

CRIMINALITY AND THE JUDICIARY IN THIS 21ST CENTURY: AN APPRAISAL

By

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Abstract

The rise of crime in this 21st century is quite alarming, there are diverse forms of violent acts perpetuated in Nigeria by sects otherwise known as terrorists, militants, insurgents, bandits, kidnappers and the likes, also electoral and domestic violence are not left out. These notorious and unlawful violent practices/crimes in the communities have resulted in an unending security threats to human lives and property. Thus, the judiciary is seen as the last hope of the masses in their continual efforts to enforce the laws meant to deter people from committing crimes and punishing those found guilty of crime. This work which focused particularly in Nigeria appraised the roles of the judiciary in tackling the increasing rate of criminality and violence in this 21st century. It is however recommended that the judiciary (members of the Bar and Bench) should play their respective roles diligently in order to ensure that there is a fall in or reduction of crimes and violence in this 21st Century and thus make the society a safer place to live in. Also, the Law Enforcement Agencies especially the Police should also brace up in combating these violent acts against the lives and properties of people.

Introduction

Criminality has to deal with activities that are in violation of the laws of the state. It is synonymous with law breaking, crime and lawlessness (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019, P. 1). The Wikipedia (2019, P.1) explains criminality as a state of being criminal, a criminal act or practice. It suffices to note that various crimes are prevalent in this 21st century, hence the urgent need to combat crime massively. This 21st century is this current century that began on January 1st, 2001 and will end on December, 31, 2100. It has been characterized by global economic meltdown, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and other property crimes and especially crimes against human dignity.

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There are also many other violent crimes (such as Domestic violence, Electoral violence etc) ravaging our society in this era and this is a threat to the security of lives and property in the society. Olarinde S. et al (2014) emphasized that the activities of militants and terrorists have threatened the global peace of the masses.

In this critical 21st century characterized by increasing insecurity resulting from crimes and violence, how can the judiciary help to curtail these offences in order to sanitize our society?

What is crime?

Osborn's Concise Law Dictionary (2001) describes 'Crime' as an act, default or conduct prejudicial to the community, the commission of which by law renders the performance liable to punishment by fine or imprisonment in special proceeding, normally instituted by officers in the service of the crown.

Crime is seen by Wikipedia as 'an unlawful act punishable by a state or other authority. Thus, an act becomes a crime if the relevant and applicable law of the National or State Assembly declares it so. The criminal law of each country contains the prescribed criminal offences and its punishment before such act can be turned as a crime. We align with the position of Okonkwo & Naish (1980) who observed that the content of the criminal law may vary even among a particular country. For example, in Nigeria, the Northern Region has their Criminal Procedure Code and the Penal Code whereas in the Southern part, what is operational are the Criminal Procedure Act and the Criminal Code Act. An offence is an act or omission done or omitted to be done in a particular state of mind (Okonkwo & Naish, 1980).

In the Nigerian Constitution and Criminal code, the word 'Crime' and 'Offence' are used interchangeable. Section 2 of the Criminal Code defines 'offences' as 'acts or omissions which render the person doing the act or making the omission liable to punishment under this code.

Muncie J. (2004) expounded the views of many scholars in trying to understand crime and its causes. According to Wilson (1975) crime has biological laws which are not amenable to individual treatment or social engineering, which people erupt and nothing avails but put them apart from the innocent. Wilson and Herrnstein, (1986) thus observed that it is impractical to try to cure crime. Goltfredson and Hirschi (1990) noted that individuals commit crime through rational choice and that the roots of all criminal acts are a lack of self control and lack of individual responsibility.

Crime was further seen by Murray (1990) to be a symptom of declining moral standards, which is epitomized by welfare dependence, permissiveness, and liberal methods of child rearing, illegitimacy, single parenting and lack of effective discipline.

Under the English Law, there are two legal elements of an offence *actus reus* (guilty act) and *mens rea* (guilty mind). The *actus reus* may not only include the conduct of the accused but also the events or consequences of that conduct (Okonkwo & Naish, 2005). On the other hand, *mens rea* is used to refer to the mental element, which is required to be proved in respect of a particular crime. Thus for an accused to be held criminally responsible, for an offence, he must be found liable both in the mental element and the act of committing the act.

The different kinds of offences/crimes prevalent in this 21st century:

It is evidently clear in this 21st Century that the commission of crime and its preceding consequences of insecurity is on the increase notwithstanding the rise in technological apparatus used to combat crime. Violent crimes, property crimes and unwarranted killings going on rampantly in our nation Nigeria is quite disquieting, yet the perpetrators of this crimes are not always brought to book.

Vanderschueren (1996) stated that globally, at least once every five years, 60% of those living in cities with 100,000 or more inhabitants are victims of one form of crime or the other (This includes Europe, North America, Africa and even Asia).

We shall briefly highlight a handful of the prevailing crimes in Nigeria and other nations of the world in this 21st century.

1. **Terrorism:**

There has been a global struggle to combat terrorism; this is because both the developed, under developed and the developing nations have all had a fair taste of the terror unleashed by the Terrorists.

Terrorism according to Wiktionary (2019) is the deliberate commission of an act of violence to create public fear through the suffering of the victims in the furtherance of a political or social agenda. It can also be seen as a form of psychological manipulation through warfare to the purpose of political or religious gains, by means of deliberately creating a climate of fear amongst the inhabitants of a specific geographical region. The above definition of Terrorism explains some elements of the crime of Terrorism as thus:

1. It is usually an indented violent act against human life.
2. It is geared towards creating fear in the lives of the masses owing to the buffering and hardship the victims of their attack suffer.
3. The terrorists are always in pursuit of a political, social or religious agenda.

From definition, the group that fits into this definition currently in our country Nigeria is the Boko Haran Sect.

Section 1 (a-c) of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2011 prohibits the acts of terrorism where a person knowingly does, attempts or threatens to do an act preparatory to or in furtherance of an act of terrorism or does anything to promote or facilitate the activities of a person engaged in terrorism. This act of terrorism according to Section 2 (a)- it is an act which is deliberately done with malice aforethought, and which may seriously harm or damage a country, unduly compel a government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act; acts of terrorism are intended to seriously intimidate a population, seriously destroy the fundamental, political, constitutional structures of a country and influence such government by intimidation and coercion (Section 2 (a) (b) (i-iv). The acts of terrorism involves an attack upon a person's life which may result to serious bodily harm or death, kidnapping of a person, destruction of a government or public facility; seizure of an aircraft, ship or other means of public or good transport, manufacturing, possession, supply and use of weapons, explosives or of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons as well as research into and development of biological and chemical weapons as well as research into and development of biological and chemical weapons without lawful authority. It also involves the release of dangerous substances or explosives in order to endanger human lives, interference with the supply of water, power or any other fundamental natural resources geared towards endangering human lives (Section 2 (c) (i-vii).

Neumann (2008) saw Terrorism as a method which can be used by any person or group and for any kind of motive and it does not tell about the people who employ it. He further expatiated that since 1990s, it became obvious that there is a renowned *modus operandi* of Terrorism termed by scholars as 'New Terrorism' and the following are their way of manifestation:

- (1) Terrorist groups may appear as normal organization but they have transitional structures and networks, this is unlike the old terrorism,

which was limited to national boundaries. These transformations in terrorism may be attributed to modern communication technologies, cheap international travels, high demand for transnational identities etc.

- (2) Terrorists now have diverse aims and ideologies, which is religiously motivated.
- (3) Terrorism has evolved- they are now more brutal. They use weapons of mass destruction to unleash terror on a large number of unassuming civilians. In the Western World, the terrorist group on the watch list is the Salafi Jihadist movement – that is the Al Qaeda while in Nigeria it is the dreaded Boko Haram.

According to BBC News (24/11/20016), this Boko Haram is version of Islam, which makes it “Haram”, or forbidden for Muslims to take part in any political or social activity associated with Western Society. This Boko Haram believe that Muslims should not take part in the electoral processes of voting, wearing shirts and trousers talk more of receiving secondary education. The official name for the Boko Haram is *Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad* which means ‘People committed to the propagation of the prophets in Teachings and Jihad’. It was the residents in the North Eastern city of Maiduguri that conferred this name ‘Boko Haram’ on the terrorist group because first their headquarters was formerly in Maiduguri (before their Vigilante Groups chased them to Sambisa forest) and their mission is to forbid Western Education. Boko means ‘Fake’ and they used it to signify that Western Education is fake and should be forbidden while Haram means ‘forbidden’. (BBC News, 2016).

This most dreaded terrorist group in Nigeria called Boko Haram was founded in 2002, and was initially focused on opposing Western Education. In 2009, they launched Military operations to create Islamic State. This group designated as a terrorist group by the United States in 2013 but till date the Federal Government has not done anything.

In pursuit of their criminal acts, the Boko Haram was originally involved in the use of gunmen on the motor bikes, the killing of Policemen, politicians and clerics (including Christians & Muslims who usually criticize them. Recently, their nefarious activities have increased to bombing Churches, Military Barracks, Police and even the UN Headquarters in Abuja.

Onah E. I. (2014) stated that it is estimated that the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria have claimed several thousands of lives and led to the loss of properties worth millions of dollars. He further stated that in 2012, Boko Haram accounted for 1386 deaths in 546 attacks and in 2013 the group was involved in 213 attacks with over 1000 death.

Zenn J. (Eds) (2018) and his team stated that by 2016, Boko Haram was not only ranked the most deadly Jihadi group in Africa but also the world.

Suffice it to note that Boko Haram started its operations in Nigeria in 2009 and this year 2019 makes them a decade in Nigeria and their operations are still deadly and so tactical. Globally, the most significant Terrorist attack has come from Salati Jihadist in the September 11, 2001 attack in the United States where about 3000 people were killed; these left them with no other option than to declare War against Terror (Neuman, 2008). Consequently, the United Nations Security Council adopted a Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in 2006 which aimed at combating Al Qaeda and all forms of Terrorism. However, due to political differences between member states, on what constitutes terrorism, it has hindered most member states from adopting it to enforce in their respective states.

Ejeh, Bappah & Dankofa (2019, Pp. 4-5) observed that there has been several violent acts in Nigeria and this has evolved into full-blown terrorism. Thus, in 2011, Nigeria enacted an Anti-terrorism Law called Terrorism Prevention Act, 2011 and was amended in 2013 by Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act, 2011. Prior to the enactment of this Act, cases relating to terrorism were handled by the Criminal Code Act and the Penal Code Act because they provide for diverse kinds of violent offences.

2. Banditry:

Banditry is defined as acts characteristic of a bandit, arm robbery; and a 'Bandit' is one who rob others in a lawless area especially as part of a group; an outlaw, one who cheat others (Wiktionary, 2019). Okoli & Okpaleke (2014) defined Banditry as the 'prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime'. It involves the use of force or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob, rape or kill. Rotberg (2007) observed that since 1999, crime against persons, including murder, rape and robbery has grown in scale and viciousness in Nigeria.

It suffices to note that from the above definitions of Banditry, it comprises of three violent crimes, which include Robbery, Rape and Murder

(homicide). Homicide was seen by Okonkwo and Naish (2005, p. 209) as the killing of a human being by another human being, however, it is not every killing of a human being that is unlawful. Section 306 of the Criminal Code Act provides that the killing of a human being is unlawful unless it is authorized/ justified or excused by law (p. 222). Specific offences such as murder, manslaughter, suicide or infanticide all fall within the spheres of unlawful homicide. The offence of murder is elaborately defined in Section 316 of the Criminal code. Murder involves where a person unlawfully intends to cause the death of another, to do grievous harm, or to do acts likely to endanger human life. There must be both the intent to kill and the act of killing. This has been the modus operandi of these bandits and 'Fulani Herdsmen' who perpetuate various violent crimes in Nigeria. It has just been lately in Nigeria that we started hearing of these acts of 'Banditry' as used to define the crimes perpetrated by unknown gunmen alleged to be either Boko Haram Sect or the Fulani Herdsmen. We have discussed earlier about Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the Federal Government announced in 2017 that Boko Haram has been technically defeated. Just as this terrorist menace was beginning to subside in Nigeria, there arose another terror-clothed set of persons named 'Fulani Herdsmen'. This Fulani Herdsmen are supposed to be innocent nomadic herdsmen who go about virtually every community in Nigeria rearing their cattle but unfortunately these cattle-rearers have been seen on camera fully armed and fortified to carry out criminal acts of robbery, rape and murder; this however is not unconnected with their incessant violent attacks on the unassuming villagers. The government of the day in Nigeria has failed to proscribe this Nomadic Fulani Herdmen, neither has the nefarious activities of this herdsmen been openly condemned by them.

Odinkah (2018) explains that 'Bandits' is now the new baptismal name for insecurity in Nigeria, and it joins a host of other growing crimes such as Boko Haram, Cultism, Herdsmen, Kidnappers and Militants.

Banditry in Nigeria has been an age long problem, which is traceable to the period after independence. However, around year 2009 due to the breakdown of government powers, the security of the Easterners were hijacked by vigilante horde named 'Bakassi Boys', this led to a fall in the crime rate because the said Bakassi Boys executed culprits almost immediately if their crime indicator alerts them that you are guilty- it was criticized for being engaged in extra-judicial killing.

Other crimes committed by these bandits in Nigeria are Rape, Kidnapping and Robbery. The crime of Robbery is committed when a person steals anything from another using or by threatening to use actual violence in order to obtain or retain the thing stolen and to avoid resistance from the person being stolen from- it is contained in Section 401 of the Criminal Code. Its punishment is imprisonment for 14 years but if the offender was armed with dangerous or offensive weapon, he will be liable to life imprisonment. However, after the civil war, the rate of Robbery was increasingly outrageous, this led to the enactment of Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree, No. 47 of 1970 to 21 years and if armed, its punishment would be death sentence by hanging or by firing squad.

Another crime prevalent in this 21st century is the offence of rape. Rape is provided for in Section 357 and 358 of the Criminal Code as when any person unlawfully has carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent or with her consent when it is obtained by force, threats or intimidation. Rape is the most grievous kind of sexual assault and its punishment is life imprisonment.

The next prevalent crime is the offence of kidnapping, its provided by Section 364 of the criminal code; it involves unlawfully imprisoning any person without his consent so that he cannot apply to court for his release and hindering access to him. The punishment is 10 years imprisonment, however some states have reviewed their criminal code law to impose life imprisonment or death sentence for the offence of kidnapping, an example is Ebonyi State.

These crimes of Terrorism, homicide, robbery, rape and kidnapping are amongst the prevalent violent crimes that are rampant in Nigeria in this 21st century.

The Nigerian Public Universities are not left out on this as high rate of offensive behaviours is among the confraternity in which include-

- (a) The Pyrates confraternity(the oldest)
- (b) The Supreme Eiyeye Confraternity (National Association of Air lords formed in Lagos in 1965).
- (c) The National Association of Sea Lords (Buccaneers) formed in 1972 in Ibadan.
- (d) The Klansmen Confraternity (Formed in University of Calabar) and
- (e) The Vikings.

These groups as at then were useful to the University politics because of their civic activism (Odinkalu, 2018). However, these groups are better titled as cultists now because they perpetuate diverse crimes in the society which negates the prior reasons for their formation, even the Secondary school students are fully immersed into these cult groups thereby exposing them to stealing, thuggery, pick-pocketing, assault and battery, rape and in most cases murder. This shows the need to wipe away every form of cultism in our nation, as it is a breeding zone for criminal behaviours among young persons and if left untamed would grow into more violent crime tendencies like banditry and murder. In Zamfara State of Nigeria, where gold-mining is ongoing they are experiencing a menace of high insecurity challenge occasioned by Banditry in the area. (Tsav A., April 7, 2019).

The Role of the Judiciary

The judiciary is one of the three tiers arms of government in Nigeria; the other two include the Executive and the Legislatives. The Judiciary is saddled with the responsibility of interpreting the law and ensuring checks and balances between the other two arms of government to avoid abuse of power. The judiciary is created or founded by Chapter 6 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Ali Y. (2001. Pp. 39-56) defined 'Judiciary' as the court system of a country. The court system is meant to dispense justice to all and this can be possible when justice is accessible in the country. Essien et al (2014) noted that the Judiciary is the bedrock of any government in this reigning democratic world today. The Judiciary is obliged to defend the constitution and uphold the rule of law in the country.

The legal profession in Nigeria comprises of the Bar and the Bench. The Bar comprises of the Legal Practitioners, the Public Prosecutors the Attorney-General whereas the Bench is made up of the Judicial officers, which include the Judges, the Magistrates, the Khadis and the Customary Court members.

In this 21st century, crime has been on a rapid increase, so also the work load for the judiciary. It is therefore expedient for the judiciary to thrive more in the face of the imminent global security challenges to ensure that justice is attainable both to the victim, to the defendant and to the general public as a whole.

We have observed that there are three instances of how criminal cases progress in Nigeria, first most of these cases on terrorism, rape and other related offences do not always get to the court, they are reported to the police and it dies at the police when the perpetrators of crime have allegedly settled and the police are given a tempting sum of money to close the case. Do we really blame the police? The police give the excuse of trying to play the role of ensuring peace and amicable settlement of disputes between the perpetrators of crime and the victims of crime, so when they agree not to proceed to court, the police allows them. This does not however negate the fact that crime committed is against the state and not against individuals.

The second instance comprises of those that actually reach the court but do not move forward. The defendants are arraigned before a lower court (Magistrates' Court) whereas they are charged with capital offences, the Magistrate declines jurisdiction and directs that they be charged properly at the High Court but for the meantime these defendants are remanded in prison custody while awaiting their Trial. These inmates are called 'Awaiting Trial Inmates'. Some of them stay in prison custody awaiting their trials for like 5 years, 10 years or more or less without their cases being instituted formally in court. Some other inmates who are buoyant enough to engage the services of a legal practitioner may apply for and be granted conditional bail pending trial.

The third instance comprises of cases of defendants who are charged to court, they take their plea and prosecution commences and continues till the final determination of the case. This instance is usually made possible when the complainants and the prosecutors are ready to proceed on the trial of the case.

The judiciary in Nigeria has been thriving in the adjudication of diverse crimes brought before her, but we believe that strategic adjudication need to employed to enhance speedy dispensation of justice. Thus, the entire Criminal Justice System which plays a key role in crime prevention, protection of victims and in the education of city dwellers as well as in reducing crime needs to be awakened further in Nigeria in order to curb diverse criminal tendencies among the citizens (Vanderschueren F. 1996. P.94). The judiciary needs to be strong, independent and ensure expeditious adjudication of crimes relating to terrorism and other national security offences. This would effectively serve as an efficient deterrent to terrorism

and would minimize the risk of violations of fundamental human rights (GCTF, 2019).

We shall look at the United Nations' Global Counter Terrorism Strategy on good practices for the Judiciary in Adjudicating Terrorism offences, these would also be useful generally to curtail the growing violent crimes in Nigeria, they are:

1. Identify and assign specially trained Judges: States should use judges specially trained to adjudicate on terrorism and other cases revolving on national security and these judges should hear the said cases from inception to conclusion. In Nigeria, Section 32 enshrines sole jurisdiction of the Federal High Court to try offences under the Terrorism (Prevention) Act
2. Support the use of continuous trials in Terrorism and other National Security cases – A functional justice system is known to be fair and expedient in its criminal trial. Some factors contribute to the delays in criminal trial, there are: hearing of evidences in part, limited judicial resources, shortage of available court time, cost of litigation and so on (GCTF, 2019).
3. Develop Effective Trial Management Standards.
4. Support Special Measures to protect victims and witnesses in the Trial Process.
5. Support the right of the Accused to a fair Trial with Adequate legal representation.
6. Support the Development of a legal Framework or Guidelines for the use and protection of evidence from Intelligence sources – that is to say an appropriate legal framework should be developed which will outline the rights and responsibilities of the parties involved as well as the procedures to be followed in this specific circumstances.
7. Contribute to the Development of Enhanced Court-house and Judicial Security Protocols and effective courtroom security – To ensure a fair and effective criminal justice system, adequate security should be provided for the judges, court personnel, victims and witnesses – Judges should thoughtfully fashion appropriate security solutions for identified threats.
8. Develop and articulate media guidelines for the court and parties - considering that trials of offences bordering on National Security is always very sensitive and attracts interests from the general public

and the media; thus, timely access to accurate information of court proceeding would increase transparency.

9. Ensuring Victims of Terrorism Access to Justice – The trial judge should play a vital role in ensuring that the victim's rights are protected, they should be treated with dignity and respect all through the court proceedings. Having seen the holistic and all embracing points on good practices for the judiciary as formulates by the Global Counter Terrorism Forum, we therefore adopt these good practices as our recommendations to the Nigerian judiciary, knowing full well that if same is practiced *in toto* in our country – Nigeria, there would be drastic fall in the recurrence of crimes especially crimes on National Security and violence.

Recommendation

Justice done to one is apparently justice done to all. It is glaring that national insecurity is the order of the day and we urge the judiciary to thrive more in ensuring that justice is done at all cost. Also, the perpetrators of these inhuman acts of Terrorism, violence and other crimes that threaten human life and national security should be promptly apprehended and speedily tried in a special court of law in order to curb the rate of this growing criminality in our society. The police being part of the Criminal Justice System need to effectively and efficiently carryout their lawful roles of apprehending the right suspects, carrying out detailed and thorough investigation before arraigning the suspect in the court of competent jurisdiction. The Nigerian Army also who are the major combatants of the terrorists should collaborate with the police to ensure that suspected terrorists/bandits and other perpetrators of violent crimes are not left off the hook without facing the full force of the law. The judges who try these cases should be adequately surrounded with active security officers to avoid this recent kidnapping of judicial officers in Nigeria. Finally, all hands must be on deck in this 21st century to ensure that there is a fall of these rising criminality and violence especially in Nigeria. The members of the public should all be security conscious and say no to all forms of crimes and violence at all levels. The public as well as the local vigilante should also be at alert in order to intelligently gather information about suspected criminals and avoid their menace.

On the other hand, the criminal justice system in the Nigeria should improvise a medium to ensure that witnesses especially eye witnesses and victims are adequately protected as provided in Section 31 of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2011. The Judiciary in this century should embrace speedy dispensation of justice without fear and favour; this would at least repose some level of public confidentiality on the Nigeria Judicial system, which is currently undergoing serious public ridicule.

Conclusion

The paper has sought to address the most prominent violent crimes ravaging our society in this 21st century. We considered terrorism and banditry. Globally, the acts of terrorism has been condemned and every country fights for the protection of the lives and properties of her citizens. The crime of banditry which is made up of three different offences- Robbery, Rape and Murder is another dehumanizing violent crime ravaging our society. The judiciary has a huge role to play in ensuring that cases of this nature brought before them are speedily and justly determined where found guilty the convicts should be made to face the full force of the law so that other members of the society would be deterred from committing the same/similar violent crimes. The Bar and the Bench and all Law Enforcement agencies including local vigilante groups, should thrive towards ensuring the security of lives and property of Nigerians and also ensure that judicial process is not watered down as to make the public to have little or no regards to the judicial system.

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