

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND NIGERIA'S EXTERNAL IMAGE, 2015-2022

**OBI, CHIKE UGOCHUKWU**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**

**&**

**UZODINMA CHUKWUEMEKA OKAFOR**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**  
**cu.okafor@unizik.edu.ng**

### **Abstract**

*Nigeria as a country is bedevilled with enormous human right violations which have in the recent time elicited national concerns and global attention. Against this backdrop, this study examined the effects of incidents of human right violation on the country's international image between 2015 and 2023. The study adopted ex post facto research design which relied on documentary sources of data collection and empirical data generated from these sources of data collection were content-analyzed to reveal the alarming height of human right violations by the security agencies was witnessed between 2015 and 2023. It further discovered that these unpleasant incidents of civil and human rights abuses had adversely undermined Nigeria's international image as Muhammadu Buhari's administration grapple with constrained efforts to mitigate these irregularities within the period under review. From these findings, the study recommends enabling legislations, advocacy, police reform as among other measures to abate violations of rights and privileges for better Nigeria's image.*

**Keywords:** External Image, Human Rights, Human Rights Violation, International image and Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Human rights and privileges are the fundamentals of modern democracies. Hence, the widening gap between democratizing states of less developed economies and democratized states of advanced economies obviously lies in the safety and liberty of individuals and groups to express alienable rights of human dignity, self-development, etc. Basically, state as a sovereign polity has enormous responsibility to guarantee and safeguard these rights. To this end, Abiri and Maigari (2014), stressed that it is generally accepted under international and national laws that human rights promotion and protection rest on the state. This is necessitated by the very fact that protection of human rights is fundamental to genuine and lasting law and order. A position hinged on the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law"(Permeable on Universal Declaration on Human Right, 1948).

Furthermore, by voluntarily ratifying international human rights treaties under international law, states create legal obligations upon themselves to be bound by such treaties (Johnson, 2016). Thus as the primary duty bearer, the state must guarantee the '*respect, protection, promotion and fulfillment*' of all human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights) of citizens and persons within its territory. These legal obligations on states creates not only positive obligations on them to protect these rights from abuse and ensure their full enjoyment and realization by taking concrete steps but also a negative obligation to restrain itself and its agents from curtailing the enjoyment and realization of the human rights. Thus, the obligation extends to providing channels for redress and effective remedies where there is an infringement in the enjoyment of the rights. This requirement to provide remedy ensures accountability (Abe and Barbara, 2016)

There are however circumstances where limitations to the enjoyment of these rights are permissible accordance to Article 29 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Right, 1948. Hence, Atiku (2018), argued that such limitations shall only be those as are determined by law. As state powers are generally exercised through its agents, by implication they are bound to adhere to and apply the universally recognized human rights norms and due process of law in the exercise of their powers. It follows therefore that states' observance or repression of human rights (as the case maybe) is realized through its agents most notably its police and other security agents.

Nigeria as a member of the international community is a state party to several regional and international human rights treaties that prohibit inhuman treatments and abuses. Nigeria's Constitution and the acts of the state security enforcement agencies stipulate procedure for professional engagement and guarantee civil rights. Also, the Nigerian government has repeatedly claimed that it does not condone human rights violations by security forces, including the police (Arogundade, 2017). However, Otu, *et al* (2018), pointed out that Nigeria's image, first at the domestic level, and the international level, was not something to be boastful of with regards to democratic rights. The political and socio-economic situations in Nigeria within this period up until the Fourth Republic, as aptly captured by Olorunyomi (2014), debased Nigeria and the country assumed a pariah status among civilized countries in the world. The nation was plagued by abnormalities in almost every, if not all, facets of the national life which brought about some international sanctions and smeared global image. Particularly, her image has been threatened by the current Boko Haram terrorism, and the violent secessionist agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) occasioned with incessant cases of human rights violations. Added to these are corruption and crime which play key roles in giving the nation a bad perception. The image crisis that has engulfed the Nigerian state, giving her a negative perception among the comity of nations, has made it difficult to market or advertise Nigeria (Agu, 2017). Hence, the curious question is whether Nigeria's negative image at the international arena was also a function of human right violations under Muhammadu Buhari's administration beyond Boko Haram terrorism and IPOB insurrectional offensives? Thus, is it appropriate to say that incidents of human right violations under Muhammadu Buhari's administration have adversely affected Nigeria's international image in view of the country's signatories to international conventions promoting human right?

Significantly, the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari's presidency in 2015 was indeed a resonance of hope for a country in fervent search for growth and development (Adewale, 2015). Also, the Buhari's administration has over the years demonstrated passionate resolve to fight corruption, protect human rights and guarantee the freedom of democratic institutions in the country (Adesina, 2019). In effort to uphold democratic rights and decent labour, Nigeria in September 2022, ratified the International Labour Organization, ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, making it the first country in West Africa and the eighth county in the world to do so. The treaty obligates Nigeria to provide comprehensive protections to ensure a world of work free from violence and harassment including gender violence and sexual harassment. The ratification further bolster the image of Nigeria state in the comity of Nations and seen as a commendable development in effort to ensure industrial harmony between the federal government and Nigeria labour unions (Hassan, 2022). On the contrary, Onuche, *et al* (2017), Atche (2018) and Williams, *et al* (2019), however respectively argued that human right violations under Buhari's administration got worse instead of abating. These contradictory assertions elicit more curiosity on the efforts of the Buhari-led administration towards safeguarding human rights in promoting better international image for the country.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Human Right and Human right violation**

Human right as a popular concept is replete with affinity of perspectives from scholarly submissions and reports of state and international institutions which underlines the essence of humanity and universality in the survival and advancement of the human race. Report of Inter-parliamentary Union, UN, (2016), defined human right as rights inherent to all human beings. It defines relationships between individuals and power structures, especially the state. Human rights delimit state power and, at the same time,

require states to take positive measures ensuring an environment that enables all people to enjoy their alienable rights. History in the past 250 years has been shaped by the struggle to create such an environment. Hence, Philip (2018) stressed that from the French and American revolutions in the late eighteenth century, the idea of human rights has driven many revolutionary movements for empowerment and for control over the wielders of power, governments in particular.

Similarly, Obiora and Onwughalu (2018) observed that human rights are basic rights and freedom that all people are entitled to regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language, or other status. It includes civil and political rights, such as the right to life, liberty and freedom of expression and social, cultural and economic rights including the right to participate in election, to work and receive education. Human rights are the fundamental features of any true democratic setting because the essence of democracy itself is based on the idea of human rights. Human rights are mostly viewed as the inalienable rights of people (Enebe, 2008). Similarly, human rights are the legal entitlements which every citizen could enjoy without fear of the government or its fellow citizens. Human rights are those rights which cannot be said to have been given to man by man but are earned by man for being a human because these are necessary for his continuous happy existence with himself, his fellow man and for participation in a complex society (Kaluge, 2013). The basic issues involved in fundamental human rights according to Ndifon (2013) are (a) freedom rights – freedom from oppression in its various forms, (b) participation rights – in the decision making processes in various sphere of life, (c) benefits right – to food, work, medical care, education, etc. In a study of the development and evolution of human rights (Enebe, 2008).

In Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that the whole of Chapter Four of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended was devoted to fundamental human rights provisions. Out of the fourteen (14) sections which make up the Chapter, eleven (11) contain various human rights provisions namely,

1. Right to life-Article 33
2. Right to dignity of human person -Article 34.
3. Right to personal liberty-Article 35
4. Right to fair hearing -Article 36
5. Right to private and family life -Article 37
6. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion -Article 38.
7. Right to freedom of expression and the press Article 39.
8. Right to peaceful assembly and association -Article 40.
9. Right to freedom of movement -Article 41
10. Right to freedom from discrimination -Article 42
11. Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria.

(Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999:34-41)

In the defence of public interest, some of the rights may be denied. The right to alter some of these rights resides in the court. To buttress this point, Section 45 (1) provides that nothing in Sections 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 of this constitution shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society in the interest of defense, public safety, public morality or public health; or (b) for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other persons. These are the conditions under which rights could be denied (Obiora and Onwughalu, 2018).

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### **External Image**

In this regard, Otu, *e tal* (2018), viewed international image as a country's standing in the international system although dependent on some other factors. International image of a country is highly dependent

on her image perception being positive or negative. The perception of a country by members of the international system to know how a country pursues its relations with others, and particularly, the behaviour of its citizens at home and abroad combine to determine the country's image (Zimako,2009).Thus, image making is very fundamental in pursuit of national interest and country's prestige in the comity of nation-states.

In explicit sense, image can be seen as the perception of a country by other actors in the international arena (both states and non-state actors), which can be a result of objectivity or subjectivity of purpose. The global image of a country, therefore, provides a basis for self-reappraisal in the event of any bad perception (Chidozie, *et al*, 2014). Global image, Boma-Lysa. *et al* (2015) purported, relates to how a country is seen by other global actors when it pursues its relations with others and particularly, the behaviour of its citizens at home and abroad. According to Holsti (1996), image as an individual's (or nation's) perception of an object, factor condition in terms of badness or goodness as well as the meaning ascribed to, or deduced there from. From this indication, it is concluded that image-building must necessarily constitute a fundamental element of a nation's foreign policy, suggesting that the way a country is perceived, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is a function of her national image (Adeniyi,2012).

To underline the import of variables that enhance or plummet the image of a country in the comity of nation-states, it is stressed that a nation's dogged pursuit of image-building forms an important determinant of how well the country is doing at home and abroad and is simultaneously an essential element in the strategy for foreign policy formulation and implementation. Drawing from Chidozie *et al* (2014) and Holsti (1996), it may be safe to state that just as image-making can be objective, it is also relative or subjective in that, images are either good or bad. Both good and bad perceptions have their consequences. But nations, according to their own standards or leaders' perception, perpetually endeavour to have a good image among the comity of nations. Hence, it may appear intangible but the benefits and advantages flowing from a good image are inestimably unquantifiable.

In the positive side, Chidozie *et al* (2014) reasoned that a good image constitutes a source of goodwill and patronage for a country. Investors largely consider this factor in determining where to direct investment funds. It also explains the level of unfriendliness. It is therefore understandable why every government seeks to promote, at all times, a better image nationally and internationally... A good image results in respect, influence and prestige. While, a bad or negative perception of a country's image implies that such a country lacks respect, influence and prestige in the international system.

Significantly, international or rather foreign image represents perception and regard accorded to a country by relating sovereign states and non-sovereign entities of the international system. To this extent, this study takes a critical look on Nigeria's international image in view of events of human right violations (if established) within the period under review.

## **Empirical Review**

### **Incidents of Human Right Violation in Nigeria, 2015-2023**

In a study carried by Nwachukwu and Aghamelo (2014), An Account of Human Right Violations in Nigeria (Pre-British, British and Post independence).The study in qualitative design examined in a historic sense status and dynamics of human rights violation from British to Post Independence. The work revealed that at the inception of the present Fourth Republic in 1999 under the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigerians had a sigh of relief that democracy and its twin sister, the rule of law, which is the basis for the protection of human rights, will come to stay. Unfortunately, everybody was amazed and disappointed at the level of human rights violation even in the democratic regime of Obasanjo. The study further concluded the reality both at the levels of civilian and military governments, the post- colonial state in Nigeria have consistently mirrored the authoritarian and repressive nature of its colonial antecedents. Furthermore, the state has not been able to attract normative legitimacy from the populace given its penchant for forceful extraction of resources from the society while not relating itself in any concrete sense to the existential realities of most the citizens. However, the study is enormously limited in the incidents of human right violations under Buhari's administration in credence to the period, 2015 to 2023.

In attempt to fill this gap, a study conducted, Adeola (2020), examined the democratic governance and human rights protection in Nigeria with reference to comparative analysis of three past administration from

1999-2019 (Obasanjo, Yar'aDua, Jonathan and Buhari's Nigeria). The study adopted qualitative research design. The study revealed that Buhari-led administration indicted high profile figures and former top officials in his cabinet of Jonathan's government on corruption charges. However, Buhari's administration was accused of being one-sided in the fight against corruption given the fact that prominent officials within the ruling party were not also indicted. There was also the arbitrary exercise of executive power, sometimes through the Department of State Services (DSS), in the illegal detention of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and afore most Shi'a Muslim cleric (Ibrahim El Zakzaky). Moreover, towards the 2019 general elections, the suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria (Walter Onnoghen) based on an *ex parte* order issued by the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) also raised concerns on the adherence by the government to the rule of law and fundamentals of civil liberty. The study concluded that the years 1999 to 2019 have brought 20 years of hope—the future of which, from the past, has raised optimism, skepticism and pessimism. The study recommend that for the future of democratic governance in Nigeria to be sustained, it is imperative for these challenges to be decisively addressed beyond the rhetoric of political promises. However, the study is limited on more pragmatic approach to address the pleasant events of human right violations in Nigeria.

In further analysis, Nzarga (2014) conducted a study on, “An Analysis of Human Rights Violation by the Nigerian Security Services. The study in a qualitative design examined the circumstances leading to such violations, as reported by the media and the impediments to the realization of human rights, the possible prospects for its amelioration in form of recommendation. The study revealed that security services of any nation are an integral part of the society that cannot be dispensed with and their responsibilities with regard to securing lives and properties cannot be overemphasized. Sadly, the study however revealed that it is, ironical that the security services (the Nigeria Armed Forces, the Nigeria Police, the State Security) who are supposed to safe-guard and protect human rights turn around to trample upon and violate the rights of the citizenry through unlawful arrest and detention, torture, etc. The study further recommends for the state enforcement agencies to always abide with the provisions of the constitution in the discharge of their duties. However, the study is limited on specific incidents of human violations by enforcement agencies.

In a more specific sense, Asogwa, *et al* (2021), in their study on the State, EndSARS Protests and Human Rights Violation in Nigeria, the study adopted a qualitative design to revealed that in November, 2017, there was an online protest against police brutality and highhandedness in Nigeria. By October, 2020, the citizens' discontent and dissatisfaction with the activities of the police led to as mass revolt against the institution, specifically against the Special Anti-Robber Squads (SARS) of the force. The response of the Nigerian state to the protest was total repression and subjugation of their demonstrators. The study further indicates that Nigerian state is corrupt, inefficient, non-productive, authoritarian, and embezzles money. It therefore follows that the institutions of the state entrusted with the power to protect the lives of people and property would compromise in doing so. Since these institutions are corrupt, it follows that they will likely not arrest the real offenders. As a result, there is a high amount of impunity and a general break down law and order. The study concluded that brutality of the Nigerian police, or specifically the Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS), is not a spur of the moment action or a spontaneous event; rather, it is a pattern and routine that is traceable to the colonial orientation of the Nigerian police and the nature of post-colonial character of the Nigerian state. The study recommends that the issues raised should be addressed. However, the study is constrained on the responses of state authorities to allegations of human right abuse by the infracting security agencies.

In a similar perspective, Chukwu, *et al* (2020), carried out a study on Police Brutality and Human Rights in Nigeria's Democracy: Focus on Restoration of Man's Dignity  
In a similar study carried out by Ozo, *et al* (2019) on Challenges of Human Right Violation and Democratic Development in Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari. The study adopted a qualitative research design with emphasis on secondary sources of data collection and textual method of data analysis. The study

revealed that one of the daunting challenges bedeviling Buhari's administration is incessant cases of human right violations which range from illegal search warrant, unlawful arrest and detention, extortion, extra-judicial killing, torture from a popular anti-graft agency, EFCC and Department of State Security Service, DSS. The study further argued that Buhari's government was very insensitive to call the infracting agency to order in view of public condemnation and outcry. The study concluded that human right violations were rampantly notorious under Buhari's government which undermines the image of the country in relation with the rest of the world. The study recommended for overhauling of the security and anti-graft agencies and reform of their operational activities to safeguard rights and respect rules of the courts. The study also advocate that Buhari's government will command a lot of respect and regard from other countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americans if there is genuine and sincere steps to address the challenges of human right violations in the country. However, the study is limited on how these cases of human right violations affected the international image of Nigeria.

### **Incidents of Human Right Violations and Nigeria's International Image, 2015-2023**

The section was reviewed in line with the demands of the study. In a study carried out by Ibukun (2021) Nigeria's Image Problem and Image-Polishing: Foreign Policy Responses since 1999. The study examined Nigeria's image crisis underlying its causes and challenges. The work adopted qualitative design with emphasis on observational and secondary sources of data collection where the data gathered were content-analyzed. The study argued that the inaugural speeches of successive regimes since 1999 show an increasing recognition of Nigeria's external image problem, especially with key governance indicators like corruption perception and human rights promotion. Hence, there is an equally growing awareness of the challenge this national image problem, acquired under decades of military rule, presents to foreign policy, demonstrating that perception matters in international relations. Consequently, what can be termed image-polishing appears to have dominated the country's foreign policy space since 1999. Drawing on data from relevant international organizations, the study empirically demonstrated and concluded that external perception of Nigeria has not improved significantly after two decades of image-polishing foreign policy. This is expected, as efforts designed to shore-up the national image have been framed by toxic domestic politics. Ultimately, Nigeria's image-polishing foreign policy thrust is enmeshed in denial and rhetorical commitment and as a result suffers a lack of constructive engagement with the country's image problem. The study advocated for need to address domestic irregularities adversely affecting the country's image. However, the study failed to establish how human right violations undermined Nigeria's international image.

In a similar attempt, Otu, *e tal* (2018), carried a study on, Nigerian Foreign Policy Posture and Global Image: An Assessment Of Nigeria's Foreign Policy in Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari's Administrations(2011–2017).The study relied on systematic qualitative content analysis of secondary data sources. A cursory thrust into the history of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence revealed that the objectives and principles of the nation's foreign policy have remained the same though with slight modifications. The study argues that the perception of Nigeria at the international level has been poor especially during the period under review. This is attributable to a number of factors like insecurity, corruption, and economic downturns. The study subsequently, recommends for the implantation of mindful efforts to curb insecurity and corruption through fortified institutional frameworks and effective surveillance hinged on resource provision and prudent use, economic diversification, and a re-definition agenda to create a new identity and image for Nigerians, by Nigerians. The study concluded that major substance of there-definition agenda should be creating a new identity and image for Nigerians. Nigerian slack a positive international identity, designing one for them becomes an urgent task for the nation's diplomats. The diplomatic missions should engage in some aggressive image laundry for the nation and its citizens being exposed to ridicule and embarrassment across the globe. The president, as the nation's chief diplomat, needs to go beyond diplomatic appeals for international recognition, foreign investments and debt relief. Mindful efforts should be made to curb insecurity and corruption through fortified institutional frameworks and effective surveillance hinged on resource provision and prudent use. However, the study is limited in the crisis of human right on Nigeria's international image,

## **Discussion of the Study**

### **Incidents of Human Right Violations in Nigeria, Between 2015 and 2023**

Basically, Kabir (2022) noted that Buhari rode to power in 2015 on a promise to respect the rule of law, but Muhammadu Buhari's tenure as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria ends on May 29, 2023 after eight years of disobeying a number of court orders, a clamp down on innocent Nigerian youths, and repeated attacks on the press. During his formal declaration for presidency in 2014, Buhari vowed to respect the constitutional separation of powers between the executive, legislature, and judiciary and respect the rights of citizens. Hoping that the promise would be fulfilled, the majority of Nigerian voters elected Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as president in preference to the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan. Speaking at the inauguration for his first four-year term on May 29, 2015, he said "the federal executive under my watch will not seek to encroach on the duties and functions of the legislative and judicial arms of government. The law enforcing authorities will be charged to operate within the Constitution." He repeatedly pledged that his administration would focus on guaranteeing press freedom and upholding the rule of law at different gatherings. He was re-elected on February, 23, 2019 and after receiving a certificate of return, Buhari said "the hard work to deliver a better Nigeria continues, building on the foundations of peace, rule of law and opportunities for all. Now that he has completed his eight years tenure as president, how did Buhari perform in terms of fulfilling his promises to respect the rule of law, and promote equity and freedom of the press? This question undoubtedly resonates from the submissions of scholars and practitioners including Nigerians on human right assessment under Buhari's administration. Emphatically, there were empirical indications which revealed that profile of human right violations in Nigeria stem from the deliberate infringements and infractions of the security agencies. In this vein, the Report of National Human Right Commission (2016), documents that the police, DSS, and military reported to civilian authorities but periodically acted outside of civilian control. The police and military remained susceptible to corruption, committed human rights abuses, and operated with widespread impunity in the apprehension, illegal detention, and sometimes extrajudicial execution of suspects. In the armed forces, a soldier's commanding officer determined disciplinary action, and the officer's decision was subject to review by the chain of command under the Armed Forces Act. The DSS also reportedly committed human rights abuses, particularly in restricting freedom of speech and press. In some cases, private citizens or the government brought charges against perpetrators of human rights abuses, but most cases lingered in court or went unresolved after the initial investigation.

Police and other security services have the authority to arrest individuals without first obtaining warrants if they have reasonable suspicion a person committed an offense, a power they often abused. The law requires that, even under a state of emergency, detainees must appear before a magistrate within 48 hours and have access to lawyers and family members. In many instances government and security officials did not adhere to this regulation without being bribed. Police held for interrogation of individuals found in the vicinity of a crime for periods ranging from a few hours to several months, and, after their release, authorities frequently asked the individual to return for further questioning. The law requires an arresting officer to inform the accused of charges at the time of arrest, transport the accused to a police station for processing within a reasonable time, and allow the suspect to obtain counsel and post bail. Families were afraid to approach military barracks used as detention facilities. Police routinely detained suspects without informing them of the charges against them or allowing access to counsel and family members; such detentions often included solicitation of bribes. Provision of bail often remained arbitrary or subject to extrajudicial influence. Judges often set exceedingly stringent bail conditions. In many areas with no functioning bail system, suspects remained incarcerated indefinitely under investigative detention within the prison system. Authorities kept detainees incommunicado for long periods. Numerous detainees alleged police demanded bribes to take them to court hearings or to release them. If family members wanted to attend a trial, police often demanded additional payment.

Subsequently, Kuta and Bello (2018) also embellished that Section 33 (1) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees the right to life for all Nigerians but the manner security agencies, including the army, are deployed to suppress civil liberties was not different from what was obtainable during the military era. In December 2015, the Nigerian Army launched an attack on members of the country's Shia community, killing hundreds of people. Today, many families still carry the scars. The military claimed that the Shia

Muslims attempted to assassinate former Chief of Army Staff Tukur Buratai when the incidents occurred but multiple sources however, insisted the soldiers killed scores without any threat to Buratai's safety. The IMN members were planning to celebrate the first day of Rabi' al-Awwal when the soldiers arrived at the venue of their programme. As the arguments between the soldiers and the IMN members got intense, the soldiers reportedly opened fire on the people, killing scores. They later proceeded to the residence of El-Zakzaky, where hundreds of people were hiding. According to Amnesty International, the incident led to the death of hundreds of people and many were allegedly buried secretly by the army in a mass grave and 23 families were said to have been wiped out of existence. In October 2020, soldiers in another case of gross human rights violations inflicted a war-grade assault on the Oyigbo community in Rivers state, after mobs suspected to be members of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) killed some security personnel. While the military authorities claimed that troops were deployed to the town to fish out terrorists who murdered soldiers and police officers, on-the-ground investigations revealed that soldiers inflicted bloodshed on the town.

Besides military brutality, it is also observed that security agencies also clamp down on peaceful protesters. The Nigeria Police have a history of brutality and disrespect for the rule of law. For years, its officers have been accused of disregarding human rights of accused persons, violently suppressing protests, infringing on fundamental rights, and corruption. All of these led to the #EndSARS protests against the activities of the operatives of the police's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). For weeks in October, 2020, many Nigerian youths protested against all forms of irregularities by the police unit. The protests led to the disbandment of the police tactical squad. But soldiers were deployed to the epicentre of the nationwide protests at Lekki Tollgate on Oct. 20, 2020, where many were killed. Many innocent Nigerians were also arrested randomly after the incident. Aside from this, security forces used excessive unnecessary force, including lethal force, against peaceful demonstrators on different occasions, a development that grossly negates the core democratic tenets of freedom of assembly, association, and expression (Olu, *et al*2021).

Today, Nigeria is literally bleeding. There is too much violence. We have bred enough Frankenstein monsters to haunt us. We feed them red meat each time they cry for blood. Those who are not killed by Boko Haram are killed by the Joint Task Force. Those who escape the JTF fall into the hands of min-bending illiteracy. Those who manage to escape all those are consumed by road accidents. Some die in poorly equipped hospitals. Those lucky to bypass all of the above are either killed with hunger, poverty, or frustration practically turns them a living dead.

In underscoring the trend of human right violations, Human Right Watch Report (2017), indicated that the ongoing Boko Haram conflict in the North-east, cycles of communal violence between pastoralists and farmers, and separatist protests in the Southern part defined Nigeria's human rights landscape in 2017. A new report by the United States Government published on Premium Times of March 26, 2018 has described Nigeria as a country where corruption, official impunity, and gross human rights violations occur at will. According to the Report, the terrorist group, Boko Haram, and the Nigerian Government are the worst perpetrators of human rights abuses in the country. The most serious human rights abuses during the year were those committed by Boko Haram, which conducted killings, bombings, abduction and rape of women, and other attacks throughout the country, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and widespread destruction of property; those committed by security services, which perpetrated extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, beatings, arbitrary detention, mistreatment of detainees, and destruction of property; and widespread societal violence, including ethnic, regional, and religious violence. On herdsman killings and communal violence, it is argued that the lingering violence between herdsman and farmers claimed more than 549 and displaced thousands in 12 states. In February 21, villagers were killed by suspected herdsman in Atad, Kaura district, Kaduna State. Twenty one people were killed by suspected herdsman in Ancha village of Miango, Plateau state. An attack by suspected herdsman leads to the death of 27 people in Nkyie-Doghwro, Plateau state. In December herdsman attacked 5 villages in Demsa LGA Adamawa State, killing up to 57 people (Udoh, 2021).

Also, the Nigerian press was not spared under Buhari's climate of right abuses, Adebajo (2017), stressed that the press faced several attacks during Buhari's administration despite the provision of the Constitution that mandate journalists to hold power to account. Since the controversial Cybercrime Act became law in 2015, many media outlets and journalists have witnessed attacks from authorities for doing critical journalism. For instance, publisher and editor-in-chief of Weekly Source Newspaper in Bayelsa, Jones Abiri



was arrested in 2016 by the State Security Service (SSS) for alleged links to armed militancy in the Niger Delta. He was not released until two years later. Abiri was re-arrested in March 2019 and spent another seven months in prison before being granted bail by the Federal High Court in Abuja, after an intense campaign by media rights activists. In 2018, police arrested Azeezat Adedigba, a reporter at Premium Times, to track her colleague, Samuel Ogundipe. The latter was in detention for five days over allegations that he had classified documents capable of causing a breach of national security and a breakdown of law and order. For using his Facebook account to call out the federal government on the poor state of the nation, SSS arrested Ibrahim Dan-Halilu, a former editor with Daily Trust, in August, 2019. He was detained in Kaduna for 11 days without access to his relatives (Udoh, 2021).

Similarly, it was argued that Nigerian press, bolstered by strong civil society, remains largely free. However, journalists face harassment, and the implementation of a 2015 Cyber Crime Act threatens to curtail freedom of expression. In January 2017, police arrested two journalists, the publisher and judiciary correspondent of an online publication, Premium Times in Abuja for articles that allegedly showed “deep hatred for the Nigerian army.” In June, Ibraheema Yakubu, a journalist with the Hausa Radio Service of the German Deutsche Welle was arrested and detained while covering a procession by the Muslim Shiites group in Kaduna. He was reportedly slapped and beaten by the policemen. In August 2017, police arrested and detained journalist, Danjuma Katsina, in Katsina State for posting allegedly “injurious comments” about a politician on Facebook. The two journalists were later released after a day each in detention following the intervention of officials of the Nigerian Union of Journalists. Daily Post News Online of February 22, 2018 similarly reported that “On 19 September 2017, the Katsina State police arrested three bloggers, Jamil Mabai, Bashir Dauda and Umar Faruq, for criticizing the Governor. “On 19 January 2018, police raided the offices of Premium Times and arrested and detained publisher Dapo Olorunyomi and correspondent Evelyn Okakwu for several hours, after the Chief of Army Staff accused the newspaper of offensive publication”. Also, the Director of Defence Information announced, in August 2017, that the military would monitor social media for hate speech, anti-government and anti-security information. The government also directed the National Broadcasting Commission to sanction any radio or television station that broadcasts hate speech. It threatened to charge people found to spread yet-to-be defined hate speech under the Terrorism Prevention Act (Olusanya, 2022).

Again on freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and freedom of expression, the police continued to deny Islamic Movement of Nigeria, which was banned by the Kaduna State government in 2016, the right to peaceful protest. On 25 July, Police in Kano city prevented a group of women from protesting against the persistent rape of women and children in the state. On 19<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the Katsina State police arrested three bloggers, Jamil Mabai, Bashir Dauda and Umar Faruq for criticizing the Governor. On 19 January 2018, police raided the offices of Premium Times and arrested publisher Dapo Olorunyomi and correspondent Evelyn Okakwu for several hours, after the Chief of Army Staff accused the newspaper of offensive publications (Obiora, 2018, Olusanya, 2022).

Other cases of rights violation abound. For instance, on April 26, 2016, Sahara Reporters reported that a human right lawyer and activist, Chief Femi Falana SAN had asked President Muhammadu Buhari in a petition to order investigations into a variety of acts of impunity and human rights abuses under his government, particularly extra-judicial execution of criminal suspects by the police and the unlawful killing of unarmed civilians including women and children by the armed forces. The newspaper reported that "On February 22, 2016, a platoon of soldiers invaded Ogoni land in Rivers State and killed three unarmed youths," Falana noted that the demand of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) that the culprits be prosecuted has been ignored by the authorities. Falana also complained about the trend of publicly parading robbery and kidnap suspects before the media in clear breach of the constitutional provisions on presumption of innocent (Willimans, 2017).

Invariably, Nigerian Government under President Buhari and its disregard for rights as further served to perpetuate the cycle of discrimination, violence and harassment, even though the country is already bound by several regional and international human rights treaties. The overall sympathy for the deplorable treatment of real or perceived Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex, LGBTQI persons is abysmally low, because speaking out against the harassment and injustice contravenes religious/ societal obligations and can easily be interpreted as a declaration of gayness.

These factors and more have successfully birthed cases of extortion, mob violence, police brutality, unlawful arrests, discrimination in the home/workplace and more, for both real and perceived LGBTQI persons in the country (Ojo, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

Human right violation in Nigeria assumed an alarming height under Mohammed Buhari's administration between 2015 and 2022. Sadly, the unpleasant situation had terribly led to loss of lives and properties. To add, the security agencies entrusted with the role to safeguard privileges and rights of Nigerians have suddenly become instruments of terror. An adverse situation which created a wide gap between the people and the government and its agencies. Hence, the relationship between the people and the security agencies is replete with suspicion and hatred.

This reality has invariably created image problem for Nigeria state. Nigerians and officials of its government are often subjected to discourteous treatment by foreign immigration officers. In this vein, the unabated waves of human right violations have continue to project Nigeria as a despotic polity which is not healthy for the realization of lofty ideals of national development. Today, investors' confidence (both foreign and domestic) have been eroded by the height of infringements of civil liberties of Nigerians and corporate organisations to indicate that Nigeria is a never serious country interested in the welfare of its people and development process of the state through foreign relations.

Sadly as noted, the security agencies (Police and Army) were at the centre of these impunities and brutalities. These unpleasant situations invariably elicited the need for a way forward.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are derived from the findings:

1. The National Assembly should strengthen the National Human Right Commission with enabling legislations to be optimal and swift in its statutory mandate. It is acknowledged that the commission is limited by laws to take decisive steps on its mandate.
2. The Federal government should initiate process for a sincere and proactive police reform. The various recommendations suggested by committees on police reforms over the years should be collated to address the irregularities in the force regarding its orientation, welfare, professional disposition and relation with the civil population.

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