



# Music and National Security in Nigeria: An Analysis of Social and Political Expressions

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## Abstract:

*This paper explores the role of music in shaping identity and societal norms in Nigeria. It emphasises historical and contemporary significance of music in promoting national security through political activism, social cohesion, and youth engagement. The theoretical framework is based on the Cultural Theory of Security, which posits that music influences national security by shaping national identity and public sentiment. Through a qualitative approach, the study analyses various songs and their impact on political movements, social unity, and national identity. The findings of this study explain that music plays an important role in fostering social cohesion, political activism, and youth engagement which in turn, foster national stability and security. The paper concludes by advocating for a balance in promotion of indigenous music and cultural content to mitigate the risks of negative influences on national security.*

**Keywords:** Music, National Security, Social Cohesion

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Music plays an important role in the expression of culture and identity. As one of the forms of art that has been cultivated by man for the transfer of value to future generations (Vidal, 2000), music has always been an important part of human life. It could be listened to consciously and unconsciously and its influence on the culture and tradition of Africans can be seen in its functionality. (Ekwueme, 2002) opined that in the activities of man ranging from birth to death, be it communication, celebrations, and expression of emotions, music serves as an important accompaniment. Such functions include, but are not limited to births, weddings, dances, storytelling, lullabies, and protests. These social functions of music are vastly important to society (Macdonald et. al., 2012) through the roles that they play at gatherings as well as in personal human lives.

Music also plays an important role in forming the identities of individuals. In its very nature, it is a social activity (Macdonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012) and plays an important role in human development. As a component of culture, music has also served to carry political and nationalistic ideologies (Umezina & Okafor, 2012) and is used as a tool for social control by its role in correcting wrongs in society. It helps in expressing displeasure to authorities and is



used as aid to cooperative labour. Music also functions as an historical device (Agordoh, 2005) which is used to tell stories of heritage through folk songs that may refer to battles lost, or victories won.

### **Music and Societal Changes**

The influence of music on societal changes in Nigeria can be described across various eras, from the colonial till date. Of key mention are the colonial era, postcolonial, and present day. During the Colonial era, music played more of a political role. In this era, traditional music was used to bring people together (Seeger & Anthony, 2010) to support agitations for independence, while highlife music helped create a sense of national identity and unity among Nigerians as it was used to accompany rallies and gatherings. From the 1970s, highlife evolved into Afrobeats and this movement was strongly led by Fela Anikulapo Kuti as it served as his tool to criticise the brutality of the military regime and social injustice. This genre of music greatly influenced many aspects of the lives of Nigerians, especially in language and social attitudes. Lyrics of one of these songs.

The 1990s saw a rise in unemployment which led to an increase in crime rate (Mustard, 2010). The Hip-Hop genre began to make waves and Musicians such as 2face Idibia used their music to highlight social issues and promote messages of hope and resilience. This period marked a shift towards a more globalised Nigerian music scene as local and international styles were incorporated to appeal to young audiences. From the 2000s to the Present, Nigerian music has now been recognised globally. Artists such as Rema, Tems, and Davido among others have come to achieve international success, bringing Nigerian music to a global audience.

This global recognition has fostered a sense of pride and cultural renaissance within Nigeria, influencing fashion, dance, and even politics as music continues to be a platform for social commentary, addressing issues such as police brutality. A typical example is the 'EndSARS' protests, where a number of musicians played significant roles in sustaining the movement. These periods highlight the dynamic relationship between music and social cohesion and politics in Nigeria, illustrating how music has been a tool for political activism, cultural expression, and social cohesion.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of national security in Nigeria is a pressing and critical concern (Campbell 2020), which demands creative and innovative solutions. This study, therefore, explores an approach with evidence that music has the potential to act as a powerful tool to promote harmony and peace among Nigerians.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Cultural Theory of Security and is also known as grid-group theory. Pioneered by Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (Douglas 1966; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982), this theory posits that cultural practices such as music, influence national security by shaping national identity, societal norms, and public sentiment. It explains that music can serve as a medium for expressing collective displeasures, political issues, and social cohesion which in turn impacts national security.

This theory explains that people can be influenced based on two dimensions of sociality. The first is the extent to which people are absorbed and sustained by being members of social groups, and the second is the extent to which the patterns of interactions in individuals' lives are influenced by external factors, (Douglas 1982). In essence, musical texts can be classified as external factors which can negatively or positively influence individuals.

### **National Security in Context**



National security was initially defined as the ability of a government to protect its citizens from military attacks. As opined by Elvie & Shawn (2023), the definition of national security has evolved to now include protection from other non-military aspects such as protection from crime, terrorism, economic and environmental security, and cyber security. This paper therefore presents an overview of the impact of music on national security under the facets of social cohesion, political activism, and youth engagement.

### **Aim and Objectives of Study**

This study aims to bring to the fore the role of music in promoting National Security in Nigeria. The objectives are to;

Highlight the ways by which music influences youth engagement in political activities.

Identify how music fosters unity among Nigeria's diverse cultures.

Investigate the lyrical expressions of different music genres on political movements.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

While books, academic articles, and credible online sources on Nigerian music and national security were reviewed, purposive sampling was employed in collecting audio and videos of songs performed by Nigerian musicians to explore concepts, meanings, and experiences in depth. These songs were selected based on their significant level of popularity and wide reach, domestically and internationally, and also based on their use in public gatherings. Content Analysis was used to explore the interplay between music, society, and politics in Nigeria.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **Music as a Tool for Social Cohesion**

Studies have shown that musical activities in groups boost relationships among such groups' members. It has also been long identified as a great tool for fostering such support. A study by Balsby and Scarl (2008), reveals that in an account of evolution, music evolved as a social activity that facilitated group cohesion and cooperation. This emphasises that musical activities, such as singing and dancing, enhance feelings of togetherness within groups. Also, community musical activities have been shown to promote social cohesion by creating ambiances where individuals from all walks of life come together to make or listen to music.

In South Africa, for instance, some community music projects aim to address social disparities and foster intercultural solidarity. These projects have been made to create an environment where participants experience a sense of belonging and mutual respect (van der Merwe L, Morelli J, which are crucial for improving the quality of life within communities. Also, Björkvold (2005) and De Quadros and Dortewitz (2011) opine that music serves as a non-verbal form of communication that individuals could easily use to express emotions and experiences. These modes of expression reinforce social bonds, help bridge divides in socialisation and promote communal behaviours.

Two examples of Nigerian songs that encourage social cohesion are 'Nigeria Yi Ti Gbogbo Wa Ni' by King Sunny Ade and 'We Are All We Have' by Timi Dakolo. These songs greatly emphasise the need for togetherness among adults and children alike.

### **Artists' Profile**

#### **King Sunny Ade**

"King Sunny Ade (KSA), was born in Ondo State, Nigeria. He is often referred to as the 'King of Juju Music', for his pioneering work in Juju music. He is recognised today for his



contributions to the global music scene. His early exposure to music was due to his father's involvement in church music and traditional Yoruba music. His professional music career began in the 1960s with Moses Olaiya. He later became famous for his unique blend of traditional Yoruba music with Western instruments in creating his distinctive Juju sound. One of his notable songs that were included in this study is 'Nigeria Yi Ti Gbogbo Wa Ni'. Among many achievements, he has been nominated for Grammy Awards, which makes him one of the first African artists to achieve this feat.

King Sunny Ade's influence extends beyond Nigeria. He is considered a world music pioneer and has collaborated with various international artists, including Stevie Wonder and Manu Dibango. His music has influenced numerous musicians and continues to be celebrated for its innovation and cultural significance. Apart from his music which promotes culture and unity, he established the King Sunny Ade Foundation, which focuses on the welfare and development of youths and the less privileged in Nigeria." (Nigerian Biography)

### Timi Dakolo

"Timi Dakolo is a renowned Nigerian singer and songwriter. He is greatly recognised for his inspiring and emotional songs, of great example is 'Great Nation.' which is one of his notable songs that promotes unity. Born in Accra, Ghana, to a Nigerian father and a Ghanaian mother. He was raised by his grandmother in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Timi attended the University of Port Harcourt, where he studied Communication Studies.

Timi Dakolo's music career began speedily after winning the maiden season of the West African Idols competition in 2007. This victory brought him into the limelight and set the stage for his career. He has won several awards, including the Headies Award for Best Vocal Performance (Male) and the Nigeria Music Video Award for Best Afro R&B Video. Timi Dakolo's songs often convey messages of love, hope, and national pride, making him a beloved figure in Nigerian music. He uses his platform to advocate for social issues and is committed to making a positive impact in his community". (MTV Base, Africa).

### Excerpt of 'Nigeria Yi Ti Gbogbo Wa Ni' by King Sunny Ade released in 2018

## Nigeria Yi Ti Gbogbo Wa Ni

King Sunny Ade

**Presto**

Ni-ge-ri-a yi ti gbo-gbo wa ni. Ko-ma\_ gbọ-dọ ba - je. To-ri ko-si'-bo mi-ran

ti a le lo\_ a - j'o - le da - bi i - le.

E - je ka s'o-wọ pọ ka f'i - mọ\_ sọ-kan. Gbe k'e-mi gbe.

Fig. 1

Lyrics excerpt:



Nigeria yi ti gbogbo wa n'i. Koma gbodo baje.

Tori kosi'bo miran ti ale lo. Ajo oda bi ile.

Eje kasowo po kafimo soka. Gbe kemi gbe.

Translating to:

Nigeria is ours. It should not be broken.

There's no other place that we can go.

There's no place like home.

Let's join hands to make Nigeria great

### Excerpt of 'Great Nation' by Timi Dakolo released in 2011

#### Great Nation

Timi Dakolo

**Adagio**

We're all we have we'll de-fend our land, we be-lieve in this na-tion, and we

8 know we'll get there. We're all we have, we'll de-fend our land we be-lieve in Ni-

15 ge-ria and the pro-mise she holds, and that one day we'll

19 shine like the sun. We're a great na-tion.

Fig. 2

Lyrics excerpt:

We're all we have, we'll defend our land

We believe in this nation, and we know we'll get there

We're all we have, we'll defend our land

We believe in Nigeria and the promise she holds

And that one day we'll shine like the sun

We're a great nation

These songs emphasise the need for togetherness among adults and children alike. They also call for unity and peace among Nigerians.



## **Music and Political Activism**

Political issues in Nigeria have been addressed by musicians in various ways especially via social media platforms while citizens make use of Protest Music to express displeasures to be heard and enforcing changes in bad governance. A significant example is the End-Sars protests which were held in Nigeria in October 2020. A study by Owoaje and Sofola (2021) revealed that there was an extensive use of music in the form of satirical songs, which was used extensively by protesters during the EndSars protest. Songs were used to express the long-overdue anger founded on several unfulfilled campaign promises by the government as well as the worsening economic state of the country.

Influential Artists, especially in the Afrobeats genre have also, through their music productions addressed societal ills. An example is the late Fela Anikulapo who spent his entire musical life preaching against colonial activities and prophesying about the gloomy future of Africa (Olaleye & Osuagwu, 2021). Examples of artistes that have made use of their platforms to address political issues are 2Face Idibia and Asa.

### **Artists' Profile**

#### **2Face Idibia**

"Innocent Ujah Idibia, popularly known by his stage name 2Face Idibia is among many other attributes, a renowned Nigerian singer, songwriter, and entrepreneur. Born in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, and hails from the Idoma ethnic group in Benue State. He began his music career with the group Plantashun Boiz alongside Blackface and Faze and is now considered one of Africa's most successful Afro-pop artists.

Among many achievements, he has earned numerous awards, including MTV Europe Music Awards, BET Awards, and Headies (Hip Hop World Awards). He founded a Reach-Out Foundation, which focuses on youth empowerment and nation-building. 2Face continues to be a prominent figure in the Nigerian and African music scene, known for his distinctive voice and timeless music." (MTV Base, Africa)

#### **Asa**

"Bukola Elemide known as Asa, is a Nigerian-French female singer, songwriter, and recording artist. She is a graduate of Theatre Arts and Music from the Lagos State University (LASU) and is now mostly known for her unique blend of pop, jazz, and indie music. Although born in France, Asa has become one of Africa's most celebrated and influential musicians.

Her music career in Nigeria began when she was discovered by the Nigerian record label Questionmark Entertainment. In 2007, Asa released her debut album 'Asa' which included 'Jailer'. This album earned her international recognition. She has received numerous awards and recognitions throughout her career, including the prestigious French Constantin Award in 2008. Asa's music is characterized by its soulful voice and thoughtful lyrics, and these lyrics often address social issues, personal experiences, and emotions, making her songs relatable and impactful. Through her platform she has advocated for social change and has participated in campaigns that promote education, women's rights, and environmental sustainability." (BBC Music)

**Excerpt of 'Vote Not Fight' by 2Face Idibia**

- A song encouraging Nigerians not to sell their votes and to stand up against election malpractice.

**Fig. 3**

Lyrics Excerpt:

Hear them say it is a do-or-die affair

We don't want nobody to come scatter ground for here

Vote not fight, that's what we want this year

**Vote Not Fight**

2Face Idibia

**Allegro**

Hear them say it is a do or die a -ffair. We don't want no-bo-dy to come  
sca-tter ground for here. Vote not fight that's what we want-ing this year. In this  
e - lec - tion time, we want a peace - ful at - mos - phere.

In this election time we want a peaceful atmosphere.

**Excerpt of 'Jailer' by Asa**

- A soulful music that addresses social and political issues.

**Jailer**

Asa

**Moderately**

You don't care a-bout my point of view, If I die, a-no-ther will  
work for you. So you treat me like a mo-ther slave Mis-ter Jai- ler. I'm  
talk-ing to you jai - ler... stop call-ing me a pris'-ner... Let  
he who is with-out sin... be the first to cast a stone Mis-ter jai - ler... You sup-  
ress all my stra-te-gies, you up press oh... e-v'ry part of me.. what you  
don't know you're a vic - tim too Mis - ter jai - ler.

**Fig. 4**  
Lyrics Excerpt:



You don't care about my point of view. If I die another will work for you.

So you treat me like a modern slave, Mr. Jailer.

I'm talking to you jailer! Stop calling me a prisoner.

Let he who is without sin be the first to cast a stone, Mr Jailer.

You suppress all my strategy. You oppress every part of me.

What you don't know, you're a victim too, Mr Jailer.

### **Undermining Stability Through Harmful Music Videos and Lyrics**

Although there are positive effects of music, it is of importance to mention its capability of negatively influencing behaviours among youths. Some studies have revealed that the abuse of drugs is common among musicians of Rap, Hip-hop, R&B and Rock genres (Motyka & Al-Imam, 2021). Some of these musicians serve as role-models for their fans, who may view drug abuse as acceptable due to its depiction in music videos. This normalization of drug abuse can inadvertently lead to harmful behaviours, posing risks to community safety and contributing to social instability.

In addition, recent songs released in Nigeria fall within popular genres such as Rap and R & B, with social media making them more accessible than they used to be. A study by Okpokwasili (2019), found that these genres often contain lyrics that relate to sex and violence, negatively impacting the social lives of Nigerian youths. These behavioural changes among young people ultimately pose a threat to national security.

### **Music and Youth Engagement**

Music in Nigeria has been known to play a major role in promoting National development. It has a sustainable impact and it is one of the tools that strongly influence the society. Ojukwu & Esimone (2014), opines that the young are more vulnerable when their developmental stages are dramatic and Georgieva (2017) states that this is evident in their emotions, actions, and understanding. Music is therefore essential in shaping and developing the minds of youths. Through music education and music performances, the minds of youths are engaged and distracted from societal vices and ills, which, in turn, leads to national security. Music has also always played an important role in shaping the identities of individuals and groups of people. In its very nature, it is a social activity (Macdonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012) and plays an important role in human development. Umezina & Okafor (2012), opines that as a basic component of culture, music has served to carry political and nationalistic ideologies.

Music shared on social media can facilitate youths' support for social causes. For instance, songs that address issues of human rights and social justice can inspire collective action and raise awareness in the country. This could in many ways strengthen societal bonds which are vital for fostering cohesiveness in communities and maintaining national security. A study by Okujeni, Zamani, Akpe, & Okocha (2024), emphasizes this as respondents expressed that music is a common language that Nigerians from diverse backgrounds understand and that (traditional, western, and gospel) have the power to foster unity and bridge cultural gaps.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As discussed previously, Music in Nigeria has been used as a tool to promote social cohesion, and Musicians have collaborated on projects to promote peace and unity in Nigeria (Obielosi & Ude, 2021). The Nigerian government has also shown support for music through initiatives, such as the Central Bank of Nigeria's Creative Industry Financing Initiative (CIFI), which provides support for the creative sector by making funds available. This has helped to foster



growth and innovation within the industry (Olatunji, 2022). Despite the diverse population of Nigeria, Nigerian musicians have made significant contributions to political activism and social cohesion through their music, using their art to inspire change, encourage unity, raise awareness, and advocate for a better society. Also, cultural exchange fosters solidarity and this contributes to national stability and music plays a major role. In this present age, music spreads faster and across borders through social media, and this in turn promotes cultural exchange among diverse groups of people, creating significant levels of socialisation.

Through music videos, especially, artists from various cultures get to collaborate and convey messages of peace and unity. Their songs critique corruption and hypocrisy in leadership and also highlight the nature of power and moral responsibility of those in authority. This helps to positively influence youths to embrace diversity and cohesion. This study analysed a small number of songs and it relied on secondary data for information on the history of the selected songs and Artists. This might have affected the accuracy of the lyrics as well as the comprehensive details of Nigerian music as used in political activism. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies in this area be conducted with a larger number of songs. While social media platforms promote the impact of music on national security by influencing youth, based on the findings of this study, the following are suggested ways by which musicians, and policymakers can leverage music as a tool for strengthening national security:

- i. The government and security agencies can leverage social media to counteract the threats against national security by monitoring and regulating the spread of harmful content,
- ii. The effects of music on youths should be balanced by fostering positive cultural exchanges and mitigating the risks of negative manipulation.
- iii. Indigenous music and cultural content should be promoted, as this will be easily relatable among youths despite the diversity in ethnicity.
- iv. Policymakers should develop a music education curriculum that nurtures musical talent but as well as emphasises the role that music plays in promoting unity.

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