THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY AND INSECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA.

Pere-Otubo Richman Amafade
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State
(amafade.richman@iuokada.edu.ng)

Adekunle Saheed Ajisebiyawo
Department of Poltical Science and Public Administration
Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Nigeria
(adekunle.ajisebiyawo@iuokada.edu.ng)

Abstract

This paper examined the relationship between poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Despite the region's substantial contribution to national oil revenue, persistent poverty, unemployment, oil-related crimes, and widespread insecurity continue to impact communities in many ways. The general objective of this paper is to analyse how different dimensions of poverty shape insecurity outcomes in the Niger Delta. The paper was grounded in Relative Deprivation Theory, which emphasised the role of structural deprivation in generating social instability. Qualitative data was obtained through key informant interviews with community leaders, security officials, and development practitioners to give the paper an empirical standing. This paper found differentiated but coherent patterns across poverty dimensions between the two states, Bayelsa and Delta adopted as case studies. It was argued that income and employment deprivation held a strong significance for crime and insecurity in the Niger Delta. Employment deprivation was strongly linked to violent conflict and social tension, and lack of access to basic healthcare services has a strong association with public insecurity. However, education deprivation, when examined in isolation, did not show a significant effect on public security, oral evidence indicated that it impacted indirectly through access to employment and livelihood pathways. When poverty indicators were combined, multidimensional poverty exhibited a strong connection to insecurity, particularly oil-theft and other related crimes. This paper concluded that insecurity in the Niger Delta as observed in Bayelsa and Delta States is deeply rooted in overlapping economic, social, and human capital deprivations rather than isolated criminal behaviour or security failures. Addressing insecurity in the Niger Delta therefore requires integrated poverty reduction strategies that prioritise employment generation, improved access to healthcare, strengthened education systems, and inclusive development interventions alongside conventional security measures.

Keywords: Crimes, Deprivation, Employment, Insecurity, Poverty, Social services

Introduction

The Niger Delta region occupies a central place in Nigeria's political economy due to its role as the country's main oil-producing area. Since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in Oloibiri in present-day Bayelsa State in 1956, the region has accounted for the bulk of Nigeria's export earnings and public revenue. Despite this strategic importance, the Niger Delta has continued to experience high levels of poverty and social deprivation, alongside persistent insecurity. International development assessments have consistently drawn attention to the development paradox in the Niger Delta. The United Nations Development Programme, in its Niger Delta Human Development Report, observed that oil wealth has not translated into improved human development outcomes for many communities in the region. Instead, decades of uneven development, weak institutional capacity, and limited accountability have contributed to poor social indicators, particularly in riverine and rural areas of Bayelsa and Delta States (United Nations Development Programmes [UNDP[, 2006; Elom, Nweze, & Chukwu, 2025). Environmental degradation represents another critical factor shaping poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta. Extensive oil spills, gas flaring, and contamination of land and water bodies have undermined traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming. The United Nations Environment Programme's Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland documented severe pollution of soil and groundwater, with long-term consequences for health, food security, and income generation. While the Ogoniland assessment focused on parts of Rivers State, similar environmental challenges have been recorded across the wider Niger Delta, including Bayelsa and Delta States, where oil pollution has disrupted local economies and heightened social grievances (UNEP, 2011; Obiam & Amadi, 2022).

From 2015 onwards, insecurity in the Niger Delta has taken multiple forms, including pipeline vandalism, oil theft, artisanal refining, piracy, and intermittent violent confrontations involving state and non-state actors. These security challenges have had direct economic and social implications. Disruptions to oil production have affected national revenue, while local communities have faced increased militarisation, restrictions on movement, and loss of livelihoods. Studies have documented recurrent incidents of pipeline sabotage and oil-related violence in Bayelsa and Delta States during this period, highlighting the persistence of insecurity despite government interventions and amnesty programmes (Owolabi & Anyaogu, 2024; Dudafa, 2025). Global development institutions have also emphasised the links between economic deprivation, environmental stress, and insecurity in Nigeria. The World Bank, through its Nigeria Development Update series, has repeatedly noted that poverty, unemployment, and weak service delivery contribute to social instability, particularly in regions affected by resource dependence and environmental damage. These reports underline how limited economic opportunities, especially for young people, can interact with local grievances to sustain cycles of insecurity (World Bank, 2016; World Bank, 2020; World Bank, 2024).

The persistence of poverty, environmental degradation, and insecurity in the Niger Delta reflects deeper political and economic challenges in the management of natural resources and

development outcomes in Nigeria. Understanding how poverty manifests in measurable forms, and how these deprivations relate to patterns of insecurity, is therefore essential for explaining the lived realities of communities in the Niger Delta and for informing evidence-based responses. At the same time, insecurity in the Niger Delta has intensified in various forms. Militancy, oil theft, artisanal refining, piracy, and communal violence have remained recurring features of the region's security landscape. These forms of insecurity have disrupted economic activities, weakened social relations, and increased the vulnerability of households whose livelihoods depend on farming, fishing, and informal trade. The persistence of violent and criminal activities suggests that underlying social and economic grievances have not been adequately addressed.

A central problem lies in the apparent relationship between poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta. High levels of deprivation, especially among young people, have coincided with the expansion of illegal economic activities and violent contestation around oil resources. Limited employment opportunities, declining traditional livelihoods due to environmental degradation, and perceptions of exclusion from the benefits of oil production have contributed to social tensions. These tensions have, in turn, created conditions in which insecurity thrives, further deepening poverty through loss of income, displacement, and restricted access to markets and services. Governance and development efforts have not sufficiently broken this cycle. Despite multiple interventions aimed at development and security, poverty and insecurity have remained mutually reinforcing in the region. The failure to effectively manage oil resources, protect local livelihoods, and provide inclusive economic opportunities has meant that the region continues to experience instability alongside deprivation.

This research paper therefore examines the impacts of persistent poverty on the reoccurrence of violent crimes and insecurity in the Niger Delta region by focusing on Bayelsa and Delta States as case references. The paper is an empirical analysis of how poverty relate to patterns of insecurity in the Niger Delta. Without such analysis, explanations of insecurity risk remaining speculative, and policy responses are likely to remain inadequate and poorly targeted. In other words, the general objective of this paper is to examine how poverty influences patterns of insecurity in the Niger Delta with specific references to Bayelsa and Delta States, while the specific objectives are to:

1. assess impacts of unemployment on insecurity
2. examine effect of deprivation in education on public security
3. analyse effects of lack of basic health care services on public security
4. determine the relationship between poverty indicators and insecurity outcomes

Literature Review

Poverty was treated in this paper as a condition characterised by limited command over resources and restricted access to basic needs required for a minimum standard of living. Early economic approaches defined poverty primarily in monetary terms, focusing on income or consumption shortfalls relative to an established poverty line. The World Bank defined poverty as an inability to attain a minimum standard of living, commonly measured through income or consumption expenditure (World Bank, 2000). This definition underpinned many national poverty assessments and remained relevant for identifying material hardship across populations. Income poverty, therefore, referred to a situation in which individuals or households lacked sufficient income or consumption to meet minimum subsistence requirements. It was commonly measured by comparing household consumption levels with nationally defined poverty thresholds. The use of consumption rather than income was particularly important in developing economies, where informal employment and income volatility were widespread (World Bank, 2000; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In Nigeria, official poverty measurement relied largely on consumption-based indicators, reflecting household capacity to meet basic needs over time (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Despite its usefulness, income poverty was widely recognised as an incomplete measure of human well-being. Scholars argued that poverty extended beyond financial shortfall to include non-monetary forms of disadvantage. Townsend defined poverty as a condition in which individuals lacked the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities, and have the living conditions that were customary or widely approved of in the societies to which they belonged (Townsend, 1979). This understanding shifted attention from income alone to broader patterns of exclusion and disadvantage. Building on these critiques, the concept of multidimensional poverty emerged to capture simultaneous deprivations across several aspects of life. Alkire and Foster proposed a framework that measured poverty using multiple dimensions, including education, health, and living standards, rather than relying solely on income indicators. They argued that individuals could experience poverty through overlapping disadvantages even when monetary income appeared adequate (Alkire & Foster, 2011). Their approach provided a systematic method for identifying and aggregating deprivations at the household level.

Deprivation formed a central element of the multidimensional understanding of poverty. Deprivation referred to the lack of access to essential goods and services that were necessary for acceptable living conditions. These included adequate housing, safe water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. Deprivation indicators were used to identify specific deficits that limited well-being and reinforced long-term poverty, particularly in regions affected by weak public services and environmental stress (Alkire & Foster, 2011; UNDP, 2019). Vulnerability added a temporal dimension to poverty analysis by focusing on exposure to risk and the likelihood of future deprivation. The UNDP described vulnerability as the probability that individuals or households would experience a decline in well-being due to shocks such as economic instability, health crises, environmental degradation, or insecurity (UNDP, 2019). Vulnerability highlighted that

poverty was not only a current state but also a condition shaped by uncertainty and limited resilience, especially among populations dependent on fragile livelihoods.

Insecurity on the other hand was understood as a condition in which individuals and communities were exposed to persistent threats that undermined personal safety, livelihoods, and social stability. Academic literature in security and development studies has long argued that insecurity extends beyond armed violence to include economic, social, and environmental sources of harm. This broader understanding informed the approach adopted in this study, which drew on human security, economic insecurity, environmental insecurity, and violent conflict as interrelated dimensions. The human security approach provided the primary analytical foundation for understanding insecurity. Critical security scholars challenged state-centred views of security by arguing that security should focus on the protection and emancipation of individuals rather than territorial defence. Booth (1991) defined security as the absence of threats to acquired values and emphasised freedom from fear and coercion as central to human well-being. Similarly, Buzan (1991) argued that security encompassed political, economic, societal, and environmental dimensions, each of which could generate threats to human survival and dignity.

These academic arguments informed the United Nations Development Programme's human security framework, which defined human security as freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity (UNDP, 1994). This framework treated insecurity as a multidimensional condition arising from poverty, unemployment, health risks, environmental degradation, and violence. Subsequent UNDP publications further clarified that human insecurity often resulted from the interaction of structural deprivation and exposure to shocks, particularly in fragile and resource-dependent regions (UNDP, 2014).

Economic insecurity represented a key dimension of human insecurity. Academic studies defined economic insecurity as exposure to income loss, employment instability, and limited protection against economic shocks. Hacker described economic insecurity as the risk of sudden and severe economic decline combined with weak institutional safeguards (Hacker, 2006). Standing similarly linked economic insecurity to precarious employment and unstable livelihoods, particularly among populations excluded from formal labour markets (Standing, 2011). These conditions heightened vulnerability and increased the likelihood of social unrest and violence.

Environmental insecurity refers to threats arising from environmental degradation and resource scarcity that undermine human survival and economic activity. Homer-Dixon argued that environmental stress, including pollution, land degradation, and declining natural resources, could intensify competition over livelihoods and contribute to social conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Dalby further noted that environmental insecurity was closely linked to political and economic marginalisation, particularly in regions where communities depended directly on

natural resources for survival (Dalby, 2002). In resource-extractive regions, environmental damage often weakens livelihoods and deepens grievances.

Violent conflict constituted the most visible expression of insecurity. Political violence scholars defined violent conflict as the organised use of force by state or non-state actors resulting in physical harm, displacement, or destruction of property (Kalyvas, 2006). Contemporary conflict research has relied increasingly on event-based datasets to measure insecurity empirically. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project defined violent events as discrete incidents involving battles, attacks on civilians, riots, protests with violence, and violence involving armed groups, allowing for systematic comparison across time and space (ACLED, 2023). The interaction of these dimensions was emphasised in fragility studies. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development argued that insecurity emerged from the interaction of political violence, economic vulnerability, weak institutions, and environmental stress, rather than from isolated factors (OECD, 2022). This perspective reinforced the view that insecurity was both a cause and consequence of deprivation, particularly in regions marked by resource dependence and governance deficits.

These conceptual understandings guided the measurement of insecurity in this paper. Human security provided the overarching framework, while economic and environmental insecurity identified non-violent threats affecting livelihoods in the Niger Delta. Violent conflict captured observable manifestations of insecurity through recorded incidents. Together, these dimensions informed the violent conflict incidence, oil-related crimes, livelihood disruption, and forced displacement in Bayelsa and Delta States in the last one decade.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on the Niger Delta consistently demonstrated that poverty and insecurity evolved through mutually reinforcing social, economic, and environmental processes rather than isolated events. Evidence from Bayelsa State showed that violent conflict was closely associated with long-standing patterns of underdevelopment, elite capture, and environmental destruction linked to oil exploitation.

Using qualitative interviews and documentary analysis, Monday and Abubakar (2020) found that poverty, environmental devastation, and perceived injustice in the distribution of oil revenues generated deep grievances among local populations, which in turn underpinned violent agitations and militancy. Their findings indicated that insecurity in Bayelsa State was not spontaneous but rooted in persistent deprivation and institutional failure, with political elites playing a central role in sustaining these conditions. Although the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme reduced open hostilities, the study showed that it did not fundamentally resolve the structural drivers of conflict, particularly poverty and unemployment.

Related empirical work extended this argument by focusing on livelihood insecurity. Babatunde (2023) demonstrated that oil exploitation directly undermined food security across oil-producing communities in Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. Drawing on interviews and focus group discussions, the study showed that pollution of land and waterways reduced access to farming and fishing livelihoods, thereby deepening household poverty. The research further established that food insecurity was not limited to nutritional deficits but included the loss of culturally acceptable diets, reinforcing social dislocation and resentment. These findings empirically linked environmental degradation to both poverty and insecurity, as livelihood loss heightened vulnerability to criminal activities and conflict participation.

Recent scholarships also approached insecurity from a human security perspective. For instance, Siloko (2024) examined how environmental degradation, livelihood loss, and weak development outcomes interacted to undermine personal, economic, and environmental security in the Niger Delta. Based on semi-structured interviews with farmers and fishers, the study showed that chronic livelihood insecurity created long-term exposure to violence, displacement, and economic marginalisation. Importantly, the findings suggested that insecurity persisted even in periods without active militancy, indicating that insecurity in the Niger Delta extended beyond direct violence to include everyday threats to survival and dignity.

Empirical evaluations of policy responses further reinforced these conclusions. Adedeji (2023), in an assessment of the Amnesty Programme in Southern Ijaw, found that while the programme reduced militant violence, it failed to address the underlying socio-economic conditions driving insecurity. Using qualitative methods, the study showed that unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and poor access to social services continued to fuel frustration and criminal activity. The findings supported earlier evidence that peace initiatives detached from poverty reduction had limited long-term effectiveness.

Earlier ethnographic research by Ajala (2016) similarly showed that human insecurity, driven by pollution, weak governance, and exclusion from resource control, was central to the outbreak of violence in Bayelsa and Delta States. The study demonstrated that community-level experiences of injustice and livelihood loss shaped patterns of conflict and distrust towards state institutions. It also provided empirical support for bottom-up, community-driven approaches to addressing insecurity, rather than reliance on militarised or elite negotiated solutions.

Empirical studies on the Niger Delta consistently documented how environmental degradation, poverty, governance failure, and insecurity intersected in oil-producing communities, particularly in Bayelsa State. Madubuegwu et al. (2025) examined environmental degradation and conflict in Bayelsa State and found that oil spills and gas flaring had contaminated land, air, and rivers in communities such as Nembe, Ogbia, Brass, and Southern Ijaw. The study, which adopted an exploratory design, showed that environmental damage generated hostility towards oil installations, personnel, and operational activities. It further established that formal state intervention mechanisms were weak or ineffective, thereby

heightening community resentment. The authors concluded that Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms could serve as viable tools for peace, social justice, and development in volatile oil-producing communities, alongside stricter enforcement of environmental standards.

Obiam and Amadi (2022) examined the role of the Nigerian state in the development of the Niger Delta and highlighted the persistent contrast between oil wealth and severe underdevelopment. Relying on secondary data and guided by Marxian Political Economy theory, the study found that the region continued to experience high unemployment, widespread poverty, poor access to quality education and healthcare, and inadequate infrastructure. The study further revealed that development agencies established by the Nigerian government, including the Niger Delta Development Commission and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, had failed to improve living conditions. The authors concluded that weak supervision, corruption, and flawed state approaches contributed to the continued impoverishment of the region.

Similarly, Osigwe, Okungbowa and Mustapha (2023) analysed contemporary challenges in the Niger Delta and identified environmental degradation, high poverty levels, armed conflict, unemployment, and infrastructural decay as major problems confronting the region. Their study reviewed existing legal and institutional frameworks and found significant gaps in enforcement and accountability. The authors argued that despite the economic importance of oil to Nigeria, the socio-economic costs borne by host communities remained severe. They concluded that legislative oversight, environmental remediation, and stakeholder collaboration were necessary to address the region's persistent development challenges.

At the community level, Akafa et al. (2025) investigated the effects of oil spillage on fishermen in the Biseni community, Bayelsa State. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design and survey data from 358 respondents, the study found that oil spills were attributed mainly to pipeline corrosion, sabotage, vandalism, and unemployment. The findings showed extensive water pollution, loss of aquatic life, declining incomes, adverse health outcomes, and displacement. Respondents also linked oil spillage to wider social problems such as kidnapping, lack of compensation, and restricted access to safe drinking water. The study concluded that repeated oil spills had significantly undermined livelihoods and intensified grievances within fishing communities.

Lastly, poverty and environmental degradation were empirically linked to multinational oil operations by Ebegbulem, Adams, and Abumbe (2022), who demonstrated that oil exploration had rendered farming and fishing unviable, intensifying poverty and underdevelopment. Alakwe (2024) reinforced this position through historical analysis and survey data, identifying mismanagement of funds and weak citizen engagement as principal drivers of poverty in the Niger Delta. Youth-focused analyses by Inyang (2018) further revealed how unemployment, environmental insecurity, and perceived injustice fueled militancy and youth restiveness, with violence emerging as a bargaining strategy against state and corporate actors.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the Relative Deprivation Theory to explain how multidimensional poverty translated into patterns of insecurity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This theory is appropriate because it connects material deprivation to broader threats to human wellbeing that extended beyond income poverty to violence, livelihood loss and social instability.

Relative Deprivation Theory was originally advanced by Ted Robert Gurr to explain why groups experiencing perceived injustice were more likely to engage in violence and collective action. Gurr argued that it was not absolute poverty alone that produced conflict, but the gap between what people believed they were entitled to and what they were able to obtain within a given society (Gurr, 1970). When expectations rose faster than the capacity of social and political systems to meet them, frustration accumulated and could be expressed through aggression, protest or violence. This theory has been widely applied in studies of internal conflict, insurgency and social unrest, particularly in resource-rich but development-poor regions (Gurr, 1970).

In the Niger Delta, oil production generated high expectations of employment, infrastructure and social welfare among host communities. However, empirical studies have consistently shown that these expectations were undermined by unemployment, declining livelihoods, environmental degradation and weak service delivery. The persistence of poverty alongside visible oil wealth created conditions of relative deprivation, especially among youths, who compared their conditions with those of oil company workers, political elites and other regions of the country. Relative Deprivation Theory, therefore, provided a useful explanation for the emergence of militancy, oil theft, kidnapping and other violent activities that characterised the study area during the period under review. Previous studies on Niger Delta militancy and youth restiveness have similarly linked frustration arising from unemployment, ecological damage and perceived injustice to violent mobilisation (Inyang, 2018; Oseghale & Festus, 2024).

While the Relative Deprivation Theory explained why grievances emerged, it did not fully account for the wide range of insecurities experienced by households beyond violence. For this reason, the study complemented it with Human Security Theory as advanced by the United Nations Development Programme. The Human Security Framework shifted the focus of security analysis from the state to the individual and emphasised protection from chronic threats such as poverty, disease and environmental harm, as well as sudden disruptions such as violence and displacement (UNDP, 1994). Human security identified economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security as interrelated dimensions of wellbeing.

Frances Stewart's work on horizontal inequalities further strengthened the framework by linking group-based deprivation to conflict risk. Stewart argued that inequalities across regions or social groups in access to economic, social and political resources increased the likelihood of violent conflict, particularly where these inequalities persisted over time (Stewart, 2008). In the

Niger Delta, spatial inequalities between oil-producing communities and other regions, as well as uneven development reinforced perceptions of exclusion and injustice. This perspective supported the study's focus on state-level comparison and on the relationship between poverty indicators and insecurity patterns. By adopting Relative Deprivation Theory, the paper explained the motivational basis of insecurity and the structural conditions that sustained it.

Methodology

This paper adopted a qualitative approach to study trends and offer in-depth explanation of the links between multidimensional poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta citing empirical evidence from Bayelsa and Delta States. The qualitative analysis provided deeper insight into how poverty-related conditions were experienced and how they translated into insecurity at the local level. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for capturing perceptions, lived experiences, and institutional dynamics that are not fully reflected in numerical data. In studies of insecurity and development, qualitative evidence helps to explain why observed statistical patterns occur and how local actors interpret them (Bryman, 2016; Silverman, 2013).

The focus of discussion was Bayelsa and Delta States, both located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The two states are part of the Niger Delta region and were selected because of their long-standing exposure to poverty, oil-related environmental degradation, and persistent security challenges. Their shared history of crude oil production, combined with variations in socio-economic conditions and conflict patterns, makes them suitable for comparative analysis. The states have both riverine and upland areas, with a larger population and more diversified economic activities, including agriculture, oil and gas production, commerce, and manufacturing.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that while Delta State performs slightly better than Bayelsa in some development indicators, significant pockets of deprivation remain, particularly in oil-producing and rural communities. State government reports and security briefings highlight recurring incidents of violent conflict, kidnapping, oil-related crimes, and communal clashes, which have posed challenges to economic activities and social stability. Both states experienced heightened insecurity during the period following the Niger Delta amnesty programme, with changing patterns of violence linked to youth unemployment, poverty, and competition over oil-related resources.

Secondary data were used to provide background information, establish trends, and situate the study within existing empirical and policy debates. Official socio-economic and poverty data were obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics, particularly the National Living Standards Surveys and State Statistical Abstracts, which provided state-level indicators on income, employment, education, health, housing conditions, and access to basic services. These sources informed the conceptualisation of multidimensional poverty and supported the interpretation of the survey findings. Data on insecurity were drawn from the Armed Conflict Location and Event

Data Project, which offers geo-referenced records of violent incidents, protests, fatalities, and oil-related crimes across Nigerian states. Additional secondary materials were sourced from reports of international organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Environment Programme, as well as relevant government publications from Bayelsa and Delta State ministries and agencies.

Primary data constituted the main empirical basis for the analysis. Empirical data were generated through Key Informant Interviews with purposively selected community leaders, security officials, civil society actors, and development practitioners. These interviews were used to provide contextual explanations of the observed relationship between poverty and insecurity. This combination of primary and secondary data sources strengthened the analytical depth of the paper and enhanced the credibility of its findings.

Analysis of the of Impacts Multidimensional Poverty on Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region

1. Unemployment and Insecurity in the Niger Delta

In the Niger Delta, expectations of economic improvement linked to oil extraction have remained largely unmet for many local communities. Longstanding problems of unemployment, environmental degradation and limited livelihood opportunities have deepened perceptions of injustice, which previous studies have identified as central to the emergence of militancy, oil theft and communal violence in the region (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2008). When households lack stable income and employment, their capacity to meet basic needs is weakened, thereby increasing exposure to fear, crime and violence (UNDP, 1994). The empirical findings of this paper supported the argument that insecurity in Bayelsa and Delta States was rooted not only in violent events themselves, but also in chronic economic vulnerability that eroded everyday safety and well-being.

A community stakeholder in Delta State noted that the transition between 2015 and 2025 marked a period of deepening economic despair, stating:

> In the last ten years, the cost of living has outpaced any local income growth. What used to be manageable poverty in 2015 has become a desperate struggle for survival by 2025, forcing many who were previously on the fence into the wait-and-see world of oil-related crime.

To contextualise the quantitative relationship between unemployment and insecurity, qualitative evidence from key informant interviews was examined. Qualitative evidence from key informant interviews further corroborated these quantitative results. A community leader in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State explained:

> When people cannot feed their families or find work, they become angry. Many of the boys you see involved in oil theft or violence are not criminals by nature. They are reacting to years of hardship and neglect.

Similarly, a civil society practitioner working on youth development in Delta State stated:

> Unemployment is the fuel of insecurity here. Once young people feel abandoned, they are easily drawn into illegal activities. Economic frustration comes before violence.

An informant from a riverine community explained;

> Within our local communities, the lack of industries means that the only thriving 'sector' is the one that involves sabotaging the pipes that pass through our backyards; unemployment doesn't just make people poor, it makes the oil infrastructure the only visible employer.

A senior security official interviewed in Warri also linked employment deprivation to rising insecurity:

> Most security problems we deal with are connected to joblessness. When there is no steady income, people take risks, and crime increases. Security operations alone cannot solve this.

Regarding the effectiveness of interventions, a youth leader in Bayelsa State expressed scepticism, remarking:

> We hear about government employment programmes on the radio, but on the ground in our communities, we don't see the impact. Most of these schemes between 2015 till now felt like political favors rather than genuine efforts to provide jobs for those of us living in the creeks.

These interview accounts present the survey evidence highlighting how low income and unemployment experienced at the community level serve as immediate triggers of insecurity. These responses underscore the central role of economic deprivation in shaping insecurity patterns in Bayelsa and Delta States. Empirical studies across the Niger Delta and Nigeria more broadly corroborated these results. Research has shown that unemployment and income poverty are strongly associated with militancy, oil theft and violent crime in oil-producing communities (Daukere, 2025; Umanah, Udom, & Badey, 2023; Evans and Kelikume, 2019).

Recent analyses by the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that states with high unemployment and poverty rates also experience higher levels of insecurity, particularly in resource-dependent regions (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). International reports

similarly highlight how economic exclusion and joblessness increase vulnerability to criminal networks and armed groups in the Niger Delta (UNDP, 2019; World Bank, 2020). Providing further confirmation of the link between low income, poverty, unemployment and insecurity, a senior community leader in Ogbia Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, stated:

> For many years, young people here expected that oil activities would translate into jobs and better living standards. When that did not happen, frustration set in. Today, some youths see illegal activities around oil facilities as the only way to earn money. It is not because they prefer violence, but because normal means of survival are no longer available to them.

Similarly, a security official stationed in Warri South, Delta State, explained:

> Most of the violent incidents we respond to are connected to economic hardship. Unemployment pushes youths into pipeline vandalism and organised oil theft. Where there are jobs and steady livelihoods, you see far less tension and crime.

A civil society practitioner working on youth development programmes in Yenagoa further observed:

> Our engagement with unemployed youths shows that many drift into illegal oil activities because they see no alternative. Poverty weakens moral restraint. When young people cannot earn a living legitimately, insecurity becomes normalised as a survival strategy rather than an exception.

While some studies emphasised political manipulation and elite interests as contributors to Niger Delta insecurity, these factors often operate alongside, rather than independently of, economic deprivation (Watts, 2008; Obi, 2014). The present finding suggested that income and employment deprivation remain foundational conditions upon which other drivers of insecurity build. Overall, this paper argued that unemployment constituted a critical pathway through which socioeconomic deprivation translated into insecurity in Bayelsa and Delta States. The strength of the association observed suggested that prolonged economic neglect and limited livelihood opportunities had intensified local perceptions of insecurity. This evidence pointed to the importance of policy responses that prioritise job creation, income support and sustainable livelihoods as part of broader strategies for reducing insecurity in the Niger Delta.

2. Lack of access to education and threat to public security in the Niger Delta

While education deprivation alone may not demonstrate independent effect on public security, its relevance becomes clearer when interpreted through theoretical frameworks that emphasise cumulative and interacting sources of frustration. This pattern was consistent with the frustration-aggression hypothesis, which posits that prolonged obstruction of access to valued social and economic goals generates frustration that may be expressed through aggression and violence (Dollard et al., 1939; Berkowitz, 1989). In Bayelsa and Delta States, the inability of individuals, particularly young people, to access quality and affordable education and venture into stable employment appeared to intensify feelings of marginalisation and resentment, increasing the likelihood of violent responses.

This finding echoed earlier studies which documented how structural unemployment and limited livelihood opportunities sustained cycles of militancy, inter-communal conflict and criminal violence in the Niger Delta. Watts (2008) demonstrated that youth unemployment and exclusion from oil-related economic benefits played a central role in sustaining militant violence in the region. Ebienfa (2011) and Ajala (2016) similarly showed that limited employment opportunities and poor social services intensified grievances and contributed to cycles of conflict in oil-producing communities.

A community leader in Delta State highlighted the link between the physical environment and social stability, noting:

> Living in crowded, dilapidated housing without clean water or electricity breeds a specific type of bitterness. You look at the oil flow stations with 24-hour power and clean water, then you look at our communities in darkness; that gap is exactly where the social tension and the urge to sabotage pipelines come from.

Other evidence has confirmed that states with high unemployment and weak social infrastructure continue to experience elevated levels of violence and insecurity, particularly in resource-dependent areas (World Bank, 2020). Evans and Kelikume (2019) also demonstrated that unemployment and underemployment significantly increased the probability of violent crime across Nigerian states, with stronger effects observed in oil-producing regions. National Bureau of Statistics labour force data further indicated that Bayelsa and Delta States consistently recorded unemployment and underemployment rates above the national average during periods of heightened insecurity, suggesting a close empirical link between labour market exclusion and violent outcomes (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Empirical evidence from key informant interviews provided further insight into how education-related constraints, particularly when combined with unemployment, poor health

access and weak infrastructure, shaped insecurity outcomes at the community level. A senior security officer in Warri South Local Government Area, Delta State, noted that:

> When young people have no access to stable work and no means of supporting themselves, conflict becomes more frequent. Many of the violent incidents we handle are rooted in frustration over unemployment and poor living conditions rather than organised political motives.

This observation highlighted how employment deprivation created conditions in which violence emerged as a coping or survival strategy, rather than an ideological choice. A contrasting but complementary perspective was provided by a development practitioner working with livelihood programmes in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, who explained:

> Even when communities receive infrastructure projects, if people cannot turn those into jobs or income, tensions remain high. Lack of skills training and access to employment means youths feel excluded, and that exclusion often shows itself in violent behaviour.

Regarding whom bears the brunt of these deprivations, a civil society representative in Yenagoa explained:

> While everyone suffers, the youth and women in the riverine areas are the most affected. The youth are deprived of the quality education needed for modern jobs, while women struggle with a lack of maternal healthcare. Because these groups feel the most neglected, they are often the most reactive when conflict breaks out.

These responses illustrated how employment deprivation operated through multiple pathways, including frustration, loss of dignity and weakened social cohesion, which may heighten the risk of violent conflict. The convergence between quantitative results and qualitative accounts strengthened the credibility of the finding and underscored its relevance to policy debates. The absence of a statistically significant independent effect does not diminish the importance of education in insecurity dynamics; rather, it highlights that education deprivation exerts influence primarily through its interaction with other poverty dimensions rather than as a standalone driver.

From a human security perspective, this paper suggested that employment deprivation undermined not only economic security but also personal and community security. When individuals were unable to secure stable livelihoods, their exposure to fear, violence and social instability increased, reinforcing cycles of insecurity (**Umanah et al**, 2023). International

assessments of the Niger Delta similarly emphasised that failure to address employment and livelihood challenges limited the effectiveness of security-based interventions and contributed to the persistence of violence in the region (World Bank, 2020).

Generally, it has been indicated in this paper like other research that education deprivation does not independently predict public security outcomes in the Niger Delta but remains a structurally important factor that shapes insecurity indirectly through its effects on employment opportunities, income stability and access to basic services. The findings indicated that violent conflict in the study area was closely tied to structural employment constraints rooted in education, health and living conditions, rather than being driven solely by criminal intent. This evidence pointed to the need for employment-centred peace-building strategies that prioritised skills development, access to productive work and improvements in basic services as essential components of sustainable security in the Niger Delta.

3. Deprivation in health care services and public security in the Niger Delta

From a theoretical perspective, investments in health care services enhance individual productivity and social participation, while inadequate access to healthcare constrains labour capacity, weakens livelihoods and increases vulnerability to engagement in illicit activity (Farmer, 2004). When healthcare is out of reach, the ordinary routes to earning a living close off as well, and it is young people who end up most exposed to recruitment by militant groups and criminal networks. A community leader from the riverine area explained.

> Pipeline vandalism is not just a crime of opportunity; it is a crime of economic necessity for those who have lost everything. When the land is too polluted to farm and the water too oily to fish for, the very pipes that caused the pollution become the only 'resource' left for the people to exploit just to buy food.

This aligns with findings from other studies where deficits in human capital have been linked to violent behaviour and heightened insecurity (Ben-Salah & Saxena, 2025). Empirical studies in the Niger Delta and Nigeria broadly have similarly documented health deprivation as salient driver of human frustration and insecurity. For example, analyses of regional development data show that communities with poorer health services exhibit higher rates of violent militancy and social instability (Mgbonyenbi & Emeni, 2020).

Key informant interviews provided complementary insights. A senior school administrator in Sapele, Delta State, explained:

> In many of our communities, children leave school early because parents cannot afford fees or there are no nearby secondary schools. Without education, these youths see few legitimate options. Many drift into repair gangs and then into pipeline vandalism or protection rackets because that is where they feel included.

A public health officer working in Nembe Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, observed:

> When families have to choose between food and clinic visits, immunization and check-ups cease. Poor health undermines their ability to farm or fish effectively. The frustration this causes, especially among young men who cannot earn, makes them susceptible to militancy recruiters promising pay for work that is just dangerous tasks.

A policy advocate focusing on youth education in Effurun noted:

> We see a direct link between lack of schooling opportunities and insecurity. Young people with few skills cannot compete for formal jobs. They feel abandoned. This frustration does not stay private. It spills into communal tensions, fights over scarce resources, and involvement in illegal refining. Their grievances are valid, but the outcomes are damaging.

This has an impact on social cohesion, a policy advocate in Effurun observed:

> These crimes have poisoned community relations. We now see brothers fighting brothers over 'bunkering' rights, and traditional leadership structures are collapsing because the young men with 'oil money' no longer respect the elders. It has destroyed the social fabric that once held these communities together.

The qualitative evidence provides important insight into how poor health access interacts with other deprivations to intensify insecurity outcomes. The KIIs illustrated two key mechanisms through which inadequate access to basic health care services contributes to public insecurity. First, poor health access undermines household productivity by limiting individuals' capacity to engage in farming, fishing and other livelihood activities. Second, health-related vulnerabilities interact with unemployment, poor education and environmental degradation to generate frustration and perceived marginalisation, particularly among young people, thereby increasing susceptibility to involvement in violent and criminal activities. For example, Oyefusi (2008) and Koos (2018), using survey and interview data from oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta, found that limited access to education and poor health services significantly

increased youth participation in oil theft, communal violence, and armed militancy. They argued that weak human capital development reduced legitimate livelihood options and normalised engagement in illegal economic activities.

Similarly, Hillesund et al (2018) demonstrated that communities with poor access to schooling and healthcare exhibited higher levels of violent conflict and criminal behaviour. His analysis showed that youth exclusion from education intensified feelings of marginalisation, which translated into aggression and participation in violent networks. Also, Hillesund et al. (2018) indicated that horizontal inequalities in education and health remain significant predictors of violent conflict across developing countries. Regions where access to social services is uneven, and where particular groups experience sustained deprivation in schooling and healthcare, are more susceptible to rebellion and organised violence, even when overall income levels are comparable.

Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argued that while poor healthcare system may contribute to conflict risk, it is not sufficient cause of violence on its own. Rather its econometric analysis suggested that access to finance for armed groups and the presence of valuable natural resources were more decisive predictors of conflict onset than social service deprivation alone. Similarly, Fearon and Laitin (2003) found that weak state capacity, rather than health levels per se, better explained the persistence of civil conflict. They contended that poor healthcare service delivery often reflects broader governance failures, which mediate the relationship between deprivation and insecurity.

This qualitative evidence indicated that deficits in health provision constituted a major structural contributor to insecurity outcomes in the Niger Delta. The findings underscore that health care deprivation does not merely reflect poor welfare outcomes but represents a critical pathway through which multidimensional poverty translates into heightened public insecurity in the region. Policies aimed at reducing insecurity in the Niger Delta should therefore prioritise investments in human capital development, including expansion of health service delivery, and programmes that integrate young people into health is wealth orientation and opportunities for sound livelihoods.

4. Poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta region

Alkire and Foster (2011), which argues that poverty operates through intersecting deprivations rather than income alone. The present findings demonstrate that when poverty dimensions are examined collectively rather than in isolation, their combined effect on insecurity becomes both statistically and substantively significant. Applied to conflict settings, this approach has been shown to better explain violence in resource-rich but socially deprived regions (Østby et al., 2009). In the Niger Delta, oil wealth has coexisted with persistent deficits

in livelihoods, infrastructure, health services, and education, creating conditions in which oil-related crimes emerge as survival strategies rather than purely profit-seeking behaviour. Studies across Nigeria and other resource-dependent regions corroborate these findings. A study by Daukere and Ifabiyi (2025) demonstrated that communities experiencing combined economic and social deprivation were significantly more likely to engage in oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism. Similarly, Schultze-Kraft (2017) showed that oil-related criminal networks in the Niger Delta often functioned as informal livelihood systems in areas where formal economic opportunities were absent.

However, some studies provided a partial counterpoint to this viewpoint. These studies argued that resource-related violence in many settings is not solely driven by widespread poverty but is also sustained through elite capture, organised criminal interests, and competitive political dynamics**.** Scholarship on Barnes (2017) highlighted the integration of organised crime and political violence, demonstrating that armed actors and criminal networks leverage natural resource rents and institutional weaknesses to pursue economic and political agendas that extend beyond immediate livelihood deprivation. These dynamics are evident in settings where political elites use sponsored gangs and networks to consolidate power and influence, often recruiting and arming groups to suppress rivals or extract resource rents for private gain, thereby sustaining cycles of violence that are intrinsically tied to elite competition rather than poverty alone. Rather than contradicting the present findings, these perspectives suggest that poverty interacts with political and elite dynamics to shape insecurity outcomes in complex and mutually reinforcing ways.

In Nigeria specifically, documented patterns of elite capture show how powerful political "godfathers" have employed organised gangs to carry out violence as part of electoral and political contests, which underscores the role of political competition and patronage in driving violence independent of general socioeconomic hardship (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Contemporary political economic research further suggested that imbalances in access to power and resource rents, reflected in malapportioned representation or exclusionary elite bargains, increase the likelihood of organised violence and competition over control of economic opportunities (Barnes, 2017). These interlinked processes reveal that resource wealth and political interests can create *political economies of violence*, in which organised criminal interests and elite competition play central roles in sustaining conflict even where poverty is not the predominant motivating factor.

The qualitative evidence provided additional insight into how overlapping poverty indicators translate into everyday experiences of insecurity at the community level. Responses from key informant interviews further strengthened this argument. A development practitioner working with livelihood programmes in Southern Ijaw, Bayelsa State, stated:

> Many young people involved in illegal oil activities come from households that lack basic needs. When there is no steady income, no skills training, and no access to services, oil theft becomes a way to survive rather than a deliberate criminal choice.

A senior security official in Burutu Local Government Area, Delta State, explained:

> Our operations show that oil theft increases in communities where poverty is deep and opportunities are limited. Where development projects and employment schemes are present, we see less resistance and fewer oil-related offences.

In a separate interview, a civil society coordinator based in Bomadi, Delta State, observed:

> Poverty here is not just about money. It is about poor schools, weak healthcare, and no alternatives for young people. These combined problems push many into the oil economy because it is the only option they see.

These accounts support the argument that multidimensional poverty shapes both the motivation and social acceptance of oil-related crimes. Thus, a researcher in Yenagoa noted:

> While all deprivations matter, the 'unemployment-education' trap is the most lethal for security. When you have a young man who is healthy but has no functional education and no job prospects, he becomes the primary target for oil-theft syndicates. In my experience, these two dimensions - lack of work and lack of skills-are the biggest predictors of violence.

The consistency between survey data and qualitative insights strengthens the credibility of the findings and underscores the importance of addressing overlapping deprivations rather than focusing solely on security enforcement. A policy consultant interviewed in Delta State suggested an integrated approach, remarking:

> The best intervention is not more soldiers; it is a 'Development-Security Pact.' We need policies that simultaneously offer localized modular refinery licenses to community cooperatives while funding massive technical vocational centers. This addresses the 'crime' by legalizing and regulating the energy need, and addresses 'poverty' by providing the technical skills and ownership required to sustain it.

Overall, the evidence indicated that insecurity outcomes in the region, particularly oil-related crimes, are deeply rooted in multidimensional poverty. Policies that prioritise military

responses without addressing income poverty, education deficits, poor living conditions, and limited livelihood opportunities are therefore unlikely to achieve sustainable reductions in insecurity. The findings instead support integrated development approaches that combine poverty reduction, human capital investment, and inclusive economic participation as central strategies for addressing oil-related insecurity in the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

This paper examined the relationship between poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta through empirical evidence from Bayelsa and Delta States, analysis impacts of unemployment, education deprivation, health care deprivation as combined effects of multidimensional poverty on insecurity outcomes. Drawing on qualitative survey evidence, the paper reached several key conclusions that reflect both the differentiated and cumulative effects of poverty dimensions on insecurity in the Niger Delta. The paper concluded that unemployment constitutes a major and direct driver of insecurity in Bayelsa and Delta States being the key references and empirical evidence demonstrated a relationship between unemployment and insecurity, with respondents experiencing high levels of unemployment overwhelmingly reporting high levels of insecurity. This finding indicates that unstable livelihoods and income insecurity undermine household resilience and increase exposure to crime, violence, and social instability. Unemployment was therefore not perceived as a peripheral economic concern, but as a central factor shaping insecurity dynamics in the study area.

The paper concluded that deprivation in education, when examined in isolation, does not exert a statistically independent influence on public security in Bayelsa and Delta States. Although respondents widely acknowledged educational constraints and their broader social consequences, analysis revealed weak direct association between education deprivation and public security. This finding suggests that education deprivation does not directly explain variations in public security perceptions on its own. However, education remains structurally important, as qualitative and descriptive evidence indicated that its effects on insecurity operate indirectly through interactions with unemployment, income instability, poor health access, and limited livelihood opportunities.

This paper also established that lack of access to basic health care services has a strong effect on public security. Respondents experiencing high levels of health care deprivation were significantly more likely to report high levels of insecurity. This result highlights health access as a core dimension of human security, with inadequate health services undermining household productivity, increasing vulnerability, and intensifying social stress. Unlike education deprivation, health care deprivation demonstrated a direct and independent association with public insecurity, underscoring its critical role in shaping insecurity outcomes in the study area.

Therefore, multidimensional poverty, measured through combined indicators of unemployment, education, health access, income stability, and living conditions, has a significant relationship with insecurity in the Niger Delta. Consequently, the paper recommends as follows:

1. Federal and state governments prioritizing employment creation as a core security strategy in the region. Reducing unemployment should be treated not merely as an economic policy objective but as a preventive measure against crime, violence, and social instability. Targeted public works programmes, youth employment schemes, and support for small and medium-scale enterprises should be expanded, particularly in oil-producing and riverine communities where formal employment opportunities are limited. Vocational and skills acquisition programmes should be aligned with local economic activities such as agriculture, fisheries, environmental remediation, construction, and artisanal services. In oil-producing areas, employment initiatives linked to environmental clean-up, pipeline surveillance, and infrastructure maintenance would provide immediate livelihoods while contributing to community stability.

2. Investments in education should focus on improving access to functional schooling, technical and vocational education, and skills-based training that enhance employability. Education policies should be closely linked to labour market opportunities and local economic needs, ensuring that educational attainment translates into meaningful livelihoods. By strengthening the role of education within broader employment and poverty reduction frameworks, its indirect contribution to reducing insecurity can be maximised.

3. Improvements in health service delivery be prioritised as a core human security intervention. Strengthening access to affordable and functional healthcare would enhance household productivity, reduce vulnerability, and mitigate social stress that contributes directly to insecurity. Specific measures should include upgrading primary healthcare facilities, expanding mobile health services in hard-to-reach riverine communities, and ensuring the availability of essential drugs and qualified health personnel. Health policies should be integrated with livelihood and employment programmes, recognising that improved health outcomes enhance individuals' capacity to participate in productive economic activities and reduce susceptibility to insecurity.

4. That poverty reduction strategies in the Niger Delta adopt a coordinated, multidimensional approach. Single-sector interventions are unlikely to be effective in isolation. Instead, policies should simultaneously address unemployment, health access, education, income stability, and living conditions. Poverty alleviation programmes should be closely linked to resource governance and community development initiatives. Oil companies, regulatory agencies, and state institutions should implement genuinely participatory development projects that respond to local priorities rather than symbolic or short-term interventions. Addressing overlapping deprivations is essential to transforming oil-related crimes from perceived survival strategies into socially unacceptable activities and to achieving sustainable security in Bayelsa and Delta States.

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