

# Nigeria: State Capacity and Insurgency in the Niger Delta since the 1990s

Otoabasi AKPAN

Ubong Essien UMOH

**Abstract.** *During the post-1990 period, negative peace (the absence of armed violence) appeared to have taken a holiday in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The insurgency in the Niger Delta has experienced a free fall, mutating and escalating almost uninterrupted. Mainstream analyses of the causes and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta tend to focus on the deprived actor (frustration and aggression) and rational actor (greed and opportunity) paradigms. Less attention has been paid to the role of state capacity in the onset and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta. Indeed, the specific relationship between state capacity and the onset and duration of the insurgency, especially in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, is yet to receive brawny scholarly attention. This paper attempts to remedy this shortcoming. Building upon well-established theoretical and empirical literature on state capacity, the paper examines the effect of state capacity on the insurgency in the Niger Delta since the 1990s. The paper argues that the manifestation and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is a reflection of a feeble state capacity. State capacity significantly explains the willingness to participate in, and the shelf life of, the insurgency in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. To this end, the cause of and cure for the insurgency in the Niger Delta rests on a robust state capacity which the Nigerian state lacks.*

**Keywords:** *State Capacity, Insurgency, Niger Delta, Rebellion.*

## Introduction

Mainstream approaches to insurgency in the Niger Delta tend to nest upon issues of environmental degradation and pollution (Onosode, 2003; Jike, 2004; Aaron, 2006; Akpan, 2008; Douglas, 2009), injustice (Tamuno, 2011; Emeseh, 2011), inequality (Tamuno, 2011), underdevelopment

Otoabasi AKPAN

Department of History &  
International Studies, Akwa Ibom  
State University, Nigeria  
E-mail: otoabasiakpan@yahoo.com

Ubong Essien UMOH

Department of History &  
International Studies, University of  
Uyo, Nigeria  
E-mail: ubongumoh@uniuyo.edu.ng

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 14, January 2016, pp. 92-110

(Agbonifo, 2009; Tamuno, 2011; Ledum, 2011; Akpan, 2011), deprivation and exploitation (Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009; Obi, 2010b; Obi, 2009c), oil extraction and dispossession (Obi, 2010a; Ukiwo, 2011; Bassey, 2012), poverty (Oyefusi, 2008), unemployment (Oyefusi, 2008; Oyefusi, 2010), greed (Ikelegbe, 2005, Tangban and Umoh, 2014), opportunity (Oyefusi, 2010), corruption (Tangban & Umoh, 2014), poor schooling (Oyefusi, 2010), arms proliferation (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Ibeanu & Luckam, 2006; Ojodu, 2007; Duquet, 2011; Edeko, 2011), bulging youth population (Ukeje, 2001; Oyefusi, 2008), state repression (Owugah, 2009; Inuwa, 2010), injustice (Asain, 2009; Owugah, 2009), deficit corporate social responsibility of oil companies (Owugah, 2001; Frynas, 2003; Idemudia, 2011), resource control (Anugwom, 2005; Obi, 2007; Obi, 2009; Ako, 2011; Sufyan, 2012), resource curse (Watts, 2004; Alao, 2007; Obi, 2010a, 2010b), regime type (Inuwa, 2010).

These issues seamlessly weave into the Deprived Actor (DA) and Rational Actor (RA) debate. The deprived actor (DA) line of thinking highlights grievances as an important cause of insurgency while the rational actor (RA) school, on the other hand, downplays the role of grievances and instead emphasises both resource mobilisation and opportunity structure as credible factors motivating insurgents' activities (Jakobsen, 2011). Both approaches have been used to explain the cause and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta, leaving the salient impact of state capacity in relative neglect. Moreover, although, few studies examine the relationship between state capacity and political violence in the general literature (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2015; Fjelde and de Soysa, 2009), the concept has not found tenants as it borders on the Niger Delta insurgency.

Consequently, state capacity becomes an undisclosed variable in the factorial mix and calculation of the onset and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta. It is safe to infer that the place and significance of state capacity in the onset and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta denied the academic attention it deserves. This paper seeks to remedy this deficiency in the historiography of the Niger Delta insurgency since the 1990s. Focus is given to the dimension of state capacity that concerns security. Security refers to the ability of the state to uphold its monopoly over the legitimate use of force. This revolves around the state's stability, control, protection from predation, and the ability to adapt and respond to unexpected crises.

### **The Concept of State Capacity in International Security Studies**

Tilly (1990, 2003) opined that state capacity evolved historically over centuries in response to the exigencies of war. In the field of international security studies, which circumscribes defence, war and conflict (Buzan & Hansen, 2009), state capacity is viewed as a multidimensional concept (Sobek, 2010; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2015) that has a prominent place in the literature on the causes of armed conflict (Arbetman & 7 Kugler, 1998; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Buhaug, 2006), the intensity of armed conflict

(Benson & Kugler, 1998), its duration (DeRouen & Sobek, 2004), the proliferation of armed social actors (Hendrix, 2010; Braithwaite, 2010; Akpan, 2010) and human rights abuse (Englehart, 2009).

Fearon and Laitin (2003) provide a convenient start up point for the discourse on state capacity and insurgency. They made a bold attempt to relate the concept of state capacity to insurgency on the premise that the risk of rebellion appears to increase as state capacity declines. In their argument, the risk of insurgency increases as state capacity declines and the supply of rebels increases if the state is “weak” and cannot effectively police its territory (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). This was given verve by Sobek (2010, p. 267) who posited that state capacity plays a critical role in the onset and conduct of civil violence as strong states can simply deter resistance through their ability to physically coerce dissenters. To Sobek (2010), a strong state can limit the escalation of dissent, win wars or credibly commit to negotiated solutions. McBride, Milante and Skaperdas (2011, p. 457) build upon that to argue that weak governance is more likely to lead to conflict, be it in the form of an organised rebellion or social protest.

In the literature on international security studies, there are many subject matters that are linked with the concept of state capacity. These include natural resources (Chudhry, 1997; Karl, 1997; Herbst, 2000; Klare, 2001; Synder, 2002; Fearon & Laitin 2003; Ross 2004; Smith 2004; de Soysa & Neumayer, 2007; Lujala, Rod & Thieme 2007), conflict (Hendrix, 2010; Braithwaite, 2010; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2015), revolution (Goodwin & Skocpol, 1989; Lichbach, 1995), war (Tilly, 1990; Humphreys, 2005; Fearon, 2005; Fjelde & de Soysa, 2009; McBride, Milante & Skaperdas, 2011), peace (De Rouen, Ferguson, Norton, Park, Lea & Streat-Bartlett, 2010; McBride, Milante & Skaperdas, 2011), military capacity, bureaucratic/administrative capacity (Hutchison and Johnson, 2011) and the quality and coherence of political institutions (Akpan, 2010; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011).

Skocpol (1985) identifies five variables central to defining whether or not a state has adequate capacity: sovereign integrity; financial resources; loyal and skilled officials; stable administrative-military control; and authority and institutional mechanisms to utilize resources. Recent efforts have been attempted to substantiate Skocpol’s five variables. As argued out by Braithwaite (2010), they include fair public goods provision (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Silversson, and Morrow, 2003), the ability to increase cost associated with challenging the regime (Gates *et al.*, 2006), government revenue and spending (Lektzian & Prins, 2008), government observance of contracts and investor-perceived expropriation risk (Fearon, 2005), institutional and economic capacity (Buhaugh, 2006), fostered economic development (Engelbert, 2000) and the ability to penetrate society, regulate social relationships and appropriate resources (Midgal, 1988). Versi (2007) as well as Rice and Patrick (2008), list four sets of critical government responsibilities which define state capacity. These are: fostering an enabling environment for sustain-

able and equitable economic growth; establishing and sustaining legitimate, transparent and accountable political institutions; protection of citizens from violent conflicts and securing the country's territorial integrity; and meeting the basic human needs of the population (Versi, 2007; Rice & Patrick, 2008).

Gleaned from the above, it is safe to infer that state capacity appears difficult to define (Hendrix, 2010, p. 273) given its multidimensional and comprehensive nature. Hanne Fjelde (2010) opines that "there remains disagreement about what state capacity actually is and how to measure it." Conceptualising, measuring and analysing state capacity appears rather knotty. A way out of the conceptual quagmire was provided by Hendrix (2010) who argues that:

Decisions about how to best operationalize the concept of state capacity are, to a certain extent, driven by the topic that researchers are addressing, in addition to competing notions about what constitutes a strong state (p. 275).

For the purpose of this paper, state capacity will capture the variables of state stability, effective military control within its borders, exclusive monopoly to extract resources, and the ability to adapt and respond to unexpected crises. In these four variables, the capacity of the Nigerian state appears weak and vulnerable. To this end, two definitions of state capacity appear useful to assist us engage our analysis. First is Hendrix's (2010, p. 247) definition of state capacity as "the state's ability to deter or repel challenges to its authority with force." This definition is in line with the Weberian idea of a state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory" (Weber, 1958, p. 77). The second is Braithwaite's (2010, p. 313) definition of state capacity as "the endogenous resources that a state possesses that can be mobilised to deal with emergencies". In line with this, Sobek (2010) argues that despite the various ways in which state capacity can be measured, strong states have a decreased risk of experiencing insurgencies. However, he fondles with a reverse causality where insurgencies decreases state capacity.

As state capacity increases, insurgents will locate geographically farther away from a government's centre of power in order to find adequate shelter from detection and incarceration by regime authorities (Markowitz & Fariss, 2013). Strong power projection ability allows states to employ maritime security over long distances, and thus increases its ability to coerce, deter, attack or defend (Blechman & Kaplan, 1978). States that are not capable of fulfilling their maritime security mandate may provide opportunities for maritime-related crimes such as piracy, smuggling, and hijacking, among others (Murphy, 2009). States with weak capacity are thus described as weak, failing, collapsing. Failed or collapsed states are in one way or another held to account for civil war, domestic and international terrorism, ethnic cleansing, piracy, refugee flows, illicit economies, corruption, and a general failure of development, among other ills.

Jackson (2007) identifies three distinct dimensions of state capacity: infrastructural capacity in terms of the ability of state institutions to perform essential tasks and enact policy; coercive capacity in terms of the state's ability and willingness to employ force against challenges to its authority; and national identity and social cohesion in terms of the degree to which the population identifies with the nation-state and accept its legitimate role in their lives. Succinctly captured, Jackson (2007) pontificated thus:

The inability of the state to provide peace and order creates a contentious environment where each component of society – including the ruling elite or regime – competes to preserve and protect its own well-being. This creates a domestic situation similar to the neo-realist conception of structural anarchy where groups create insecurity in the rest of the system when they try to improve their own security... This condition of insecurity is self-perpetuating because every effort by the regime to secure its own security through force provokes greater resistance and further undermines the institutional basis of the state and the security of the society as a whole (p. 152).

Fjelde and de Soysa (2009) situate governmental capacity along Kenneth Boulding's three conceptual faces of state power viz: a state's threat capacity, economic capacity, and integrative capacity (Boulding, 1989). In the discourse of state capacity, Fjelde and de Soysa (2009) rechristens Boulding's division as coercive capacity, capacity to co-opt social compliance and capacity for forging social cooperation. Among these three dimensions: coercion, co-optation, and cooperation, the idea of coercion fits into the requirement of the present study. Coercion is a corresponding notion of state strength, which emphasises the citizenry's subordination to coercive force. It projects an argument which sustains the position that state institutions back by strong police and military capabilities, with administrative reach into rural areas, are essential elements of a government's ability to project its force across the territory and impose order within its jurisdiction (Herbst, 2000). Collier and Hoeffler (1998) are of the opinion that militarily capable states reduce the opportunity for challengers to form an armed insurgency against the state. This is complemented by Fearon and Laitin (2003) argument that the state's military, policing, and administrative powers influence the government's ability to monitor, deter, and suppress dissent before it materialises into efficient rebel organisations that confront the state with armed force. The central argument is that an organisationally weak government invites sub-national actors to use force to further their agendas and challenge state authority through violence (Fjelde & de Soysa, 2009, p. 8).

In all, state capacity is different from government capacity. To this end, when examining the issue of state capacity in the Niger Delta, it is important to distinguish between the government and the state. Making a case for the distinction, McBride, Milante and

Skaperdas (2011) submit:

A government at a particular point in time is in charge of the state but the former is a short-lived collection of individuals whereas the latter, in its ideal type at least, is a long-lived entity consisting of many bureaucratic agencies and departments that have a measure of independence from the particular government that is in charge (pp. 447-448).

State capacity has a relationship with political violence (Tilly, 2003; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2015). Fjelde and de Soysa (2009) as well as Schwarz (2005) argue that states that are not able to provide effective public goods delivery may foment grievances that increase the risk of violence. Tilly (2003, p. 41) defines governmental capacity as the extent to which governmental agents control state activities and resources within the government's territory. Arguably, higher levels of state capacity should deter the onset of the insurgency, while the onset of insurgency should reduce state capacity (Thies, 2010).

### **Background to Contemporary Insurgency in the Niger Delta of Nigeria**

Contemporary (post-independence) insurgency in the Niger Delta is often viewed as a collective reaction to the problems made manifest by the activities of the petroleum oil industry on the people and environment of the Niger Delta, where crude oil is domiciled. These problems that precede the onset of insurgency in the Niger Delta are factored to include environmental degradation, neglect, marginalisation of the people, and generally the paradox of poverty in the midst of wealth (Akpan, 2011). However, from the filter of history, the problems associated with the insurgency in the Niger Delta are much deeper than tensions generated by the oil industry. In terms of age, the problems cut across three periodisations of the Nigerian history and historiography namely: the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-independence periods (Akpan, 2011, p. 35). In terms of particulars, the Niger Delta question embodies the impact of three major economic endeavours in Nigeria namely: the slave trade economy (illegitimate trade) the staple trade (the so-called legitimate trade) and the petroleum economy.

Arguably, the interaction between the Niger Delta peoples and external actors across the Atlantic since the slave trade period up to and even beyond the staple trade era, set the background to the insurgency in the Niger Delta. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Atlantic slave commerce brought about three societies in the Niger Delta: the slave trading society, the slave raiding society, the slave raided society (Afigbo, 2006; Ajayi & Uya, 2010). Given that one of the ways of acquiring slaves was through war (Afigbo, 2006; Ajayi & Uya, 2010), a number of wars, especially between the Aros and their neighbours ensued (Afigbo, 2006). This was marked by a regular flow of small arms and light weapons within the Niger Delta.

By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the export trade in palm oil supplanted the export trade in slave, the process of transition was marked by unpleasant friction: between and among



entrepreneurial coastal chiefs, on one hand, and major palm oil producers in the hinterlands, on the other, as well as that between the coastal chiefs and European supercargoes (Falola & Paddock, 2012). This necessitated a strong British naval squadron in the Bight of Biafra which consequently expanded the scope and context of social and commercial combustion during the period. A rich source of slaves during the Atlantic slave trade, the Bight of Biafra was a major battle zone between the British Preventive Squadron and unrepentant slave dealers between about 1807 and 1860 (Afigbo, 2006, p. xi).

Further conflicts were witnessed in the Bight of Bonny in the face of British attempt to extend her influence and suzerainty into the Royal Niger Company (United Africa Company) operating in the Oil Rivers (Niger Coast) protectorate. This attempt met with stiff resistance from local potentates like King Jaja of Opobo (1887), King Nana of Olomu of Itsekiri (1892), King Ibanichuka of Okrika (1896), Oba Ovanrenwem of Benin (1897), and King Koko of Brass. As company rule slowly gave way to direct rule, armed challenges to British imperial authority in the form of armed conflicts included but were not limited to the Akassa War of 1895 and the Ekumeku Wars between 1898 and 1911.

The discovery of oil in commercial quantities first at Oloibiri in 1956, and in other communities of the Niger Delta after independence, introduced a new dimension of the problems in the Niger Delta – that of environmental degradation and resource control. When peaceful protest and civil action by various groups in the Niger Delta failed to provide an expedient solution to these perceived problems; insurgency was employed to attract government attention.

Since the 1990s, albeit arguably, the link between violence and resources appeared to be a distinctive feature of the security environment of the Niger Delta. This made a significant addition to Michael Klare's thesis on "resource war" where the imbalance in the allocation of oil rents coincides with ethnic or political divisions and creates a natural recipe for internal conflicts (Klare 2001; Philippe Le Billon 2001, 2007). To this end, the insurgency was a war against the Nigerian state and its multinational partners. As much as can be adduced, it represented a stern challenge to the Nigerian military, especially the Navy which had the constitutional role to police Nigeria's littoral boundary and gateway. Going by the idea of state capacity which suggests that a state that has a strong military apparatus at its disposal is rarely challenged, it is safe to argue that the relative weakness of the Nigerian military provided a necessary and sufficient explanation for the onset and duration of insurgency in the Niger Delta in the period under review.

### **How Does State Capacity Explain the Onset of Insurgency in the Niger Delta?**

This study adopts Hendrix (2010) idea of state capacity which emphasizes the state's ability to deter or repel challenges to its authority with force. The unchallenged control of the state territory and the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within the

borders of the state encapsulate the Weberian defining properties of a sovereign state (Rothschild & Harbeson, 2000). In the post-independence Nigerian state, these defining properties have been routinely desecrated by enduring insurgency in the Niger Delta. The earliest form of insurgency post-colonial Nigeria's Niger Delta found expression in the Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro-led twelve days secessionist insurgency in 1966, which failed to establish a "Niger Delta Republic". Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) and set up a base in Taylor Creek – an area where the Nigerian state capacity in terms of governance was completely absent. From there, Boro took over Kaiama, Yenagoa, Imbiam, Oloibiri, Nembe, Patani, Odi and Sagbama communities in the Niger Delta. Although the insurgency was defective in terms of duration, it exposed the frail nature of state capacity in the Niger Delta.

From the 1990s, renewed local agitation against underdevelopment and environmental degradation brought about by the activities of various multinational oil companies exploring and mining oil in the Niger Delta witnessed the mushrooming of insurgents (organised armed groups known in popular media parlance as "militants") attacking oil installations and personnel of various multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, thereby, disturbing the equilibrium of peace (Osakwe & Umoh, 2012). Most violent conflicts pitched rival local communities in the Niger Delta against each other and often centred on how to distribute the compensation that was been paid by either the government or the multinational oil companies (Small Arms Survey, 2004, 2007). Some inter-communal wars included, but not limited to, Okpoama vs Ewoama (1997); Liama vs Beletiam (1998); Oleh vs Olomoro (2000). Some inter-ethnic wars between 1997 and 2003 included, but not limited to, Ijaw vs Itsekiri (Delta State); Urhobo vs Itsekiri (Delta State); Ogoni vs Okrika (Rivers State); Ogoni vs Andoni (Rivers State); Ilaje vs Ijaw (Ondo State).

By 2003, the Niger Delta was a complex operating environment, characterized by random armed conflicts within and between oil possessing communities (often related to access to the benefits of oil operations); between oil possessing communities and oil companies; and between various insurgent groups and the Nigerian security forces deployed to protect the vast oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta. Although most of these wars and crises were unexpected, it exposed the inability of the Nigerian state to adapt and respond to unexpected crises. Arguably, the rather frequent wars exposed the feeble capacity of the Nigerian state to manage the complex political economy of the Niger Delta that relied hugely on oil rents, compensation, patronage and blackmail.

The budding of insurgent groups, and consequently, the renewed onset of the insurgency after 1999 testifies, albeit arguably, to an ebbing capacity of the Nigerian state to provide security in the Niger Delta. These groups include but are not limited to the Movement for the Survival of Izon Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), Niger Delta Freedom Fighter (NDFF), the Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities (FNDIC), the



Membutu Boys, the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Militant Force Squad (NDMFS), Niger Delta Coastal Guerillas (NDCG), South-South Liberation Movement (SSLM), Movement for the Sovereign State of the Niger Delta (MSSND), the Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), the November 1895 Movement, ELIMOTU, the Arobo Freedom Fighters, Iduwini Volunteer Force (IVF), the Niger Delta People's Salvation Front (NDPSF), the Coalition for Militant Action (COMA), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Martyrs Brigade. Added to these, were some armed gangs, criminals and cult groups that took advantage of the weak capacity of the Nigerian state to perpetuate crimes of oil bunkering, vandalization of oil infrastructures and kidnapping in the Niger Delta. Some gangs and cult groups include Akaso Marine, Asawana, Black Axe, Black Braziers, Buccaneers, Columbians, Cyprus Marine, D12, Deadly Underdogs, Dey Gbam, Deywell, Elegem Face, Germans, Greenlanders, Icelanders, Italians 2001, KKK, Mafia Lords, Okomera, Outlaws, Vikings, Vultures, Wayingi Marine, among others.

How did such a telephone directory list of social actors bud and bulge with significant numbers of disciples in the Niger Delta without the Government of Nigeria intercepting their formation? The state capacity provides an explanation. The proliferation of private technicians of violence in the Niger Delta exposed the feeble capacity of the Nigerian state to effectively protect the vast oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta buried in the intestine of creeks and provide adequate security for the local population. As argued by Fearon and Laitin (2003), the supply of insurgents increases if the state is "weak" and cannot effectively police its territory. Consequently, the risk of insurgency appears to increase as state capacity declines. State capacity is determined by the state's ability to deter or repel challenges to its authority with force. Bringing such determinant to bear, the capacity of the Nigerian state appeared comatose in the face of mutating insurgent groups in the Niger Delta.

Moreover, all insurgent groups, as well as cult and criminal groups, possessed intimidating quantities of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). Such weapons were an integral part of the daily commercial transactions that took place within the creeks of the Niger Delta. With SALWs in the regular possession of social actors and technicians of violence in the Niger Delta, it became quite easily to challenge the monopoly of violence of the Nigerian state, and indeed, assault its overall capacity to effectively provide security and order in a Weberian style. The plausible argument sustained by the state capacity tenants is that when a state's status as the monopoly of violence begins to slip, social actors of all types see a need to provide for their own security. The ebbing capacities of the state provide the essential condition for violence to emerge.

Country-level analyses on the link between military power and violent conflict onset have been inconclusive. Subnational geospatial analyses have argued that violence will most likely occur in areas where the state is not present or not able to effectively exert

authority (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2015, p. 177). Such areas are often tagged “ungoverned territories” – an area in which a state faces significant challenges establishing control (Rabasa, 2007; Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010). Proponents of the state capacity concept further argue that weak states simply do not possess sufficient police, military, and intelligence forces to monitor extensive geographical areas, which are largely ungoverned. Consequently, insurgents organise and operate in such spaces left relatively ungoverned. The creeks in the Niger Delta were peculiar examples of such ungoverned spaces where insurgents organised and operated. Seeing such ungoverned spaces as peculiar domains of insurgent bases, it is safe to argue that the insurgents were masters of that domain in terms of their knowledge of the creeks. Insurgents in the Niger Delta gainfully took advantage of the relatively ungoverned spaces in the creeks to have freedom of action and secure bases of operation where they were safe from interdiction.

The creeks were one of such ungoverned spaces in the Niger Delta. The Nigerian state lacked the needed and necessary police, military and intelligence manpower to effectively monitor the extensive and complex environment of the Niger Delta. Consequently, insurgents rivalled the state in their exclusive right to the monopoly of violence. This satisfies the argument of state capacity pundits that most fundamental feature of weak states is their near inability to establish and maintain a monopoly of the instrument of violence as weak states tend to share this important mark of nationhood and sovereignty with other social actors. The insurgents in the Niger Delta represented such social actors. However, while the formation of insurgent groups in the Niger Delta was one thing, the ability of insurgent groups to challenge the Nigerian state for a significant duration was another. Can the state capacity still explain the duration as much as it has explained the onset?

### **How Does State Capacity Explain the Duration of Insurgency in the Niger Delta?**

In Lichbach’s (1995, p. 68) view, weak states “invite collective dissent and revolution,” whereas strong states “decrease the rebel’s expectation of victory” (Sobek, 2010, p. 269). To this end, any rational insurgent would avoid conflicts with strong states, all else being equal, as compared to weak states (Sobek, 2010). To this end, a state can either be weak or strong lending support to Migdal’s (1998) definition of state capacity as state strength. In Buzan’s (1983) view, weak states either do not have, or have failed to create, a domestic political and social consensus of sufficient strength to eliminate large-scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation.

While the onset of insurgency in the Niger Delta is attributable to the general weak capacity of the Nigerian state to manage its resource politics of the Niger Delta, the duration of the insurgency can be explained in terms of a relatively unprofessional military that took up a policing job in the Niger Delta. Between 1966 and 1970, the Nigerian military was able to interrupt separatist insurgency in the Niger Delta – first against

Isaac Boro in 1966 and the second against Odumegwu Ojukwu's Biafra between 1967 and 1967. While the capacity of the Nigerian state was weak enough to allow the onset of such insurgency, its resilience was applauded given the relatively short duration it took the military to interrupt both insurgencies.

However, the post-1990 period appeared quite different as it took the Nigerian military more than two decades to bring about relative order in the Niger Delta. became an exception to in an attempt to interrupt mutating insurgency in the Niger Delta, the Government of Nigeria (GoN) organised service wings of the Nigerian military – Army, Navy and Air Force – into a formidable counterinsurgency (COIN) unit known in popular parlance as the Joint Task Force. Arguably, Decree No 23 of 1992 appeared to have established the first military COIN outfit in the Niger Delta – Rivers State Internal Security Task Force (RSISTF) (Inuwa, 2010; Umoh, 2015). This appeared to have been in response to the budding insurgency by MOSOP in Ogoniland and the capacity problem of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to effectively neutralise the crisis. Both the Nigerian Army (NN) and the Nigerian Navy (NA) were involved in the RSISTF operations. RSISTF was deployed to neutralise the Ogoni crisis that was increasingly assuming the form of an insurgency after the four Ogoni chiefs were murdered.

By 1999, insurgent groups blossomed in the Niger Delta with more violent capacity to challenge the Nigerian state and its multinational oil partners. The reality agrees with Gurr and Bishop's (1970, p. 235) position that "if dissident coercive control is substantially less than the regime coercive control in both scope and degree, dissidents are not likely to be able to organise and sustain an internal war." Gleaned from this, the insurgency is fundamentally about the loss of state monopoly over the use of force (Fjelde & de Soysa, 2009). The duration of the state loss of the monopoly of violence appeared to have been much more of a function of weak state capacity measured in terms of poor counterinsurgency posture of the military. This adds credence to Fjelde and de Soysa's (2009) position that weak states are poor at counterinsurgency.

Given the importance of Nigeria's vast oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta to the economic survival of Nigeria, it was expected that the duration of the insurgency, especially after 1999, would be quickly interrupted. However, it was not so. To reflect the reality that insurgency thrived and survived in a location (the Niger Delta) where Nigeria derived over 80% of its GDP, 95% of its national budget, and 90% of its foreign exchange earnings, is to cast overwhelming doubt on the capacity of the Nigerian military deployed to police the area. However, under the counterinsurgency umbrella of the Nigerian military in the Niger Delta, the economy of Nigeria still bled, and the lateral cut took place in the creeks where Nigeria's vast oil infrastructure lay prostrate and vulnerable to attacks. The ability of the insurgents to carry out artisanal extraction of crude oil (oil bunkering) in the Niger Delta over the years, revealed the loss of the exclusive monopoly to extract resources by the Nigerian state.

The weak posture and poor counterinsurgency outfit of the Nigerian Navy reached an embarrassing point in 2008 when MEND insurgents attacked an offshore oil platform operated by Shell-BP. The attack, which took place about 120km offshore, was within the maritime security zone of the Nigerian Navy. The insurgent attack on an offshore oil facility which had the capacity to produce 220,000 barrels per day of oil, equivalent to about 10 percent of Nigeria's crude oil output (Emma & Jimitota, 2008; Agbo, 2009) revealed that the Nigerian state was not able to employ maritime security over long distances. In 2009, the weak capacity of the Nigerian Navy (NN) was further exposed when MEND insurgents made their way on Nigeria's international waters to the Lagos coast and blew up the Atlas Cove Jetty – one of Nigeria's biggest oil storage facilities. These events affirm Murphy's (2009) argument that states that are not capable of fulfilling their maritime security mandate may provide opportunities for maritime-related crimes such as piracy, smuggling, and hijacking, among others. It exposed the lack or loss of effective military control within Nigeria's maritime borders.

Few argue that the Nigerian military faced ambiguous challenges in its counterinsurgency campaign in the Niger Delta (Afahakan, 2015; Umoh, 2015). The terrain made armoured campaigns difficult if not completely impossible. Indeed, the Niger Delta peculiar terrain increased tactical sluggishness on the part of the Nigerian military. Since 2003, the Nigerian military operating in the Niger Delta under the JTF attempted to employ a conventional mindset in an unconventional security environment. It required the immediate transformation from a static garrison to a flexible patrolling force with the novel responsibility of police duties. The need to attain overall military objectives using minimum force questioned the professional capacity of the Nigerian military, and among other things, mirrored weakness. The need to upgrade the COIN capacity of the Nigerian military to conform to the realities of the Niger Delta insurgency was paid for by an extended COIN duration.

Furthermore, given that the post-1990 insurgency in the Niger Delta had all the trapping of political and economic fraudulence (Tangban and Umoh, 2014), made possible by the gains from oil deals, the Nigerian military became a frail agency of a feeble government. Chaudhry (1997), Karl (1997), Herbst (2000), Klare (2001), Synder (2002), Fearon and Laitin (2003); Collier and Hoeffler (2004); Smith (2004); Humphreys (2005); Fearon (2005); Ross (1999, 2003, 2004, 2006); de Soysa and Neumayer (2007); Aspinall (2007); Lujala, Rod and Thieme (2007); Basedau and Lay (2009); and Akpan (2010), all argue that oil is generally regarded as the resource most directly associated with the weak state capacity and the resource curse phenomenon. As de Soysa and Neumayer (2007, p. 204) noted: "state strength is weaker under conditions of oil extraction ... because of 'political Dutch disease' working through negative effects of resource wealth on state institutions". Thies (2010) takes a leap forward and examines how primary commodities affect the relationship between civil war and state capacity. This reality finds an almost apt expression in the Niger Delta of Nigeria in the post-1990 period.

Regardless of the filter one uses, oil is implicated in the Nigerian tragedy for the simple fact that it is the lone source of revenue upon which about 150 million Nigerians depend on (Akpan, 2011).

To this end, it becomes pertinent in Ahonsi's (2011) view, to question the capacity of the Nigerian state to lead and implement an effective response to the insurgency in the Niger Delta. This is because such a response clearly requires a robust and strong capacity to plan, implement and monitor a complex series of interventions over a sustained period, which the Nigerian state has increasingly shown itself to be lacking (Ahonsi, 2011).

## Conclusion

Relying on the variables of state stability, effective military control within its borders, exclusive monopoly to extract resources, and the ability to adapt and respond to unexpected crises, the capacity of the Nigerian state showed every indication of weakness. Despite the seeming advantages possessed by the Nigerian state: legitimacy to carry out international relations, maintain a military and police force, create institutions, establish bureaucracies, make laws, provide social amenities, as well as determine resource use and distribution; it appeared that capacity was not added to such advantages. On account of its weak state capacity, it became difficult for the Nigerian state to repel insurgents in the Niger Delta with ease. Insurgent groups sprung up in the Niger Delta given the almost ungovernable nature of the area by the Nigerian state – a problem attributable to weak state capacity. Furthermore, as the capacity of the Nigerian state remained weak, the shelf life of the insurgency extended. To this end, state capacity partly, but significantly, explains the onset of insurgency in the Niger Delta since the 1990s and its duration up to date.

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