

# Behavioral Characterization of an Organized Crime Network in Southeast Nigeria: A Critical Review Approach

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**Abstract:-** This study took a critical insight into the behavioral characterization of an organized crime network in southeast Nigeria due to the high wave of insecurity of lives and properties in the region. The researchers identified some existing organized crime groups in the region to include herdsmen, unknown gunmen, confraternities, area boys, drug and human traffickers. A review of current occurrences in the region from a theoretical perspective revealed that the ideological activities of a particular organized crime group (the unknown gunmen), which has overwhelmed the security apparatus due to its shroudedness in secrecy and other forms of behavioral characterization, have become highly prevalent. Further review revealed that little light has so far been shone on the mapping of organized crime behavioral characterizations, which when properly modeled using computational-based mathematics, can help predict their activities. Based on this gap in literature, the researchers critically reviewed six (6) unique behavioral characterizations of an organized crime network. The review revealed amongst others that resilience enabled the group resist external pressures from law enforcement agencies while well-structuredness gave them the abilities to creating adequate communication networks. Informed by these expositions, the researchers concluded that in-depth knowledge of these behavioral characterizations of an organized crime network will not only fuel sound computational-based backgrounds in the area of mathematics of crime (MoC) and computational criminology but also yield intelligent counterterrorism approaches, which will aid the required paradigm shift from the existing non-technological methods of tackling crime (Sense – Response) to the technological methods of

**Predict - Prevent. Guided by these, the researchers made numerous recommendations amongst which is for security personnel to focus intelligence gathering on the behavioral characterizations of already existing organized crime networks in the region, in order to effectively map and predict their future lines of action.**

**Keywords:-** Organized Crime Network, Unknown Gunmen, Behavioral Characterization, Mathematics of Crime, Computational Criminology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, there has been an alarming increase in the spate of insecurity in Nigeria in the last two decades. This has formed the greatest threat to the societies across the various states of the nation (Nwanga et al., 2021). Consequently, the Southeast region of Nigeria has witnessed a considerable rising dimension of this insecurity landscape. The region used to be one of Nigeria's relatively peaceful zones but has witnessed this rising violence and security uncertainties in recent years. This current wave of insecurity, terror agenda, and all other forms of criminalities in Southeast Nigeria is worse than any pandemic as it promotes huge economic waste in all facets of businesses in the region. The resultant anti-developmental effect is the enforcement of sit-at-home (SAH) among the various states and monumental loss of lives (435 people in 2021 and 2022 alone) in about 94 incidents of terror attacks recorded within the time frame (Alfaro, 2022; GTI., 2022).

According to Okafo et al (2023) and Udo (2022), the escalation of violence and conflicts across the various states of the region is unprecedented. Indeed, the incidents have led to thousands of lives and property losses, which can be considered as having seemingly overwhelmed the nation's security operatives. These attacks are orchestrated and masterminded by a group of organized criminals nicknamed unknown gunmen (UGM), whose attacks range from killing to kidnapping and in most recent times, the Herdsmen attack that also has engulfed the entire region (Akinyetun et al, 2023). Their terror activities include sporadic shooting of unarmed and innocent citizens, and the destruction of critical infrastructures in the region and nation respectively.

These violent criminal attacks have a high negative consequence on the region and nation (Iwuamadi et al, 2021) as they led to huge economic, lives and property losses in their trail (Ibrahim et al, 2020; Maza et al, 2020). According to Nwangwu (2023), another flip consequence of their actions is the discouragement of foreign investors from investing in the region and the national economies which have continued to hinder business activities, major entrepreneurial development, and increased government expenditures on security. Therefore, the activities of this organized crime network can be said to have stifled and retarded the region and nation's socio-economic development in the past decade (Bello et al, 2018)

Interestingly, these criminals exist in organized forms with specific and unique characterizations such as;

- Network resilience
- Structured organization
- Centralized authority
- Coefficient for network planning and activity secrecy
- Specialized division of labor &
- Threat and violence.

These unique characterizations enable them to carry out their nefarious activities by encouraging the concealment of such activities from law enforcement agencies and only making them noticed on execution or after execution. Based on these challenges, the researchers sought to critically review this organized crime network's unique characterizations which they believe will aid in the exposition and prediction of their nefarious activities before execution.

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines crime simply as an action or omission which constitutes an offense and is punishable by law. On another hand, Emeh (2018) noted that it was an infraction on the basic principles of law and no society was immune to its menace while Schmalleger (2017) viewed crime as a conduct behavior or an act that violated criminal laws, formal or written laws of the State for which a punishment is prescribed whereas Taylor et al. (2019)

perceived crime to consist of acts, which contravened the human moral code and statutory laws.

Organized crime can be regarded as the unlawful activities of members of a highly organized and disciplined association, who engage in the supply of illegal goods and services which may include but not limited to gambling, prostitution, loan-sharking, narcotics, labor racketing, and other (Jones et al, 2023). Although organized crime might be potentially involved in many crimes, what separates individual crime from crimes committed by groups of people is the term organized or organization, which can be described as a group of people who cooperate to accomplish the group's desired objectives and goals (Brodeur, 2016). It is also worthy to note that as a legitimate organization, no two organized crime groups are exactly alike, hence each distinct group evolves in its own manner, requiring supervision and management in order to implement necessary strategies for accomplishing the group's task (Brodeur, 2016).

## III. ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORKS AROUND THE GLOBE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Chukwuere et al (2018), organized crime is a scourge that afflicts countries in every corner of the globe, from tiny Island states to large economic superpowers and it has been an underlying driver of many major geopolitical challenges which include conflict, political instability, and forced migration. However, because of its clandestine nature, very little is known about their operation in various countries of the world and this led the GI-TOC to develop the Global Organized Crime Index (GOCI), which is used to analyze organized crime groups in the 193 UN member states. While considering the five continents, the index offered an insight into regional dynamics, and Asia was found to exhibit the highest levels of organized criminality (5.30) followed by Africa (5.17), the Americas (5.06), Europe (4.48) and Oceania (3.07). Although Asia was the highest-ranking continent for organized criminality, a regional breakdown of the result showed that the hotbeds of organized crimes are not centralized within one region alone but dispersed across the continents. According to Brayton et al. (2023), some top crime organizations in the world are the Segunda Marquetalia, ISIS (DRC, Mozambique, Libya, Great Sahara, Bangladesh, Sinai Province, Philippines, and West Africa), Harakat Sawa'd Misr, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, etc.

Africa which is the host to the greatest number of countries in all the continents, has experienced unprecedented growth in terms of economics, infrastructure, and technology in the past two decades. These developments have contributed to the continent's growing prosperity and at the same time, created a conducive environment for organized crime. As elsewhere in the world, the continent's success comes hand in hand with opportunities for criminal actors to exploit, and this criminal expansion is supported by areas in the continent

where conflict and instability are present (Chukwuere et al, (2018). Some organized crime groups in Africa are the Somali Pirates, Al-Shabaab, Boko-Haram, ISIS, and Al-Qaeda. According to the United Nation on Drugs and Related Organized Crime in Nigeria (UNODC, 2017), organized crime in West Africa was generally perceived to have emerged in the 1970s. This emergence was hinged on factors such as the oil boom of the decade to the delinking of the dollar from gold during that era.

Nigeria which benefitted exceptionally from the oil boom of the decade, was intact at greater risk of the harm that arose from organized criminal activities during the 1970s as organized groups in the country falsified import duties in order to launder the excess proceeds from the oil sales outside the country through over-invoicing and importation of substandard goods in return for kickbacks and appointments by government officials. This set of individuals formed the pioneering pillar for organized crime network in the country. Another factor that seems to have encouraged the birth and continued propagation of organized crime network activities in the country is the free flow of people and goods in the country which was made possible through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) treaty of 1975. Hence, Nigeria became one of the major regions of the world with a high mobility rate of persons of different race and ideology, which has been noted to be one of the major factors that nurture and increases organized crime activities in any region of the world. Somotan (2022) also noted that organized crime activities increased in Nigeria during the country's civil war (1967 - 1970), where groups of individuals broke the law to survive the economic and political hardship of the era through the forgery of documents to avoid conscription into the army and the impersonation of soldiers in order to procure food and other necessary items during the era. In the post-civil war era (that is from the early 1970s),

In recent days, many youths have been led astray through an unpredictable political atmosphere and lack of progressive management of the economy, which has led to galloping inflation and the concentration of wealth to a privileged few, who are in positions of authority. Also, other indices for the propagation of violence in any region of the world such as high population explosion, unemployment, corruption, and gross indiscipline among the political elites, have become highly prevalent in the country today. Hence, ethnic militia uprisings and civil unrest have engulfed the nation in the past decades. Some attending organized crime groups visible in Nigeria are the Boko Haram sect, Herdsmen, Unknown Gunmen, Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA), and the Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan.

Ten years ago, the Southeastern region of Nigeria was the country's safest region but that changed in 2021 as bubbling agitations for a breakaway state turned violent. At the center of this crisis is an evasive group that has come to be known as the Unknown Gunmen (UGM). This group has been

blamed for deadly attacks on police stations, military checkpoints, and civilians. While no one would take responsibility for their acts, one group (the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB) raises far more suspicion than others as a careful look through years of social media propaganda shows why. Some activities of the unknown gunmen network in the Southeast region of Nigeria include;

- Attacks on security operatives notably in Umualumaku, a community in Ehime Mbano local government area of Imo state Nigeria on the 19th of September, 2023 (Ugwu, 2023)
- Attacks on residents and traders in as observed in Ebonyi state, southeast Nigeria while enforcing the declared one-week sit-at-home on July 5th, 2023 (Nnachi, 2023)
- Reduction from five to four working days in the week in the region and sometimes three days if Kanu was to appear in court (Ujumadu, 2022) etc.

These incessant sit-at-home orders (until the release of Kanu from detention) and attacks by this organized crime group, has not only infused fear and feeling of insecurity in the citizenry but has also brought the economy of the region to its knees.

#### IV. BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERIZATION OF AN ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORK

As obtained in other countries of the world, the planning and execution of attacks by organized crime groups in southeast Nigeria is shrouded in secrecy and other forms of behavioral characterizations which enable them to evade public notice till execution. Based on this, the researchers critically reviewed previous studies in order to find out how much focus has been directed towards revealing these behavioral characterizations, which when properly mapped using computational-based mathematical models can be used to predict organized crime activities. The review revealed that very little light has so far been shone in this direction as previous studies focused on their activities as it affects the social, developmental, and economic activities of the region (Ajibefun, 2018; Akinyetun et al., 2023; Okoroafor et al., 2023) while others concentrated on its effects on the general public (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017). Further review showed previous literature focused on the use of restorative justice for resolving its resultant effects in the region (Ajibo et al., 2018; Onah, 2020) while others focused on the use of social media for its propagation (Chukwuere, 2018; Chukwuka, 2021).

Based on this gap in literature, the researchers critically reviewed the following behavioral characterizations of an organized crime network.

##### A. Network Resilience

According to Dandurand et al. (2022) resilience is a means through which an organized system utilizes available resources to prevent, respond, withstand and recover from adverse situations against self. From the definition above,

criminal network resilience can therefore be viewed as those dynamic processes that link a range of adaptive capacities and strengths to the network which they use to respond to various changes, threats, disturbances and adverse events targeted towards it. Hence, criminal network resilience enables organized crime network members to take meaningful, deliberate and collective actions on a situation in order to achieve a common good for the network.

Apart from environmental considerations, the concept of resilience is strongly tied to the topology of criminal networks hence, it can be configured as hierarchical, cellular, flat, or even more frequently as a combination of two or more topologies (Catanese, 2016). Therefore, resilience can be viewed as that behavior, which enables organized criminal networks easily recover from disruptive events and at the same time, strengthen their cohesion (Hardy et al., 2020; Munro, 2011; Pereda et al., 2023)

### B. Structured Organization

Structure is the relationship that exists between the different components of an organized system. For instance, a building can be viewed as the structure housing the relationship between the foundation, skeleton, ceiling, and walls of the building while the body of a human being can be viewed as a structure consisting of the relationships between the bones, organs, blood, and tissues (Cunliffe, 2014). Organized criminal networks, use structures to create frameworks that house the relationship between jobs, systems, operational processes, persons and groups who make collective efforts to in order achieve the group's set goals and objectives.

There are various models of structures through which organized crime networks propagate. Prominent among these structural models are;

#### ➤ Simple Structure

This is a flexible relationship containing limited separations and complexities. Here, members and organizational charts are designed with little or no formalities and the allocation of duties and duty management are carried out through mutual agreements, directly or informally.

#### ➤ Multidivisional Structure

This consists of separate functional structures reporting to a centralized location. Hence in this setting, each structure is responsible for managing self while the central body supervises and strategizes for the entire multidivisional structure. This model is used to decentralize the autonomy and dependence of the entire network on a central manager.

#### ➤ Hybrid Structure

In this model, a part of the entire network is dedicated to a particular type of structure while another part is dedicated to a totally different type of structure. This enables the advantages of two separate structures to be infused as one in

order to create an emerging system that can easily withstand external pressures.

This behavioral characterization, enables an organized crime network to function like a corporation where there exist leaders and other members to accomplish distinct functionalities for the organization (Hemant, 2023).

### C. Centralized Authority

The degree to which decision-making is centralized or decentralized in an organized crime network is a major factor in the allocation of resources in the network. For organizational theorists, the relative degree of centralization within an organized group is signified by the hierarchy of authority and degree of participation in decision-making, as these aspects of the structure reflect the distribution of power across the entire network (Carter et al., 2014; Glisson et al., 2020; Hage et al., 2019) Hence, a centralized organized crime network, will typically have a high degree of hierarchies and authorities, low levels of participation in decisions and policy makings as well as in the distribution of resources. On the other hand, a decentralized organized crime network will be characterized by low hierarchical authority and highly participative decision and policy making.

Thus, a highly centralized organized crime network is one in which very few individuals make decisions whereas a decentralized organized crime network is one in which all or majority of the organization members are responsible for and are involved in decision-making. The typical organized crime network currently holding sway in southeast Nigeria is one that is highly centralized hence, decision and policymaking are vested in the hands of a few members and every other member of the group respects and abides by their decisions. This makes the decisions of the organization precede personal needs, wants, and desires of individual members, families and societies.

### D. Coefficient of Network Planning and Activity Secrecy

#### ➤ Network Planning

Planning is the process through which heads or leaders of organized crime networks, establish goals and define methods of attainment. It involves managerial decision-making, the selection of missions and objectives from given alternatives. This behavioral characterization which the organized crime network uses to make future plans, is used to ensure continuity of the system (Dotsenko, 2020; Vereshchahina et al., 2020)

Some basic characterizations of this behavior are;

- It is used to achieve the desired objective of the organization.
- It is used to identify the actions that would lead to the actualization of desired objectives.
- It is used to provide a sense of direction to the various activity sets of the network.
- It is used to peep into the future with the intent of

analyzing, predicting and preparing for it.

- It is a mental activity which involves making a choice among the various alternatives, which can only be carried out by the highly intellectual members of the network.
- It is continuous and pervasive in nature.

Hence through proper planning, an organized crime network has the ability to provide adequate directions and means of implementing them towards achieving the aims of the network.

#### ➤ *Activity Secrecy*

Activity secrecy on the other hand requires that the decision-making members of the network, disclose future plans to few actors. Hence, the minimal disclosure rule could be suspended where the practical and technical requirements necessitate a confidant. For instance, a quartermaster who can grant access to specialized equipment may not be known to the entire group and individual members of the network are only informed of their tasks and not necessarily the entire task breakdown of the network (Roks et al., 2022)

According to Fielding (2017), there are basically four (4) items an organized crime network tends to keep secret;

- The information about suitable targets
- Their contacts with potential associates
- Somewhere to sell illegally obtained commodities and exchange kidnapped persons for ransom
- Ability to evade detection from security agencies and escape routes after execution of targets.

Organized crime networks thrive by maintaining activity secrecy and this behavioral characterization enables them to remain unknown to the public, hence the term unknown gunmen.

#### *E. Specialization And Division Of Labor*

According to Bennett (2015), division of labor enable organized crime network share an entire task into smaller portions, with each portion accomplished by specialized individuals. Hence through the division of labor, the output of the organized crime network at any given time of execution is greatly increased.

Some of the advantages of division of labor in an organized crime network are;

- It enables organized crime network members to learn a particular craft faster
- Dividing an entire task into smaller units, raises the possibilities of automating some of the units remotely.
- It encourages individual members to specialize on a particular skill by exposing them to a particular piece of the entire job routinely.
- Hence the division of labor in an organized crime network fosters specialization, expertise, and improved quality of output from the team members (Adedoyin et al., 2015)

The downside of job specialization is that persons end up mastering and been able to perform only one task in the entire system. Therefore, if such persons are lost, new persons will need to be recruited and properly trained to adequately replace the lost person(s) and this may make the system suffer. Additionally, organized crime network members under job specialization do not have wide arrays of applicable skills and hence may not easily re-adapt to new functional areas in the network should the opportunity arise.

#### *F. Threat and Violence*

Organized crime networks rely on violence such as the use of explosives, guns, and public infrastructural destructions and threats such as bullying and gangsterism to strengthen their reputation, maintain their market position and enforce their ideologies in society. They also use violence to maintain internal order, settle conflicts and in rare cases by individuals within groups who aim to expand their personal criminal reputation. (Luis et al., 2021) However, it is worth highlighting that while organized crime networks recognize the expedient value of force, they have historically tended to resort to violence only when other forms of intimidation prove inadequate. This is because violence attracts the attention of law enforcement agencies, which is often incompatible with the ideological motives of those involved in organized crime network propagation. In the instance of the unknown gunmen, they have proved to preferring the use of violence despite the ensuing attention from law enforcement in order to strengthen their reputation in the criminal environment, weaken public confidence in the repressive state apparatus and intimidate non-cooperating elements of the society. Hence, their members are expected to commit crimes, condone and authorize it through threats and violence.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study has been able to bring to light, the behaviors through which an organized crime network propagates in southeast Nigeria. These behavioral characterizations, can enable one identify a typical organized crime network activities at early stage and help nip it at the bud. These behavioral characterizations when properly modeled, can help in developing a mathematical mapping of the sequencies of activities that occur at the planning stage of the network. This also will help in predicting their plans and able to curb them before executions.

Guided by these, the researchers conclude that an in-depth knowledge of these behavioral characterizations of an organized crime network will not only fuel sound computational-based backgrounds in the area of mathematics of crime (MoC) and computational criminology (C.C) but also yield intelligent counterterrorism approaches which will propagate the paradigm shift from the non-technological methods (Sense – Response) of tackling organized crime network activities which have proven ineffective in recent years to technologically driven methods of Predict - Prevent.

This the researchers believe will enable security personnel adequately predict and strategize against organized crime network activities in the region and also minimize the losses of lives, properties while promoting the gross domestic product (GDP) of the region and nation in general.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made from the expositions of this study;

- Security personnel should focus intelligence gathering on the behavioral characterizations of already existing organized crime networks in order to effectively map and predict their future line of action.
- Security personnel should also observe the behavioral characterization of small cells of individuals and clubs in order to detect one propagating towards an organized crime network and nip it in the bud.
- More focus and funds should be thrown and made available by the government of the region and country in general towards developing technologically driven methods of curbing organized crime activities since the traditional methods have become ineffective and overly expensive to maintain.
- Also, attention should be paid by interested stakeholders towards the training of personnel whose job function would be intelligence gathering, mapping, modeling, and predicting organized crime network activities using their behavioral characterizations.
- Finally given that the expositions of this study can be used to carry out scientific research with data to make meaningful findings, it will form the main block of the researchers' interest.

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