Insecurity and Underdevelopment in Rivers State: Policy Options for Sustainable Peace and Development

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the symbiotic relationship between persistent insecurity and the stalled developmental trajectory of Rivers State, Nigeria. Despite its status as a strategic economic hub fuelled by vast hydrocarbon reserves, the state remains trapped in a cycle of militancy, cult-related violence, and systemic criminality that undermines both local livelihoods and foreign investment. This study argues that the underdevelopment in Rivers State is not merely a consequence of violence, but a primary driver of it. Through a critical analysis of socio-economic data and existing security frameworks, the research identifies how high youth unemployment, environmental degradation from oil extraction and perceived political exclusion create a vacuum filled by non-state armed actors. The paper moves beyond traditional "hard security" critiques, positing that the current militarized interventions have largely failed because they address the symptoms of unrest rather than the structural inequalities that sustain it. The findings suggest that sustainable peace is contingent upon a shift towards human security models. The paper proposes a multi-dimensional policy framework centred on decentralized governance, aggressive investment in technical and vocational education, and rigorous implementation of environmental remediation projects. The state can transition from a "war economy" to a resilient, diversified industrial base. The study concludes that only through a synchronized approach, in which security policy is embedded within a broader developmental agenda, can Rivers State achieve lasting stability.

Keywords: Insecurity, Underdevelopment, Policy Options, Sustainable Peace and development, Rivers State.

Introduction

- "When trouble pays you a visit, it comes with both its children and grandchildren." Igbo Proverb
- "He who brings trouble to his family inherits the wind." Ikwerre Proverb
- "The best bed that a man can sleep on is peace." Somali Proverb

Rivers State occupies a paradoxical position within the Nigerian federation. As the "Treasure Base of the Nation", it serves as a critical engine for the national economy, accounting for a significant percentage of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings through its vast oil and gas reserves. However, this strategic economic importance has not translated into a commensurate level of human security or infrastructural stability. Instead, the state has become a flashpoint for systemic insecurity, characterized by a complex intersection of militancy, oil theft, cultism and political violence. This study proceeds from the premise that the persistent volatility in Rivers State is both a cause and a consequence of chronic underdevelopment—a "trap" where economic stagnation fuels unrest, and unrest, in turn, scares away the investment needed for growth.

The crisis in Rivers State is often simplified in popular discourse as a purely criminal or an ethnic issue. However, a deeper structural analysis reveals a crisis of governance and resource management. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the state has grappled with the emergence of non-state armed actors who have leveraged the grievances of marginalized populations. According to Watts (2007), the "petro-violence" in the Niger Delta is deeply rooted in the alienation of host communities from the wealth generated on their ancestral lands. In Rivers State, this alienation is palpable. Despite the presence of multinational corporations and heavy industrial activity, local communities often lack basic amenities, while environmental degradation—caused by both corporate negligence and artisanal refining—has decimated traditional livelihoods in fishing and farming (Obi & Siri, 2011).

The theoretical nexus between security and development is well-documented. As the World Bank (2011) noted in its *World Development Report*, "fragility and

violence are not just security problems, but developmental challenges." In Rivers State, the cost of insecurity is reflected in the massive flight of capital. Port Harcourt, once a thriving industrial hub, has seen numerous manufacturing firms and service providers relocate to safer places, leading to "hollowing out" of the local economy. This economic exodus exacerbates the youth unemployment crisis, creating a ready pool of recruits for cult groups and criminal syndicates. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle: insecurity breeds poverty, and poverty provides the social oxygen for insecurity to thrive.

Furthermore, the state's security landscape is complicated by the politicization of violence. Omotola (2010) argues that the recruitment and arming of youth groups for electoral purposes have left a legacy of "orphaned" militias—groups that, once elections are over, turn to kidnapping and oil bunkering for survival. This "militancy-to-criminality" pipeline suggests that the security challenge is not merely about policing, but more about addressing the underlying political economy of violence in the state. Previous government interventions, largely characterized by "hard security" measures and short-lived amnesty programmes, have often focused on cessation of hostilities rather than cultivation of sustainable peace.

This paper moves beyond these reactive strategies. It explores a more holistic approach that integrates security policy with socio-economic empowerment. The core argument is that sustainable peace in Rivers State cannot be achieved through the barrel of a gun alone; it requires a radical reimagining of the social contract. This involves transparent resource management, restoration of the local environment, and creation of an inclusive economy that offers the youth viable alternatives to the "war economy".

This study provides a road map for policy shifts that prioritize human security over mere regime stability. It is only by addressing the major threats to sustainable development that Rivers State can move from a state of fragile peace to one of enduring prosperity.

Statement of the Problem

The central problem confronting Rivers State is the mutually reinforcing cycle of violent insecurity and systemic underdevelopment. Despite being the "Treasure Base of the Nation", the state's socio-economic landscape is marred by high unemployment (estimated at over 40% in recent cycles), pervasive poverty and environmental collapse. This developmental deficit has created a vacuum of opportunity, which non-state armed actors, ranging from cult groups like *Deygbam* and *Dewell* to sophisticated oil bunkering syndicates, have exploited. Dealing with the issues raised above requires the effectiveness of the institutional frameworks that have been established for building peace.

This paper questions the existing peace, security and development systems as well as the mindset of those operating them. How robust are the systems vis-a-vis the problems they are expected to solve? What are the security and development issues? What attempts were made to address and redress these conflict issues? What are the low hanging fruits and quick wins in Rivers State? Which of the multiple security challenges have defied solutions, and what gaps are to be filled in their management and how such practical-knowledge gap could be filled by both state and non-state actors? What are the global/Africa-centred best practices and lessons for correcting existing peace, security and development problems? What social, economic and political infrastructure must be provided to attain sustainable peace? What collaborative frameworks are needed between the state and non-state actors for preventing and managing the crisis situations in Rivers State? What is the hope for the future? These are the core modern-day peace, security and development questions the study attempts to answer.

Previous governmental responses have relied heavily on kinetic (military) interventions and state-sponsored amnesty deals. While these measures occasionally achieve "negative peace" (the temporary absence of violence), they consistently fail to produce "positive peace" because they do not address the structural grievances of the populace. Consequently, the state remains a high-risk environment for investment, leading to business flight and further impoverishment. The problem, therefore, is not just the presence of violence, but a fundamental failure of the state to provide the human security necessary for

sustainable development. This is the gap that interveners have to fill in practical terms to build more peaceful and resilient society.

Objectives of the Study

The guiding objective of this research is to evaluate the nexus between insecurity and underdevelopment in Rivers State and propose viable policy alternatives to spread peace and positivity and help to build a more compassionate Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

i. identify the socio-economic drivers of insecurity and underdevelopment;
ii. analyze the impact of persistent violence on the industrial and investment climate of Port Harcourt and its environs;
iii. evaluate the efficacy of current security policies in mitigating non-state armed violence; and
iv. propose a human security-centred policy framework for achieving sustainable peace and development.

Theoretical Framework: Human Security Theory

This paper adopts Human Security Theory as its primary analytical lens. Formally introduced by the UNDP in its 1994 Human Development Report, this theory shifts the "referent object" of security from the State (territorial integrity and regime stability) to the individual (well-being and dignity).

Why this theory fits Rivers State:

Freedom from Fear vs. Freedom from Want: In Rivers State, the threat of physical violence (fear) cannot be separated from the lack of basic necessities (want). Human security posits that hungry or unemployed youth are a security threat precisely because their "economic security" has been compromised.

The Social Contract: The theory aligns with the Lockean view that the state's legitimacy depends on its ability to protect the lives and livelihoods of its citizens. In Rivers State, the perceived breach of this contract, where oil is extracted but the "dividends of democracy" are absent, fuels the agitation that leads to insecurity.

Preventative Policy: Unlike traditional security models that react to violence, the Human Security Theory advocates "prevention through development". It

provides the logical basis for the paper's argument that investing in vocational training and environmental clean-ups is a more effective long-term security strategy than increasing military checkpoints. This emphasis flows from the Normative Democratic Peace Theory, which posits that mature democracies hardly resort to violence in dealing with problems but the transitional ones do. What this means in essence is that one of the ingredients of a mature democracy is the preference for peaceful settlement of differences instead of resorting to violence. Therefore, humans must shift away from the lawlessness of the past to demonstrating respect for due process. In this respect, the democratic process must be characterized by joint problem-solving attitudes and behaviour, such as compromise, cooperation, understanding as well as transparency and accountability. This is a peacebuilding responsibility.

Literature Review: The Insecurity-Development Nexus

The relationship between insecurity and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta, and specifically within Rivers State, is characterized by complex, bidirectional causality. Contemporary scholarship suggests that these two forces do not merely coexist; they feed into each other in a destructive symbiotic loop. To understand this nexus, one must move beyond surface-level observations of crime and examine the structural, political and economic underpinnings that have rendered Rivers State a volatile paradox of "wealthy land, poor people".

The "Resource Curse" and the Political Economy of Petro-violence

A foundational theme in the literature is the "resource curse", otherwise termed the paradox of plenty. Watts (2007) and Obi (2011) argue that the discovery of oil transformed Rivers State into a monoculture economy, where the focus on hydrocarbon extraction led to the systemic neglect of traditional sectors like agriculture and fishing. This "Dutch Disease" did more than just skew the economy; it altered the social fabric of the state.

As the state became a rentier entity—dependent on oil rents rather than a diversified tax base—the social contract between the government and the governed began to fray. Watts (2007) introduces the concept of "petro-violence", suggesting that the presence of oil infrastructure creates a high-stakes environment where communal agitation becomes a primary tool for bargaining

with both the state and multinational corporations. In this context, underdevelopment is not just a lack of infrastructure; it is also an active state of "ecological dispossession" where the destruction of local environments by oil spills forces the peasantry into a state of permanent economic vulnerability, making the "rebellion" a survival strategy.

The Governance Gap and the "Orphaned Militia" Phenomenon

A significant body of literature focuses on the "governance gap". Omotola (2010) and Iyesha & Abu (2023) assert that insecurity in Rivers State is, at its core, a failure of political institutions. A particularly pervasive theme is the instrumentalization of violence for political gain. During electoral cycles, the political class frequently recruits, arms and funds youth groups to serve as enforcers. The tragedy, as noted by Iyesha & Abu (2023), occurs in the post-election period. Once the political objectives are met, these groups are often "orphaned"—abandoned by their patrons but remaining in possession of both arms and a taste for the illicit economy. Left without a viable path back into the formal labour market, these orphaned militias morph into the cult groups and kidnapping syndicates that currently haunt the streets of Port Harcourt and its riverine hinterlands. Thus, insecurity is revealed not as a random outbreak of lawlessness, but as a direct by-product of a political culture that prioritizes regime security over human security.

The Economic Cost of Violence: The "Hollowing Out" of Port Harcourt

Recent empirical studies have begun to quantify the devastating economic toll of this persistent instability. Research by *Quest Journals* (2024) highlights the "hollowing out" of Port Harcourt, once the undisputed industrial heartbeat of the South-South region. The literature identifies a staggering increase in the "risk premium" associated with operating in Rivers State.

The escalating cost of doing business—driven by astronomical insurance premiums, the necessity of maintaining private security details (Mobile Police attachments), and the logistical nightmare of "danger zones"—has led to a steady exodus of multinational service companies. When these firms relocate to more stable environments, like Lagos or even Accra, the state loses more than just jobs; it also loses a critical portion of its internally generated revenue. This depletion of the state's fiscal capacity further hampers its ability to fund the developmental

projects—schools, hospitals and roads —that might alleviate the frustrations of the populace. This completes the "vicious cycle": underdevelopment breeds the grievances that lead to violence, and violence ensures that the state remains too unstable to develop.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research design, utilizing a desk-based secondary data analysis approach. This method is particularly suited for exploring the complex socio-political dynamics of Rivers State, as it allows for the synthesis of diverse perspectives, historical trends and longitudinal data that a primary survey might fail to capture within a limited timeframe. By interrogating existing records, the research identifies patterns of conflict and developmental stagnation that have evolved over decades.

Data Sources and Selection

The study relied on purposive selection of high-quality secondary materials to ensure academic rigour and objectivity. The data corpus included the following:

Official Government Publications: Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) regarding unemployment and poverty indices, and documents from the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)

Scholarly Literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference papers focusing on the political economy of the Niger Delta

Institutional Reports: Periodic assessments from international organizations, such as the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and non-governmental organizations, like the Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN)

Security Archives: Data from the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) and various conflict-mapping platforms that document incidents of cultism, kidnapping and militancy in Rivers State

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were processed using thematic and content analyses.

The research categorized information into core themes, such as Economic Exclusion, Environmental Injustice and Political Militia Recruitment.

Socio-economic Drivers of Insecurity

It is important to look beyond the immediate symptoms of violence and examine the structural rot that makes conflict an attractive, and sometimes rational, alternative for the populace. The insecurity in the state is not a spontaneous phenomenon; it is a predictable outcome of specific socio-economic pressures that have converged to create a "fragility trap".

1. The Crisis of Youth Unemployment and Idleness

Rivers State presents a stark contradiction: It hosts some of the most capital-intensive industrial operations in Africa, yet it consistently grapples with one of the highest unemployment rates in Nigeria. This systemic exclusion of the youth from the formal economy is arguably the most potent driver of insecurity.

The "Reserve Army" of the Unemployed: When thousands of energetic, educated, or semi-skilled young people are excluded from the labour market, they become a "reserve army" for non-state armed groups. In this context, joining a cult or a militant faction is often viewed not as a criminal choice, but as an economic one—a way to secure "social protection" and a share of the "oil cake" through extortion or oil bunkering (Ayeni & Akeke, 2022).

Skill Mismatches: There is a profound disconnection between the requirements of the high-tech hydrocarbon industry and the output of the local educational system. This gap ensures that, while jobs exist, they are often filled by "expatriates" or Nigerians from other regions, deepening the sense of local resentment and "relative deprivation".

2. Environmental Degradation and the Death of Traditional Livelihoods

In Rivers State, the environment is the economy. For the rural majority, the land and the rivers are the primary means of production. Decades of oil spills and gas flaring have compromised this foundation, leading to what scholars termed "environmental insecurity".

Destruction of the Primary Sector: Persistent pollution has decimated the fishing and farming sectors. When a river is coated in crude, a fisherman loses his livelihood; when the soil is scorched by acid rain or spills, a farmer loses his capital. This "ecological dispossession" leaves the rural youth with two options: migrate to the urban slums of Port Harcourt, where they join the ranks of the urban poor, or engage in artisanal refining (Kpo-fire), which further degrades the environment in a destructive feedback loop (SDN, 2021).

The "Kpo-fire" Economy: Ironically, the response to environmental and economic neglect has been the rise of illegal local refineries. While these provide immediate income, they foster a culture of criminality and trigger violent wars between rival syndicates and security forces.

3. Structural Inequality and the "Resource Curse"

The driver of insecurity is often less about absolute poverty and more about inequality. The visible opulence of the oil elite in Port Harcourt, contrasted with the squalor of the waterfront settlements and rural Ogoniland, creates a powerful narrative of injustice.

Perceived Marginalization: The sense that the state's wealth is being extracted to develop other regions (or enrich a few local "political gatekeepers") provides the ideological fuel for militancy. As Watts (2007) argues, this "petro-capitalism" produces a governance structure that is more accountable to oil revenues than to its citizens, leading to a breakdown in the social contract.

Cultism as Social Capital: In the absence of a functional state that provides security and opportunity, cult groups have stepped in to provide a perverted form of "social capital". These groups offer identity, protection, and a means of wealth redistribution through kidnapping and "protection fees" levied on businesses and politicians (Okoli, 2019).

4. Political Instrumentalization of Violence

The socio-economic vulnerability of the population is frequently exploited by the political class. The "poverty of the electorate" makes it inexpensive for politicians to recruit youth as electoral thugs. Once the elections end, these groups remain

armed but unpaid, transitioning into kidnapping and highway robbery to sustain themselves, a phenomenon often described as the "democratization of violence" (Omotola, 2010).

5. Character education, which is critical to sustainable peace and development in the state, has been left unattended to in many of the development plans of the government and other stakeholders (Nwobueze, 2025).

Impact of Persistent Violence on the Industrial and Investment Climate of Port Harcourt and Its Environs

The industrial and investment climate of Port Harcourt and its environs exists in a state of high-stakes tension. While the city remains a strategic point for sub-Saharan Africa's energy sector, the persistence of violence, ranging from kidnapping and cult-related skirmishes to sophisticated oil theft, has fundamentally altered its economic landscape. This impact is not merely a series of isolated disruptions; it is a profound structural erosion of the state's competitive advantage.

1. The "Risk Premium" and Escalating Operational Costs

For businesses in Rivers State, the cost of doing business is significantly higher than in more stable regions. "Security tax" manifests in several ways:

Private Security Architecture: Multinational corporations and large-scale indigenous firms are forced to maintain extensive private security details, including Government Security Forces (GSF) attachments and private contractors. These non-productive expenditures divert the capital that would have otherwise been channelled into innovation, capacity expansion or research (Adegbite et al., 2021).

Insurance and Logistics: High-risk designations by international insurers lead to exorbitant premiums. Furthermore, the logistical challenge of moving personnel and equipment, particularly along the East-West Road or through the riverine areas, requires armoured escorts and restricted movement windows, leading to severe supply chain inefficiencies.

2. De-industrialization and "Business Flight"

The most visible impact of persistent violence is the physical relocation of businesses. Port Harcourt was once a vibrant hub for manufacturing and logistics, but the peak of militancy and the subsequent rise in ransom-motivated kidnapping triggered the "hollowing out" of the industrial sector.

Corporate Exodus: Numerous oil-service companies and manufacturing firms have relocated their headquarters or primary operational bases to Lagos or neighbouring countries, like Ghana. This capital flight is driven by the need for "personnel safety" and "predictability", two variables that the Rivers State investment climate currently struggles to guarantee (*Quest Journals*, 2024).

Stagnation of Small and Medium Enterprises: Small and medium enterprises, which lack the resources to fund private security, are the most vulnerable. Frequent cult-related violence in commercial areas like Obio-Akpor and Port Harcourt City Local Government Area often forces premature closures, discouraging the "bottom-up" entrepreneurial growth essential for a resilient economy (Adeyemi, 2022).

3. Erosion of Human Capital and Workforce Stability

The investment climate is further degraded by the impact of violence on the labour force. A stable industrial climate requires a highly skilled, mobile and motivated workforce, yet insecurity creates "brain drain" and psychological instability.

Skill Migration: High-level technical experts and seasoned managers often refuse postings to Port Harcourt or demand "hardship allowances" that inflate payroll costs. In many cases, the most talented local graduates migrate to safer regions, depriving the state of its most vital resource, human capital (Okeke, 2021).

Workforce Productivity: Persistent threats of abduction and communal violence lead to high rates of absenteeism and psychological stress among workers. When employees operate in an environment of fear, productivity declines, and the competitive edge of local industries is blunted (Onwuka et al., 2022).

Deterrence of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
Rivers State's unique economic position means it should be a magnet for FDI. However, insecurity acts as a powerful deterrent. Potential investors prioritize "political stability" and "the rule of law".

The Reputation Trap: The global perception of Port Harcourt as a "volatile" zone discourages new entrants. Even when profit margins in the oil sector are high, the reputational risk and the potential for "hostage crises" make institutional investors wary (Nwankwor & Nkechukwu, 2023).

Infrastructure Vandalism: Persistent violence often targets the infrastructure needed for investment, such as pipelines, power installations and telecommunications towers. This vandalism increases the "recovery time" for businesses and signals a lack of state control, further dampening investor confidence.

Efficacy of Current Security Policies in Mitigating Non-state Armed Violence
The efficacy of the current security policies in Rivers State remains a subject of intense debate among policymakers and security scholars. While the state and federal governments have deployed an array of strategies—ranging from the kinetic operations of the Joint Task Force (JTF) to localized amnesty deals—the results are often characterized by "temporary lulls" rather than structural stability. An objective evaluation reveals that, though these policies have succeeded in protecting critical oil infrastructure, they have largely failed to neutralize the pervasive threat of non-state armed violence at the community level.

1. The Limitations of Kinetic-first Strategies
The dominant security paradigm in Rivers State has been "kinetic"—the use of superior military force to displace armed groups. Operations such as JTF's Operation Delta Safe have been effective in reclaiming territories from open militancy and protecting offshore assets (Global Sentinel, 2025). However, these interventions often treat the symptoms rather than the disease.

The Displacement Effect: Military raids frequently push armed actors out of urban centres, like Port Harcourt, to riverine or rural "ungoverned spaces" in local

government areas like Khana and Gokana. This does not eliminate violence; it merely relocates it, often leading to increased impunity in rural communities where police presence is negligible (Amnesty International, 2020).

Human Rights and Mistrust: Over-militarized responses have frequently been marred by allegations of extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests. According to Arimomo (2020), such actions deepen the "distrust" between civilians and security forces, making community members hesitant to share the intelligence necessary for proactive policing.

2. The Amnesty and De-radicalization Paradox

State-level amnesty programmes, which have been a staple of Rivers State security policy since the mid-2000s, offer a "soft" alternative to combat. While these have successfully brought high-profile "generals" to the negotiating table, their long-term efficacy is questionable.

The Incentive for Violence: Critics argue that "monetized" peace deals create a moral hazard. By rewarding armed actors with stipends and contracts, the state inadvertently signals that violence is a viable path to economic empowerment. This encourages the emergence of new "orphaned militias" who take up arms in hopes of securing the next round of government patronage (Iyesha & Abu, 2023).

Failure of Reintegration: The "Reintegration" phase of "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration" (DDR) remains the weakest link. Without a robust post-amnesty economic framework, former cultists often return to crime, utilizing the very skills they honed during their time in the creeks (ResearchGate, 2025).

3. Intelligence Gaps and Political Instrumentalization

The efficacy of security agencies in the state is further hampered by a lack of coordinated intelligence and the persistent shadow of political interests.

Intelligence Stagnation: Despite investments in ICT and surveillance, the Rivers State Command often struggles with "actionable intelligence". Research indicates that the lack of community support is a primary barrier; when people do not feel

protected by the state, they are more likely to seek protection from (and provide information to) local non-state actors (*EA Journals*, 2023).

The Political Nexus: A significant policy failure lies in the inability—or unwillingness—to decouple security actors from political patronage. As long as non-state armed groups are utilized as "electoral security" by the political elite, any policy aimed at their eradication will be fundamentally compromised (Nextier, 2025).

4. Transitioning to Human Security (2025 Projections)
As of late 2024 and early 2025, there was a visible shift in the discourse towards "non-kinetic" measures. The Fubara administration has pledged increased support for security agencies, but experts argue that success hinges on governance-led security (*Punch*, 2025).

Community Policing and Vigilantism: The legalization of local vigilante groups (like OSPAC -Onelga Security and Peace Advisory Committee) represents a policy attempt to bridge the security gap. While popular, these groups remain a "double-edged sword", requiring strict state oversight to prevent them from devolving into the very cult-like entities they are meant to combat (*Quest Journals*, 2024).

Human Security-centred Policy Framework for Achieving Sustainable Peace and Development
To achieve lasting stability in Rivers State, the state must shift from a "statist" security model, which prioritizes the protection of infrastructure and elite interests, to a human security-centred framework. This paradigm shift recognizes that violence is not merely a policing failure, but a symptom of socio-economic disenfranchisement. A sustainable policy framework must, therefore, integrate economic opportunity, social development, environmental justice and institutional reform into a unified strategy for peace.

The proposed framework is built upon four strategic pillars designed to challenge the structures and processes that contribute to insecurity and underdevelopment in the state.

1. The Economic Anchor: Decentralized Industrialization and Vocational Mapping
The current "rent-seeking" economy must be replaced with a productive, inclusive model.

Sector-specific Vocational Hubs: Rather than generic skill acquisition, the state should establish vocational centres in each senatorial district tailored to local strengths, for example maritime and blue economy hubs in the riverine areas and agro-processing centres in the upland regions. This creates a "ladder of opportunity" for youth, making the "war economy" less attractive (Obi & Siri, 2011).

Incentivizing the Informal Sector: Policies should focus on formalizing the artisanal economy. By providing micro-credits and cooperative frameworks for small-scale manufacturers and technicians, the state can move thousands of young people from the periphery to the formal tax-paying economy.

2. The Environmental Anchor: Remediation as an Employment Strategy
In Rivers State, environmental degradation is a direct driver of conflict. Reversing this is not just an ecological necessity but also a security imperative.

The "Green Jobs" Initiative: The state should mandate and co-fund large-scale remediation projects for oil-impacted sites. By training and employing the local youth in environmental clean-up and reforestation, the state transforms potential "saboteurs" into "stewards" of their own land.

Sustainable Agriculture and Aquaculture: Restoring the ecosystem allows for the revitalization of traditional livelihoods. Policies must support the modernizing of these sectors to ensure they are high-yield and profitable enough to compete with the lure of illegal refining (SDN, 2021).

3. The Governance Anchor: Institutionalizing Community Policing and Oversight
The "trust gap" between the people and the state is a primary obstacle to peace.

Legislative Oversight for Local Vigilantes: Groups like OSPAC must be brought under a rigorous, transparent legal framework that includes human rights training

and strict accountability to the State Ministry of Justice. This prevents the devolution of security outfits into partisan militias (Iyesha & Abu, 2023).

The Peace and Reconciliation Commission: A permanent, non-partisan commission should be established to mediate communal land disputes and chieftaincy tussles before they escalate into armed conflict. This body would serve as a "proactive peace" mechanism rather than a reactive one.

4. The Social Anchor: Reform of the Educational and Social Contract
Sustainable peace requires a cultural shift in how the youth view their relationship with the state.

Civic Education and Conflict Resolution: Integrating peace studies and civic responsibility into the state's secondary and tertiary curriculums is vital to de-radicalizing the "cultist" mindset from an early age.

Transparency in Resource Management: To mitigate the "Resource Curse", the state must adopt Open Government Partnership (OGP) principles, ensuring that local communities can see exactly how oil derivatives and internally generated revenues are being spent in their specific domains (World Bank, 2011).

A human security-centred framework posits that peace is a by-product of development, not a prerequisite for it. By treating the youth as assets rather than threats, and by addressing the environmental and economic grievances that have festered for decades, Rivers State can break the cycle of insecurity. The transition from a "fortress state" to a "human security state" is the only viable path to a stability.

Conclusion

The trajectory of Rivers State serves as a poignant case study in the complex interplay between resource abundance and socio-political fragility. This research has demonstrated that the state's persistent insecurity is not an isolated phenomenon of criminality, but rather a structural by-product of chronic underdevelopment and the erosion of the social contract. The "Treasure Base of the Nation" remains caught in a paradoxical loop: while its subsoil generates the

wealth that sustains the Nigerian federation, its surface is marked by environmental ruin, economic exclusion and the rise of non-state armed actors. To view the volatility in Rivers State through a purely kinetic lens, as a problem to be solved solely by military might, is to ignore the fundamental drivers that make violence a rational, albeit destructive, choice for a marginalized youth population. The findings of this paper underscore a critical reality: the current security architecture, heavily reliant on state-centric "hard" power and transient amnesty deals, has reached the limits of its efficacy. While these measures may achieve short-term stability or protect vital oil infrastructure, they fail to address the "freedom from want", which is central to the lives of the citizenry. The "hollowing out "of Port Harcourt's industrial base and the subsequent flight of investment are clear indicators that the "risk premium" associated with the state has become unsustainable. Without a radical departure from the status quo, the state could face a permanent descent into a "war economy", where the lines between political agitation, communal survival and organized crime become increasingly blurred.

Sustainable peace in Rivers State is contingent upon the adoption of a human security-centred policy framework. As argued in this paper, the path forward must be paved with tangible developmental milestones. This involves shifting from a rent-seeking governance model to one that prioritizes decentralized industrialization, investment in agriculture to strengthen food security and improve quality of life, environmental remediation and institutionalization of community-led security oversight. By transforming polluted creeks into hubs of aquaculture and replacing militia patronage with vocational dignity, the state can begin to reclaim its youth from the periphery of society. Economic progress must be accompanied by security and peace.

The challenge of Rivers State is governance. The transition from insecurity to sustainable development requires more than just policy documents; it demands the political will to decouple security from partisan interests and a commitment to transparent resource management. The state stands at a crossroads. It can either continue the cycle of reactive policing and underdevelopment, or pioneer a new model of "peace through prosperity". If the recommendations outlined in this paper are integrated into a cohesive strategy, Rivers State can finally bridge the

gap between its immense potential and its lived reality, securing a future where nation-building is a shared responsibility.

To achieve this, the citizens must stand together in unity of purpose, uphold patriotism, and collectively serve the state with honour and integrity. Certainly, a collaborative and problem- solving methodology will accelerate sustainable development through contributions that empowered, healthy and enlightened Rivers indigenes will make to national peace, security and development.

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