, militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers arose in response to perceived injustices, aiming for greater control over resources, improved living conditions, and addressing environmental degradation caused by oil exploration (Okonofua, 2016).

In response, the Nigerian government deployed security measures and military interventions to protect vital oil infrastructure, although these have raised concerns about human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions, and their potential to exacerbate conflict dynamics (Obi, 2019). The conflict has also brought socioeconomic consequences, disrupting livelihoods, displacing communities, and exacerbating economic hardships (Braide, 2014). Environmental damage from oil spills and pollution has further harmed local residents' health and well-being. International actors, such as foreign governments and multinational corporations, have also influenced the region's security responses due to global oil demand and economic interests (Braide, 2014). Given the conflict's lasting impact on Niger Delta residents, this study seeks to critically evaluate government security responses,

assess their effectiveness, examine human rights implications, and propose evidence-based policy recommendations to balance security and human rights while promoting stability.

### **Statement of Problem**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has long been plagued by a protracted and multifaceted conflict, characterized by persistent insecurity, economic disparities, and human rights concerns. At the core of this issue lies the contentious struggle for control over the region's abundant oil and gas resources. While these resources have the potential to drive economic prosperity and development, they have instead been a source of contention, exacerbating ethnic tensions and social inequalities. One of the key problems in this context is the government's security responses to the conflict. While these responses are aimed at restoring order and protecting vital oil infrastructure, they have raised significant human rights concerns. Reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and violations of due process by government security forces have created a climate of fear and mistrust among local communities.

Moreover, these security measures have had far-reaching socioeconomic consequences, including disruptions to livelihoods, displacement of communities, and economic hardships. The environmental degradation caused by oil exploration further compounds the challenges faced by the region's residents. This study aims to address the pressing problem of government security responses in the Niger Delta, assessing their effectiveness, human rights implications, and socioeconomic impact. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the development of evidence-based policy recommendations that balance the need for security with the imperative of respecting human rights and promoting long-term stability in the region.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of government security responses to conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.
2. Investigate the human rights impact of these security responses.
3. Propose policy enhancements for more effective and rights-respecting security measures.

### **Literature Review**

The Niger Delta conflict's historical context is richly documented, underscoring its roots in historical injustices, environmental degradation, and struggles for resource autonomy (Sobrasuaipiri, 2016). It is widely argued that British colonial rule disrupted indigenous governance systems, laying the foundation for the ongoing disputes that have become synonymous with Nigeria's oil feud (Sobrasuaipiri, 2016). The discovery of oil in the 1950s, while bringing wealth to Nigeria, simultaneously marginalized Niger Delta communities and degraded their environment, with oil spills and deforestation threatening traditional livelihoods and escalating grievances (Braide, 2014; Abasi, 2018). This historical context turned the Niger Delta into a hotbed of grievances, further fueled by economic underdevelopment (Nwapi, 2019; Osumah, 2021).

Non-state actors expressed these grievances through the emergence of militant groups that targeted oil infrastructure in pursuit of wealth distribution equity (Nwapi, 2019). In response, government strategies often turned to militarization, resulting in severe human rights abuses (Aderinola, 2016). While the Niger Delta Amnesty Program aimed to address root causes, it

fell short of resolving the deep-seated issues (Obi, 2019). Government interventions encompassed infrastructure development, community engagement, and environmental restoration (Aderinola, 2016). However, environmental degradation persisted, cultural heritage eroded, and economic diversification lagged (Obi, 2019). Community engagement initiatives aimed to foster inclusion and peace (Nwapi, 2019). Throughout this historical trajectory, human rights violations, such as arbitrary arrests and speech restrictions, remained widespread (International Humanitarian Law, 2019). These conflicts often triggered or exacerbated rights abuses, highlighting the imperative of upholding human rights, even in the midst of conflict (Chase, 2016; Levy, 2015).

### **The Wide-Ranging Impact of Security Measures on Communities Human Rights**

Security interventions in volatile regions, while deemed necessary, have had profound consequences for local communities (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In these regions, high-intensity security operations often force locals to migrate, severing ties to their homes and livelihoods. Similarly, overbearing measures like curfews limit access to critical services, hinder economic growth, and deter investments. In extreme cases, security operations disrupt logistical routes, causing supply shortages and escalating prices (Sobrasuaipiri, 2016). These measures often result in the damage of infrastructure, degrade fertile land, and pollute the environment (Akpan, 2019). These operations also inflict psychological trauma, leading to mental health issues, mistrust, and behavioral challenges (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In regions like the Niger Delta, security measures significantly impact complex dynamics (Osumah, 2021). They aim to restore peace, protect assets, and engage communities (Arimomo, 2020). Policies focus on intelligence, but conflicts simmer unless root causes are addressed (Abasi, 2018).

### **Current Gaps in Security Measures Adopted in Conflict Areas**

The security approach in the Niger Delta reveals significant gaps and shortcomings that contribute to human rights violations and exacerbate conflicts. The Niger Delta's security approach reveals significant flaws contributing to human rights violations and prolonged conflicts. Operational ambiguities, inadequate oversight, and a lack of accountability mechanisms often underlie these violations (UNEP, 2016; Sobrasuaipiri, 2016). Security personnel may lack essential training, leading to disproportionate use of force. Additionally, the absence of accessible reporting channels leaves affected respondents and communities without recourse (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Nwapi, 2019).

A notable gap is the limited focus on community dialogue within the security approach. Overly militarized strategies can escalate tensions and further human rights abuses, deepening mistrust (Arimomo, 2020). The conflict profoundly impacts the region's economy, affecting Nigeria's revenue due to disruptions like attacks on oil facilities (Imobighe, 2017). Infrastructure damage requires significant funds for repairs, while increased security measures impose financial burdens (Ajibola, 2015). Investor hesitancy and untapped tourism potential deprive the region of capital and revenue opportunities (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Imobighe, 2017). Oil spills have long-term economic implications, and disturbances in the Niger Delta affect Nigeria's budget and international reputation, deterring global businesses and investors (Ononye, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for understanding the challenges in the Niger Delta encompasses the Resource Curse theory, Political Ecology, and their intricate intersections within the region.

### **The Resource Curse Theory**

The Resource Curse Theory explores the complex relationship between resource-rich regions and economic development, highlighting that despite the Niger Delta's vast oil wealth, it suffers from economic deprivation, driven by factors such as over-reliance on resource exports, volatile global oil prices, and institutional weaknesses (Aderinola, 2016; Olanrewaju, 2020). This paradox can lead to the Dutch Disease phenomenon, potential corruption, and authoritarianism, all of which contribute to the region's economic struggles and disparities.

In the Niger Delta context, the Resource Curse Theory unveils a sharp contrast between the abundance of oil revenues and local underdevelopment, resulting in poverty, environmental degradation, and conflict within local communities (Olasupo, 2017). This glaring disparity has given rise to militant groups striving for a greater share of oil wealth or autonomy in its management (Olasupo, 2017). To navigate the Resource Curse in the Niger Delta, a multifaceted approach is essential. This includes sustainable development investments, environmental conservation, active community involvement, and transparent governance (Imobighe, 2017; Olasupo, 2017).

### **The Political Ecology Theory**

The Political Ecology Theory serves as another crucial framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of politics, societal structures, and environmental interactions in the Niger Delta (Abasi, 2018). This theory reveals complex power dynamics at play in the region, involving the state, multinational corporations, local elites, and grassroots movements. Multinational corporations' collaboration with the state to initiate large-scale oil extraction disrupted local communities and created significant power imbalances (Nwapi, 2019). Local elites and traditional leaders played multifaceted roles, sometimes aligning with state entities or corporations, further exacerbating the gap between the populace and decision-makers (Abasi, 2018).

Grassroots movements, represented by activists like Ken Saro-Wiwa and community collectives such as the Ogoni, emerged as voices challenging prevailing power structures, advocating for environmental justice and the restoration of local agency (Arimomo, 2020). Land rights became a contentious issue intertwined with ethnic identities, cultural significance, and the right to resources. This complexity added to the power struggle, questioning not just land ownership but also resource access and responsibility for land well-being. The economic disparities in the region symbolize the broader struggle for power and representation, raising fundamental questions about revenue allocation, governance transparency, and wealth distribution (Nwapi, 2019).

### **Methods**

The study comprised approximately 100 respondents selected through Taro Yamani's sampling technique and selected via random sampling across the three samples from Akuku-Toru local government area in Rivers State, Isoko-South local government area in Delta State and Eket Local government area in Akwa-Ibom,. Data collection employed structured questionnaire, with quantitative data being analyzed using descriptive statistics. Ethical considerations were

rigorously observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and minimizing potential harm.

## Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	72	72.0
Female	28	28.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18-24	22	22.00
25-34	34	48.00
35 – 44	12	17.00
45 – 54	14	14.00
55 and above	18	18.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Primary school	9	9.00
Secondary School	11	11.00
University	27	27.00
Postgraduate degree	49	49.00
Others	4	4.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Field survey, 2024*

Table 1 provides the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of sex, age, and educational background. The majority of respondents were male (72.0%), belonged to the age group 25-34 (48.0%), and held a postgraduate degree (49.0%).

**Table 2: Government Security Responses and Conflict Impact**

<b>Respondent's Awareness of Government Security Response?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	72	72.00
<b>No</b>	28	28.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>If Yes, Respondent's Security Responses Awareness Types</b>	<b>Frequency (Multiple-Choice)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Military operations	20	20.00
Police presence	32	32.00
Amnesty programs	39	39.00
Community policing	9	9.00

Others	0	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Effectiveness of Government Security Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very effective	12	12.00
Somewhat effective	14	14.00
Neutral	58	58.00
Ineffective	6	6.00
Very ineffective	10	10.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Field survey, 2024*

Table 2 shows that 72% of respondents are aware of government security responses in the region. While 39% indicate the presence of Amnesty programme in the region. The table also revealed that 58% of the respondents were neutral regarding effectiveness of government security responses.

**Table 3: Government Security Response and Stability in the Niger Delta**

<b>Contribution of Government Security Responses to Improved Stability in the Niger Delta</b>	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	10.00
Agree	14	14.00
Neutral	52	52.00
Disagree	14	14.00
Strongly Disagree	10	10.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Respondents Witnessing Instances Government Security Responses led to Conflict Escalation</b>	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	43	43.00
No	57	57.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Field survey, 2024*

Table 3 revealed that 52% of respondents were "neutral" regarding government security responses' impact on stability, reflecting mixed views. Additionally, 57% of respondents had not witnessed these responses leading to conflict escalation, suggesting varied experiences within the region.

**Table 4: Government Security Responses and Conflict Escalation in Niger Delta**

<b>If Yes, Factors believed to have contributed to Conflict Escalation due to Government Security Responses</b>	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of community engagement	24	24.00

Excessive use of force by security forces	17	17.00
Miscommunication or misunderstanding between security forces and the community	21	21.00
Ethnic or tribal tensions	12	12.00
Economic factors	14	14.00
Ethnic or tribal tensions	12	12.00
Other	0	0.00
No observed conflict escalation	0	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Respondents' Observation of Government Security Responses have Positive Influence on Reducing Conflict</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Yes	68	68.00
No	32	32.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Field survey, 2024*

Table 4 indicate that the respondents (68%) believed government security responses positively reduced conflict, emphasizing their importance. They identified a lack of community engagement (24%) and miscommunication (21%) as key factors contributing to conflict escalation.

**Table 5: Effect of Human Rights Violation on Community Life**

<i>Effects of the Human Rights Violation on the Lives of the Community</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Physical harm or injury</i>	21	21.00
<i>Psychological trauma and emotional distress</i>	21	21.00
<i>Loss of livelihood or economic stability</i>	21	21.00
<i>Disruption of family and community relationships</i>	6	6.00
<i>Restrictions on freedom of movement and expression</i>	5	5.00
<i>Increased fear or mistrust within the community</i>	26	26.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Field survey, 2024*

Table 5 presents the effects of human rights violations on the lives of the community, focusing on the highest percentage findings. The most prevalent impact was the "increased fear or mistrust within the community," reported by 26% of respondents. Additionally, "physical harm or injury," "psychological trauma and emotional distress," and "loss of livelihood or economic



stability" were each mentioned by 21% of respondents, highlighting the significant consequences of these violations on community life.

**Table 6: Type Human Rights Violation Associated with Government Responses**

<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100.00</i>
<i>Any Human Rights Violations Associated with Government Security Responses</i>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Yes</i>	77	77.00
<i>No</i>	23	23.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<i>Respondents' Recall of the Types of Human Rights Violation following Government Security Responses</i>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Arbitrary arrests</i>	40	40.00
<i>Extrajudicial killings</i>	11	11.00
<i>Forced displacement</i>	9	9.00
<i>Freedom of speech restrictions</i>	36	36.00
<i>Others</i>	4	4.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 6 reflects respondents' perceptions of human rights violations associated with government security responses. The highest frequency finding reveals that 77% of respondents reported "Yes" to the presence of human rights violations in the context of government security responses. Among those, the most commonly recalled types of violations were "arbitrary arrests" and "freedom of speech restrictions," both mentioned by 40% and 36% of respondents, respectively. This underscores the prevalence of these violations and their significant impact within the communities.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings have shed light on the interplay between government security responses, conflict dynamics, and human rights violations in the resource-rich yet conflict-afflicted Niger Delta region as noted by Akpan, 2019. Notably, the majority of respondents were male, emphasizing the importance of considering gender-specific impacts in conflict analysis and policy interventions, especially given documented gender-based violence and discrimination in conflict-affected areas. This corroborates the work of Sobrasuaipiri, 2016; Osumah & Osumah, 2021.

The survey highlighted that a significant portion of respondents (72%) were aware of government security responses in the region, reflecting the prevalent security challenges and visible security forces' presence as reported by Amnesty International, 2020. Nevertheless, the findings revealed a mixed perception regarding the effectiveness of these security responses.

While some respondents deemed them effective, a substantial portion remained neutral or found them ineffective, indicating gaps in the current security approach, including issues related to oversight, training, and community engagement, this support UNEP, 2016.

Surprisingly, a significant majority (79%) believed that government security responses had a de-escalating effect on conflicts, contrasting with the literature that emphasizes human rights violations often linked to security operations. This divergence underscores the need for a nuanced analysis of perceptions and experiences, given the multifaceted nature of conflicts and security responses in the Niger Delta (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Obi, 2019).

The views on government security responses' contribution to improved stability were mixed, with a substantial proportion (62%) remaining neutral and 24% disagreeing with their positive impact. This aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of community dialogue and consensus-building as a preventive measure against potential conflicts and violations (Arimomo, 2020). The neutral stance may reflect a desire for more inclusive and community-centric strategies (Braide, 2014).

The survey indicated that a significant majority of respondents (77%) associated human rights violations with government security responses, consistent with documented instances of human rights abuses, such as arbitrary arrests and restrictions on freedom of speech (Amnesty International, 2020; International Humanitarian Law, 2019). These violations had severe effects on the community, including physical harm, psychological trauma, and loss of livelihood, underscoring the urgent need for accountability and redress mechanisms (UNEP, 2016; Chase, 2016).

Respondents who witnessed conflict escalation attributed it to factors like a lack of community engagement and excessive use of force by security forces, aligning with the literature's observations of power imbalances, environmental concerns, and misunderstandings between security forces and communities contributing to conflicts (Abasi, 2018).

Lastly, the survey identified various government initiatives, such as amnesty programs and community dialogue, as contributing to conflict de-escalation, consistent with the literature's emphasis on community engagement, dialogue, and sustainable development projects in addressing the resource curse and conflict dynamics (Imobighe, 2017; Olasupo, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study reveals that there is prevalence of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and restrictions freedom of speech in Niger Delta. This findings aligns with documented human rights abuses in the Niger Delta region, emphasizing the need for human rights safeguards within security initiatives.

## **Recommendations**

To address the challenges of conflict and insecurity as well as the problem of human right violations by security operatives in the Niger Delta region, several recommendations have been made based on the findings from the study.

Firstly, government should put measures in place to prevent arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial killings of the citizens in the region. There should be concerted effort for the training of security personnel on how to handle and live harmoniously with the indigenes.

Secondly, government to promulgate laws to safeguard freedom of speech, establish transparent reporting system and oversight mechanisms that will reduce conflicts and insecurity in the region.

Lastly, government to invest in sustainable development initiatives and adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to resource distribution to promote stability in the Niger Delta region. This underscores the urgency of community- centric strategies, transparency and accountability in security operations

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