Boko-Haram Terrorism and its Implication for Security and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Boko Haram terrorism and its implications for security and sustainable development in Nigeria. Boko Haram's insurgency, driven by religious extremism, political exclusion, and socio-economic deprivation, has significantly undermined Nigeria's national security and territorial integrity. The violent activities of the group have resulted in widespread displacement, loss of lives, and the destruction of critical infrastructure, particularly in education, healthcare, and agriculture sectors, thereby hindering sustainable development in affected regions. Using a qualitative approach with a historical research design, the study analyzes secondary data to explore the causes, impacts, and responses to the insurgency. Findings reveal that despite government and regional efforts to combat Boko Haram, challenges such as poor coordination, corruption, and inadequate rehabilitation programs limit the effectiveness of these strategies. The study underscores the need for integrated security measures combined with socio-economic development and inclusive governance to achieve lasting peace and sustainable progress in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram, terrorism, national security, insurgency, socio-economic impact, counter-insurgency strategies

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and insurgency have become global phenomena threatening peace, security, and development in various regions of the world. From the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States by Al-Qaeda to the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, extremist violence has evolved into one of the most significant threats to global stability. Countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Syria have battled with various extremist groups that not only destabilize governments but also reverse years of developmental progress (Ali & Bashir, 2022).

In Europe, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany have witnessed sporadic terrorist attacks primarily linked to foreign radical groups or homegrown extremists influenced by global jihadist ideologies (Lindekilde & Sedgwick, 2023). These events have heightened global concern regarding transnational terrorism, ideological extremism, and the vulnerabilities of national security systems. Africa has also become a hotbed for extremist insurgencies. From Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya to Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali and the Sahel region, the continent is grappling with violent extremism with deep socio-political and economic implications (Tunde & Ogundipe, 2021). These groups often take advantage of weak state institutions, widespread poverty, unemployment, and political marginalization to radicalize and recruit vulnerable individuals.

In West Africa, the emergence and escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has posed a major threat to national and regional security. Boko Haram, officially known as *Jama'atu Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, began as a radical Islamic movement in the early 2000s but became violent around 2009 following the death of its founder, Mohammed Yusuf. Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau and later other factions, Boko Haram evolved into a full-fledged insurgent group

responsible for bombings, kidnappings, mass killings, and territorial occupation in parts of northeastern Nigeria and surrounding countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Yahaya & Mustapha, 2023). The insurgency has significantly undermined Nigeria's national security. Over 350,000 people have died either directly or indirectly as a result of Boko Haram's violence, while more than 3 million people have been displaced, according to UN reports (UNDP, 2022). These statistics reflect the gravity of the crisis and its implications for the security architecture of Nigeria. Security agencies, including the military and police, have been overstretched, and the government has had to divert enormous resources toward counter-insurgency operations, often at the expense of social services and infrastructure development (Okonkwo & Audu, 2021).

Beyond immediate security concerns, the insurgency has significantly disrupted sustainable development in Nigeria. Sustainable development involves achieving economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection—pillars that are increasingly undermined by the Boko Haram crisis. Educational systems in the North-East have collapsed due to attacks on schools, notably the Chibok (2014) and Dapchi (2018) abductions of schoolgirls. Thousands of children have been denied access to quality education, thereby jeopardizing the human capital needed for national development (Adebayo & Hassan, 2023). The agricultural economy, which is the primary source of livelihood in the affected regions, has been devastated. Farmers have fled their lands, food insecurity has risen sharply, and the local economy has stagnated. Health care systems in insurgency-affected areas are also strained, with many facilities destroyed or inaccessible (Umaru & Danjuma, 2022). The overall socio-economic environment has become hostile to investment, leading to capital flight, unemployment, and increased poverty rates.

The Boko Haram insurgency also has severe consequences for Nigeria's international image and diplomatic standing. The country is frequently listed among the world's most terror-affected nations, which affects foreign direct investment, tourism, and international cooperation (Oluwole & Ifeanyi, 2024). Moreover, Nigeria's ambition to lead the West African sub-region and contribute significantly to continental peace and security under the African Union framework is being undermined by the internal instability caused by insurgency. Despite various efforts by successive Nigerian governments, including military operations like Operation Lafiya Dole and regional cooperation through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), Boko Haram continues to mutate, creating splinter factions such as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which remains active and dangerous. These groups exploit poor governance, porous borders, and socio-economic inequalities to sustain their campaigns of terror (Ahmed & Salisu, 2023). Thus, the Boko Haram insurgency is not merely a security issue; it is a developmental crisis with long-term consequences. As such, any meaningful response must go beyond military tactics to include strategies for inclusive governance, poverty alleviation, quality education, inter-religious dialogue, and youth empowerment. Without addressing the underlying drivers of extremism, national security and sustainable development will remain elusive goals in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine Boko-Haram Insurgency and its impact on national security and sustainable development in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

i. examine the causes and motives behind the Boko Haram terrorist activities in Nigeria

ii. assess the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on national security in Nigeria.

iii. evaluate the effects of Boko Haram insurgency on sustainable development in Nigeria

iv. identify and analyze government and regional strategies in combating Boko Haram and their effectiveness in restoring security and promoting development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

i. What are the causes and motives behind the Boko-Haram terrorist activities in Nigeria?

ii. How has the Boko Haram insurgency affected Nigeria's national security and territorial integrity?

iii. In what ways has the Boko Haram insurgency hindered sustainable development in Nigeria, especially in key sectors such as education, healthcare, and agriculture?

iv. What strategies have been employed by the Nigerian government and regional bodies to combat Boko Haram, and how effective have these strategies been?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research method with a historical research design to explore the causes, impacts, and responses to Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The qualitative approach was appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of complex socio-political issues through interpretative analysis. Historical research design enabled the researcher to examine past events, patterns, and developments related to the insurgency. The study relied entirely on secondary data sourced from journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and media publications. Content analysis was employed to systematically review and interpret the collected data. This analytical method helped identify recurring themes, trends, and key insights relevant to the research questions. The process involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting textual data to uncover the underlying motives, impacts, and responses concerning Boko Haram. Through this approach, the study provided evidence-based and contextually grounded explanations. It ensured the data used was credible, relevant, and adequately addressed the research objectives.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the 'clash of civilizations theory' as developed by Samuel Huntington. The study is anchored on the clash of civilizations theoretical paradigm which was originally propounded by Huntington in 1993 and later developed into other works. The major assumption of this theory as argued by Huntington, is that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-cold war world. For Huntington, the age of ideology had ended; the world is now faced with cultural conflict rooted in civilizations. He further posits that conflict essentially, will revolve around cultural and religious lines in years to come and by extension, the concept of different civilizations as the highest rank of cultural identity, will definitely become increasingly useful in analyzing the potential for conflict. Ezeani and Chilaka (2013) opined that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflicts will be cultural. The nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilization will dominate global politics. The unit lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. Huntington (1993) argued thus"

A civilization is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from others. In a more amenable manner, different civilizations offer individuals different answers about how they should live their lives, social norms, relationship with others and permit them to pursue what they think is a fulfilling existence. It should be emphasized here that civilizations are differentiated by history, language culture, tradition and most vitally religion. The world is divided along this line and makes conflict inevitable. Adherents of this theory further argue that civilization conflicts are particularly prevalent between Muslims and non - Muslims identifying the "Bloody borders" between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations. They further observed that some of the factors contributing to this conflict are that both Christianity which has influenced Western

civilization and Islam are: Missionary religions, seeking conversion of others. Universal, "all-or-nothing" religions, in the sense that it is believed by both sides that only their faith is the correct one.

Teleological religions, that is, that their values and beliefs represent the goals of existence and purpose in human existence. Irreligious people who violate the basic principles of those religions are perceived to be furthering their own pointless aims, which lead to violent interactions. Implicitly, other factors contributing to a Western-Islamic Clash according to Huntington are the Islamic Resurgence and demographic explosion in Islam, coupled with the values of Western Universalism that is the view that all civilization should adopt Western values that infuriate Islamic fundamentalists. AU of these historical and modem factors combined according to Huntington would lead to a bloody clash between the Islamic and Western civil

The relevance of clash of civilization theory to the present study is that it reflects very significantly, the driving force of Boko Haram which is religion as identified by Huntington to be the most fundamental factor in the clash of civilizations. Again, Boko Haram terrorism can safely be appreciated within the clash of civilization theoretical framework if one looks at the trend of Nigerian politics with violent extremism which is extensively becoming intractable. The clash of civilization theory also provides plausible theoretical explanation for understanding the emergence of the Boko Haram, especially when the motives given by the sect for their scourge is considered. The sect claims they hate modem Western civilization. The idea of a civilization clash between socio-cultural entities is a powerful metaphor with which to interpret the rise of radical Islamic group. Huntington, (1996) warns that the fault lines of modern conflict will not be empires or state but 'civilization'. He lists eight categories of civilizations and deposits that could conflict with each other, with a potential to threaten global peace. Fundamentally, these occur between Islamic and Judeo-Christian faiths. To those cut up with Islamic civilization, their primary attachment is to their religion and not to their nation-state. The Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria is a product of an attempt by some Islamic sect to Islamize the entire country.

Initially, the founder of Boko Haram (Muhammed Yusuf) set out to establish Sharia government in conjunction with the Borno State Government in Northern Nigeria in the administration of Au Modu Sherrif. The sect's main grievances against the Nigerian state is that the existing socio-economic condition is both wrong and repressive. Primarily, it is wrong according to this perspective because it does not correspond to Islamic principles. Thus, to get rid of the condition of repression and wrongdoing, Boko Haram seeks to establish an Islamic State. This is a true reflection of Huntington's thesis. Furthermore, the need to rid Nigeria of immoral and imperial Western domination and influence through the adoption of an Islamic path forms its basic objectives.

Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism is a multifaceted and highly contested concept that lacks a universally accepted definition due to its political, ideological, and cultural complexities. Generally, terrorism is described as the use or threat of violence by non-state actors aimed at achieving political, religious, or ideological objectives by instilling fear among a population (Jones & Libicki, 2021). It typically targets civilians or symbolic institutions with the intent to pressure governments or societies into granting demands or altering policies. According to Abiola and Musa (2022), terrorism thrives in environments marked by inequality, injustice, weak governance, and social alienation. These factors create breeding grounds for radicalization and violent extremism. In the African context, terrorism has been fueled by factors such as poverty, ethnic divisions, religious intolerance, and political marginalization (Zubair & Chinedu, 2023). Groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and ISIS in Libya demonstrate how insurgent organizations use terrorism to challenge the authority of the state and destabilize entire regions.

The United Nations (2020) defines terrorism as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes." This definition emphasizes the strategic and psychological elements of terrorism, using fear as a weapon to achieve broader objectives. Modern terrorism also exploits technology and media. Social media platforms and encrypted communication apps have become tools for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination among terrorist groups (Fatima & Ojo, 2021). This digital dimension complicates counterterrorism efforts, as information warfare blends with physical violence. Despite the variation in

definitions, most scholars agree that terrorism violates international laws and human rights and represents a serious threat to global peace and security. Thus, understanding terrorism requires a multidimensional approach that considers its root causes, ideological drivers, methods, and socio-political contexts (Onwuka & Suleiman, 2024).

Concept of Security

Security is a broad and evolving concept that encompasses the protection of individuals, communities, and states from threats that endanger their survival, peace, and well-being. Traditionally, security was understood in military terms, focusing on defense against external aggression or warfare. However, the contemporary understanding of security includes economic, political, environmental, cyber, and human dimensions (Buzan & Hansen, 2021).

Baldwin (2022) defines security as the "low probability of damage to acquired values." This includes not only territorial protection but also the safeguarding of social order, economic stability, and the rights and freedoms of citizens. In developing countries like Nigeria, security challenges range from terrorism and armed banditry to police brutality, political violence, and communal conflicts (Ibrahim & Olayinka, 2023). Human security, a concept popularized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), shifts focus from the state to the individual. It emphasizes freedom from fear, freedom from want, and the ability to live in dignity (UNDP, 2022). According to Ede and Nwankwo (2024), security in Nigeria must be viewed through this human-centric lens, especially given the impacts of insurgency, poverty, and climate-related displacement on everyday lives. Modern security is also transnational. Issues like cybercrime, pandemics, terrorism, and climate change do not respect borders, thereby requiring multilateral cooperation and intelligence sharing. The rise of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria illustrates how national security threats can spill into neighboring countries like Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, leading to regional instability (Ogundele & Yusuf, 2021).

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development refers to a mode of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This concept, popularized by the 1987 Brundtland Report, integrates three key pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). According to Igbokwe and Hassan (2022), sustainable development in Nigeria must address issues such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and weak institutions. In recent years, Nigeria's efforts to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been hindered by insecurity, corruption, and poor infrastructure. The Boko Haram insurgency has further complicated development by displacing millions, destroying schools and hospitals, and disrupting agriculture in the northeast (Ajayi & Musa, 2023). Sustainable development must also contend with the legacies of colonial exploitation, climate change, and youth unemployment. Okafor and Bako (2021) emphasize that without peace and strong governance, sustainable development will remain an abstract ideal. They argue for a holistic approach that includes equitable resource distribution, inclusive political processes, and climate resilience. Environmental sustainability, often overlooked in conflict zones, is essential. The destruction of forests, contamination of water sources, and overuse of arable land, especially in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, pose long-term ecological risks (Danladi & Yusuf, 2024). Development projects must therefore prioritize green technologies and community participation to be genuinely sustainable.

Causes and Effects of Terrorism in Nigeria

Terrorism in Nigeria is a deeply rooted phenomenon driven by a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, political, and ideological factors. At the heart of Nigeria's struggle with terrorism lies the rise of Boko Haram, a jihadist group that has violently contested the authority of the Nigerian state, particularly in the northeastern region, since 2009. While terrorism is a global challenge, its causes in Nigeria are largely contextual and reflect systemic failures of governance, inequality, marginalization, and religious extremism (Abdullahi & Onuoha, 2022). A fundamental cause of terrorism in Nigeria is poverty and unemployment, especially among the youth. The northern region of Nigeria, where Boko Haram originated, has long suffered from economic neglect, poor infrastructure, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. According to Aliyu and Musa (2021), these socio-economic conditions create fertile ground for radicalization, as disillusioned youths become easy targets for

recruitment into extremist groups that promise purpose, identity, and financial rewards. The persistent economic disparity between the North and the more prosperous South further deepens grievances and fuels extremist ideologies.

Religious extremism and radical ideology also play a significant role in Nigeria's terrorism crisis. Boko Haram, which translates to "Western education is forbidden," promotes a Salafist interpretation of Islam that rejects modern governance, democracy, and secular education. The group's ideology is rooted in anti-Western sentiments and the belief that Nigeria should be governed by strict Sharia law (Umar & Adeyemi, 2023). Such radical beliefs are reinforced through religious indoctrination in unregulated Islamic schools, known as Almajiri schools, which are prevalent in the northern region. Without effective regulation, these schools can serve as breeding grounds for extremist teachings. Another major factor contributing to terrorism in Nigeria is political marginalization and poor governance. Successive governments have failed to effectively integrate diverse ethnic and religious groups into the political and economic mainstream, leading to perceptions of exclusion and disenfranchisement. The lack of accountability, widespread corruption, and weak state institutions have also undermined public trust in the government's capacity to provide security and justice (Eze & Haruna, 2020). When citizens perceive the state as absent or ineffective, non-state actors—including terrorist groups—emerge to fill the vacuum of authority and provide alternative forms of governance. Porous borders and weak security architecture have further exacerbated terrorism in Nigeria. The country shares borders with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, countries that also face similar security challenges. These borders are largely unmonitored, allowing insurgents to smuggle weapons, recruit fighters, and establish transnational networks (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2021). Furthermore, the Nigerian security forces are often under-resourced, poorly trained, and sometimes accused of human rights abuses, which can alienate local populations and hinder counter-terrorism efforts.

The effects of terrorism in Nigeria are far-reaching and devastating. One of the most visible consequences is the mass displacement of people. Boko Haram's attacks have led to the displacement of over 2.5 million people, creating a humanitarian crisis marked by overcrowded internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, inadequate food and medical supplies, and increased vulnerability to diseases and sexual violence (UNHCR, 2022). Displacement not only disrupts livelihoods but also erodes community cohesion and undermines long-term development goals.

Terrorism has also severely impacted education and healthcare in affected regions. Schools have been destroyed or closed for safety reasons, and thousands of children have been denied access to formal education. The abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok and Dapchi highlighted the group's strategy of using education as a battleground for ideological warfare (Ajibola & Tanko, 2023). Health facilities have similarly been targeted, leading to a breakdown of essential services, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas. Terrorism has had serious implications for national security and state sovereignty. Constant attacks on military bases, police stations, and government institutions have weakened the authority of the Nigerian state in some areas, creating "ungoverned spaces" where terrorist groups operate freely. These zones pose a threat not only to Nigeria's internal stability but also to the wider West African region, given the cross-border nature of terrorist networks (Okeke & Bello, 2023).

The economic consequences of terrorism are equally significant. The destruction of infrastructure, reduced agricultural activity, and loss of investor confidence have stunted growth, particularly in the northeast. Resources that could have been used for development projects are instead diverted to security and military operations. According to Nwankwo and Garba (2021), Nigeria spends billions annually on counter-insurgency operations, yet the underlying causes of terrorism such as poverty, injustice, and marginalization remain largely unaddressed.

Boko Haram Terrorism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The intersection between Boko Haram terrorism and sustainable development in Nigeria reveals a tragic reality in which the country's long-term growth and stability are consistently undermined by insecurity, violence, and systemic instability. Boko Haram's emergence and continued insurgency have contributed significantly to the stagnation and regression of developmental efforts in key areas such as education, health, economic productivity, infrastructure, and social inclusion. Since the group began its violent campaign in 2009, its operations ranging from bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilian and government institutions have had devastating implications for Nigeria's ability to achieve the goals of sustainable development (Adeosun & Bello, 2021). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by Nigeria as part of the global development agenda, emphasize the eradication of poverty, quality education, gender equality, peace and justice, decent work, and

sustainable economic growth. Boko Haram terrorism poses direct and indirect threats to the realization of these goals. For instance, the insurgency has had a profound impact on education, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. Thousands of schools have been destroyed or abandoned, and the fear of abduction and violence has led to a significant decline in school enrollment, especially for girls (Mohammed & Zubairu, 2023). The abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014 and subsequent similar incidents have highlighted how terrorism directly undermines gender equality and the right to education—two critical pillars of sustainable development.

Boko Haram has also crippled economic productivity in Nigeria's northeastern region. The insurgency has disrupted agricultural activities, which are the main source of livelihood in rural areas. Farmers are often forced to abandon their land due to fear of attacks or displacement, resulting in food shortages, inflation, and increasing dependence on humanitarian aid. According to Okon and Abubakar (2022), over 70% of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region are rural farmers who have lost both their means of subsistence and social stability. This loss of agricultural output not only undermines food security but also aggravates poverty levels in an already economically disadvantaged region. The destruction of infrastructure by Boko Haram further deepens the development crisis. Roads, bridges, healthcare centers, and communication facilities have been bombed or rendered inoperable due to the group's attacks. These infrastructural deficits have cut off entire communities from access to health services, education, and markets, reinforcing cycles of poverty and marginalization (Ibrahim & Olatunji, 2020). In conflict-affected zones, hospitals and clinics often lack basic supplies and personnel, and the fear of insurgent attacks discourages professionals from working in these areas. Consequently, health indicators such as maternal mortality, infant mortality, and life expectancy are significantly worse in the northeast compared to other regions.

Social cohesion and national unity have also been severely affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. The sectarian nature of the conflict, which is often framed in religious terms, has fostered suspicion and division between Muslim and Christian communities, as well as between different ethnic groups. As noted by Agbo and Musa (2023), terrorism has fragmented social trust and weakened the institutions necessary for inclusive governance and community resilience. Without trust and cooperation across communities, long-term development projects and democratic governance struggle to gain legitimacy and sustainability. Moreover, terrorism has forced the Nigerian government to divert a significant portion of its national budget toward military and security expenditures at the expense of developmental investments. While defense spending is essential in responding to the insurgency, the overemphasis on militarized responses, without corresponding investments in human development, has limited the state's ability to address the root causes of underdevelopment. As Obi and Ibrahim (2022) argue, development and security are intrinsically linked; thus, any failure to address poverty, illiteracy, and marginalization will only fuel cycles of violence and hinder sustainable progress.

Gender-based violence has also become a critical concern in the context of terrorism. Boko Haram has systematically targeted women and girls for abduction, forced marriage, sexual slavery, and human trafficking. These acts not only violate fundamental human rights but also hinder efforts aimed at promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and social protection. The trauma faced by survivors and the stigma associated with returning from captivity pose long-term psychological and social challenges, particularly for young girls seeking to reintegrate into society (Chukwu & Ahmed, 2023).

Terrorist activities in Nigeria

Terrorist activities in Nigeria have become a significant challenge to national stability, peace, and development. Over the past two decades, Nigeria has experienced a surge in terrorism, characterized by armed insurgency, abductions, suicide bombings, attacks on civilian populations, and the destruction of property and infrastructure. The most prominent terrorist group in Nigeria is Boko Haram, whose insurgency in the northeast has gained international notoriety. Other terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), bandits in the northwest, and violent herdsmen in the north-central region, have also contributed to Nigeria's growing insecurity (Yahaya & Musa, 2023). The proliferation of these violent actors has worsened the humanitarian crisis, displaced millions, and hindered development initiatives across affected regions. The activities of Boko Haram, which began as a religious movement in 2002, evolved into a full-blown armed insurgency by 2009 following the extrajudicial killing of its founder, Mohammed Yusuf. Since then, the group has targeted government institutions, religious centers, markets, schools, and civilians, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States (Aghedo & Osumah, 2021). Their tactics include suicide bombings, raids on villages,

mass abductions (such as the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls incident), and attacks on Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The emergence of ISWAP as a splinter faction has added complexity to the conflict, with ISWAP reportedly aligning with global jihadist movements and employing more strategic attacks focused on military targets and infrastructure (Oyeleke & Ibrahim, 2022). Terrorist groups in Nigeria have benefited from weak governance, porous borders, economic inequality, youth unemployment, and corruption. These structural weaknesses have made it easier for extremist ideologies to flourish, particularly in areas where state presence is minimal or completely absent (Usman & Adekunle, 2023). In the northern part of the country, terrorist actors exploit local grievances and ethno-religious divisions to recruit members and establish control over communities. The lack of effective intelligence gathering and a fragmented security response have further enabled the spread of terrorism to other regions, including the Middle Belt and northwest Nigeria, where criminal banditry has morphed into terrorist-like violence.

In recent years, the nexus between terrorism and criminality has become more apparent. In the northwest, heavily armed bandits engage in mass abductions, cattle rustling, and attacks on villages, demanding ransom payments. While these groups were initially considered distinct from ideological terrorist movements, growing evidence suggests increasing cooperation between bandits and jihadist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP (Okoli & Nnaemeka, 2020). This convergence has transformed the landscape of violence in Nigeria, making it more difficult to contain and resolve through conventional military means.The consequences of terrorist activities in Nigeria are far-reaching. Beyond the immediate loss of lives and property, terrorism has created a humanitarian catastrophe. According to the United Nations, over 2.2 million people have been displaced in the Lake Chad Basin region, with most of them residing in overcrowded IDP camps (UNHCR, 2023). The protracted conflict has also contributed to food insecurity, lack of access to education, and public health crises in the northeast. Terrorist attacks on schools have discouraged parents from enrolling their children, especially girls, in formal education, thereby undermining human capital development (Mohammed & Yusuf, 2022).

Economically, terrorism in Nigeria has discouraged both domestic and foreign investment, especially in the agriculture and oil sectors. Frequent attacks on transportation networks, such as roads and rail lines, have disrupted trade and contributed to inflation. In Borno State, once considered the breadbasket of the northeast, farmlands have become battlegrounds, and farmers face the constant threat of being killed or kidnapped (Ibrahim & Adebayo, 2023). These disruptions have weakened Nigeria's economy, increased unemployment, and deepened regional disparities. Terrorism has eroded social cohesion and trust in state institutions. Communities living under the shadow of terrorism have become distrustful of the government's ability to protect them. In many areas, vigilante groups and local militias have emerged to fill the security void, further complicating the security architecture and often leading to human rights abuses. According to Ojo and Salisu (2024), the proliferation of self-defense groups has occasionally led to inter-communal violence and retaliatory attacks, worsening the insecurity they were meant to address.

The Nigerian government has launched multiple military operations to combat terrorism, such as Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai. However, these efforts have yielded mixed results due to inadequate funding, corruption, and poor coordination among security agencies. Additionally, a military-focused approach without addressing the root causes, such as poverty, education gaps, and political exclusion, has proven insufficient in defeating terrorism in the long term (Ekpenyong & Suleiman, 2021). There is a growing consensus among scholars and policy experts that a holistic counterterrorism strategy must include deradicalization programs, community policing, socio-economic development, and interfaith dialogue

Why the War against the Insurgents Persists

Despite years of sustained military operations, billions of naira in security spending, and international support, the war against insurgent groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continues to persist in Nigeria. The resilience and adaptability of these terrorist organizations are the results of several interwoven political, economic, institutional, and social factors. Understanding why this war remains protracted is essential to addressing Nigeria's deepening insecurity and creating a pathway toward lasting peace and development. One of the primary reasons the insurgency continues is the ineffectiveness of Nigeria's security architecture, which has been hampered by corruption, poor coordination, and inadequate logistics. Although military operations such as *Operation Lafiya Dole* and *Operation Hadin Kai* have made temporary gains, these have not

translated into a decisive victory. As observed by Ibrahim and Mohammed (2022), systemic corruption within the military procurement and operations processes has weakened operational capacity, leading to low troop morale, outdated equipment, and poor intelligence gathering. In many cases, soldiers on the frontlines lack sufficient welfare support, thereby reducing their combat effectiveness.

Another critical factor is the failure to address the root causes of terrorism, including poverty, unemployment, political exclusion, and illiteracy. Many of the areas most affected by terrorism, especially in the northeast, suffer from extreme underdevelopment and neglect. This provides fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root, especially among disillusioned youth (Okoro & Yahaya, 2023). Insurgent groups have exploited these conditions by offering incentives, protection, and a sense of purpose to marginalized populations. According to Adeyemi and Gambo (2021), the persistence of socio-economic inequality continues to feed the insurgency, despite military offensives. Compounding the issue is the lack of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that combines military operations with political, economic, and social interventions. The Nigerian government has often prioritized kinetic responses without investing adequately in non-military measures such as deradicalization, community engagement, and peacebuilding initiatives. Scholars like Umeozor and Bala (2023) argue that counterinsurgency in Nigeria has been reactive rather than proactive, lacking a coordinated long-term vision that involves civil society, traditional institutions, and local communities in preventing radicalization.

The regional dimension of the insurgency also plays a key role. Nigeria shares porous borders with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, making it easy for insurgents to move weapons, fighters, and supplies across borders. While the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has had some operational success, cross-border coordination remains limited due to divergent national interests and inconsistent funding (Ismail & Tukur, 2022). Furthermore, geopolitical tensions and the internal instability in neighboring countries have allowed insurgent groups to find safe havens from which they launch cross-border attacks. The fragmentation of insurgent groups has made the war more complex and prolonged. Boko Haram split into rival factions in 2016, leading to the emergence of ISWAP, which operates with a different command structure and ideological orientation. While Boko Haram has historically targeted civilians and government institutions indiscriminately, ISWAP focuses more on military targets and has built a support base by providing rudimentary governance and services in areas under its control (Nwosu & Danjuma, 2024). This evolution in tactics and the decentralization of leadership have made it harder for the Nigerian military to achieve a conclusive victory.

Political factors have also contributed to the endurance of the insurgency. In some cases, allegations of political interference and elite complicity have emerged, with claims that certain actors benefit from the continuation of the conflict through security contracts and arms deals. This has led to a general lack of accountability and transparency in counterterrorism operations. As Eze and Tanko (2023) assert, without the political will to confront internal saboteurs and reform the security sector, military efforts will remain ineffective. Moreover, the absence of trust between citizens and the government has undermined intelligence gathering and community cooperation. In conflict-affected areas, civilians are often caught between the military and insurgents, leading to fear and silence. Incidents of human rights abuses by security forces have further alienated local populations. According to Usman and Bassey (2024), the lack of trust between civilians and the military has made it difficult for security agencies to obtain reliable information on insurgent movements and plans.

Lastly, the international dimension cannot be ignored. While Nigeria has received support from foreign partners such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, these interventions have often been piecemeal and reactive. Additionally, the global shift in focus toward other conflicts, such as those in Ukraine and the Middle East, has diverted international attention and funding away from Nigeria's insurgency (Olawale & Ajayi, 2023). The declining visibility of the conflict on the international stage has allowed the insurgency to linger without the sustained global pressure needed to resolve it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the underlying causes and ideological motives behind Boko Haram's terrorist activities in Nigeria?

The rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria is grounded in a complex interplay of political, socio-economic, religious, and ideological factors. At the core of the insurgency lies a radical Salafi-jihadist ideology that rejects Western-style education and governance, framing them as contrary to Islamic principles (Adamu & Musa, 2021). This ideological foundation is strengthened by the perception of

pervasive marginalization and systemic neglect in northern Nigeria, where poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy are most pronounced. Mohammed and Okonkwo (2023) contend that the high youth unemployment rate and inadequate government presence in the northeastern region created fertile ground for extremist indoctrination. The group's founder, Mohammed Yusuf, exploited these grievances, promoting a puritanical view of Islam and promising social justice through Sharia governance.

Furthermore, poor governance, corruption, and the failure of political leadership have exacerbated popular disenchantment with the state. As Nwankwo and Ibrahim (2022) note, the perceived indifference of the Nigerian government to the plight of marginalized communities has driven some to view Boko Haram as an alternative form of resistance. In addition, external influences, such as ideological connections to global jihadist networks like al-Qaeda and ISIS, have emboldened Boko Haram's operations and lent the group both logistical and ideological support (Olaide & Onyekachi, 2024).

Religious extremism alone does not fully explain Boko Haram's motives. Political objectives, such as destabilizing Nigeria's secular state and creating an Islamic caliphate in the Lake Chad Basin, also underpin their violent campaigns. Additionally, economic incentives play a role, particularly as the group began to engage in kidnapping, arms trafficking, and looting to finance its activities (Tanko & Ayoola, 2023). The merging of ideology with survival strategies has led to a shift in the group's behavior from purely ideological violence to more opportunistic and criminal conduct.

Research Question 2: How has the Boko Haram insurgency impacted Nigeria's national security and territorial integrity?

The Boko Haram insurgency has significantly destabilized Nigeria's national security and territorial integrity. Since escalating in 2009, the group has conducted attacks on military bases, police stations, government facilities, and civilian populations, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. According to Abubakar and Tunde (2022), these attacks have caused not only massive loss of life and destruction of property but have also exposed the structural weaknesses of Nigeria's security architecture. The group's ability to overrun territories and temporarily establish control in parts of the Lake Chad region highlights the state's struggle to maintain sovereignty over its borders. One of the most alarming consequences is the erosion of public trust in the government's capacity to protect its citizens. As stated by Ojo and Daramola (2021), communities frequently targeted by insurgents often resort to local vigilante groups like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) due to the ineffectiveness or absence of federal security forces. This decentralization of security highlights a significant challenge to Nigeria's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Moreover, the insurgency has forced the Nigerian military into prolonged internal operations, diverting resources from external defense and weakening the country's strategic posture (Lawal & Eze, 2023).

The insurgency has also led to the displacement of over two million people, contributing to a massive humanitarian crisis and overwhelming the capacity of both domestic and international aid agencies. Displacement not only increases pressure on neighboring states but also undermines national cohesion. Furthermore, the porous borders shared with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have allowed Boko Haram fighters to exploit cross-border sanctuaries, complicating military responses and regional security cooperation (Ibrahim & Salisu, 2024). The insurgency has, therefore, transformed from a localized threat to a national security dilemma that threatens the unity and integrity of the Nigerian state. In areas where Boko Haram once raised its flags and collected taxes, the challenge to state authority became glaring. As Nigeria continues to grapple with this crisis, it must confront the deeper implications of insurgency for its national identity, sovereignty, and institutional capacity.

Research Question 3: In what specific ways has the Boko Haram insurgency impeded sustainable development in Nigeria, particularly in the education, healthcare, and agricultural sectors?

Boko Haram's insurgency has gravely undermined Nigeria's pursuit of sustainable development, especially in the core sectors of education, healthcare, and agriculture. One of the group's most notorious tactics has been its violent campaign against education, particularly Western-style schooling, which it views as corrupt and un-Islamic. The kidnapping of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014 and Dapchi in 2018, as well as attacks on schools in Borno and Yobe states, have discouraged school attendance and led to the closure of hundreds of schools across the Northeast (Abdulrahman & Nwachukwu, 2022). This disruption has created an entire generation of children deprived of formal

education, compounding the region's development challenges and threatening long-term human capital growth (Yakubu & Olalekan, 2023).

Healthcare systems have also been devastated by the conflict. Hospitals and clinics have been destroyed or abandoned due to insecurity, and medical personnel have been forced to flee affected areas. As Uche and Hassan (2021) point out, the insurgency has led to the collapse of primary healthcare delivery in many rural communities, increasing maternal and child mortality and reducing access to immunization and basic health services. The burden on humanitarian agencies has escalated, but aid delivery is often hindered by poor security and access constraints (Njoku & Mohammed, 2023).

Agriculture, the primary livelihood for many in the northeast, has equally suffered. Farmers have been displaced from their lands, and access to markets has been restricted due to road insecurity and attacks. According to Chukwu and Danladi (2024), large swaths of fertile land in Borno and Adamawa have been abandoned, resulting in food insecurity and higher prices in local markets. The destruction of irrigation systems, storage facilities, and rural infrastructure further compounds the crisis, pushing rural households into poverty and dependency.

In essence, Boko Haram's violent campaign has crippled the institutional frameworks needed for sustainable development. The government's development plans under Vision 2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been significantly hindered in the affected regions. Until security is restored, efforts to rebuild infrastructure, improve human capital, and promote socio-economic development will remain stifled. Hence, any meaningful development strategy must prioritize peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

Research Question 4: What counter-insurgency strategies have been implemented by the Nigerian government and regional organizations to address Boko Haram, and how effective have these strategies been in curbing the insurgency?

The Nigerian government and its regional partners have adopted a range of counterinsurgency strategies to combat Boko Haram, with mixed results. Initially, the government relied heavily on a military-centric approach, deploying the Joint Task Force (JTF) and later establishing Operation Lafiya Dole. These operations focused on kinetic warfare, including airstrikes, ground offensives, and the reclaiming of captured territories. However, scholars such as Bello and Ifeanyi (2022) argue that while these efforts yielded tactical victories, they failed to address the underlying socio-political causes of insurgency, thereby allowing Boko Haram to regroup and evolve.

In response to the limitations of unilateral action, Nigeria joined forces with neighboring countries, such as Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The MNJTF has achieved notable successes in coordinated border patrols and joint military operations, disrupting Boko Haram's mobility and logistics across the Lake Chad Basin (Ahmed & Garba, 2023). However, logistical constraints, mistrust among member states, and uneven troop commitments have weakened the overall effectiveness of this regional strategy (Omolade & Kazaure, 2024). Beyond military responses, the Nigerian government has initiated soft counter-terrorism measures, such as the Operation Safe Corridor program, which focuses on the deradicalization and reintegration of repentant Boko Haram fighters. While the program is innovative, its impact has been debated. Critics point to limited transparency and community resentment over the reintegration of former insurgents, which sometimes undermines local peacebuilding efforts (Iro & Adebanjo, 2023). Additionally, the government has collaborated with international organizations and NGOs to provide humanitarian relief and reconstruct conflict-affected communities. However, development-based strategies remain underfunded and poorly coordinated, often lacking the scale necessary to achieve long-term stability (Okeke & Ibrahim, 2022). The persistence of corruption and weak governance further dilutes the effectiveness of these strategies.

Findings and Observations

The findings were observed:

i. The study found that Boko Haram's terrorist activities are fundamentally driven by a combination of religious extremism, socio-economic inequality, political exclusion, and ideological indoctrination.

ii. It was discovered that the insurgency has greatly compromised Nigeria's national security and territorial integrity, resulting in large-scale displacement, weakened state control, and increased cross-border threats.

iii.   The research revealed that Boko Haram has significantly hindered sustainable development in Nigeria, particularly in the education, healthcare, and agricultural sectors, through targeted destruction and disruption.

iv.   The study found that although the Nigerian government and regional bodies have adopted various counter-insurgency strategies, their effectiveness remains limited due to poor implementation, corruption, and inadequate rehabilitation efforts.

CONCLUSION

The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is rooted in complex causes, including religious extremism, political marginalization, and socio-economic challenges. The insurgency has profoundly impacted the country's national security and territorial integrity, causing widespread instability and displacement. Furthermore, Boko Haram's activities have obstructed sustainable development by damaging critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and agriculture, thereby worsening the humanitarian situation in affected regions. Despite efforts by the Nigerian government and regional organizations to combat the insurgency through military and strategic interventions, these measures have faced significant challenges that limit their overall effectiveness. Addressing the Boko Haram crisis requires a multifaceted approach that combines security measures with socio-economic development and inclusive governance to foster long-term peace and stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

i.   The Nigerian government should prioritize addressing the root causes of Boko Haram's insurgency by promoting inclusive political participation, reducing socio-economic inequalities, and fostering community engagement to counter radicalization.

ii.   Strengthening national security through improved intelligence gathering, enhanced border controls, and better coordination among security agencies is essential to protect territorial integrity and prevent cross-border insurgent activities.

iii.   There should be increased investment in rebuilding and securing critical infrastructure in education, healthcare, and agriculture to restore and promote sustainable development in affected regions.

iv.   The government and regional bodies must improve the implementation of counter-insurgency strategies by enhancing transparency, accountability, and adopting comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former insurgents to prevent recidivism and support lasting peace.

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