

## A CLEARER EXAMINATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SECURITY ISSUES IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explored some psychological perspectives on security issues in Nigeria. It delved into the cognitive biases, decision-making processes, and human responses to threats, uncertainty, and risk that shape perceptions and reactions to security challenges. Understanding the psychology behind individual and collective behaviours is fundamental to designing effective security measures. Examining the Nigerian context, this paper explored how cultural factors, personal experiences, and socio-economic status influence security perceptions. Additionally, the psychological consequences of insecurity, including stress, anxiety, and trauma have been explored. Drawing on behavioral economics principles, the paper discusses how incentives, nudges, and decision-making biases can enhance or hinder security practices. Effective communication strategies are essential for shaping perceptions of security, with language, framing, and messaging influencing public trust and cooperation. Finally, ethical considerations surrounding privacy, individual freedoms, and the manipulation of human behaviour underscore the importance of balancing security imperatives with ethical standards. Therefore, the paper encouraged policymakers and security professionals to integrate psychological insights into security practices. The recommendations included: a holistic approach for security that fosters trust, cooperation, and resilience in the face of evolving threats.*

**Keywords:** *Psychological Perspectives, Security Perspective, Security Issues, Security Measures*

### **Introduction**

Psychological perspective of security issues in Nigeria delved into the intricate relationship between psychology and security measures within the Nigerian context. It explores cognitive biases, decision-making processes, and human responses to threats, unveiling their pivotal roles in shaping individual and collective behaviors. Investigating perceptions of security, psychological

impacts of insecurity, and ethical considerations the paper offered insights into designing effective security practices. In addition, it discussed future trends, and recommendations based on psychological insights to bridge theory and practice in enhancing security outcomes in Nigeria.

## 1. Cognitive Biases and Security Perceptions and Policies

- i. *Cognitive Biases*: Cognitive biases are systematic patterns of deviation from rationality in judgment, whereby individuals process and interpret information in subjective ways. One prominent bias relevant to security is the availability heuristic, where individuals assess the likelihood of an event based on its ease of retrieval from memory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). For instance, media coverage of a particular type of crime might lead individuals to overestimate its prevalence, influencing their perceptions of personal safety and the need for security measures.

The widespread deployment of surveillance cameras in urban areas is influenced by the availability heuristic, where high-profile crimes captured on camera reinforce perceptions of the need for surveillance. However, research suggests that the actual effectiveness of surveillance cameras in preventing crime may be limited (Welsh & Farrington, 2009), highlighting the role of cognitive biases in shaping security policies.

- ii. *Decision-Making Processes*. Individuals' decision-making processes are influenced by various factors, including emotions, social norms, and perceived risks and benefits. Prospect theory suggests that people weigh potential losses and gains asymmetrically, with losses typically having a greater psychological impact than equivalent gains (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). In the context of security, individuals may prioritize avoiding perceived losses like harm to oneself or loved ones over potential gains like convenience, leading to decisions that prioritize security measures even when the actual risk is low. For Example, the implementation of strict security measures at airports, such as body scanners and luggage checks, is often driven by public perceptions of the threat of terrorism. Despite the low probability of a terrorist incident, the fear generated by high-profile attacks leads to demands for increased security to mitigate perceived risks.

## 2. Perception of Security

Examining how people in Nigeria perceive security differently based on psychological factors such as culture, upbringing, personal experiences, and socio-economic status sheds light on the complex interplay between individual backgrounds and attitudes towards security practices and policies.

- i. *Culture*. Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own cultural norms and values. These cultural differences influence perceptions of security in various ways. For example, research by Omotola (2016) highlighted how cultural beliefs about fate and destiny influence responses to security threats. In some communities, fatalistic attitudes may lead individuals to perceive security measures as useless, while in other communities with a strong sense of communal responsibility may drive collective action to address security challenges.
- ii. *Upbringing and Personal Experiences*. Individuals' upbringing and personal experiences shape their perceptions of security. For instance, those who have experienced violence or crime firsthand may have heightened perceptions of insecurity and advocate for more stringent security measures. Conversely, individuals from privileged backgrounds who have been shielded from such experiences may underestimate the security concerns faced by marginalized communities. Individuals

from marginalized communities may perceive the police as ineffective or corrupt due to negative personal experiences or community narratives. This skepticism may lead to low levels of trust in law enforcement agencies and reluctance to cooperate with security initiatives (Maiangwa & Umar, 2018).

- iii. *Socio-economic Status*: Socio-economic status significantly influences perceptions of security in Nigeria. Alemika and Chukwuma (2012) demonstrated how inequalities in access to resources and opportunities could contribute to differential experiences of security. For example, individuals from affluent neighborhoods may have access to private security services and fenced communities, leading to perceptions of safety, while those in low-income areas often lack such resources and may feel more vulnerable to crime. In areas with weak state presence, vigilante groups may emerge as alternative sources of security. While some view these groups positively as community defenders, others may perceive them as sources of violence and abuse of power, depending on their personal interactions and socio-economic status (Agbiboa, 2016).

### 3 Psychological Impact of Insecurity

Living in unsecured environments in Nigeria can have profound psychological consequences. Abiodun, et al. (2020) in their study highlighted the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among residents of conflict-affected regions in Nigeria. Exposure to violence, displacement, and the constant threat of insecurity contribute to heightened levels of psychological distress, impacting individuals' well-being and quality of life.

- i. *Long-Term Effects*: The long-term effects of living in insecure environments extend beyond immediate psychological distress. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to insecurity can lead to chronic mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex trauma (Igreja, et al., 2019). These conditions can impair individuals' ability to function in daily life, disrupt social relationships, and perpetuate cycles of violence and instability within communities.
- ii. *Role of Security Measures*. Security measures play a dual role in addressing the psychological consequences of insecurity in Nigeria. On one hand, effective security interventions can create a sense of safety and stability, reducing the prevalence of stress and anxiety within communities. For example, Hakeem and Okereke (2021) stated how community policing initiatives in conflict-affected areas have helped to rebuild trust between residents and security forces, leading to improved mental well-being.

However, the implementation of heavy-handed security measures, such as mass arrests, curfews, and militarized interventions, can exacerbate existing trauma and distress within communities. For instance, research by Odekunle (2017) highlighted how indiscriminate security operations in response to insecurity in Nigeria have led to human rights abuses and increased fear and mistrust among civilians.

### 4 Behavioral Economics Principles and Security

Behavioral economics principles recognize that individuals do not always make rational decisions and are influenced by psychological factors such as biases, emotions, and social context. In the context of security, these principles shape how individuals perceive and respond to threats, as well as their interactions with security measures. In many communities across Nigeria, neighborhood watch programs have been established to supplement formal law enforcement efforts and address local security challenges. These programs often rely on the following behavioral economics principles to encourage community participation and cooperation in crime prevention.

- i. *Incentives*: Incentives play a crucial role in shaping behavior and compliance with security measures. Research by Ajao and Oluwagbemi (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of incentive-based approaches in promoting adherence to security protocols, such as offering rewards or recognition for reporting suspicious activities. For example, the "See Something, Say Something" campaign implemented by security agencies in Nigeria offers incentives, such as cash rewards or public recognition, to individuals who provide information leading to the prevention of security threats. On Many occasions the Nigerian government offers cash rewards for actionable intelligence leading to the arrest of wanted criminals like late notorious leader of Boko Haram Abubakar Shekau. Or government promises the rewards for providing intelligence that can lead to the prevention of terrorist attacks.
- ii. *Nudges*: Nudges are subtle interventions that influence behaviour without restricting choice. In the context of security, nudges can be used to guide individuals towards safer behaviours and compliance with security measures. For instance, research by Ogunrinola and Adeboye (2021) demonstrated how simple environmental cues, such as signage indicating the presence of security cameras or police patrols, can push individuals towards increased vigilance and adherence to safety protocols in public spaces. For example, displaying signs or stickers indicating membership in the neighborhood watch scheme serves as a visual cue (nudge) to remind residents of their commitment to collective security. Additionally, the visibility of these signs creates a social norm that encourages others to join and contribute to community safety.

## 5. Communication and Perception of security

Highlighting the significance of effective communication strategies in shaping perceptions of security involves exploring how messaging, framing, and language influence public perception and compliance with security measures in Nigeria.

- i. *Significance of Effective Communication Strategies*: Effective communication strategies are crucial for shaping public perceptions of security and fostering compliance with security measures. In Nigeria, where diverse socio-cultural contexts and communication channels exist, strategic messaging plays a pivotal role in disseminating information, building trust, and encouraging cooperation among citizens and security stakeholders.
- ii. *Messaging and Framing*: The way security messages are framed can significantly influence public perception and behaviour. Ojebuyi, et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of framing security messages in a manner that resonates with the cultural values and beliefs of Nigerian communities. For example, framing security threats in terms of their potential impact on community well-being and social cohesion may evoke a stronger sense of collective responsibility and motivate proactive engagement with security measures.
- iii. *Influence on Public Perception and Compliance*: Effective communication strategies have a direct impact on public perception and compliance with security measures in Nigeria. Alabi, et al. (2021) *revealed* how well-crafted security messages that emphasize the benefits of compliance and the importance of community involvement can enhance public trust and cooperation with law enforcement agencies. Conversely, ineffective or misleading communication may erode trust, sow confusion, and undermine the legitimacy of security measures.

## 6. Trust and Security

Investigating the relationship between trust and security in Nigeria involves examining how trust in institutions, technologies, and fellow citizens influences the implementation and acceptance of security measures.

- i. *Trust in Institutions.* Trust in governmental institutions, such as law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of security and willingness to comply with security measures. Ibrahim, et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of trust in police effectiveness and accountability in fostering cooperation with security initiatives in Nigeria. When citizens trust that security institutions will act in their best interests and uphold the rule of law, they are more likely to support and adhere to security policies and practices.
- ii. *Trust in Fellow Citizens.* Trust in fellow citizens and community members influences cooperation and collective action in addressing security challenges. Adesina, et al. (2021) examined the role of interpersonal trust in community policing initiatives in Nigeria. Findings suggest that trust among residents fosters collaboration, information sharing, and mutual support, leading to improved community safety and security. When individuals trust that their neighbors will act responsibly and assist in times of need, they are more likely to engage with community-based security measures.
- iii. *Relationship between Trust and Security Measures.* The relationship between trust and security measures is reciprocal: trust enhances the effectiveness and acceptance of security measures, while the implementation of reliable and transparent security measures fosters trust in institutions, technologies, and fellow citizens. In Nigeria, building and maintaining trust through accountability in governance, transparent communication, and community engagement are essential for effective security provision and sustained public support.

## 7. Ethical Considerations

Examining the ethical dilemmas related to psychological aspects of security involves exploring issues such as privacy concerns, the balance between security and individual freedoms, and the ethical implications of manipulating human behaviour for security purposes.

- i. *Privacy Concerns.* Privacy concerns arise when security measures infringe upon individuals' rights to privacy and autonomy. In the context of surveillance and data collection, ethical considerations center on the collection, storage, and use of personal information. Adebayo and Ojo (2021) explored privacy concerns associated with the use of biometric technologies for security purposes in Nigeria. The study highlights the need for robust privacy policies and safeguards to protect individuals' rights while ensuring effective security measures.
- ii. *Balance Between Security and Individual Freedoms.* The balance between security and individual freedoms involves navigating the tension between safeguarding public safety and preserving civil liberties. Ethical dilemmas arise when security measures restrict freedoms such as freedom of expression, movement, and association. Adigun, et al. (2021) examined the ethical implications of counterterrorism measures on individual freedoms in Nigeria. The study highlights the importance of upholding human rights principles while implementing security policies to mitigate potential abuses and ensure accountability.
- iii. *Ethical Implications of Manipulating Human Behaviour for Security Purposes.* Manipulating human behaviour for security purposes raises ethical concerns related to autonomy, consent, and the potential for abuse of power. Behavioural interventions, such as social engineering techniques or behavioural profiling, may infringe upon individuals' rights and freedoms. Akpan and Inyang (2021) explored the ethical implications of using

behavioural profiling for security screening in Nigeria. The study emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability, and oversight to mitigate the risks of bias, discrimination, and unintended consequences associated with behavioural manipulation.

## 8. Future Trends in Nigerian Security

Discussing potential future trends in the intersection of psychology and security involves considering emerging areas of research, technological advancements, and evolving security challenges. Here are some potential future trends with recent references and internal citations:

- i. *Behavioural Biometrics*: The integration of behavioural biometrics, such as gait analysis, keystroke dynamics, and voice recognition, into security systems to enhance authentication and identification processes based on unique behavioural patterns.
- ii. *Predictive Behavioural Analytics*: The use of advanced analytics and machine learning algorithms to analyze patterns of behaviour and predict potential security threats or risks based on psychological indicators and digital footprints (John, Bertocello & Cecchinato, 2021).
- iii. *Emotional AI for Threat Detection*: The development of emotion recognition technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms were capable of detecting and interpreting human emotions to enhance threat detection and situational awareness in security contexts.
- iv. *Psychological Resilience Training*: The implementation of psychological resilience training programs for security personnel and the general public to build coping skills, stress management techniques, and emotional intelligence to mitigate the impact of security-related stressors and trauma.

## Suggestions

Here are recommendations for policymakers and security professionals to bridge the gap between theory and practice based on psychological insights:

### 1. Provide Training on Psychological Resilience:

- i. *Policymakers*: Allocate resources for the development and implementation of psychological resilience training programs for security personnel and the general public to build coping skills, stress management techniques, and emotional intelligence.
- ii. *Security Professionals*: Incorporate psychological resilience training into security personnel training programs to enhance their ability to cope with stress, trauma, and challenging situations effectively.

### 2. Foster Trust and Cooperation

- i. *Policymakers*: Promote initiatives that foster trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility between security agencies and the public, such as community policing programs, transparency measures, and community engagement events.
- ii. *Security Professionals*: Build trust and rapport with communities by engaging in proactive communication, listening to concerns, and addressing grievances effectively to enhance cooperation and collaboration in security efforts.

### 3. Implement Behavioural Insights

- i. *Policymakers*: Integrate behavioural insights into security policies and strategies to address human factors, cognitive biases, and decision-making processes that influence security outcomes, such as behavioural profiling, predictive analytics, and behavioural nudges.

- ii. *Security Professionals*: Leverage behavioural insights to inform security risk assessments, threat detection techniques, and decision-making processes, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of security operations.

#### 4. Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration.

- i. *Policymakers*: Support interdisciplinary collaboration between psychologists, security experts, policymakers, and other stakeholders to leverage diverse expertise and perspectives in addressing complex security challenges.
- ii. *Security Professionals*: Collaborate with psychologists, researchers, and policymakers to integrate psychological insights into security practices, policies, and interventions, fostering innovation and effectiveness in security efforts.

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