Nigerian Immigration Policy And Insecurity In Nigerian (2015– 2023)

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Abstract
This paper examined the impact of immigration policy on insecurity in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. With the aid of logical method of inquiry and survey of literature as methods of data gathering the paper pursued the following Objectives: To examined the various policy measures adopted by Nigeria to track and control informal and irregular migration into the country since 2015. In addition, to evaluate the impact of the measured on insecurity. Trend analysis served as tools for analyzing the data generated. Results of analysis revealed that in addition to other changes, the 2015 immigration Act removed administrative processes at the border thereby allowing immigrants to enter into Nigeria before processing their documentations. Further, it reveals high level increases terrorism, kidnapping and other crimes due to uncontrolled influx of Fulani migrants due to policy alteration and associated political interest. In conclusion, there is a strong relationship between Nigerian immigration policy and increasing insecurity since 2015. The paper recommends re-introduction of strict border administrative processes, strong checks and documentation that allows immigrants to enter into the country.
Keywords: *Nigeria, Immigration Policy, Irregular/Illegal Immigration, Insecurity*

I.   Introduction

Nigeria is a large country in Africa in geography and in population. It also has one of the largest economies in Africa (with expanse and rich natural resources). It is the most powerful state in the West African economic community, ECOWAS, and plays a leading role in the region's politics and economics. It is also a country immigration and emigration, quite large-scale in absolute terms by African standards, if not by global standards …. (Amadi, 2024, p.1).

European partitioning of the West African region during colonialism created difficult dividing boundaries that forcefully partitioned autonomous entities and separated kith and kin across the partitions into different countries (Afolayan et al., 2008; Okobiah, 1989). Consequently, regular and what seems to be normal process of interaction that evades all forms of legal and structural boundaries began and persisted among these kith and kin the contiguous countries formed by Europeans. Ullah and Huque (2019), Young and Goldman (2015), Collyer (2006) identified poverty, unemployment, armed conflict, increasing desertification, pastoralist, and the need to seek a greener pasture as the drivers of this movement. However, Bourn et al. (2001) attributed it mostly to ethnos-political and economic interests. The movements and interactions there in progressively exerted significant economic, political, and social consequences after the independence of various countries involved particularly Nigeria, which is adjured as the most powerful, richest, and largest state in the region. The negative influence of the cross boarder relations led each country to initiate policies for the regulation of the movements, in and out of the country.

The regulatory measures, which many scholars admit or observe to be ineffective in curtailing irregular or illegal immigration (Castles, 2004; Czaika & de Haas, 2013) focus more on restrictive policies (see Rosina & Fontana, 2024; Bhatia et al., 2024). However, the literature notes that the restrictive policies increase immigration visibility, lead to more irregularity, and amplify the prevailing sense of insecurity (Geiger & Pécoud, 2017; Andersson, 2016; Chebeld' Appollonia, 2012). This school of thought tends to explore the relationship between migration and persisting/increasing set of security threats in a country such as criminalities, terrorism, banditry, and insurgency etc. (see Griffini, 2023; O'Brien & Eger, 2020). This leads to

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increased surveillance and/or the criminalization of irregular migration. However, another school of thought views it as instrument to reduce, stop, and/or divert migratory flows into the country (see Hammoud-Gallego, 2024; de Haas, 2011; Czaika & Hobolth, 2016; Pinotti, 2017). In each of the divides, policy defines the focus, goals, objectives, approaches, and success of the state in migration matters– whether as a response to rising feeling of insecurity or increasing number of illegal immigrants (Pettrachin, 2024; Massari, 2021; Paterson &Karyotis, 2020; Dimari, 2020; Bonansinga, 2019). The push factors as used here refers to factors that force people to move away from their original habitation to another place such as unemployment, natural disaster, autocratic regime, conflict and insecurity etc. (Tabassum et al., 2017; Etchie et al, 2018; Ogunleye et al., 2018; Basar et al.,(2019). On the other hand, pull factors refers to factors that attract people from other nationalities to come into an alien locality such as better and higher standard of living, greater employment and economic opportunities, relative freedom, good education system, and relative security etc. (Mohammed, 2016; Shafique, 2017; Okunade, 2019; Perpetua et al., 2019.

In Nigeria, the post-independent policy that governs immigration is the Immigration Act of 1963,1975 (amended), and the Revised Treaty of 1993, which is contemporarily governed by the 1999 Constitution. It focuses on controlling and legalizing movements into the country. Specifically, the Act provides that foreigners can only enter Nigeria with a valid passport or other travel document and a visa or recognized entry permit that must specify the purpose and duration of stay, destination or place of residence and activities with movements restricted within the country. Thereafter, such migrants are issued with resident card and empowered to bring family members, work, and own property and businesses, and seek redress in a court of law on any issue in Nigeria. This policy was later influenced substantially by the ECOWAS Treaty, protocols, conventions, and decisions (Nneli et al., 2022; Adejumobi, 2016). Its 1979 protocol on free movement of persons, residence and establishment provided the right of entry, abolition of visas and stays of up to 90 days provided the migrant possesses a travel document and international health certificate, and the right of residency and business after 90 days (see Nneli *et al.*, 2022; Article 27(2) of the ECOWAS Treaty of 1975, now Article 59 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993).

However, only the right of entry, abolition of visas, and 90 days' privilege became functional due to economic crisis, limited employment opportunities, massive displacement from civil wars, political instability, border disputes, non-convertibility of currencies, bureaucratic delays, and corruption. Abiodun (2015) observed that this led to higher rate of border and trans border crimes such as smuggling, drug and human trafficking, terrorism, and the importation of extremists to enhance the propagation of religious activities. Thus, the free movement exacerbated Nigeria's socio-economic and political crises thereby leading to Aliens Expulsion Order of 1983. According to Amadi (2024) an estimated 1,000,000 Ghanaians, 180,000 Nigeriens, 250,000 Chadians, 180,000 Cameroonians, 15,000 Togolese, and 13,000 Beninois etc. were forced out of Nigeria and border closed.

With increasing desertification in the region due to climate change (Amadi & Vundamina, 2023; Shaw et al., 2018), many Fulani pastoralists from different ECOWAS countries began to migrate increasingly into Nigeria to join their fellow Fulani in the north in search of favourable pastoral lands (see Mwiturubani & van Wyk, 2010; Young & Goldman, 2015) but at a time of high-level political contest between the Fulani led north and the south to fill the vacuum created by the sudden demise of President Yara'Dua. Eventually, when President Muhamadu Buhari– a Fulani Northerner - ascended to power in 2015, a new immigration Act vide Immigration Act of 2015 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015) was enacted. The Act removed all bureaucratic processes required to enter Nigeria in the first instance (Amadi, 2024) thereby leading to the influx of Fulani herders from all over the region and even beyond to secure voters' card and other nationalization documents illegally (Mikailu, 2016; Buari, 2017; Rasaq et al, 2018; Omoleye & Segun, 2018; Godwin, 2018; Oladele, 2018). Available data shows that the immigrant population rose from 456,621 in 1990 to 1,308,568 million in 2020 with African citizens consisting 1.17 million of the migrants (see Nneli et al., 2022). Consequently, this paper embarks on impact assessment of Nigeria's immigration policies on insecurity trends between 2015 and 2023. Some scholar such as Regan(2009), Attoh (2019), and Awire & Okumagba (2020), Obi,(2024) contend that human capital flight enhances the national development of the receiving country by complementing its labour force with quality skills and expertise for maximum productivity, and boasting their technological advancement. Nevertheless, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2023 observed that the movements of human capital undermine national development because it provides solid framework for the influx of unskilled workers and unwanted persons into the receiving countries. These migrants do constitute public nuisances resulting to unwanted outcomes that are anti-development such as social vices, agents of insecurity, and criminalities.

II.   Materials And Methods

This paper adopted logical method of inquiry and survey of literature as methods of data collection. The methods here were the review of relevant literature and findings on Nigeria's immigration policy,

immigration statistics, and insecurity of extracted from publications in public and private libraries, and internet websites. The publications include journal articles, book chapters, review materials, government and civil society publications, grey reports and media information in magazines and daily newspapers.

In all, trend analysis, were used to dissect and interpret the data generated. First, the variables and their associated indices for the study were identified and presented in the Logical Framework (LGF) below. Secondly, the dynamics of variables vis-à-vis their indices, characteristics, and causative factors were examined and determined. There from, the study made its conclusion and findings as to the impact of immigration policy on insecurity in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023.

Table a: Logical Framework (LGF) of the study

S/n	Variables	Sub-divisions	Indicators/Indices
1	Immigration	Cross border	Movement beyond national boundaries to another place
			Taking shelter under a different national sovereignty
			Legal requirements to fulfil before like visa provision
			Residing in the new environment for a minimum of six months
2	Insecurity	Human insecurity	Prevalence of danger, hazards, & uncertainty
			Lack of citizens' confidence on the state for protection
			Prevalence of banditry, abductions, kidnappings, and armed robbery
			Instability, troubles, conflicts, and incessant killings/assassinations
			Rising rate of unemployment, under-employment, and loss of job
			Prevalence of hunger, hardship and diseases
			Prevalence of other vices and criminalities
			Lack of relative peace, militancy and separatist agitations
			Instability in the educational system, poor standard of education, and high level of illiteracy
		Institutional insecurity	Inabilities to advance state interests and objectives
			inability to protect the sovereignty of the state
			Inability to control crime and eliminate corruption
			Prevalence of threats to human rights
			Inability to protect lives and property
			Inability to drive genuine development & national goal, which leads to lack of the welfare and quality of life of every citizen
		Insecurity of Infrastructures/Property	Lack of safety of individual and corporate property
			Wanton destruction of public and private property, and arson
			Lack of proper maintenance of infrastructures and property
			Poor and/or absence of equitable public utilities such as roads, housing, electricity, water supply etc.
			Prevalence of dilapidated infrastructures

Sources: Omede, 2012; Achumba et al., 2013; Ewetan and Urhie, 2014; &Nwolise, 2012.

Framework of Analysis

Rational choice theory propounded by Gary Becker, Anthony Downs, and James Coleman was used to organize the arguments and analysis herein in the paper. Primarily, the theory postulates that decisions are based on a cost-benefit analysis of the potential outcomes of actions. Therefore, rational actors strive to maximize their objectives by engaging in behaviors that are of best interest. It further observes that social context and opportunity structures shape the emergence of such decisions. The theory, therefore, provides appropriate framework for viewing and assessing Nigeria's immigration policies as rational decisions taken to reduce insecurity; and equally observe the social context and opportunity structures that shaped them, which in the context of this study is the struggle for Fulani ascendency to power and consequent emergence of Muhamadu Buhari – a Fulani – as president from 2015 to 2023. It further enabled the paper to examine and understand the insecurity nexus of the policies in the latent conflicts between the Fulani herders and farmers over grazing access. Thus, the theory is appropriate for the study.

III.   Data and Analysis
Policy Measures to Track Informal/Irregular Migrants into Nigeria

Nigeria shares a 4,047 km border with its neighbors i.e. 773 km with Benin, 1,497 km with Niger, 87 km with Chad, and 1,690 km with Cameroon, with a modest coastline of about 853 km. This lengthy border, which span across many states and local governments is characteristically porous with only 84 approved entry/exist points while over 1,400 illegal and unmanned other routes exist (Abayomi, 2024; Chinedu, 2019). Therefore, it has not been hard for irregular/illegal migrants to move across Nigeria borders in their thousands. Consequently, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigerian took different measures vis-a-vie policies to stop and/or reduce irregular informal migration into Nigerian from other countries. These measures include:

a. Introduction of Operation Safe Corridor to condone, rehabilitate and reintegrate former illegal emigrants and insurgent groups especially in the NorthEast. This strengthens borders control, increased surveillance and border patrols, etc.

b. Heightened Diplomacy: Diplomatically, Nigeria agreed with neighbouring Niger republic, Chad, Cameroon and the Gulf of Guinea to curtail cross-border criminal activities through intelligence sharing and border control. Further, the country established partnership with international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to strengthen its migration governance.

c. The North East Development Commission (NEDC) was established for the purposes of post-conflict reconstruction, rehabilitation, and development of the North East region.

d. The Presidential Initiative on the North East (PINE) emerged to provide immediate relief and support such as food, shelter, healthcare, and other essential services to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable communities in the region. It further embarked on rebuilding critical infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads, and water supply systems damaged by conflict; creating employment opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship, and supporting the revival of agricultural activities.

e. Creation of institutions to address irregular migration: In 2003, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement Act established the NAPTIPto works closely with other agencies to rescue and rehabilitate human trafficking victims and prosecute traffickers. This agency has made significant arrests and rescued over 1227 trafficked persons since inception (Oyibo, 2009).

f. Strengthening Border Control: The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) intensified surveillance and patrols along Nigerian borders to deter illegal entry.

g. Border Closure: In some occasions such as in 2019, Nigeria closed its land borders due to insecurity concerns. However, this was effective for the 84 approved entry/exist points while the vast unmanned porous borders were actively used by illegal immigrants.

h. Deportation of Illegal Immigrants: The country adopted the policy of deporting foreigners who reside in Nigeria illegally.

i. Public Awareness Campaigns: The various governments that have ruled Nigeria since 2011 embarked on public awareness campaigns to educate the citizens about illegal immigration and its consequences. This was intended to use the citizens as intelligence gathering network.

j. Legal and Regulatory Framework: The Immigration Act 2015 was introduced to regulate the entry and exit of persons into and out of Nigeria, and equally made provisions for monitoring and controlling the entry of non-nationals. The 2015 Act modified the provisions of the Immigration 1963 Act (Abebe et al., 2018). It distinguishes between different types of unauthorized entry and stay, differentiated between various degrees of offenses and their associated penalties, and further strengthened prevailing enforcement mechanisms by enhancing the powers and capacities of immigration officials. Additionally, it abolished entry administrative protocols at the border and permitted immigrants to seek for visa and resident after entering into Nigeria. The Act streamlined the visa application process for investors, entrepreneurs, and highly skilled professionals in order to attract more professionals for the purpose of Nigeria's economic growth and development. Although the Immigration Act of 2015 was moderated by the 2017 Immigration Regulations, the abolition of entry administrative protocols by the Act complemented the unmanned long border areas in allowing unprecedented and unaccountable number of immigrants into Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.

Immigration and Insecurity in Nigeria, 2015 – 2023

Succinctly, Garba and Ishaya (2023), Enyi and Oluleye (2020), and Akinyemi (2013) observed that the influx of illegal immigrants into a country is a foundational threat to the internal security of such a country. Other studies such as Choucri (2002), Koser (2011), Ullah and Huque, (2019), Aliyu and Temitope (2023) affirmed the existence of strong relationship between international migration and insecurity. It is characterized by increasing trans-border crimes such as illicit trade, smuggling, drugs, human trafficking, and other ancillary crimes (Okorn & Ndum, 2021). It is, therefore, not abnormal to note that illegal immigration and insecurity in Nigeria are intertwined, and exacerbated by the country's long porous borders and weak border security. Aliome (2019) attributed the rising tides of insurgency and activities of terrorist groups in Nigeria to illegal migrants from the Republics of Niger and Chad. They are potential sources of ammunitions and weapons, and membership recruitment for Boko Haram and other insurgent groups in northern Nigeria (Anya et al., 2023).

The illegal movements into Nigeria has been slow but steady for over fifty years (Bourn et al., 2001) until 2009 when late President Musa Yar'Adua died – a death that generated high-level and acrimonious contestation in the country's political landscape between the Fulani led north and the south. In 2007, President Musa Yar'Adua (a northern Fulani) took over power from President Olusegun Obasanjo (a southerner) with GoodLuck Jonathan as vice. Unfortunately, he died leading to the ascendency of Jonathan as the President as provided by the constitution. However, to retrieve power from the South during 2011 general elections, the

North engaged in a massive invitation and importation of Fulanis from other West African countries particularly – an act that propelled the rate of illegal migration into Nigeria starting from 2010 (Awotokunet al., 2020; Mikailu, 2016).

Ortom (2019) explicitly noted that although Fulani attacks/killing dates back to 2002, it assumed a notorious and a superlative dimension of widespread killings in 2011. Virtually all parts of Nigeria have experienced the attacks of Fulani nomads in their communities in one form or the other. Nevertheless, it is more intense in the Middle Belt, and the entire Southern Nigeria. According to Nte (2016), they are equipped with new types of sophisticated weapons and communication devices that out-weigh that of the police force. With it, they have been sacking many communities, killing people in their hundreds, and burning their houses and property.

It is equally true that since 2010, Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in banditry, conflicts, insurgency, and farmers-herdsmen clashes, robbery, kidnapping, killings, raping and other organized crimes (Aliyu & Temitope, 2023). Further, historical evidences show that occasional destruction of farmland by pastoral herders and livestock theft exist, and often lead to clashes between herders and farmers, however, these incidences increased drastically since 2011 leading to the death of over 10,000 people (see Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; Ilo et al., 2019). The International Crisis Group (2017) noted an annual fatality average of more than 2,000 deaths due to the clashes. The antagonism orchestrated mutual distrust, government interventions, and allegations of favoritism against the government particularly from southern groups.

The mutual distrust did not only lead to the emergence of ethnic based security outfits or vigilante groups but equally generated ethnic resistance to certain agricultural government policies introduced to curb the farmers – herders conflicts such as grazing routes, cattle ranches, open grazing, grazing reserves, or RUGA project. To complicate the scenario, some of the ethnic based security outfits or vigilante perceive government security agencies as enemies, vice versa. On their side, the bandits/insurgent groups are killing and banishing different communities in their numbers and killing personnel of the Armed Forces and the Police across many states in Nigeria uncontrollably. No security for agricultural production and farm produces, the farmer, and the normal herds' man in the country. It is pertinent, therefore, to observe that Nigeria's security is at the cross-road due to illegal/irregular immigrants.

IV.   Conclusion

Immigration is a necessity for development, however, that has been over flooded by illegal/irregular migrants in Nigeria due to long porous and uncontrolled borders. The pattern of Euro-balkanization and partitioning of the West African region during colonialism, which divided Kith and kin and allocated them different countries with borders, exacerbated the scenario. This led to uncontrollable irregular/illegal cross-border movements guided by culture and ethnic affinity. The scenario has continued to aid and abate, facilitate and structure insecurity in Nigeria since 2010 North-South contest for presidential power following the death of President Musa Yar'Aradua. Therefore, there is strong relationship between immigration policy and increasing insecurity in Nigeria since 2015.

Recommendations
1. Consequently, the paper recommends government's re-introduction of strict border administrative checks and documentation as a prerequisite for entering into the country in the first instance.
2. Secondly, the federal government should embark on immediate project and programme of establishing control across the long porous border through which most of the illegal migrants enter the country.

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