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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Strategies

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Abstract

Nigeria has faced persistent threats from terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and various armed militias, posing serious challenges to national security, political stability, and socio-economic development. Over the years, the Nigerian government has adopted a range of counter-terrorism strategies, including military offensives, intelligence gathering, deradicalization programmes, community engagement initiatives, and legislative frameworks such as the Terrorism (Prevention) Act. This study critically evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies by examining their implementation, outcomes, and limitations. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from security reports, policy documents, and scholarly analyses, the research assesses the extent to which these measures have reduced terrorist activities, improved security, and addressed underlying socio-economic drivers of extremism. Findings indicate that while military operations have weakened some terrorist networks and reclaimed territories, challenges remain in areas such as inter-agency coordination, respect for human rights, corruption, and insufficient attention to root causes like poverty, unemployment, and political marginalization. The paper concludes that a more integrated, intelligence-driven, and community-based approach complemented by socio-economic reforms is essential for sustainable counter-terrorism success in Nigeria.

Keywords: Evaluating, Effectiveness, Nigeria, Counter-Terrorism, Strategies

1. Introduction

Nigeria has, for over a decade, been at the forefront of a protracted battle against violent non-state actors whose operations have destabilized communities, undermined economic growth, and strained national security. Groups such as Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), alongside the escalating wave of armed banditry in the North-West and parts of the Middle Belt, have inflicted devastating humanitarian and socio-economic consequences.¹ In response,

¹ Njoku, Emeka Thaddues. (2019). *The ligaments of counter-terrorism regime: Sexual violence and the vicarious traumatising of female non-governmental organisation workers: evidence from Nigeria. Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 30(6– 7), 1233–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1649830>

successive Nigerian governments have developed and implemented various counter-terrorism strategies ranging from military offensives and intelligence operations to community-based deradicalization programs and regional security collaborations.

Assessing the effectiveness of these strategies is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows policymakers to determine whether current approaches are achieving the intended security outcomes or require recalibration. Second, it helps identify gaps, such as inadequate coordination, intelligence failures, or human rights concerns, that may undermine long-term peace and stability. Third, systematic evaluation ensures that scarce resources are directed toward interventions that yield measurable results, especially in a context where insurgencies are adaptive and threats evolve rapidly.

This article seeks to critically evaluate Nigeria's counter-terrorism measures with particular focus on operations against Boko Haram,



ISWAP, and armed bandits. The objectives are to; examine the design and implementation of key government strategies, assess their impact on reducing the operational capacity and influence of these groups, highlight challenges and unintended consequences, and propose evidence-based recommendations for policy improvement. The scope of the analysis will cover the period from the escalation of Boko Haram's insurgency in 2009 to recent security developments in 2025, with attention to both domestic and regional dimensions of Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts.²

1.1 Theoretical Framework

For this study, I adopted strain theory as the guiding theoretical framework to shape the research questions and interpret the findings. In this section, I provide a brief overview of strain theory, while a more detailed discussion appears in Chapter 2. Strain theory, introduced by Merton (1938), suggests that stress (or strain) and experiences of failure can contribute to criminal behavior. Expanding on Merton's ideas, Agnew and White (1992) argued that strain is often linked to poverty and low socioeconomic status, creating a cycle that generates further strain and higher rates of crime.³ Strain may arise from several factors, including the inability to achieve goals, the removal or restriction of opportunities and amenities, and exposure to negative influences (Agnew & White, 1992). Among these, negative influences are particularly significant because they may appear to offer access to resources that can alleviate poverty and reduce strain. Strain theory has been applied to various forms of criminal activity, including terrorism. Agnew emphasized that societal strain can drive individuals to join terrorist groups as a way of addressing perceived injustices. Such groups often present themselves as providing resources and a more secure lifestyle, even if these promises are illusory.

The theory also offers insights into preventing crime and terrorism. According to strain theory, reducing strain requires community leaders, law enforcement, and policymakers to collaborate in expanding opportunities, alleviating poverty, and improving access to resources. By doing so, the pressures that drive individuals toward criminal actions are diminished. I selected strain theory as the framework for this study because it not only explains the conditions under which criminal activities including terrorism emerge, but also outlines strategies for addressing them. This aligns directly with the focus of the study: exploring the perceptions of Nigerian government officials on the implementation of the Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) in tackling groups such as Boko Haram under the evolving jihadist ideology.⁴

² Tella, O. (2018). *Boko Haram terrorism and counter-terrorism: The soft power context*. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(6), 815–829. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909617739326>

³ Abada, I. M., & Ngwu, E. C. (2019). *Corruption, governance, and Nigeria's uncivil society, 1999-2016*. *Análise Social*, 54(2), 386–408.

⁴ Bamidele, O. (2015). *Combating terrorism: Anti-terrorism law, Boko Haram and insecurity in Nigeria*. *African Journal of Democracy and Governance*, 2(34), 139–158.

1.2 Legal Framework

Constitutional foundations; Primary purpose of government: Security and welfare of the people⁵ is the guiding principle for Counter-Terrorism (CT) policy and legislation.

Fundamental rights & limits: Fair hearing, liberty, expression, etc.⁶, remain in force; any limits must follow constitutional tests and statute. In an emergency, the President may proclaim a state of emergency subject to strict conditions and legislative oversight.⁷

Core counter-terrorism Act; Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022⁸ (TPPA 2022), Nigeria's primary CT law (repealed the 2011/2013 Acts). Key features, definitions & offences: Broad catalogue of terrorism and terrorism-financing offences (e.g., recruitment, training, provision of facilities, FTF travel financing).

Institutions: Establishes/recognises the Nigeria Sanctions Committee (designation, asset-freezing, domestic list aligned with the UN list) and provides for the National Counter-Terrorism Centre⁹ (NCTC) under the Office of the NSA to coordinate policy/operations.

Jurisdiction & procedure: Federal High Court jurisdiction, search/seizure, proscription of groups, asset freezing/forfeiture, cooperation with UN measures.

Terrorist-financing / financial-sector controls; Financial sectors in Nigeria play an important role in counter-terrorism efforts, particularly through countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) and ensuring compliance with global standards. Terrorist organizations need funds to operate, so cutting off financial support is a key strategy. Here are the main ways financial institutions in Nigeria fight terrorism. Regulatory and Legal Frameworks. Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022 and earlier terrorism laws criminalize financing of terrorism. The Act¹⁰ works hand in hand to prevent illicit money flow. Nigeria aligns with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations and works with the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA).

Financial Intelligence Gathering. The Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) monitors suspicious financial activities and shares intelligence with law enforcement and security agencies. Banks and other institutions are mandated to report Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) and Currency Transaction Reports (CTRs).

Know Your Customer (KYC) & Customer Due Diligence (CDD). Banks verify customer identities, sources of funds, and monitor

⁵ CFRN 1999 as Amended

⁶ Chapter iv CFRN 1999 as Amended

⁷ Section 305 CFRN 1999 as Amended

⁸ *Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022*.

⁹ *National Security Agencies Act, Cap N74, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004*.

¹⁰ *Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022*



unusual patterns of transactions. This helps prevent terrorists from using fake identities or front companies to channel funds.

Freezing and Blocking Terrorist Assets. Financial institutions are required to freeze accounts linked to terrorists or terrorist groups once flagged by government directives or international sanctions (e.g., UN Security Council resolutions). Collaboration with Security Agencies. The financial sector works closely with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Department of State Services (DSS), and international bodies to disrupt terror financing networks. **Monitoring Informal Financial Systems.** Many terrorist groups in Nigeria (like Boko Haram/ISWAP) exploit informal money transfer systems (hawala, cash couriers, NGOs, and charity fronts). The financial sector, with regulators, has been tightening oversight on these channels to prevent misuse.

Technology and Data Analytics. Use of digital transaction monitoring systems, big data, and AI to detect red flags such as: Unexplained large cash deposits in rural areas, Frequent small transfers (structuring/smurfing) to avoid detection, Donations to suspicious organizations. Nigeria's financial sector fights terrorism by enforcing anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) laws, monitoring and reporting suspicious transactions, freezing terrorist funds, and collaborating with national and international agencies to cut off financial lifelines of terror groups.

Cyber, critical infrastructure & digital evidence; Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015 as amended in 2024,¹¹ strengthens provisions on cyber offences, evidence, CERT/incident response, and introduces updates including the cybersecurity levy framework feeding the National Cybersecurity Fund under ONSA (implementation by CBN circular). Useful in CT where attacks/financing leverage digital rails.

Trial management & courtroom security; Federal High Court Practice Directions (On Trial of Terrorism Cases) 2022, provides for in-camera proceedings, witness shielding, and other security measures while balancing fair-trial rights¹². Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015 (background procedure) and Evidence Act 2011 operate alongside the above for arrests, remand, admissibility (including electronic evidence).

Human-rights safeguards relevant to CT; The Act¹³ criminalises torture and makes the freedom from torture non-derogable; applies to security-sector operations in CT contexts.¹⁴ The law creates a framework for protecting/coordinating witnesses and related persons (relied on in terrorism and serious-crime cases).

¹¹ *Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention,) Act, 2015 as amended in 2024*

¹² *Federal High Practice Direction of 2022*

¹³ *Anti-Torture Act, 2017*

¹⁴ *Witness Protection and Management Act, 2022*

Institutions & coordination architecture; Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA)¹⁵ / National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC): national coordination of CT policy, strategy, and CVE; the NCTC traces to a 2012 centre within ONSA and now leads multi-agency implementation.

Nigeria Sanctions Committee: listing/delisting, asset-freezing under TPPA 2022 and UNSCR implementation. **NFIU/EFCC/SCUML/CBN:** financial-intelligence, investigation, supervision, and enforcement of AML/CFT/TF controls. **DSS/Police/Armed Forces:** operational CT roles under the National Security Agencies Act and sector statutes, coordinated through ONSA/NCTC. **UN & regional linkages:** Nigeria aligns with UN Security Council counter-terrorism measures via the CTC framework; regionally, it participates in ECOWAS CT Strategy implementation.

2. Literature Review

The central issue addressed in this study is the limited understanding of Nigerian government officials' perceptions and implementation of the Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) in responding to terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, particularly within the context of emerging jihadist ideologies. This qualitative case study seeks to explore how officials apply TPA policies and strategies, while also identifying the need for adjustments to Nigeria's counterterrorism framework to enhance effectiveness. Boko Haram, which began in the early 2000s as a movement advocating for religious rights, had by 2015 evolved into one of the most violent and destructive terrorist organizations, posing a severe threat to Nigeria's national security and state stability. Its insurgency reshaped the country's security environment and posed significant challenges to government authorities. This study therefore examines Boko Haram and other extremist groups, while engaging with ongoing debates about the TPA's provisions—particularly those that authorize the banning of individuals or groups. Such measures raise critical concerns regarding civil liberties, human rights, and the extent of governmental power. The prohibition of groups based on political or religious ideology carries profound implications, highlighting the importance of further inquiry into both the effectiveness and ethical dimensions of these policies.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform Nigerian policymakers as they continue to confront Boko Haram and related security threats. This chapter provides a historical background of Boko Haram, outlining its objectives, evolution, and the broader landscape of terrorism in Nigeria. It also reviews government responses and the challenges encountered in addressing extremist violence. Terrorism, broadly defined, is the unlawful use of violence against individuals or property to pressure governments into conceding political, religious, or material demands. It functions as a mechanism for socio-political change by forcing authorities to respond to prevent further violence or disruption. When politically motivated, terrorism often mobilizes

¹⁵ *National Security Agencies Act 2004*



disaffected citizens to join insurgencies, escalating conflict and destabilizing the state, while simultaneously amplifying grievances and drawing global attention to perceived injustices.

2.1 Governmental Response to Terrorism

The Nigerian government's response to terrorist activities, as well as its broader initiatives to restore stability, warrants careful consideration. Foundational studies on governmental responses to terrorism emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of terrorist organizations in order to design effective defense strategies. Scholars note that terrorism impacts societies at personal, organizational, and national levels, producing severe economic, political, psychological, and social consequences. They further argue that governments that fail to understand the reasons individuals are drawn to terrorist groups risk implementing counterproductive policies measures that may unintentionally encourage more citizens to join such groups.

Ebeku illustrates this point by examining Nigeria's handling of Boko Haram. Instead of relying on evidence-based strategies and judicial processes, the government frequently resorted to violence, detaining individuals suspected of links to the group without sufficient evidence or due process. Such actions, in a democratic context, undermine fundamental rights and can escalate rather than reduce the threat. Roach similarly contends that terrorism should be addressed within the framework of democratic law: once terrorist activities are identified, perpetrators should be apprehended and prosecuted under existing criminal law for crimes such as conspiracy, bombings, or murder. Western democracies have largely embraced this approach, finding it more effective than suppressing freedoms of expression and association.

Nigeria, however, has often deviated from these principles. By imprisoning and torturing suspected individuals without adequate evidence, the government has restricted fundamental rights in ways that, according to scholars, produce a "boomerang effect." These violations not only delegitimize state authority but also generate sympathy for terrorist groups, thereby fueling further attacks. This dynamic illustrates how policies that limit rights in times of crisis can backfire and worsen insecurity.

Comparatively, nations such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States enacted robust anti-terrorism laws following events like the September 11 attacks. Yet, while these countries have largely contained the threat, Nigeria's struggle with Boko Haram has persisted and escalated. The consequences have been devastating: widespread displacement, destruction of property and businesses, closure of economic activities, and a general decline in citizens' quality of life.

By 2013, Oyewole had already identified Boko Haram as both a national and international security threat, jeopardizing Nigeria and its foreign partners. More recently, Chibuike and Innocent (2019) concluded that Nigeria's counter-terrorism measures remain ineffective and require urgent reconsideration. The Nigerian experience thus demonstrates that without rights-based, evidence-driven approaches, governmental responses to terrorism risk intensifying the very insecurity they aim to resolve.

2.2 Evolution of Tactics

1980s–1990s Mass riots, machete attacks, crude firearms. Mostly sectarian violence with limited sophistication.

2000–2009 Targeted assassinations, hit-and-run raids, police station attacks. Boko Haram emerged as a structured group under Mohammed Yusuf.¹⁶

2009–2014 Suicide bombings, mass kidnappings (e.g., Chibok), IEDs, vehicle-borne explosives Nigerian terrorism became a global headline; increased urban attacks.¹⁷

2015–2018 Guerrilla warfare, occupation of territory, taxation of locals, propaganda videos ISWAP focused on controlling territory and winning local support.¹⁸

2019–present Drone surveillance (limited), complex ambushes, mass ransom kidnappings, cross-border operations into Niger, Chad, Cameroon. Shift towards funding through ransom, smuggling, and illicit trade.

2.3 Current Trends

Fragmentation of groups Boko Haram split into ISWAP and JAS factions, with different targeting strategies. Hybrid threats Bandits in the North-West, adopting terrorist tactics, blurring lines between organized crime and insurgency. Regionalization: Greater cross-border movement into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Use of social media for recruitment, propaganda, and psychological warfare.

Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Historically, Nigeria's response to insecurity and dissent has largely reflected a "stick and carrot" approach. Episodes such as the Civil War, the Maitatsine uprisings of the 1980s, and the Niger Delta militancy reveal how repression was frequently deployed as the primary solution to conflict. The Boko Haram insurgency followed a similar trajectory. Before the death of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, the state's handling of the crisis—characterised by arbitrary force and poor conflict management—drew widespread criticism. The 2009 crackdown, which culminated in Yusuf's death, further escalated the situation by transforming him into a martyr and strengthening the group's mobilisation.

Despite international support, Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts have yielded limited results. The United States alone contributes approximately US\$3 million annually in security assistance, alongside technical and logistical support. Domestically, Nigeria has significantly increased its security budget, yet this has not translated into effective counterinsurgency outcomes. Scholars and observers attribute these shortcomings to political, strategic, and

¹⁶ Akresh R, Lucchetti L, Thirumurthy H. Wars and child health: evidence from the Eritrean–Ethiopian conflict. *J Dev Econ.* 2012;99(2):330–40.

¹⁷ Galhena DH, Freed R, Maredia KM. Home gardens: a promising approach to enhance household food security and wellbeing. *Agriculture & Food Security.* 2014

¹⁸ Vlahov D, Galea S, Freudenberg N. The urban health "advantage." *J Urban Health.* 2005;82(1):1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jurban/jti001>.

tactical weaknesses. Politically, corruption persists, with legislators reportedly extorting military leaders under the guise of budget approvals (Onuoha, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2016). Strategically, military procurement processes remain opaque and plagued by mismanagement. At the tactical level, factors such as outdated equipment, poor welfare for soldiers, sabotage, and persistent human rights violations undermine operations (Amnesty International, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Alongside military efforts, successive administrations have experimented with dialogue and negotiation, albeit with mixed results. Under President Goodluck Jonathan, attempts were made in 2012 to negotiate through intermediaries such as Datti Ahmad, though without success. Similarly, Jonathan's assurances to rescue the abducted Chibok girls in 2014 were quickly contradicted by Boko Haram's video demands for a prisoner exchange. The Buhari administration has also pursued negotiations, resulting in the release of some abductees, including the Dapchi schoolgirls in 2018 and the Jangebe schoolgirls in 2021.

While negotiations may offer short-term relief, they raise significant dilemmas. Kaplan cautions that conceding to terrorists legitimises abduction as a bargaining tool. Critics, however, argue that from a tactical standpoint, prioritising the safety of hostages is a moral obligation, while strategically, outright refusal to negotiate risks provoking further violence and damaging the state's international reputation. Yet in practice, Nigeria's recurring resort to negotiation appears to have reinforced kidnapping as Boko Haram's preferred tactic, thereby validating Kaplan's concerns.

Despite the extensive literature on Nigeria's counterinsurgency, a critical gap remains: limited attention to community perspectives on interventions against Boko Haram. The following section outlines the methodology adopted to address this gap.

Achievements of the Strategies

Reclaiming territory from Boko Haram, Killing/capturing of key leaders, improved regional collaboration and deradicalization and reintegration of former fighters.

Military Offensives: Operations like Lafiya Dole and later Hadin Kai weakened Boko Haram's territorial control, reclaiming many towns in the Northeast.

Legal & Institutional Framework: The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 and the establishment of the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) provide a legal backbone for counter-terrorism.

Regional Cooperation: Nigeria collaborates with neighbors (Chad, Cameroon, Niger) through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which has disrupted cross-border insurgent activities.

De-radicalization Programs: Initiatives like Operation Safe Corridor aim to rehabilitate repentant fighters. Non-kinetic strategies in Nigeria have complemented military action by undermining extremist ideology, reducing recruitment, promoting defections, rebuilding trust with communities, and addressing socio-economic grievances. While challenges remain, such as

reintegration difficulties, local mistrust, and limited resources, these approaches have proven essential in achieving more sustainable counter-terrorism outcomes. Nigeria's counter-terrorism measures are partly effective; they have reduced insurgents' territorial dominance but have not eliminated terrorism or its root causes. For greater effectiveness, Nigeria needs to strengthen its intelligence, address governance failures, improve socioeconomic conditions, and ensure respect for human rights.

3. Challenges and Criticisms

Corruption and mismanagement of military funds. One of the major obstacles to effective counter-terrorism operations is the diversion and mismanagement of resources meant for security purposes. Corruption within the defense sector leads to the embezzlement of funds allocated for the procurement of weapons, training, welfare, and logistics. As a result, security forces are often ill-equipped, underpaid, and demoralized, which undermines their operational effectiveness.¹⁹

When funds are mismanaged, essential equipment such as armored vehicles, surveillance technology, and protective gear may not reach the troops on the frontline. This exposes them to greater risks and weakens their capacity to confront terrorist groups that are often better armed. Moreover, corruption erodes public trust in government and security institutions, making communities less willing to cooperate with security agencies in providing intelligence. Thus, corruption and mismanagement of military funds not only weaken the state's capacity to combat terrorism but also embolden terrorist groups who exploit the inefficiency of the armed forces. Strengthening accountability, transparency, and oversight in military financing is therefore crucial to the success of counter-terrorism strategies.²⁰

Human rights violations by security forces. Counter-terrorism strategies are most effective when they combine security measures with respect for the rule of law and human rights. However, in many states, security forces sometimes engage in practices that violate fundamental rights. These violations not only undermine justice but also fuel resentment, radicalization, and mistrust, thereby weakening counter-terrorism efforts.

Intelligence failures and internal sabotage. Counter-terrorism strategies rely heavily on timely intelligence, operational secrecy, and institutional trust. When intelligence fails or internal sabotage occurs, the effectiveness of such strategies is greatly undermined, giving terrorist groups room to operate, regroup, and strike.²¹ Lack

¹⁹ Oussama D. *Terrorism and International Law: Challenges and Responses*, pp. 147–154, *The Problem of Responding to Terrorism and International Law* Sanremo, 2002. PP. 43- 48

²⁰ Evans, O., & Kelikume, I. (2019). *The impact of poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption and poor governance on Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram terrorism and Fulani Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria*. *International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences*, 8(2).

²¹ Nnam, M. U., Ugwuoke, C. O., Njemanze, V. C., & Akwara, F. A. (2020). *Boko Haram terrorism and human security in Nigeria:*

of coordination between agencies. When multiple agencies operate independently without proper coordination, there is often overlapping work. This leads to inefficient use of resources, wasted time, and sometimes conflicting actions that reduce the overall effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures.

Example: Two security agencies might conduct separate intelligence gathering on the same terrorist group but fail to share information, delaying the ability to respond effectively.

Inadequate addressing of root causes (poverty, unemployment, education). Poverty creates desperation and vulnerability.²² Individuals living in extreme economic hardship may be more susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups that promise income, basic needs, or a sense of purpose. If anti-terror policies do not include economic empowerment programs, job creation, or social safety nets, they miss a crucial prevention layer. High unemployment, especially among youth, leads to idleness and frustration. Extremist organizations exploit this by offering both material benefits and a sense of belonging. Strategies that focus solely on military action without skills development, vocational training, or employment opportunities fail to reduce the pool of potential recruits. How it fuels terrorism. Lack of access to quality education limits critical thinking and awareness, making populations more vulnerable to radical ideologies. Poor education also reduces long-term employment opportunities, feeding the cycle of poverty and extremism. Counter-terrorism implication. Without educational reform, literacy programs, and awareness campaigns, counter-terrorism measures address only symptoms rather than root causes.

4. Public Perception and Civilian Involvement

The public perception of civilians regarding counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria is multifaceted, reflecting a complex interplay of support, scepticism, and concern. While some communities actively collaborate with security forces, others express disillusionment due to perceived inefficacies and human rights violations.²³

A systematic review of 21 studies indicates a significant disconnect between governmental counter-terrorism strategies and community perspectives. Many community members feel that their concerns and local contexts are overlooked in the design and implementation of these strategies. This misalignment has led to a lack of trust in government initiatives and a perception that these efforts are more about political gain than genuine security improvement.

Matters arising. Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 0(0), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2019.1710637>

²² Nnenna Ibeh (2015). "Boko Haram camps 'wiped out' – Nigerian military". Premium Times <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/political-expl>. Accessed 2nd May, 2024

²³ Ofongo, O. A. (2018). *Defence strategy: Intelligence and management of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria*. <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/xmlui/handle/1993/32912> Ojo,

In response to the Boko Haram insurgency, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was established in 2008 in Borno State. Comprising over 26,000 volunteers, the CJTF assists the military by providing intelligence and participating in operations. While some view the CJTF as a vital community-driven initiative, others criticize it for alleged human rights abuses, including extortion and violence against civilians.²⁴

Civilian casualties resulting from military operations have been a significant concern. For instance, the 2023 drone strike in Tudun Biri, Kaduna State, intended to target bandits, mistakenly killed at least 88 civilians. Such incidents have fueled skepticism about the military's ability to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, leading to calls for improved intelligence and accountability.²⁵ Some local initiatives aim to address the root causes of radicalization. In Kano State, for example, mass weddings have been organized to reduce unemployment and strengthen community ties, with the hope of deterring young men from joining extremist groups. While over 1,300 couples have married through this program, its long-term effectiveness in preventing terrorism remains uncertain.

5. Conclusion

Terrorism has posed a persistent threat to Nigeria's national security, economic stability, and social cohesion over the past two decades. From the deadly insurgency of Boko Haram in the northeast to growing threats from ISWAP and bandit groups in the northwest, the Nigerian government has been compelled to adopt a range of counter-terrorism strategies. These include military operations, legal frameworks, intelligence efforts, and regional cooperation. While some progress has been made, questions remain about the long-term effectiveness of these approaches. This article evaluates Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategies, highlighting key achievements, ongoing challenges, and potential improvements for a more secure and stable future.

Recommendations for Improvement

Strengthening inter-agency coordination. Adopt a single national counter-terrorism strategy that defines roles, priorities, and metrics across agencies (police, intelligence, military, immigration, justice, finance, local government, social services). Create a senior coordinating body (e.g., National CT Council) chaired at a sufficiently high level (minister/PM) with statutory authority to allocate resources and resolve disputes.

Investing in education and economic empowerment. Terrorism often thrives in environments where poverty, unemployment, and lack of education create frustration, social exclusion, and susceptibility to extremist ideologies. Beyond military and

²⁴ Obarisiagbon, B. E. I., & Akintoye, E. O. (2019). *Insecurity crisis in Nigeria: The law enforcement agents a panacea*. *Journal of Sociology, 7(1), 44-51*.

²⁵ Ujomu, Philip Ogo. *National security, social order and the quest for human dignity in Nigeria: Some ethical considerations*. *Nordic Journal of African Studies, Vol. 10 (2004) pp. 245–264*



intelligence strategies, addressing the root causes of terrorism through socio-economic investment is a sustainable approach.

Ensuring accountability in security operations. Counter-terrorism operations are critical for safeguarding national security, but they often involve extraordinary powers that can affect human rights, the rule of law, and civilian trust. Ensuring accountability means creating mechanisms that make security agencies answerable for their actions, while balancing effectiveness and respect for fundamental rights.

Enhancing technology-based surveillance. Identifying suspicious activities before they escalate into attacks. Intelligence Gathering: Tracking movements, communications, and financial transactions of suspected groups. Monitoring active terror situations for coordinated interventions. The presence of advanced surveillance systems discourages terrorist planning.

Supporting victims and IDPs (internally displaced persons). Terrorism often leaves behind a trail of human suffering, particularly for direct victims and internally displaced persons (IDPs). While counter-terrorism is often associated with military, legal, and intelligence measures, addressing the needs of victims and IDPs can play a vital role in preventing radicalization, fostering resilience, and building sustainable peace.

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