

## Forensic Art: Implication for National Security within Communities in Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20383837>

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### Abstract

*National security is one of the most talked about subjects in our time. We all have at one time or another experienced some level of insecurity such as armed robbery, rape, banditry and kidnapping, domestic violence among others. This article discusses forensic art; the practice of using drawings or paintings (generating images) to either track down criminal elements in our communities or to identify their victims as an effective way for strengthening national security. This article is geared towards revealing a simple and innovative approach to curbing crime in underdeveloped societies. This method leverages on an artist's ability to draw or paint the portrait of a described suspect to resemblance, in such a way, that the individual could be picked up for interrogation by law enforcement agents. This method is collaborative in nature and it has the capacity to empower citizens to fight crime in their local communities. Among the recommendations are the following: government should integrate or incorporate forensic artists into the security apparatus; this subject should be encouraged in most of our schools, because it has potential to develop our mental and visual perception necessary for creating the security-consciousness we need; government should uphold this practice because it holds promise in the area of job creation for its practitioners among others.*

**Keywords:** Forensic Art, National Security, Communities

## Introduction

Forensic art is one of the multi-dimensional approaches required in strengthening our national security. It is a concept Westerners are familiar with but alien to many people in the under-developed and developing world. It is a field of academic study in some universities in the west. This obviously is in recognition of its usefulness in the fight against crime or security breaches within communities. It also has immense potential in the area of employment opportunity for forensic artists. Forensic art is a practice which draws inspiration and rightly belongs to the broad field of visual arts. It is vocational in nature, because apart from its usefulness in crime fighting, it offers job opportunities for its practitioners either as government employees (mostly in law enforcement agencies) or as freelance artists. Forensic art is an integral part of visual art (fine arts in particular) because it involves drawing and painting. According to Uzoagba (2002), fine art is the branch of art which appeals to man's sense of beauty and higher emotion. This includes painting, sculpture and music. Other authorities have always added drawing and architecture. He added that drawing (the chief ingredient in forensic art) means to put a line round something in order to name it and attempt to enumerate its characteristics. Furthermore, he sees drawing as the intellectual exercise by which we train ourselves to observe and think plastically in terms of the dimensions of space. Drawing develops constructive imagination and the habit of exact thinking. It provides an objective and scientific way of exploring and developing our sensitivity to physical relationships. In effect, the art of drawing is a useful extension of our visual memory. By implication, fundamental ingredients like sound memory, the power of observation and perception, quick and exact thinking, creative and manipulative drawing skills form the basis for successful forensic art practice.

Forensic art is the presentation of visual information in relation to procedures. Forensic artists aid in the identification or location of victims of crime, missing persons or human remains. They help with the identification, apprehension or conviction of criminals ([www.dundee.ac.uk/study/pg/forensic.n.d](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/study/pg/forensic.n.d), 2020). Lurigio (2024) observes that it is about artistic representation of unidentified individuals, particularly suspects in crime, created based on eyewitness descriptions. Similarly, Kelmansky (2025) explains that forensic artists use interviews with victims or eyewitnesses at a crime scene to make sketches that police and the public may use to identify and capture criminal suspects. The Michigan State Police (2026) also reports that it is any art that aids in

the conviction of a criminal offender and aids in identification of deceased persons. This article attempts an exposition on the usefulness of forensic art as an important instrument for strengthening national security. Although, Artificial Intelligence (A I) could be used for the purpose of generating images based on text prompts and to explore various styles and themes quickly as reported by Baxter (2024); however, this article is geared towards empowering individuals and the security architecture in underdeveloped communities with knowledge of this simple procedure.

### **National Security**

National security can be equated with the vital oxygen we need to be kept alive. It is such an important issue that hardly will there be gathering of people without it being mentioned. Abd-Rahman (2023) considers national security to be the security of a state from external threats. It includes threats to the territorial integrity of the state, its citizens, or its infrastructures. National security he further adds encompasses security of the state from internal threats, such as coups or civil unrest. This concept has become so important that Bukar (2015) stresses that everybody's welfare is underlined by the security of the place where they dwell. He added that national security is about the survival of an individual, group or an entity such as a state. In his opinion, insecurity slows down development on all fronts. Expounding on this idea, he asserts that a serious relationship is thus established between security and national development. Aside from the amount of resources required towards the restoration of peace, no serious production or activity could be undertaken by individuals or groups in any serious security situation, more so if such a situation is prolonged and wide-spread.

Drawing from the assertion of Bukar (ibid), we in the Federal University of Education, Kontagora, Niger state, Formerly Federal College of Education, Kontagora, can recall that, when we experienced bomb blast in the college, academic activities were briefly suspended and academic calendar was disrupted. Within that period, we could not conduct any meaningful activity. It is a fact that Boko Haram activities in the North-East and the presence of militants in the South-South hamper economic activities and development in those regions. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED, 2013), Nigeria is the fourth most violent country measured by the number of violent events and the seventh most fatal over the course of the datasets coverage (1997-March 2013). David (2006) in Nwanegbo and Jude (2013) explained the concept of national security as the condition or feeling of safety from harm or danger, the defence, protection and absence of threats to

acquired values. The importance of national security and the need for Nigerians to strengthen it was emphasized by Tonnie (2011) when he said that, the insecurity situation in the country calls for extraordinary measures to combat it. He argued that the definition of the term insecurity is wider than the government's definition in terms of defence and military might only. National security he says encompasses basic dimensions like 'Job', 'water' and 'food' security; otherwise a national security policy would be of no use to the unemployed and hungry citizens that constitute the majority of the population in a poor country like ours. That national security is the ability of a state to overcome any of its challenges, no matter what the challenge is. Thomas (2008) opined that it was Walter Lippmann who first defined national security explicitly. "A nation has security", he wrote "when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able if challenged, to maintain them by war". National interest and national security are treated as one. Furthermore, that a nation can be secured only if it increases its own power at the expense of another nation or other nations. Another school of thought emphasizes the minimizing of national power and stress conscious efforts to increase international co-operation. By implication, national security has both internal and external dimensions. It is a form of protection from within and without. Modern concept of national security according to Kim (2015) arose in the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the thirty years war in Europe and the civil war in England. In 1648, the peace of Westphalia established the idea that the nation-state had sovereign control not only of domestic affairs such as religion, but also in external security. Kim (ibid) outlined the following as components of national security:

### **The Concept of Power**

Power he says can be defined as a nation's possession of control of its sovereignty and destiny. It implies some degree of control of the extent to which outside forces can harm the country. Power is about control, while soft power is mainly about influence-trying to persuade others, using methods short of war, to do something.

### **Military Strength:**

This term refers to the military capacity and capabilities of the armed forces.

### **Force:**

This is the use of military or law enforcement capacity to achieve some objective. Force is an instrument of power. It is an applied instrument of coercion.

### **National Defence:**

This refers to the ability of armed forces to defend the sovereignty of the nation and the lives of its people. Domestic as well as military instruments are employed in the U.S. (since the 2001 terrorist attacks) to defend the nation from terrorists and other attacks, either inside or outside the country. The use of forensic artists in combating crime within the nation is one of the aspects of the deployment of domestic elements in strengthening national defence.

### **Non-Military Ideas of National Security:**

Kim (Ibid) further stresses that national security in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was focused on military security, but as a concept, it expanded overtime beyond what armed forces could do (or not do as the case may be). This is typical of the security situation in Nigeria, because it is evident that our military alone cannot guarantee security unless with the collaboration of all Nigerians. That in 1947, the United States created the national security council to “advise the president with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign and military policies relating to the national security”. National security means different things to different people. There are all kinds of “national securities”. They include economic security, energy security, environmental security and even health, women’s and food security. Homeland security (after 9/11) includes airport, port security, border security, transportation security, immigration and others; cyber security involves protection of computer and data processing infrastructure and operating system from harmful interference. Human security, a concept developed by United Nations after the end of cold war encompassing people’s safety from hunger, disease and repression including harmful disruptions of daily life. It has expanded to include economic, environmental, food, health, personal, community, political securities and the protection of women and minorities.

Going back to the views expressed by Nwanegbo and Jude (2013) on national security, is the regret that one of the major setbacks to development in Nigeria was insecurity. Security they say is the pillar upon which every meaningful development could be achieved and sustained. Nwanegbo and Jude believe conditions that engender violence can retard development. They declare that about 70% of the population lives in poverty. Resource based conflict (Niger delta), ethno-religious crises (Jos), persistent communal conflicts (very recently is the banditry attacks). The climax of these security threats is the emergence of a group called Boko Haram in Nigeria. Thus, a considerable effort to end

the violence and to build a sustainable peace in order to steer the economy to sustainability seems far from realization. This calls for concerted efforts, among which is the need to explore and deploy forensic art and artists to help stem the vicious tide of violence within communities in the country. The sophistication of crimes in our society requires novel, uncommon but friendly result oriented techniques and solutions. They also report that there have been attempts to shift conceptualization of security from a state-centered perspective to a broader view that places premium on individuals, in which human security that embodies elements of national security, human right and national development remain major barometer for explaining the concept. This concept is helping the world to shift from the concept of security from the level of the states to the societies/communities and individuals, and from military to non-military issues.

### **Internal Security**

This concept is seen as the freedom from or absence of those tendencies which could undermine internal collusion and the cooperate existence of the nation and its ability to maintain its vital institutions for the promotion of its core values and socio-political and economic objectives, as well as meet the legitimate aspirations of the people. According to Rapley (2007) in Nwanegbo and Jude (2013), development is multifaceted and indeed centered on man. Man they stress is both the measure and determinant of development. Fundamentally, ethno-religious conflicts have claimed many lives in Nigeria, a multi-religious society with lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation (Salawu, 2010) in Nwanegbo and Jude (2013).

A report by the Washington Post (2014) has it that since July 2009, when the Boko Haram conflict escalated, at least 11,100 people have died on both sides of the conflict. This figure is more than the death toll from the wars in Syria and Iraq put together. A major contributory factor to state insecurity is the unacceptable rate of unemployment as captured by the National Bureau of statistics report (2016), that unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 10.40 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015 from 9.90 percent in the previous period. The number of unemployed persons went up by 518 thousand to 8 million and labour force population rose by 1 million to 16.95 million. Trading Economics (2026) quoted National Bureau of Statistics report that, unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 4.90 percent in the fourth quarter of 2024 from 4.60 percent in the third quarter of 2024. Unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 4.49 percent from 1991 until 2024, reaching an all-time high

of 10.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2019 and a record low of 3.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2013. Anyo (2026) in News Central TV reports that projections indicate an unemployment rate of 4.84 percent by 2024, and an estimated 3.9 million Nigerians are expected to be jobless. This high rate of unemployment is a catalyst for surging crime. Abiodun (2015) observes that corruption is also a matter of national security because it is affecting our national security and endangering the lives of you and I. Nigerians cannot forget how money meant for the procurement of weapons in order to prosecute the war against insurgency was diverted thereby putting the lives of Nigerians in danger. To this extent one would say that corruption is compromising our national security. David Cameron cried out recently, during the world summit on Anti-corruption, he said “corruption is the cancer at the heart of most problems in the world”.

### **Forensic Art and National Security**

The economic meltdown in the country and high rate of unemployment among others are obvious reasons for our youths and citizens plunging into crime of all scales. This phenomenon is a threat to our national security. This view is supported by Bukar (2015) who said that abject poverty and non-availability of amenities, bad leadership and corruption continue to fuel discontent and social unrest in many African countries. Forensic art is an important tool for reducing crime rate and for strengthening national security. Forensic art is an aspect of the general creative arts but blended with other subjects to fight crime. Art is a way of life. Every aspect of our national life is influenced by art (creative arts). Science, religion, technology and any other imaginable area of human endeavour are propelled by creative art. Forensic art has a lot to offer in Nigeria’s quest for national security. Forensic art involves manipulative skills in the field of drawing or painting. It is an integral part of fine and applied arts education. Fine and applied arts education in the National policy on education (NPE, 2004) is encouraged to be taught as a subject in schools because of the recognition of its role as a powerful instrument for self-reliance. It avails trainees the opportunity to acquire appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to contribute to the development of the society. One of the objectives of fine and applied arts is to produce self-reliant, resourceful, creative people; people with initiative and understanding for the need to create; people with a positive identity in the community.

One of the important areas of creative initiatives to address social problems is through forensic art. Emmanuel, Chukwunonso, and Ndubuisi (2025) observe that, in Nigeria, forensic evidence is increasingly gaining importance in criminal investigations, legal proceedings, and the overall administration of justice. For example, Eyewu-Edero (2020) records that a 70 year old man was murdered in Amuwo Odofin area of Lagos state in 2015. Finding his killer became a major challenge to the team of investigators. The first suspect in the murder case was his security man. A picture of the man was difficult to get; however, his portrait was finally obtained through the creative effort of a forensic facial sketch artist. Occupants of the late man's house and those who knew the security man gave descriptions of his facial features. Similarities in the descriptions given were used by a forensic artist to produce a sketch of the suspect. Those who knew the security man upon seeing the sketch agreed that it looked exactly like him. Finally, Okada riders in the area that saw the picture led the team to Alaba Rago where he was apprehended. Olotu and Didia (2020) narrate that the discovery of the Ibadan forest of horror and the infamous Okija shrine in Anambra state in 2014, is an indication of the sophistication of crime in the country. The authors stress that the police in Nigeria has a long list of missing persons which is unresolved and that one wonders if the victims will ever get justice. They report of incidences like ritual killings, kidnapping, militancy, Boko Haram, to mention but a few, resulting in the disappearances of humans. This, the authors argue will require situations where human parts will have to be identified by forensic experts. It is in support of the fight against crime and the need for creating an institutional framework with regards to this development, ([https://main.ouagoiwoye.edu.ng/colleges/oachs/bms/forensic\\_2026](https://main.ouagoiwoye.edu.ng/colleges/oachs/bms/forensic_2026)) documents that, recent initiatives, such as the 2023/2024 establishment of forensic science programs at institutions like Olabisi Onabanjo university, now include forensic art as part of specialized training for investigators. Similarly, the federal university of technology Owerri (FUTO) also offers the course. Olotu and Didia (2020) while commenting on the development of forensic art in Nigeria state that some of the experts in human anatomy/facial reconstruction and crime scene investigation are Owolabi Joshua, Nurudeen Adegbite, Haliru Shafiu, Sunday Agbooola Olatunji, Adetunji Adedeji, and Ahmad Adekilekun. One forensic sketch artist who is famous in this aspect of crime fighting is Lois Gibson. It is on record that Lois Gibson is one of the world's most successful forensic artists. A graduate of the University of Texas with a bachelor of fine arts degree and a holder of the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Academy forensic art course certificate. She was the victim of a serial rapist and killer. Her near-death experience fuels her passion for catching criminals. Her sketches have helped law enforcement agents to identify more than 751 criminals ([www.loisgibson.com](http://www.loisgibson.com), 2026). This example is a catalyst for the need to initiate creative ideas to mitigate the lingering problem of violence or insecurity in our country. Dukeh (2026) regrets that in Nigeria, some crimes are never reported to police. Many rural areas do not have police stations. This makes this intervention necessary. Further-more, Nigeria currently ranks 8<sup>th</sup> globally on the organized crime index with a criminality score of 7.32 out of 10. The country's crime index stands at 66.2 as at 2025. Crimes against persons represent about 40 percent of reported offences. It is said that assault and grievous bodily harm lead this category. Examples are domestic disputes, neighbourhood conflicts, and road rage incidents that escalate into violence. Additionally, that violent deaths from insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping killed over 2,266 people in the half of 2025 according to the National Human Rights Commission. Nigeria's crude death rate is said to stand at approximately 11.60 deaths per 1000 population as of 2025 according to United Nations Population Division data.

Forensic art is a form of non-military intervention in a situation of conflict or crime within the community. It is an effective, result-oriented, combative and peaceful strategy for tracking down criminals or identification of victims of crime in our communities. It is an artistic method that is mainly about establishing facial identities of either criminals or their victims. We could recall that pictures or photographs of Boko Haram suspects were produced as posters and pasted at public squares for members of the society to identify them. This unique operation is within the domain of the forensic artist. The fight against insecurity as time has proved is beyond the use of the military alone. It is an issue requiring collaborative efforts from all well-meaning citizens. Practical application of this aspect of forensic art can happen in situations such as this: Whenever there is a case of breaking and entry (theft) into a house in the community, it is likely that the criminal might have been sighted by an individual. All that the forensic artist will need is a vivid description of the thief or armed robber. Whoever sighted the criminal, as a witness, he or she must possess a sound memory with the ability to recall facial features and other characteristics of the criminal. The forensic artist thus, draws to resemblance the identities of the criminal, such that the criminal could be traced and picked up by law enforcement agents. If a lady is raped too, or an individual is physically

assaulted. Victims are to confidently approach a forensic artist with a clear description of their attackers' facial features. Individuals who are giving description here must take into consideration, the uniqueness of their attacker's shape of head, nose, eyes, mouth, ears, chin, mustache, beard and other characteristics like body shape, how he or she walks among other features, as the forensic artist may demand. Recently, photographs of banditry kingpins are in circulation. This is also a form of forensic art practice. Its usefulness to the military for tracking terrorists, even when they disguise themselves, cannot be underestimated; especially as they keep changing their locations. This simple crime fighting method of consulting any visual artist, who can technically combine imagination with remarkable drawing and painting skills appears to be cost effective. This is because, citizens in both urban and rural areas do not need any sophisticated gadgets. A camera and a good memory will do the job. They are the ingredients needed by a forensic artist, and luckily, most citizens are armed with retentive memories and the ability to describe. The involvement of all patriotic citizens in this fight against crime is crucial. This is because, most of the crimes or terrorism we suffer are carried out by fellow citizens/ neighbours. It is rare to hear of attacks by external forces. Most times our security challenges are bred from within, even if there are foreign collaborators. The betrayal is usually from within our communities.

### **Who is a Forensic Artist?**

The forensic artist according to Criminal Sketch Artist Organization (2014) is the artist who aid law enforcement by using witness descriptions to create a likeness of suspects and missing persons. By this definition, the forensic artist or criminal sketch artist is dedicated to providing the best information (visually) possible about forensic art. This is a fascinating, valuable field, vital to law enforcement and dedicated to witnesses and victims of crime in our society.

### **Duties of Forensic Artist**

Forensic artists focus on facial features as they interview informants, asking them to choose from examples of noses, eyes, mouths, foreheads and chins. This is in an attempt to get the image that is in a victim's mind out and on paper, where it can be used to generate leads and ideally lead to the perpetrator. Unlike portrait artists, criminal or forensic artists do not always have the benefit of working from a picture or a live model. Instead, they have to compile a variety of features that are often described orally. This process involves several trials and errors as the artists improve their work

to correspond to eyewitness description. Sketching is mostly done by hand, however, forensic artists who specialize in age progression make use of computer graphic programmes. Forensic artists most of the times work with limited and sometimes conflicting information to sketch the best possible match. It is also possible sometimes that, a witness caught only a partial glimpse of the suspect, therefore, a forensic artist must ask the right questions and listen patiently. This is where possession of a strong artistic imagination and ability to recall becomes an asset. Organizations like the International Association for Identification (IAI) and the Crime Scene Investigation (2016) mutually agree on the following classification in the forensic artist's field:

### **Composite Art**

Composite art is a technique that is created by sketching an unknown individual using a number of individually described parts. Composite art provides a single, graphic image that is designed to be a likeness or similarity of the individual. Way (2026) adds

### **Image Modification/Age Progression**

Image modification is alterations or enhancements of photographs or images used for updating, clarifying and/ or identifying an individual. Image modification or enhancement may include age progression or age regression.

### **Post-Mortem and Facial Reconstruction**

In post-mortem and facial reconstruction, the major task here involves rebuilding the facial features of either decomposed or partially decomposed human remains. Software is usually deployed in this vital process, because it allows room for the forensic artist to create 3-D images: however, forensic artists could perform facial reconstruction using sketches or produce 3-D clay figures. It crucial for forensic artists to have a good understanding of facial anatomy, digital imagery, human memory, aging processes and victim psychology. Each of these listed areas are broad fields of study and specialization, that could create opportunities for job creation as vital as they are in the broad area of crime prevention and reduction/control. Additionally, the artist prepares reports, exhibits and displays for court proceedings. The mystery behind the abduction of Chibok girls and their present states could be unraveled by forensic artists if they are employed and assisted to infiltrate the ranks of the terrorists in the North East of Nigeria. They can succeed in identifying the missing girls 'through their knowledge of age progression. Visual images of some of the most wanted terrorists could be

generated by them and projected to the public and law enforcement agents. The same method could be applied in uncovering identities of some of the kidnapping kingpins who are operating underground cells.

### **Conclusion**

The most effective ways to strengthen national security in our time is not just about relying on the armed forces only. Civil societies, groups and individuals have the obligation to help guarantee national security by becoming sensitive and alert. From the literatures reviewed, this article has established the fact that criminal elements have been apprehended using forensic artists sketches. It demonstrates the potency, validity and reliability of forensic art as a vital tool in the fight against crime in our communities. More people die as a result of conflicts or crimes within the country than from external attacks. There are many secret killings from within; this largely could be attributed to political conflicts, ethno-religious conflicts, cattle rustling, herders and farmers clashes, robbery, domestic violence, ritual killings, high rate of unemployment, hunger/starvation/diseases due to food insecurity, death in the hands of assassins, kidnappers, rapists and serial murderers. Security is now people centred. A state is secure to the extent her citizens are secure (security of individuals is the security of the state). Every individual has experienced insecurity in one form or another. Those who commit crime within our communities are not ghosts (petty thieves, burglars, robbers, kidnappers, rapists, among others), they have faces and unique identities. People generally possess the ability to recall and describe them. This simple skill qualifies individuals to join in the fight against crime and to meaningfully contribute to national security, especially in this age of global and national terrorism. Interestingly too, acquisition of knowledge and skills in forensic art is a vista for job creation.

### **Recommendations**

This article has the following as recommendations for reducing the problem of insecurity as well as engendering national development:

Governments must encourage the use of both kinetic and non-kinetic means of tackling insecurity and unemployment that are plaguing this nation. The field of forensic art, apart from the fact that, it could be used to help generate employment in the country, should be embraced and incorporated into a number of government departments responsible for fighting crime. The departments should be well funded and equipped to be effective.

From the article, it is obvious that, if national security is to be strengthened, government must pay attention to the needs of individuals, promote fundamental human rights, reduce corruption, and quickly intervene in internal conflicts. Marginalized communities and oppressed persons must be helped to regain freedom. Job creation must be taken seriously by government by creating the right environment and the promotion of incentives to entrepreneurs. This is necessary, because unemployment can fuel discontent leading to the breakdown of law and order.

Very importantly too, a strong database be created for profiling criminals within communities like rapists, drug addicts, people with psychological problems that can suddenly unleash terror on innocent and law-abiding citizens, robbers, and other terrorists.

Every citizen must be alert. Individuals must be mindful of happenings around them. The era of carelessness and insensitivity is over. This assertion is vital, considering the fact that, insecurity begins subtly in individual thoughts or emotions, world views, which gets translated into attitudes and actions.

Finally, institutional framework like training of crime investigators in forensic art should be given and sustained across various levels in Nigeria. Incorporation of forensic art and science into academic programmes in some of the universities in Nigeria is a move in the right direction. This should be properly funded.

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