



Political Economy of Presidential Amnesty Programme and Its Impact on Militant Activities in The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria has earned US\$3.6 trillion from the sales of crude hydrocarbon (petroleum) since 1958 when crude oil was discovered in Bayelsa State in southern Nigeria. Records show that proceeds from crude oil sale have not translated into sustainable development in the oil-bearing communities. When peaceful and non-violent protest failed, youths of the Niger Delta region took to violent protest resulting to militancy and subsequently its hindrance to socio-economic development and political stability. Thus, creating the conditions that altered existing social order in the area. In order to curb this menace, Presidential Amnesty Programme was initiated and established in 2008 to provide opportunity for genuine resolution of the contending issues and restoration of stability in the region. The primary objective of the study was to establish the nexus between Presidential Amnesty Programme and the increase in activities of the militants in Niger Delta. Political economy approach was utilized to explain capitalist relations, resource extraction and class conflict taking place in the area. The study used a sample population of 450 drawn from the study population comprising three states in the Niger Delta region, did focus group and used archival document. The study revealed the relationship between the amnesty programme and the increase of militancy in the Niger Delta region. The study recommends the need to engage those not covered in the initial phase of the programme and other stakeholders considering the Petroleum Industry Act and design a bottom-top development blueprint for the area.

Keywords: *Oil Production, Presidential Amnesty Programme, Niger Delta, Militancy, Political Economy, and Informal Oil Economy.*

1. Introduction

Nigeria is the seventh-highest oil and gas producer and among the largest oil exporter in Africa, with proven oil reserves of more than 39 billion barrels and natural gas reserves of more than 190 trillion cubic feet (Onwuemenyi, 2016). Between 1958 and 2019, a period of sixty years, Nigeria earned over US\$3.6 trillion from crude oil and natural gas sales, which translates to about ₦1,512 trillion using today's conversion rate of ₦420/\$1 as of June 2020 (This Day Newspaper July 16, 2020). The vast revenue failed to improve the living standards among the oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta region but benefited a few elites, Government, and the oil multinationals. Instead, oil exploration and exploitation have brought severe environmental devastation, widespread pollution, and poverty to the people of the Niger Delta. From 1999 when democratic rule returned to the country up to 2016, militancy became an intractable problem in the region with its transmutation from a movement to emancipate the people to a means of livelihood for youths.

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) was conceived as a holistic solution designed to address the problem of militancy and armed conflict in the Niger Delta through a disarmament policy and integration of militants into the society through skills and training of persons involved in militancy activities. According to Okolie-Osemene (2015), these criminal activities from militancy made Nigeria lose between 100,000 –

200,000 barrels of crude oil per day, a significant loss to the country's oil industry. The implication was a gradual erosion of the value system and norms of communities in the Niger Delta. In the prevailing circumstance, youths in the region became susceptible to militancy. Activities like kidnapping and sea piracy worsen the security and stability of the region and threatened Nigerian's oil production through a reduction in oil revenue.

This study sought to establish the nexus between the PAP and the increase in militancy in Niger Delta region. The study further seeks to support the view that recent militancy in the region is built on purely economic and political motives with little or no altruistic motive attached. The study used survey carried out in three states of the Niger Delta region, focus group and data from military sources to critically examine and assess the successes of the Presidential Amnesty Programme.

1.1 *Statement of the Problem*

The study revolves around the political economy, which is the bedrock of the relationship between resource allocation and the struggle and competition involved in the process. According to Keefer (2004), political economy explains how society allocates resources. These social relations provide the structures for the relationship among the population and determine who gets what, how and when. The problem of the study arises from the distortion of the traditional economy of Niger Delta because of crude oil exploration and production in the region. This situation has been exacerbated by militancy and militancy-induced activities prevalent in the region like kidnapping, sea piracy and pipeline vandalism. Against this background, the study investigates evidence of how the Presidential Amnesty Programme inspires youths to embrace militancy through the increase in the number of militant groups to gain the government's attention and earn a living.

1.2 *Aim and Objectives of the Study*

The study aims to examine the political economy of the Presidential Amnesty Programme. The specific objectives of the study are;

1. Identify the role of the Presidential Amnesty Programme that has led to changes in the social status of militants.
2. Establish the nexus between acceptance of the Presidential Amnesty Programme and the increase manifest in crude oil theft and pipeline vandalism.

1.3 *Research Questions*

1. What is the role of the Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta, which has led to changes in the social status of militants?
2. What is the nexus between acceptance of the Presidential Amnesty Programme and the increase in artisanal oil refining, crude oil theft, and pipeline vandalism?

1.4 *Conceptual Framework*

The political-economic approach deals with class formation, capital accumulation and exploitation, resulting in inevitable class conflict. From the Niger Delta case study, the metamorphosis of militants hitherto seen as victims of the repressive economic system represented by Nigeria's corrupt oil economy to a class of influential power brokers who have created an alternative economic system can be seen as class mobility. This transformation from militant leaders fighting in the hinterland creeks to accepting the Presidential Amnesty Programme and becoming business entrepreneurs is evidence of the formation of a nascent social class which challenges the established hierarchy and social order in the region.

This phenomenon is also evidence of the fundamental basis of the political economy approach, which is premised on the interdependence of the political and economic dynamics which shape human societies. It explores critical questions like how and why militant leaders replaced their agitations for social justice and

political marginalization with the present quest to accumulate wealth and capital through government patronage.

1.5 *Scope of the Study*

The scope of the study focuses on how militancy created the emergence of the Presidential Amnesty Programme and formed a new social class of ex-militant leaders and their followers. The study focused on the three states of the Niger Delta which are Abia, Imo, and Ondo States. Three Local Government Areas from each of the three states were specifically chosen as the study's sample population.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Political Economy Approach*

In the view of Williams (2014), the political economy answers questions in a society, such as how political leaders are chosen and how they are held accountable in any given society. It also examines how policies are made, which policies are selected, why, and which interests shape the policy-making process. Political economy also answers to who gains or losses from the policies made in the society. Her definition of political economy describes it as a study of how a society is managed and governed, especially regarding the policy-making processes and distribution of resources.

2.1.1 *Oil and Militancy in the Niger Delta*

The discovery of crude oil changed the region's social dynamics and economic fundamentals, which brought unprecedented disruptions in the people's way of life. As oil became the mainstay of the region's economy, it displaced the traditional political economy as it forced the people out of their farming and fishing activities without creating alternatives. The informal oil economy and militancy are both the outcomes of governance failure and marginalization of the region's people who demand resource control and social and economic justice. The destruction of the traditional economy of the Niger Delta led to an increase in the number of youths ready to engage in militancy and participate in illegal informal oil economy.

Ebiri (2014) asserted that oil destroyed an economy that has sustained generations of Niger Delta people but did not properly absorb the displaced people into the oil economy. Furthermore, the development of the Nigerian oil industry was conceived without considering the impact on the lives of the people. This point was clearly explained by Ojokorotu and Gilbert (2010). They attributed militancy to poorly conceived Government policies implemented haphazardly and the deliberate alienation of the people by an oil industry which colluded with the Government from the onset to shortchange the region.

Against this background, the emergence of militancy was an apparent reaction to the faulty structure of the oil economy built on the region's natural resources. For example, Ibaba (2015) described how the initial peaceful approaches of the people did not yield the desired Government response. The Government preferred to treat non-violence of the region's people with levity. The establishment of the Willink's Commission in 1958 to address the numerous issues raised by the region, especially regarding oil revenue sharing and environmental challenges, was the first of several intervention programs for the region. Yet the Commission failed to make far-reaching decisions apart from recommending the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB), which came into being in 1960. Unfortunately, the NDDDB failed to fulfill its mandate of developing the Niger Delta region but was used by the same Government to distribute political patronage.

At the peak of their agitation between 2006 and 2009, more than thirty active and well-armed militant groups were operating in the Niger Delta region. The prominent ones were the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) under Ateke Tom, the Niger Delta Strike Force led by Farah Dagogo and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer

Force (NDPVF) under the leadership of Alhaji Asari Dokubo. Okolie-Osemene (2015) identified the primary objectives of these militant groups, which were to compel the Federal Government and oil companies to address poverty, development, and environmental devastation in the Niger Delta and to have a stake in the oil economy built on the oil resources of the region.

It is essential to distinguish between individuals who can be referred to as militants and those who choose to hide under the cloak of militancy to engage in pure criminal activities which are not aimed at achieving anything for the more extensive interests of the Niger Delta region. These criminals do not represent any agitation for the region. Many of them are not from the region but were attracted by the proceeds they will make from criminal activities like oil theft, kidnapping, and sea piracy.

Employing methods like hostage-taking, pipeline vandalism and destruction of oil and gas installations, these militant groups were able to cripple Nigeria's economy. For example, the country's crude oil exports dropped from about 2.2 million barrels per day to only 700,000 barrels per day as of January 2009, while power generation dropped to a mere 1900 megawatts from over 4,000 megawatts within the same period (Arinze, 2010). Interestingly, a distinct strain of militancy arose alongside the influential militant groups and these groups were associated with cultism and outright criminality.

These groups had names like Greenlanders, D12, KKK, Icelanders, Dey Gbam and Dey Well engaged in kidnapping for ransom, bank robberies, sea piracy and oil bunkering. Their activities extended into the region's political process as they played vital roles as political thugs and engaged in electoral violence. Oluwatoyin (2011) explained that though both types of militants appeared on the surface to fight for the same ideals of Niger Delta emancipation, it was evident that the latter was using the cover of militancy to perpetrate criminal activities and engage in cultism. However, they were tolerated and enjoyed support in their communities because their presence made the region uncomfortable for the oil companies and security agencies. These activities would later come to define the informal oil economy.

Militancy is an outcome of societal differences in opinion and goals, which can be addressed using the right tools of compromise and negotiations, but which can degenerate if poorly handled or addressed, as the case in the Niger Delta used in this study shows. Most of these agitators were not keen to embrace the Amnesty Programme because of the lucrative nature of the illegal informal oil economy. Paradoxically, their demand to be included in the programme was offered as the reason for their return to militancy. In this circumstance, these youths seek to be settled by the government and oil companies. Their activities enrich their sponsors and leaders who have grown powerful and influential in their communities yet remain primarily faceless. The success of the informal oil economy in creating much-needed jobs and income in the poor communities encourages more youths to become militants. It induces the oil-bearing communities to protect their existence.

Apart from the large-scale oil theft, a more dangerous aspect is kidnapping for ransom and sea piracy which threatens the region's stability, disrupts economic activities in the waterways and provides a ready excuse for the invasion of communities by the military and other security agents. Okolie-Osemene (2015) explained that militancy in its present form in the Niger Delta is a cover for criminality, stating that kidnap gangs and armed robbers all claim to be militants in the prevailing circumstance. This illegal business is richly more rewarding than legitimate jobs and pays much more than the N65,000 stipend received by participants in the Amnesty Programme.

A report by Social Action (2010), a civil society and advocacy organization, estimates that Nigeria spends close to \$2 billion (Dollars) annually to combat illegal oil bunkering and artisanal oil refining. However, this vast figure did not stop the country from losing N3.8 trillion (Naira) to the illicit business in 2016 alone. The huge gains from the operations fund arms purchases in the region and have caused frequent deadly clashes between security agents and the militants. The report also criticizes the mode employed by

the military in destroying illegal oil refineries, which adds to the environmental damage to the region. It also bemoans the quantity of crude oil condensate and by-products produced and dumped in the environment by artisanal oil refining operations as only 20% of their crude oil feedstock can be feasibly distilled using their low-level local technology.

As argued by Odalonu (2016), the people of the Niger Delta mainly participate in these illegal crude oil bunkering and refining operations on a subsistence level. However, according to Naanen and Tolani (2014), the ideal economic model for the Niger Delta region must go beyond tackling the menace of artisanal crude oil refining, crude oil theft, kidnapping and sea piracy and create a workable industrialization policy that would focus on petrochemicals, agro-processing, fish processing and tourism which the region already has the potentials to fulfill. Likewise, education and information communication technology would greatly benefit the youths who engage in illegal activities and equip them to work in formal industries.

As more ex-militant leaders become legitimate power brokers; they can influence policymakers and government officials to soft-pedal actions and policies that negatively affect artisanal oil refining in their communities. In some cases, these operations are directly or indirectly controlled by ex-militant leaders themselves. The more funds at the disposal of militants, the more their capacity to threaten the region's stability and become influential in their communities.

2.1.2 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Emerging from reviewed literature in the study, the root cause of militancy in the Niger Delta was identified as the failure of different palliative measures by successive Governments to alleviate the suffering of the local population. Notably, the various programmes failed to address poverty and youth unemployment, creating fertile conditions for militancy to thrive in the region. Militant activities have eroded traditional authorities and the militants have become dominant figures creating new centers of power and influence, worsening the region's instability. This was not captured by previous studies.

These identified literature gaps aside, previous studies also failed to pinpoint the proliferation of militant groups that took place between the pro-amnesty period and post-amnesty period, which has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of militant groups, some existing merely as community-based protection rackets to protect their artisanal oil refining business interests. It is evident none of these groups engage in meaningful agitation for social justice but exist to protect the political economy created by militancy.

Data for this study were primarily drawn using surveys, focus group discussions, and archival document to gather relevant information. Aspects of the research problem from which the data were drawn include investigating how militancy is connected to the informal oil economy, particularly its role in activities like artisanal oil refining, illegal oil bunkering, sea piracy, and pipeline vandalism and kidnapping. The interviews and focus group discussions identified those who are stakeholders like ex-militants, militants, community leaders, youth leaders, and so on. They asked them questions on how militancy came into existence in the Niger Delta, the key actors who engage in militancy, those who benefit from militancy and the underlying causes of artisanal oil refining which is the foundation of the informal oil economy.

3. Study Area

The total population is estimated at 11 million people across three states: Abia, Imo, and Ondo States. Demographically, about 62% of this population falls into the age bracket of 15 to 35 years, and the most populous states are Imo, and Abia States (NBS Report, 2015). The traditional economy of the Niger Delta people is mainly rural and subsistence in nature. Most of the rural populace typically engage in farming, fishing, hunting, local crafts, lumbering, pottering, etc. All over the rural areas, local markets thrive and support the local population, while the urban areas are a mixed economy of industries, oil and gas service sector and commercial activities in urban areas.

3.1. Focus Local Government Areas in the States of the Study Area

In Abia State, Ukwa East, Ukwa West, and Obamas Ngwa LGAs were selected because of high incidences of militancy and pipeline vandalization which reached a climax in the 2010 kidnap of fifteen pupils from a primary school in Aba, Abia State. Imo state had its focus narrowed to Oguta, Ohaji-Egbema and Ngor-Okpala LGAs because they are the oil-producing areas in the state and experience frequent kidnapping and armed robberies, pipeline vandalism and artisanal oil refining. The areas of focus in Ondo State are Akoko South-West, Oso and Akoko South-East LGAs, which are associated with kidnapping and sea piracy.

Table 1: Local Government Areas that Participated in the Study

S/NO	State	Local Government Area
1	Abia	Ukwa-East, Ukwa West, Obioma Ngwa
2	Imo	Ohaji-Egbema, Oguta, Ngor-Okpala
3	Ondo	Akoko Southwest, Akoko Southeast, Ose

Compiled by: The Researcher 2022

The sample size was arrived at using the Taro Yamane formula, which is $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$. It has a confidence level of 95%, leaving a 5% margin of error. This calculation of the cumulative population of the states, which is 11 259, 992, gave a sample size of 450 men and women after approximation which was broken down into one hundred and fifty respondents from each of the three states and fifty respondents from each of the nine Local Government Areas selected for the study.

A total of 450 copies of questionnaires were distributed among the respondents, out of which 389 were accurately filled and returned, 50 were wrongly completed, and the respondents did not return five. Three hundred and eighty-nine copies of questionnaires were collated and analyzed for the study using responses given by the respondents. In each of the nine states, 150 copies of questionnaires were distributed. Imo and Ondo state returned every questionnaire distributed, which is a 100% rate of return. However, Abia state returned 149 copies of the questionnaires each, which gave a return rate of 99.33%.

A total of three Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were carried out in three selected Local Government Areas drawn from each state in the region: Obioma Ngwa in Abia State, Ohaji Egbema in Imo state, and Ose in Ondo state. These local government areas were selected for Focus Group Discussions because earlier studies had identified them as areas where activities like sea piracy, crude oil theft and pipeline vandalism were endemic (Naanen & Tolani, 2014; Odalonu, 2016). Participants in the Focus Group Discussions comprised fifteen persons, each drawn from community-based associations, community vigilante groups, and ex-militants. These select groups have a comprehensive knowledge of the activities of militants and feel the direct impact of militancy-induced activities on the communities. In all, forty-five individuals took part in the three local government areas, and they were drawn from six groups selected from the FGDs. Secondary data sources for the study were obtained from reports, compilations, periodicals, and journals from relevant agencies like the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) Office, Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, Federal Ministry of Environment, Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources, and Ministry of Justice, etc.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection and Validity of Instruments

The responses obtained from the Questionnaire were carefully collated and were represented through charts, tables, and bar charts. It was from these that the mean scores were derived after presenting the responses as percentages. The Discussions and interviews to support the Questionnaire with the responses grouped under participants, beneficiaries, dependents, stakeholders, policymakers, and law enforcement

agencies to indicate the existence of the informal oil economy. Quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods were used in analyzing the data with a focus on linking PAP to increase in militant camps and the creation and sustenance of the informal oil economy. The data centered on who participates in the PAP, who benefited and still benefits, why there is increase in militant camps and so on. It assessed the social status of ex-militants and those who control the informal oil economy, measuring the impact of these individuals on the politics, culture, and economy.

4. Research and Analysis

The difference today, as argued in this study, is that the dynamics of the political economy driven by oil have metamorphosed from an ideological and political conflict to an economic war over the control of the oil resources by the people of the oil-bearing communities who want to make a living through means deemed illegal by the Government but considered legitimate by the people.

Chart 1: Distribution of Respondents according to key Socio-economic Characteristics N=(450)

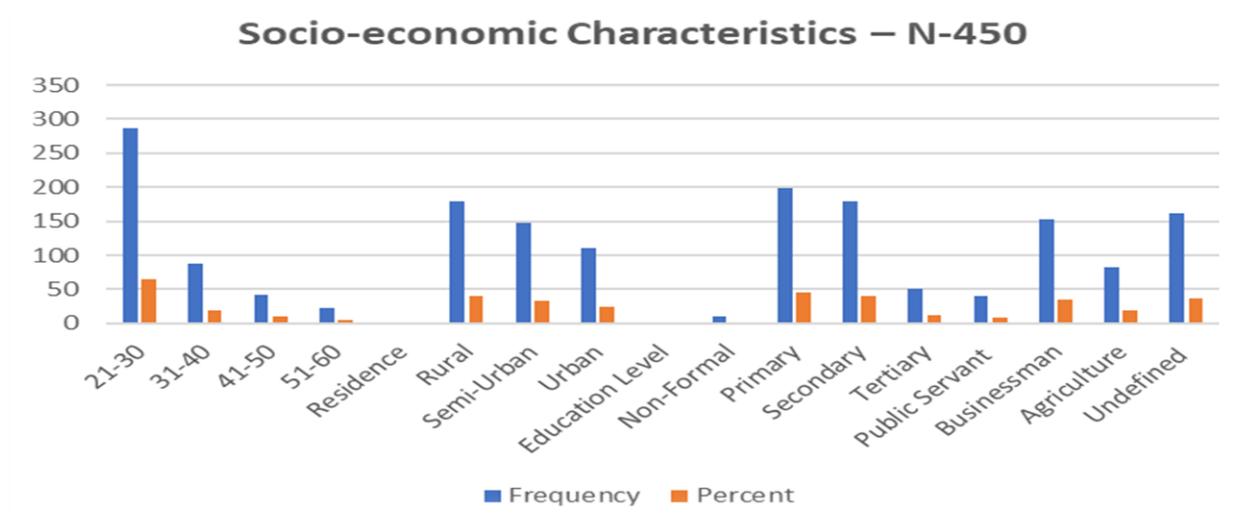
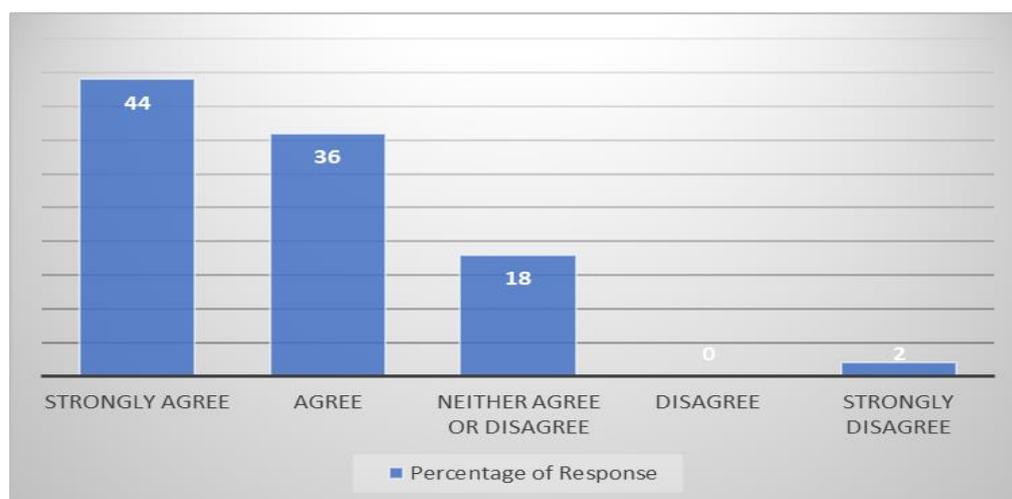


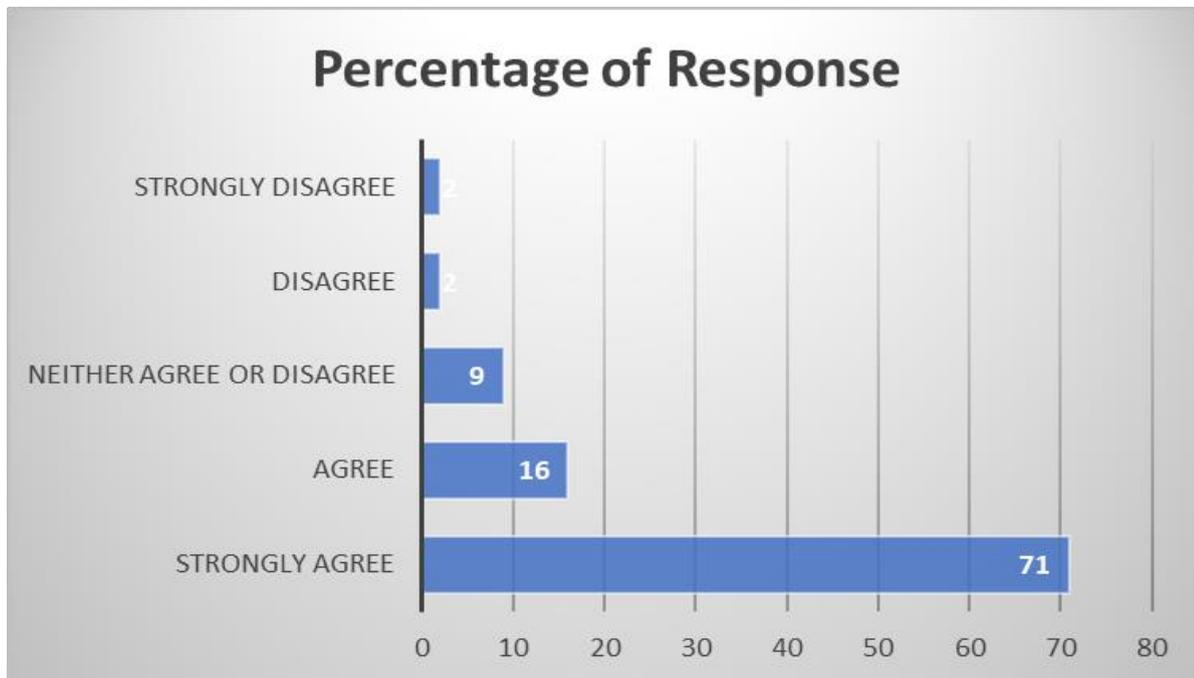
Chart 2: Responses to if Militancy and Militancy-Induced Activities Have Resulted to Increased Control and Participation of Ex-Militant Leaders on Niger Delta Politics, Economy, Culture and Social Order.



Source: Field Work, 2020

In the same way, there is a positive acceptance among respondents to the question of if militancy and militancy-induced activities have led to a new social class of rich and powerful individuals in the Niger Delta region.

Chart 3 Responses to if militancy and militancy-induced activities like artisanal oil refining and illegal oil bunkering have negative impact on the social, economic, political, and cultural indices of the Niger Delta region.



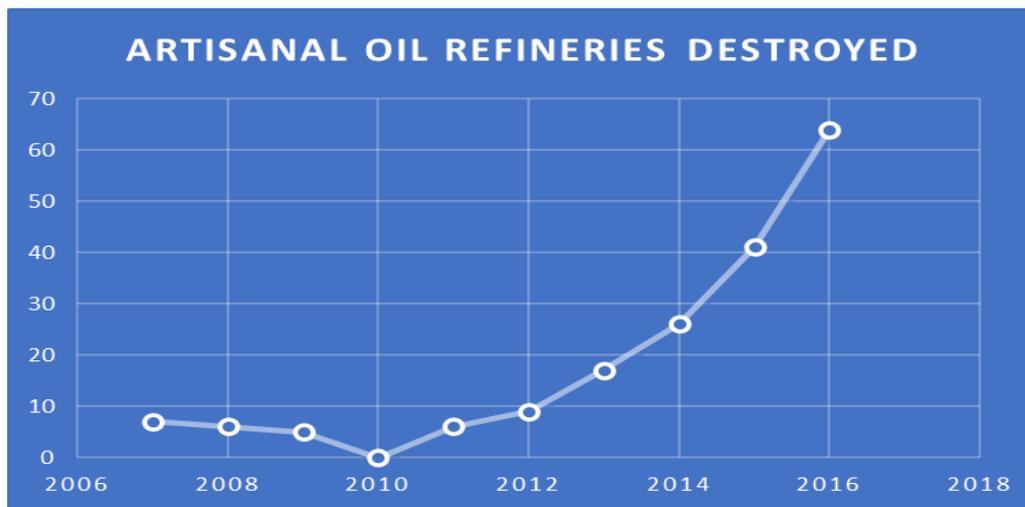
Source: Field Work 2022

Militancy has become endemic in the Niger Delta region and has contributed to positive and negative changes to the government's approach to the region. For example, militancy forced the government to seek for truce with the oil-bearing communities through the PAP, but it also creates violence, insecurity, and youth restiveness in the communities. On the balance, militancy is a divisive issue in the Niger Delta and the reasons are obvious.

First, many respondents see militancy as the only means to get the attention of government to their plight. As shown in chart 4.2, 23% and 21% of respondents indicated that militancy and militancy-induced activities are solutions to the problems of the region. Those who gave negative responses see militancy and militancy induced as the main problem facing the region, 48% and 8% of respondents supported the view that militancy is not the solution to the problems of the Niger Delta.

Thus, the responses in chart 4.2 indicate that respondents are more inclined towards seeing militancy and militancy-induced activities as being the problem of the region. They point to environmental, political, social, and cultural impact of militancy and the negative effects of activities like artisanal oil refining.

Chart 4: Artisanal Oil Refineries Destroyed in The Niger Delta (2007-2016) - Operation Delta Safe; Nigerian Navy (2016)



Source: Nigerian Security Civil Defence Corps

Table 3: Militant Groups that operated in the Niger Delta between 2004-2009

Group	Leader (s)	Area of operations
Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force	Alhaji Mujahid Asari-Dokubo	Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta
Niger Delta Vigilante	Comrade Ateke Tom	Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta
Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta	Henry Okah, Government Ekpemupolo	Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Akwa-Ibom
Joint Revolutionary Council	Cynthia Whyte	Bayelsa, Rivers
Niger Delta Strike Force	Farah Dagogo	Rivers, Bayelsa
Outlaws	Soboma George	Bayelsa, Rivers

Sources: CASS, Presidential Amnesty Programme Office (2017, 2018)

Table 3. shows the main militant groups which operated in the Niger Delta before the PAP came into being in 2009. Between 2004 and 2009, these main groups were about six in number and were easily identified, prominent and well structured. The leaders were well known and used their real names in most cases like Comrade Ateke Tom, Mujahid Asari Dokubo and Dr. Farah Dagogo.

Their areas of operations were mostly confined to Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States which were the epicentre of militancy before 2009. The clout of these militant leaders during these active years were well established which forced the hand of the Government to negotiate with them through the PAP. In contrast to table 4, there is evidence from table 5 on the exponential increase in the number of militant groups which sprang up in the Niger Delta region from 2013 to date.

Table 4: Active Militant, Cults and Criminal Groups in Niger Delta (2013-present)

Group	Leader (s) (aliases are used in their operations)	Area of Operations
Niger Delta Republic Seekers	General Santana Otuku	Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa
Niger Delta Green Revolutionaries	Brig. General Esuku Friday	Bayelsa, Rivers
Niger Delta Greek Warriors	General Chris Ekareotu	Bayelsa, Delta
Ogunuma Camp of Niger Delta	Brig. Gen. Etigbein Oghene	Delta
Nigeria Delta Redemption Fighters	General Ovie Tinks	Delta
Niger Delta Marine Force	General Benikeme Hitler	Delta, Bayelsa
Reformed Niger Delta Avengers	Maj. Gen. Johnmark Ezonobi	Bayelsa, Delta
Niger Delta Watchdogs	General John Duku	Rivers, Bayelsa
Niger Delta Volunteers	General Ekpo Ekpo	Akwa-Ibom, Cross River
Niger Delta Warriors	General Osarolor Nedam	Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers
Niger Delta Avengers	Brig. Gen. Mudorch Agbinigbo	Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo
Bakassi Freedom Fighters	Maj. Gen. Askwo Henshaw	Cross River, Akwa Ibom
Adaka Boro Avengers	General Edmos Ayayeibo	Bayelsa,
Utorogun Liberation Movement	General K. Omovudu	Delta, Edo, Ondo
Ultimate Warriors of Niger Delta	General Sibiri Taiwoh	Bayelsa, Rivers,
Niger Delta Development Network	Major Gen. Abiye Tariah	Rivers, Bayelsa
Niger Delta Peoples Fighters	Maj. Gen. Henry Okon Etete	Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa-Ibom
Niger Delta Movement of Justice	Maj. Gen. Ibinabo Horsfall	Rivers, Imo
Niger Delta Fighters Network	Maj. Gen. Duke Emmanson	Bayelsa, Delta
Niger Delta Freedom Mandate	Maj. Gen. Inibeghe Adams	Bayelsa, Delta
Reformed Egbesu Assembly	Tony Alagbakereowei	Bayelsa, Delta
Asawana Deadly Force of Niger Delta	Commander Kakarakoro	Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers,
Red Scorpions	Faceless	Imo, Abia, Rivers

Sources: Premium Times, Vanguard Newspaper, Field Sources. (2013-Present)

This increase indicates the resort by more youths to militancy in the region and this has two distinct features. First, the geographical spread of the militant groups has gone beyond Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states expanding into Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Edo, Imo, Abia and Ondo States. Secondly, the leaders of these militant groups have resorted to the use of Aliases rather than real names and some are faceless preferring to present fronts as their leaders making them hard to identify.

4.2 Data Analysis and Test of Research Question

Research Question 1: What is the role of the Presidential Amnesty Program in the Niger Delta, which has led to changes in the social status of militants?

The evidence to validate this question is derived from an investigation into the status of ex-militant leaders who once were confined to the creeks. As shown in Table 5, these individuals have transformed into wealthy powerbrokers whose influence has political, economic, cultural, and social dimensions in the Niger Delta region. Collectively, the wealth accumulated by these ex-militant leaders has placed them at the top of the Niger Delta social stratum with the ability to use their clout to whittle down constituted authorities and exert pressure on governance to protect their interests. Their incursion into the region's political structure, such as the Deputy Governor of Delta State who a cousin to one of the prominent militant leaders is an affirmation of this emerging reality which could change the future of Niger Delta politics.

Research question one is buttressed with chart 2, which shows responses to the relationship between Militancy and militancy-induced activities and the emergence of a new social class. The evidence of this new social class is shown in the questionnaire, where 59% of respondents strongly agreed that Militancy has led to a new social class. In comparison, 19% of respondents gave "Agree" as a response, giving it a cumulative 78% of positive reaction to this research question. 12% and another 8% gave "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" as their responses, respectively, while 2% answered "Don't know" as responses showing a cumulative 22% who did not accept that Militancy is linked to the transformation of individuals who engage in informal oil economy into a new social class.

For the responses to research question one, there is a positive correlation between the Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta and the emergence of a new social class of ex-militant leaders and militants who dominate the informal oil economy and the considerable influence they exert on the politics, economy, cultural and social spheres of the Niger Delta. Their views correspond to interviews with youth leaders, community leaders and Traditional rulers who affirmed the power and wealth accumulated by these individuals, which gives them the access and capacity to influence issues in the region.

The responses in chart 2 is a validation of the research question one, given that the mean scores of the answers show over 70% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the question made in the study. Those who accept the emergence of a new social class created by the informal oil economy and Militancy believe that these individuals are interested in their business and how to advance their political interests, not the wider region's interests.

The influx of wealth in the poor oil-producing communities concentrated in the hands of few individuals makes it possible for them to become influential, seek power and cause instability. These are evidence that the new wealth created by the informal oil economy is a source of instability, violence, and conflict in the Niger Delta region. The responses affirm the research question that a new social class has emerged in the area and validate the position taken by the study, supporting evidence from table 4.6 showing the current social status of the ex-militant leaders who championed agitations.

Research Question 2: What is the nexus between acceptance of the presidential amnesty program and the increase in artisanal oil refining, crude oil theft, and pipeline vandalism?

Chart 3 show evidence of the nexus between acceptance of the presidential amnesty program and the increase in artisanal oil refining, crude oil theft, and pipeline vandalism.

Chart 4 presents the recorded number of artisanal oil refineries destroyed by security agencies which comprise the Nigeria Navy, NSCDC and Operation Delta Safe, between 2007 and 2016. There was a geometric increase from only seven artisanal oil refineries destroyed in 2007 to 64 in 2016. There was a lull in activities between 2009 and 2012 as the security agencies attributed this to the immediate impact of the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP), which created calm in the Niger Delta. This figure started to increase in 2013, reaching its highest in 2016, which shows that the impact of the PAP has diminished, and these

activities have resurfaced in the region. The charts confirm the growth of militancy-induced activities aligned with the informal oil economy, indicating the increased impact it has on the region's social, political, and economic well-being and Nigeria's oil-based economy.

4.3 Results of Focus Group Discussions held in three locations in three selected Local Government Areas in the Niger Delta.

Question 1: what are the underlying factors that brought militancy and militancy-induced activities to the Niger Delta?

The responses to the question indicated that 89% of the participants blamed marginalization for militancy and militancy-induced activities, while 4% did not agree, and 7% responded they don't know. For economic reasons, 78% of participants agree it is the driving force, while 4% and 18% gave negative responses, while 18% said they do not know. Of other factors, 66% of participants attributed Militancy and militancy-induced activities to factors beyond marginalization and economic reasons. 29% did not attribute these activities to other factors, and 5% gave no response in the discussions.

Question 2: The resurgence of militancy coincides with an increase in artisanal oil refining and other militancy-induced activities. Does this suggest a link between the two trends?

The participants in the Focus Group Discussions believed that the resurgence of militancy is linked to the increase of militancy-induced activities like artisanal oil refining. Their responses show that 69% support the opinion that the two phenomena are linked, while 21% do not hold the view, and 10% responded they do not know.

The conclusions from the Focus Group Discussions indicate that most participants gave positive responses to support hypothesis one that links militancy to artisanal oil refining and illegal oil bunkering prevalent in the region. Militancy-induced activities create wealth for militant leaders, who use it to struggle for power and exert influence in the region. Participants in the Focus Group discussions supported hypothesis two that the wealth accumulated by militant leaders transformed them into a social class of wealthy individuals who control and own huge assets and property and occupied positions of power, as shown in table 4.6. The participants also agreed that the impact of the wealth in the hands of militants and ex-militants has adverse effects on social order, stability, norms, and the environment of the Niger Delta, which conforms with research question three.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

In summary, there is evidence of the existence of an entirely new economic model which militancy created as a fall-out of disaffected individuals who were omitted by PAP attracted the government's attention through activities like kidnapping, sea piracy and crude oil theft.

By 2006, militancy in the Niger Delta had become a centerpiece of confronting the Federal Government. Prominent militant organizations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) have transformed into formidable groups with the capacity to carry out the bombing of critical oil infrastructures, kidnapping of oil company workers and armed confrontations with Nigeria's security agencies. Odalonu (2016) observes that this stage of militancy, as argued in this study, was initially a movement for social justice, economic rights, and political emancipation of the Niger Delta region. These militant groups were well structured with leaders like Comrade Ateke Tom, Henry Okah and Mujahid Asari Dokubo. At the same time, they sourced their arms mainly from ransoms, illegal crude exports, and hostage-taking. This was the stage of militancy where the government knew the leaders, making it easier for negotiations to take place and initiate the Presidential

Amnesty Programme in 2009. The programme absorbed about 30,000 ex-militants, and their leaders in a manner that disarmed them, trained them, and re-integrated them into the society.

This distinction must be made to understand why the militants metamorphosed into "economic militants" who feel aggrieved by their omission in the Amnesty Programme and training, nor were they paid the monthly stipend of N65,000. This phase of militancy started in 2014 and has continued to increase with over 20 prominent militant groups who carefully supported the foundation for the informal oil economy built around illegal oil bunkering, crude oil theft and artisanal oil refining conceived as a means of livelihood since the government has absorbed those it felt were eligible for the Amnesty Programme.

5. Conclusion

To provide answers to the three research questions, the researcher adhered strictly to the methodology of the study. First, the analysis of the data obtained during the study showed that there is a clear and robust correlation between militancy and the informal oil economy. At inception, militancy was a political ideal with economic dimensions. The agitations were focused on demands allowing the Niger Delta to exercise a fair amount of control over its oil resources. By contrast, the new wave of militancy that arose after the Presidential Amnesty Programme portrays a different set of objectives which center on economic survival at all costs rather than political and social justice goals. Evidence shows that militant groups use agitations to engage in illegal and criminal activities like kidnapping for ransom, sea piracy.

This set of variables resulted in militant agitations, which encouraged the people to forcefully participate in an oil economy controlled by government interests, political elites, and oil companies. Thus, the people created an alternative oil economy to survive and benefit from their oil wealth.

Thirdly, the impact of the informal oil economy on the Niger Delta is visible and profound. Illegal oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism have greatly magnified the environmental devastation of the region. Sea piracy and kidnapping for ransom have made the entire region unsafe and unstable. The waterways of the region, which are usually the only means to get around the oil-rich communities, have become operational areas for militants and sea pirates.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are strongly suggested;

1. The Government needs to de-militarize the Niger Delta as part of confidence-building measures. The numerous military deployments and operations have failed to pacify the region but have created avenues for corruption for security agencies. In its place, the government can explore the feasibility of creating community-based security outfits paid to guard oil facilities in their localities. The advantages are obvious; they know the environment, and they live in the environment. It is also a better approach than awarding centralized pipeline surveillance contracts that made a few ex-militants obscenely wealthy and powerful.
2. Government should implement affirmative action in the Nigerian oil industry. For example, the allocation of oil blocs should be reformed to reserve a proportion for the host communities. Also, companies should engage the people in management and skilled levels beyond the current practice of employing them as low-level staff.

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