

Politics and Terrorism in Northern Nigeria, 2009-2025

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ABSTRACT

Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, the country has experienced a steady escalation of violent conflicts that have undermined national stability, weakened governance structures, and eroded public trust in state institutions. Among these security challenges, the Boko Haram insurgency, which intensified from 2009, has remained one of the most severe manifestations of terrorism in Nigeria. This study examined the relationship between politics and terrorism in Nigeria, with specific focus on Boko Haram insurgency between 2009 and 2025. The study was anchored on the State Failure Theory, which explained terrorism as a consequence of weak governance, loss of legitimacy, and institutional decay. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 12.27 million people drawn from Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States, using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 400 was determined. Primary data were collected using 4-point likert scale structured questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from academic literature, government reports, and international publications. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's product moment correlation. The instrument for data collection was validated via expert review while reliability was confirmed at a coefficient range of 0.82 to 0.86 using the Cronbach's Alpha. Findings revealed that political interference significantly contributed to the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency, institutional weaknesses reduced the effectiveness of counterterrorism operations, socio-economic deprivation facilitated recruitment and expansion of insurgent networks, and human rights violations negatively affected public trust and community cooperation in security efforts. The study concluded that Boko Haram insurgency was fundamentally rooted in governance failures, institutional fragility, and socio-economic inequalities rather than purely ideological or religious motivations. The study recommends that the Nigerian government should ensure that security matters are treated as national priorities rather than being used as ready weapons for political maneuvering. Policies and strategies for counterterrorism should be consistent, coordinated, and free from political interference. This will enhance national unity and improve the effectiveness of security operations.

Keywords: Politics, Boko Haram, Terrorism, Government, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between politics and terrorism in Nigeria has continued to attract considerable scholarly attention, particularly in the context of the country's persistent security challenges and governance deficits. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in violent conflicts that have threatened national stability, undermined development, and weakened public trust in state institutions. Among these security challenges, the Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, stands out as one of the most devastating manifestations of terrorism in the country. What initially emerged as a radical religious movement in northeastern Nigeria has evolved into a protracted insurgency with regional and international dimensions, raising fundamental questions about the role of politics in the emergence and persistence of terrorism. Terrorism in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the political environment within which it operates. Issues such as poor governance, corruption, political exclusion, and institutional inefficiencies have contributed significantly to the conditions that enable extremist groups to thrive. Nsiegebe (2020) argues that Nigeria's political economy is characterized by structural imbalances and weak institutions, which create opportunities for insecurity and violence. This position is reinforced by Davies (2020), who identifies political corruption as

a major obstacle to effective governance and national development, noting that it erodes state capacity and fuels grievances among citizens. These systemic weaknesses have provided fertile ground for the emergence of groups such as Boko Haram, which exploit political and socio-economic discontent to recruit members and sustain their operations.

The origins and evolution of Boko Haram illustrate the complex interplay between political factors and terrorism. The group initially positioned itself as a religious movement opposing Western education and advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state. However, its transformation into a violent insurgent group was largely influenced by the state's response to its activities, particularly the use of force and the failure to address underlying grievances. Nsiegbe (2020) contends that the escalation of the insurgency was linked to the inability of the government to adopt a holistic approach that combines security measures with socio-economic and political reforms. Similarly, Moses, Davies, and Nsiegbe (2021) emphasize that ineffective civil-military relations and lack of coordination among security agencies have weakened counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria. Political processes in Nigeria have also contributed to the proliferation of violence and insecurity. Electoral violence, political manipulation, and the marginalization of certain groups have created an environment in which extremist ideologies can flourish. Nsiegbe (2023) observes that electoral violence has undermined democratic consolidation and contributed to political instability, which in turn exacerbates insecurity. In the same context, Ogele (2021) highlights the role of elite domination and governance failures in shaping political outcomes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, arguing that the exclusion of large segments of the population from meaningful participation in governance increases the likelihood of conflict and radicalization.

The issue of national integration further complicates the relationship between politics and terrorism in Nigeria. The federal character principle, which was designed to promote inclusiveness and equitable representation, has faced significant challenges in its implementation. Nsiegbe and Davies (2023) argue that the limitations of this principle have hindered national integration and contributed to feelings of marginalization among various ethnic and regional groups. This sense of exclusion is often exploited by extremist organizations to mobilize support and justify their actions. In a related study, Nsiegbe and Davies (2022) examine the phenomenon of collective victimization and secessionist agitation, noting that these dynamics weaken national cohesion and create conditions conducive to conflict and terrorism. Another important dimension of terrorism in Nigeria is the role of porous borders and weak territorial control. The country's extensive and poorly managed borders have facilitated the movement of arms, fighters, and illicit goods, thereby strengthening the operational capacity of terrorist groups. Nsiegbe and Gabriel (2024) assert that porous borders are a significant factor in the rise of banditry and terrorism in Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions. This view is supported by Ogele (2024), who highlights the role of external forces and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in sustaining conflicts across Africa.

The transnational nature of these challenges underscores the need for coordinated regional and international responses to terrorism. Socio-economic conditions also play a critical role in shaping the dynamics of terrorism in Nigeria. High levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality have created an environment in which many individuals are vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. Ogele (2020) identifies unemployment as a major driver of human security threats, noting that economic deprivation often leads to frustration and increases susceptibility to radicalization. The effectiveness of Nigeria's response to terrorism is closely linked to the nature of its civil-military relations. Strong and coordinated interactions between civilian authorities and the military are essential for effective counterterrorism operations. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of accountability, and poor intelligence gathering have limited the effectiveness of these efforts. Moses et al. (2021) emphasize that weak civil-military relations undermine national security and hinder the fight against insurgency. Nsiegbe (2020) further notes that the absence of coherent and consistent security policies has contributed to the persistence of Boko Haram and other forms of violent extremism.

In addition to Boko Haram, Nigeria has witnessed the emergence of other forms of violent conflict, including banditry, herder-farmer clashes, and secessionist movements. These conflicts are often linked to political and socio-economic factors similar to those that drive terrorism. Nsiegbe and Chidi (2024) adopt a transitional justice approach to analyze the reconciliation of various conflicts in Nigeria, including Boko Haram insurgency, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies that address both immediate security concerns and long-term peacebuilding. Ogele (2022) also underscores the importance of effective conflict management

strategies, including dialogue and community engagement, in resolving these challenges. The impact of terrorism on Nigeria's development has been severe. The Boko Haram insurgency has resulted in the destruction of infrastructure, displacement of millions of people, and disruption of economic activities, particularly in the northeastern region. The evolving nature of terrorism in the 21st century has introduced new challenges, particularly with the increasing use of digital technologies. Terrorist groups now utilize online platforms for recruitment, propaganda, and financing. Ogele (2024) highlights the role of digital technologies, including cryptocurrencies and online crowdfunding, in facilitating terrorist financing.

The specific objective of the study was to: Examine the extent which political interference and the politicization of security issues influences the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025;

The study raised the research question: To what extent does political interference and the politicization of security issues influenced the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025?

Research Hypotheses

The study was guided by the null hypothesis (H_0) that; there is no significant relationship between political inference and the politicization of security issues and the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025.

State Failure Theory

The State Failure Theory provides a strong analytical framework for understanding the relationship between politics and terrorism in Nigeria, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency between 2009 and 2025. The theory emerged from scholarly attempts to explain why some states are unable to perform their basic functions of governance, especially in relation to maintaining security, enforcing law and order, and providing essential public goods. At its core, State Failure Theory argues that when a state becomes weak, ineffective, or loses legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, it creates a vacuum that non-state actors can exploit, often resulting in violence, insurgency, and terrorism (Rotberg, 2003). Weak governance structures, corruption, poor service delivery, and institutional decay are therefore seen as key drivers of internal conflict and insecurity.

Rotberg (2003) explains that failed states are characterized by their inability to control their territory, monopolize the use of legitimate force, and provide basic political goods such as security, justice, education, and economic opportunity. When these functions break down, citizens may lose confidence in the state, leading to alienation, grievance, and ultimately rebellion. In such environments, extremist groups often find fertile ground for recruitment and mobilization. Similarly, Zartman (1995) argues that state collapse or significant weakening leads to the emergence of "ungoverned spaces" where non-state actors operate freely without effective resistance from government institutions.

In relation to terrorism studies, State Failure Theory is widely used to explain the emergence and persistence of violent extremist groups. According to Patrick (2006), failed or fragile states provide enabling conditions for terrorism because they lack effective policing, intelligence capacity, and political legitimacy. This allows terrorist organizations to establish operational bases, recruit members, and carry out attacks with minimal resistance. Nigeria, particularly the North-East region, has often been described in this context due to persistent insecurity, weak governance structures, and socio-economic marginalization (Onuoha, 2014).

The Boko Haram insurgency aligns closely with the assumptions of State Failure Theory. Since its escalation in 2009, Boko Haram has exploited governance gaps, poverty, unemployment, and political neglect in Northern Nigeria to expand its influence. The group's ability to capture territories, attack government institutions, and displace millions of people reflects the weaknesses in Nigeria's security architecture and governance system. Scholars such as Aghedo and Osumah (2012) argue that Boko Haram's rise is closely linked to state neglect, corruption, and poor socio-economic conditions, which created widespread disillusionment among citizens in affected regions.

Furthermore, the theory is supported by Rotberg's (2004) assertion that when states fail to provide security and welfare, citizens may resort to alternative sources of protection, including insurgent groups. Boko Haram has been able to recruit members by presenting itself as an alternative authority in areas where the Nigerian state is perceived as absent or ineffective. This is particularly evident in rural communities of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States, where government presence is minimal and infrastructure is weak.

Another important aspect of State Failure Theory is its emphasis on legitimacy. A state is considered stable when its citizens recognize its authority as legitimate and effective. However, when legitimacy is eroded due to corruption, electoral violence, and poor governance, political instability becomes inevitable (Fukuyama, 2004). In Nigeria, issues such as electoral malpractice, uneven distribution of resources, and corruption have weakened public trust in government institutions. This loss of legitimacy has indirectly strengthened extremist narratives that challenge the authority of the Nigerian state.

The theory also highlights the relationship between economic deprivation and insecurity. According to Aning (2010), failed states often experience high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality, which create conditions for recruitment into violent groups. Boko Haram has effectively exploited these socio-economic vulnerabilities, particularly among unemployed youth, to sustain its insurgency. This demonstrates how political and economic failures intersect to produce insecurity.

Applying State Failure Theory to this study, it becomes clear that Boko Haram insurgency is not merely a religious or ideological conflict but a product of deeper structural and political weaknesses within the Nigerian state. The inability of successive governments between 2009 and 2025 to effectively address governance failures, strengthen security institutions, and reduce socio-economic inequality has allowed the insurgency to persist. The theory therefore provides a comprehensive explanation of how political instability, weak governance, and institutional decay contribute to terrorism. In the context of this study, State Failure Theory is used to analyze how Nigeria's political environment has influenced the emergence and persistence of Boko Haram. It helps to explain why counter-terrorism efforts have achieved limited success despite significant military expenditure and policy interventions. The continued existence of governance gaps, corruption within security institutions, and lack of development in affected regions demonstrate the relevance of the theory to understanding the Nigerian situation. State Failure Theory offers a robust framework for analyzing the intersection of politics and terrorism in Nigeria. It demonstrates that Boko Haram insurgency is deeply rooted in political and institutional failures rather than isolated acts of violence. By applying this theory, the study is able to critically examine how weak governance, loss of state legitimacy, and socio-economic deprivation have collectively contributed to the persistence of terrorism in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025.

Terrorism

Terrorism is a complex and contested concept that has generated extensive academic debate due to its political, ideological, and methodological variations across contexts. Despite the absence of a universally accepted definition, terrorism is broadly understood as the deliberate use or threat of violence against non-combatants by non-state actors or, in some cases, state actors, to achieve political, ideological, or religious objectives. According to Schmid (2011), terrorism involves "the use of fear-inducing violence against civilians to influence political outcomes," emphasizing its strategic and psychological dimensions. This definition highlights the centrality of fear as a tool for political communication and coercion. The concept of terrorism has evolved significantly over time, particularly in response to changes in global politics, technological advancement, and ideological movements. Hoffman (2006) argues that modern terrorism is distinguished by its transnational character, ideological extremism, and symbolic targeting of civilians. Unlike traditional warfare, terrorism does not seek direct military victory but rather aims to destabilize governments, attract attention to grievances, and undermine public confidence in state institutions. This makes terrorism a tool of asymmetrical warfare where weaker actors confront stronger states.

In the African context, terrorism is often intertwined with issues of governance failure, poverty, weak institutions, and political exclusion. Wilkinson (2011) emphasizes that terrorism thrives in environments where political grievances are left unresolved and where state legitimacy is weak. Nigeria, in particular, provides a clear example of how socio-economic inequality and governance deficits can create conditions conducive to

terrorist emergence and sustainability. Groups such as Boko Haram have exploited these structural weaknesses to justify their violent campaigns.

Terrorism in Nigeria cannot be fully understood without considering its socio-political foundations. Laqueur (2003) describes terrorism as a strategy employed by groups that perceive violence as the only viable means of achieving political transformation. In the Nigerian context, Boko Haram's ideology reflects a rejection of Western political systems and an aspiration to establish an alternative governance structure based on its interpretation of religious doctrine. This ideological framing transforms terrorism from mere violence into a political statement against the state. Crenshaw (2014) further explains that terrorism is not an irrational phenomenon but a calculated political strategy rooted in perceived injustice and strategic opportunity. Terrorist organizations often arise in contexts where political participation is limited, and where grievances are either ignored or violently suppressed. In Nigeria, long-standing issues such as regional inequality, unemployment, and corruption have contributed to the radicalization of certain groups, particularly in the North-East region. These conditions provide fertile ground for terrorist recruitment and expansion.

The operational dynamics of terrorism involve a combination of psychological warfare, symbolic violence, and strategic targeting. Terrorist groups often select targets that maximize media attention and public fear. According to Ganor (2015), terrorism is designed to influence not only the immediate victims but also broader political audiences. This explains why attacks are often directed at schools, markets, religious centers, and government installations, all of which carry symbolic significance. Technological advancement has also transformed the nature of terrorism in the 21st century. The rise of digital communication platforms has enabled terrorist groups to recruit members, spread propaganda, and coordinate attacks more efficiently. Weimann (2016) notes that the internet has become a critical tool for modern terrorist organizations, allowing them to reach global audiences and bypass traditional security surveillance mechanisms. This digital dimension has made terrorism more decentralized and harder to combat. In addition to ideological and technological factors, terrorism is also sustained by financial networks that support recruitment, logistics, and operations. Byman (2013) highlights that terrorist organizations rely on a combination of illicit funding sources such as kidnapping for ransom, smuggling, taxation of controlled territories, and external sponsorship. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has been linked to various forms of illicit financing, which have enabled it to sustain prolonged insurgency despite military pressure. The impact of terrorism on national development is profound and multidimensional. It affects political stability, economic growth, social cohesion, and human security. Enders and Sandler (2012) argue that terrorism imposes both direct costs, such as loss of lives and infrastructure destruction, and indirect costs, such as reduced investment, tourism decline, and increased security expenditures. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has disrupted agricultural production, displaced millions of people, and strained national resources.

Boko Haram Insurgency

The Boko Haram insurgency represents one of the most devastating and complex security challenges in contemporary Nigeria, with far-reaching political, social, economic, and humanitarian implications. Emerging in the early 2000s but becoming violently prominent in 2009, Boko Haram has evolved from a religious sect into a sophisticated insurgent organization that has persistently challenged the authority of the Nigerian state. The group's activities have significantly destabilized the North-East region of Nigeria and contributed to broader national insecurity. Understanding the Boko Haram insurgency requires an examination of its ideological foundations, historical evolution, operational strategies, socio-political drivers, and its impact on governance and development.

Boko Haram, officially known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, loosely translated as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad," was founded in Maiduguri, Borno State. The group initially emerged under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf, who criticized Western education, secular governance, and perceived corruption in Nigerian society. According to Thurston (2017), the group's ideology is rooted in a radical interpretation of Islam that rejects Western influence and advocates for the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. This ideological position forms the foundation of its insurgent activities. The transformation of Boko Haram from a religious movement into an armed insurgency occurred after 2009, following a violent confrontation with Nigerian security forces that led to the extrajudicial

killing of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. This event marked a turning point in the group's history, as it re-emerged under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau with a more militant and violent strategy. Campbell (2014) argues that the group's radicalization was significantly influenced by state repression, weak governance structures, and socio-economic marginalization in Northern Nigeria. These conditions created an environment conducive to insurgency. Boko Haram's operational strategy is characterized by guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, mass abductions, and attacks on civilian and military targets. The group's most internationally recognized attack was the 2014 kidnapping of over 270 schoolgirls from Chibok, which drew global condemnation. Such actions reflect the group's strategy of psychological warfare aimed at instilling fear, attracting media attention, and undermining state legitimacy. Forest (2012) explains that modern insurgent groups often rely on asymmetrical tactics to offset their military disadvantages, and Boko Haram fits this pattern.

The insurgency has been sustained by several interrelated factors, including poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and weak state presence in Northern Nigeria. According to Onuoha (2014), the North-East region has long suffered from developmental neglect, making it vulnerable to extremist ideologies. The lack of economic opportunities has particularly affected young people, many of whom become easy recruits for insurgent groups. This aligns with relative deprivation theory, which suggests that perceived inequality and exclusion can lead to collective violence. Another critical factor sustaining Boko Haram is weak governance and institutional failure. The Nigerian state has struggled to provide security, justice, and basic services to affected populations. This failure has undermined public trust and created legitimacy gaps that insurgent groups exploit. Adebayo (2017) notes that corruption, poor leadership, and inadequate security coordination have significantly weakened Nigeria's capacity to respond effectively to the insurgency. The inefficiency of security agencies has allowed Boko Haram to adapt and survive despite military operations.

The insurgency also has strong religious and ideological dimensions. Boko Haram's rejection of Western education is symbolically significant, as reflected in its name, which loosely translates to "Western education is forbidden." This ideological stance has led to targeted attacks on schools, teachers, and students. Zenn (2018) highlights that Boko Haram's ideology is not only anti-Western but also seeks to delegitimize the Nigerian state by portraying it as corrupt and un-Islamic. This ideological framing has been central to recruitment and propaganda efforts. From a political perspective, Boko Haram reflects deeper issues of exclusion and marginalization. The North-East region has historically experienced limited political representation and unequal development compared to other regions in Nigeria.

This imbalance has contributed to feelings of resentment and alienation among local populations. According to Agbiboa (2015), insurgent groups often emerge in contexts where the state fails to integrate all segments of society into the political and economic system. The humanitarian impact of Boko Haram has been catastrophic. The insurgency has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, the displacement of millions of people, and the destruction of infrastructure. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps across Nigeria and neighboring countries such as Cameroon, Chad, and Niger continue to host victims of the conflict. The United Nations has described the crisis as one of the worst humanitarian emergencies in the world. The destruction of livelihoods has further deepened poverty and food insecurity in the region. Economically, Boko Haram has severely disrupted development in Northern Nigeria. Agricultural activities, which are the primary source of livelihood in the region, have been heavily affected due to insecurity. Markets, transportation systems, and trade networks have also been disrupted. According to ICG (International Crisis Group, 2016), the insurgency has significantly reduced economic productivity and increased dependence on humanitarian aid. This has long-term implications for regional and national development. The insurgency has also affected Nigeria's education system. Thousands of schools have been destroyed, and many children have been deprived of access to education due to safety concerns. This has contributed to a widening educational gap between the North-East and other regions. UNESCO has warned that prolonged disruption of education in conflict zones can have generational consequences, including reduced human capital development and increased poverty levels. In response to the insurgency, the Nigerian government has implemented various counterinsurgency strategies, including military operations, regional cooperation through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and rehabilitation programs for former combatants. However, these efforts have faced significant challenges, including inadequate funding, corruption, poor intelligence coordination, and human rights concerns. Some

military operations have also resulted in civilian casualties, further complicating relations between the state and affected communities.

National Security

National security is a fundamental concept in political science, international relations, and public administration, reflecting the ability of a state to protect its citizens, territorial integrity, and institutions from internal and external threats. Traditionally, national security was understood in narrow military terms, focusing primarily on the protection of state sovereignty from external aggression. However, contemporary understanding of national security has expanded to include political stability, economic wellbeing, human security, environmental safety, and social cohesion. This broader perspective recognizes that threats to a nation may originate not only from external military forces but also from internal instability, terrorism, insurgency, poverty, and institutional weakness.

According to Buzan (1991), national security is the ability of a state to maintain its core values, including sovereignty, territorial integrity, and societal stability, under conditions of external and internal pressure. This definition introduces a multidimensional approach to security, emphasizing that threats are not limited to military invasion but also include political, economic, societal, and environmental dimensions. In this sense, national security becomes closely linked to state capacity and governance effectiveness. In the modern global system, national security has evolved beyond the protection of borders to include the safety and welfare of individuals within the state. This shift is largely influenced by the human security paradigm introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994), which defines security in terms of freedom from fear and freedom from want. This approach emphasizes that poverty, unemployment, disease, and lack of access to basic services are as threatening to national stability as armed conflict. In Nigeria, national security has become a major policy concern due to increasing threats from terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts. The Boko Haram insurgency, particularly since 2009, has significantly challenged Nigeria's national security framework. Nsiegbe (2024) argues that porous borders, weak security institutions, and poor governance structures have contributed to persistent insecurity in Nigeria, especially in the northern regions. These challenges highlight the structural weaknesses within the Nigerian security architecture.

National security is closely linked to the concept of state legitimacy and governance. A state is considered secure not only when it can defend itself militarily but also when it can provide basic services, ensure justice, and maintain public trust. According to Ayoob (1995), security in developing states is primarily about regime security and political survival rather than external defense. This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where internal instability often poses a greater threat than external aggression. One of the major dimensions of national security is political security, which refers to the stability of governmental institutions and the legitimacy of political authority. Political instability, corruption, and weak institutions undermine national security by reducing citizens' trust in the state. Egobueze (2023), notes that political instability in Nigeria is deeply connected to governance failures and elite manipulation of power, which often exacerbate insecurity and weaken national cohesion. Economic security is another critical dimension of national security. It involves the ability of a state to provide sustainable economic opportunities, reduce poverty, and ensure equitable distribution of resources. In Nigeria, economic insecurity has been a major driver of instability. High unemployment rates, especially among youth, have contributed to the rise of criminal activities and insurgent recruitment. According to Reason (2025), Nigeria's dependence on oil revenue and failure to diversify its economy have created structural vulnerabilities that fuel insecurity and social unrest.

Social security is also an essential component of national security. It refers to the protection of citizens from social injustices, inequality, and exclusion. In societies where large segments of the population feel marginalized, the risk of conflict increases significantly. Boko Haram, for example, has exploited social grievances in Northern Nigeria to recruit members and justify its violent ideology. This demonstrates the link between social exclusion and national insecurity. Environmental security has also become increasingly important in the discourse of national security. Climate change, desertification, flooding, and environmental degradation can contribute to resource conflicts and displacement of populations. In Nigeria, environmental challenges in the northern regions have intensified competition over land and water resources, contributing to farmer-herder conflicts and broader insecurity. This highlights the interconnectedness of environmental and

human security. Institutional capacity plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of national security systems. Strong institutions are necessary for intelligence gathering, law enforcement, border control, and crisis response. However, in Nigeria, institutional weaknesses have significantly undermined security efforts. Nsiegbe (2021) observes that poor coordination among security agencies, corruption, and inadequate funding have limited the effectiveness of counterterrorism operations. National security is also influenced by international relations and regional cooperation. In an increasingly globalized world, security threats often transcend national borders. Terrorist organizations, arms trafficking networks, and cybercrime groups operate across multiple countries, requiring coordinated international responses. Nigeria has engaged in regional security cooperation through organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to combat Boko Haram and other threats. However, these efforts face challenges related to funding, coordination, and political differences among member states.

The role of intelligence and technology in national security has become increasingly important in modern security frameworks. Intelligence gathering, surveillance systems, and cybersecurity measures are essential tools for preventing and responding to security threats. Weimann (2016), highlights that terrorist groups increasingly use digital platforms for recruitment, propaganda, and coordination, making cyber intelligence a critical component of national security strategies. Human security has emerged as a key framework for understanding national security in contemporary discourse. Unlike traditional state-centric approaches, human security focuses on protecting individuals from threats such as hunger, disease, violence, and displacement. The UNDP (1994) emphasizes that sustainable national security cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes of human insecurity. In Nigeria, issues such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education remain central challenges to achieving human security.

National security is also closely tied to governance quality and leadership effectiveness. Effective leadership is essential for policy formulation, implementation, and crisis management. Poor leadership, corruption, and lack of accountability undermine security institutions and reduce their effectiveness. Davies (2020) argues that corruption remains one of the most significant obstacles to national development and security in Nigeria, as it weakens institutions and diverts resources away from critical sectors. The relationship between national security and terrorism is particularly significant in the Nigerian context. Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram exploit governance failures and socio-economic inequalities to sustain their operations. Hoffman (2006) explains that terrorism thrives in environments where the state is weak, legitimacy is low, and grievances are widespread. This underscores the importance of addressing structural causes of insecurity rather than relying solely on military solutions. National security is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond military defense to include political stability, economic development, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and human wellbeing. In Nigeria, national security challenges are deeply rooted in governance failures, economic inequality, institutional weaknesses, and insurgency threats such as Boko Haram. Achieving sustainable national security therefore requires a comprehensive approach that integrates security reforms, socio-economic development, institutional strengthening, and inclusive governance.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between politics and terrorism in Nigeria, with particular focus on the Boko Haram insurgency from 2009 to 2025. The design enabled the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data relating to political interference, institutional weaknesses, socio-economic deprivation, human rights issues, and terrorism. The study focused on the North-East region of Nigeria, particularly Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States, which were the most affected by insurgency activities. The population comprised residents, government officials, security personnel, traditional rulers, civil society actors, internally displaced persons, and other stakeholders within the selected states. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 400 was determined. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from academic publications, government reports, international organizations, and security agencies. The questionnaire was a 4-point Likert scale structured instrument and was validated through expert review. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.86, confirming high reliability. Data were analyzed using

descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and content analysis to ensure comprehensive findings on the relationship between politics and terrorism in Nigeria.

Data Presentation

Table 1. Questionnaire Administered and Retrieved with Percentages

Questionnaire Status	Number	Percentage (%)
Administered	400	100%
Retrieved	350	87.5%
Not Retrieved	50	12.5%
Total	400	100%

Spss Output 2026

Table 1 shows the distribution of questionnaire administered and retrieved in the study. A total of 400 questionnaire representing 100% were administered to respondents. Out of this number, 350 questionnaire were successfully retrieved, representing 87.5% response rate, while 50 questionnaire, accounting for 12.5%, were not returned. This indicates a high level of respondent participation and engagement in the study. The high retrieval rate enhances the reliability and validity of the data collected for analysis. The non-retrieved questionnaire is attributable to respondents' unwillingness or accessibility challenges, but they do not significantly affect the overall representativeness of the study findings.

Data Analysis

Table 2: Political Interference and the Persistence of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria, 2009–2025

To what extent has political interference and the politicization of security issues influenced the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025?

S/N	Items	SA F(%)	A F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	Total	Mean	Std. D
1	Political interference has influenced the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.	155 (44.3%)	120 (34.3%)	45 (12.9%)	30 (8.6%)	350	3.14	0.89
2	Politicization of security operations weakens counterterrorism effectiveness.	162 (46.3%)	118 (33.7%)	42 (12.0%)	28 (8.0%)	350	3.18	0.87
3	Electoral politics contributes to delayed responses to Boko Haram attacks.	148 (42.3%)	125 (35.7%)	47 (13.4%)	30 (8.6%)	350	3.12	0.91
4	Political elites sometimes exploit insecurity for personal or group advantage.	170 (48.6%)	110 (31.4%)	40 (11.4%)	30 (8.6%)	350	3.20	0.88
5	Weak political accountability sustains insurgency in Nigeria.	158 (45.1%)	122 (34.9%)	45 (12.9%)	25 (7.1%)	350	3.18	0.86

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

Table 2 presents respondents' views on political interference and the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, 2009–2025 across five thematic items. For Item 1: Political interference has influenced the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, 155 (44.3%) strongly agreed, 120 (34.3%) agreed, 45 (12.9%) disagreed,

and 30 (8.6%) strongly disagreed (Mean = 3.14, SD = 0.89). For Item 2: Politicization of security operations weakens counterterrorism effectiveness, 162 (46.3%) strongly agreed, 118 (33.7%) agreed, 42 (12.0%) disagreed, and 28 (8.0%) strongly disagreed (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.87). For Item 3: Electoral politics contributes to delayed responses to Boko Haram attacks, 148 (42.3%) strongly agreed, 125 (35.7%) agreed, 47 (13.4%) disagreed, and 30 (8.6%) strongly disagreed (Mean = 3.12, SD = 0.91). For Item 4: Political elites sometimes exploit insecurity for personal or group advantage, 170 (48.6%) strongly agreed, 110 (31.4%) agreed, 40 (11.4%) disagreed, and 30 (8.6%) strongly disagreed (Mean = 3.20, SD = 0.88). For Item 5: Weak political accountability sustains insurgency in Nigeria, 158 (45.1%) strongly agreed, 122 (34.9%) agreed, 45 (12.9%) disagreed, and 25 (7.1%) strongly disagreed (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.86). Overall, the results indicate a high level of agreement that political interference significantly contributes to the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency, as reflected in consistently high mean scores above .

Test of Hypothesis

Table 3: Relationship between Political Interference and the Politicization of security issue and the persistence of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria between 2009-2025

Test of Hypothesis (H₀):

Political interference and politicization of security issues have no significant influence on Boko Haram insurgency persistence, 2009–2025.

Correlations

	H ₀₁ Ind.	H ₀₁ Dep.
H ₀₁ Ind.		
Pearson Correlation	1	.821**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.000
N	350	350
H ₀₁ Dep.	.821**	1
Pearson Correlation	.821**	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	—
N	350	350

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

Table 3 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) result on the relationship between political interference and Boko Haram insurgency persistence in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025. The result shows a strong positive relationship between political interference (independent variable) and insurgency persistence (dependent variable), with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.821**. The significance value (p = 0.000) is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. With a sample size of 350 respondents, the finding implies that increases in political interference are strongly associated with the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency.

Decision: Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that political interference has no significant influence on Boko Haram insurgency persistence, is rejected. The alternative hypothesis is therefore accepted, confirming that political interference and politicization of security issues significantly influence the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Political Interference and the Persistence of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria, 2009–2025

Table 2 presents empirical evidence on the extent to which political interference and the politicization of security issues have influenced the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025. The analysis is based on five questionnaire items administered to 350 respondents, with responses measured on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Across all items, the results consistently show high levels of agreement, with mean scores above the decision benchmark of 2.50, indicating that respondents generally perceive political interference as a significant driver of insurgency persistence. Item 1: Political interference has influenced the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria recorded 155 (44.3%) strongly agree, 120 (34.3%) agree, 45 (12.9%) disagree, and 30 (8.6%) strongly disagree, with a total of 350 respondents. The mean score of 3.14 and standard deviation of 0.89 indicate a strong consensus that political interference contributes to the continuation of Boko Haram insurgency. This aligns with Ake (1996), who argues that political manipulation of state institutions in developing countries weakens governance effectiveness and sustains insecurity. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that respondents' opinions are closely clustered around agreement, reinforcing the stability of this perception. Item 2: Politicization of security operations weakens counterterrorism effectiveness recorded 162 (46.3%) strongly agree, 118 (33.7%) agree, 42 (12.0%) disagree, and 28 (8.0%) strongly disagree, with a mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.87. This indicates that respondents strongly believe that when security operations are influenced by political considerations, their effectiveness is reduced. This finding is supported by Nwankpa (2016), who emphasizes that governance failures and political interference in security institutions significantly reduce counterterrorism efficiency in Nigeria. Similarly, Babatunde (2015) highlights that inconsistent political directives weaken operational coordination among security agencies, thereby allowing insurgent groups to exploit security gaps. Item 3: Electoral politics contributes to delayed responses to Boko Haram attacks recorded 148 (42.3%) strongly agree, 125 (35.7%) agree, 47 (13.4%) disagree, and 30 (8.6%) strongly disagree. The mean score of 3.12 and standard deviation of 0.91 indicate agreement, though slightly lower than other items, suggesting some variation in perception. This implies that while respondents acknowledge the influence of electoral politics on security response delays, there may be differing views on the extent of its impact. This finding is consistent with Egobueze and Ogele (2020), who argue that electoral cycles in Nigeria often influence government priorities, sometimes leading to delayed or politically calculated responses to insecurity. Harry and Kalagbor (2021) also note that political competition can shift focus away from urgent security concerns. Item 4: Political elites sometimes exploit insecurity for personal or group advantage recorded the highest level of agreement, with 170 (48.6%) strongly agree, 110 (31.4%) agree, 40 (11.4%) disagree, and 30 (8.6%) strongly disagree. The mean score of 3.20 and standard deviation of 0.88 indicate a strong perception that insecurity is sometimes politically instrumentalized. This finding is significant because it highlights the political economy dimension of Boko Haram insurgency. Davies (2020) argues that political corruption in Nigeria often manifests through the exploitation of public insecurity for personal gain. Similarly, Akinola (2015) explains that insecurity in the Lake Chad region has been influenced by elite interests, where instability becomes a tool for political negotiation and resource control.

Item 5: Weak political accountability sustains insurgency in Nigeria recorded 158 (45.1%) strongly agree, 122 (34.9%) agree, 45 (12.9%) disagree, and 25 (7.1%) strongly disagree, with a mean score of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.86. This indicates that respondents strongly believe that lack of accountability in governance structures contributes to the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency. This aligns with Transparency International (2024), which identifies weak accountability as a major enabler of corruption and insecurity in Nigeria. Rotberg (2004) further argues that weak accountability structures are a defining feature of fragile states, where governance failures create conditions for prolonged conflict. Overall, the descriptive results show that all five items have mean values above 3.00, indicating strong agreement among respondents that political interference plays a significant role in sustaining Boko Haram insurgency. The relatively low standard

deviations (0.86–0.91) further suggest homogeneity in responses, meaning that perceptions are not widely dispersed but rather consistently aligned across respondents. This strengthens the reliability of the findings.

When linked to the research question, the results clearly indicate that political interference and politicization of security issues have a substantial influence on the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025. Respondents consistently identified political interference, politicized security operations, electoral influences, elite exploitation of insecurity, and weak accountability as key mechanisms through which insurgency is sustained.

Hypothesis (H_0): Political interference and politicization of security issues have no significant influence on Boko Haram insurgency persistence, 2009–2025. The inferential analysis presented in Table 3 provides further statistical validation of the descriptive findings. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.821 with a significance value of 0.000 indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between political interference and Boko Haram insurgency persistence. Since the p-value is less than 0.01, the relationship is significant at the 1% level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). This result confirms that political interference and politicization of security issues significantly influence the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The strength of the correlation (0.821) suggests a very strong association, meaning that increases in political interference are strongly associated with increases in insurgency persistence. This finding is consistent with Campbell (2014), who argues that Boko Haram's endurance is closely linked to governance failures and inconsistent political responses. Similarly, Adesoji (2010) notes that the emergence and sustainability of Boko Haram are deeply rooted in political and governance contradictions in northern Nigeria. Secondary literature further supports this empirical finding. The Global Terrorism Index (2021) identifies Nigeria as one of the most affected countries by terrorism, with Boko Haram responsible for a significant proportion of fatalities and displacement. The Nigeria Security Tracker (CFR, 2019) also documents persistent violence patterns linked to governance instability. These datasets reinforce the argument that insecurity in Nigeria is structurally sustained rather than episodic. Human Rights Watch (2014; 2017) reports highlight that ineffective governance, weak accountability, and political interference in security operations have contributed to both insurgent resilience and public distrust. Amnesty International (2015; 2018) further documents that security operations have sometimes been undermined by political considerations, reducing operational effectiveness and community cooperation. These secondary sources align strongly with the statistical findings.

Theoretically, the findings are consistent with Ayoob's (1995) Subaltern Realism Theory, which posits that insecurity in developing states is primarily driven by internal political and institutional weaknesses. The findings also align with Gurr's (2015) Relative Deprivation Theory, which explains that perceived political exclusion and injustice can fuel sustained rebellion. When political interference weakens institutions and accountability structures, grievances intensify, thereby sustaining insurgency. Additionally, the World Bank (2017) governance framework emphasizes that weak institutions and politicized governance structures significantly increase the risk of conflict persistence. Boko Haram's continued operations reflect this condition, where governance failures create an enabling environment for insurgent activity. The combined descriptive and inferential results from Table 3 and Table 4 demonstrate that political interference is not only perceived by respondents as a major factor in insurgency persistence but is also statistically validated as having a strong and significant relationship with Boko Haram's continued operations in Nigeria between 2009 and 2025.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is fundamentally rooted in political and governance failures rather than being solely a security or religious problem. The findings clearly demonstrate that terrorism in Nigeria is a multidimensional phenomenon driven by the interaction of political interference, institutional weaknesses, socio-economic deprivation, and human rights challenges. The Nigerian state's limited capacity to effectively govern, provide public goods, and maintain legitimacy has created conditions that allow terrorism to thrive.

The politicization of security issues has emerged as a major obstacle to effective counterterrorism. When security challenges are influenced by political interests, it leads to fragmented responses, inconsistent policies,

and lack of coordination among stakeholders. This weakens national unity and reduces the effectiveness of efforts aimed at combating terrorism. Similarly, institutional weaknesses, particularly within the security sector, have significantly undermined the state's ability to respond to insurgency. Corruption, inadequate funding, poor intelligence systems, and lack of professionalism have reduced operational efficiency and allowed Boko Haram to adapt and persist.

The study also highlights the critical impact of socio-economic factors in sustaining terrorism. Poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion have created widespread grievances, particularly in Northern Nigeria, making individuals more susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. These conditions reflect broader governance failures, including uneven development and lack of inclusive policies. Without addressing these underlying socio-economic issues, counterterrorism efforts are unlikely to achieve long-term success.

Furthermore, the study concludes that human rights violations during counterterrorism operations have had counterproductive effects. Instead of weakening insurgent groups, such actions often increase resentment among local populations, reduce trust in government institutions, and hinder community-based security cooperation. Effective counterterrorism therefore requires a balance between security measures and respect for human rights.

Overall, the study emphasizes that military solutions alone are insufficient to address terrorism in Nigeria. While security operations are necessary, they must be complemented by political reforms, institutional strengthening, socio-economic development, and community engagement. Sustainable peace and security can only be achieved through a holistic approach that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of terrorism.

Recommendations

Depoliticization of Security Issues: The Nigerian government should ensure that security matters are treated as national priorities rather than political tools. Policies and strategies for counterterrorism should be consistent, coordinated, and free from political interference. This will enhance national unity and improve the effectiveness of security operations.

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