

TERRORISM AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA (2017 – 2024)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the relationship between terrorism and political governance in Nigeria, examining how terrorism can be manipulated as a tool for political advantage and the significant consequences it has on governance, society, and the economy. Through a conceptual and theoretical framework, the paper discusses key theory. Elite Theory, to explain how terrorism impacts political structures. The paper investigates into the manipulation of terrorism for electoral violence and political gain, while assessing the broader implications of terrorism on governance, such as weakened institutions, resource diversion, and compromised democratic processes. In response to these challenges, the paper reviews current counterterrorism efforts, their successes and shortcomings, and advocates for political reforms aimed at strengthening institutions and ensuring accountability. The study concludes with policy recommendations for curbing the use of terrorism in governance, reinforcing democratic governance, and promoting community participation. This paper contributes to the broader understanding of terrorism's impact on political governance in Nigeria, offering insights into strategies for addressing this complex issue.

Keywords: Terrorism, Political Governance, Electoral Violence, Resource Diversion, Political Reforms.

Introduction

Terrorism has become a global phenomenon that has significantly impacted political, economic, and social structures worldwide (Hoffman, 2006). In the context of Nigeria, terrorism has emerged as a critical threat to the country's stability and democratic development (Venda, 2016). The rise of terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has posed a formidable challenge to the Nigerian government's efforts to maintain law and order and protect its citizens (Ojukwu, 2017). The roots of terrorism in Nigeria can be traced back to the socio-economic and political marginalization of certain regions and ethnic groups within the country. The unequal distribution of resources, high levels of poverty, and lack of employment opportunities have created an environment conducive to the emergence of radical ideologies and the recruitment of disaffected individuals into terrorist organizations (Ibrahim and Egwu, 2007).

Moreover, the historical tensions and conflicts between different ethnic and religious communities in Nigeria have been exploited by terrorist groups to further their agenda (Iwilade & Agbaje, 2012). The inability of the Nigerian government to effectively address these underlying

social and political issues has contributed to the perpetuation of terrorism within the country. The tactics employed by terrorist groups in Nigeria have evolved over time, ranging from suicide bombings and targeted assassinations to the abduction of civilians and the seizure of territory (Maiangwa et al., 2012). These acts of violence have not only resulted in the loss of countless lives but have also had a devastating impact on the country's economy, infrastructure, and social fabric (Enders and Sandler, 2006). In response to the growing threat of terrorism, the Nigerian government has implemented various counter-terrorism strategies, including military operations, intelligence-gathering, and the enactment of anti-terrorism legislation. However, these efforts have often been criticized for their heavy-handed approach and the alleged human rights abuses committed by security forces (Golder, 2014). Furthermore, the political elite in Nigeria have been accused of exploiting the threat of terrorism for their own political gain, using it as a tool to consolidate power, silence opposition, and divert attention from other pressing issues facing the country.

This has led to the perception that terrorism is not merely a security challenge but also a means of political governance in Nigeria (Combs, 2003). The ongoing threat of terrorism in Nigeria has had far-reaching consequences for the country's development and its ability to fulfill its democratic aspirations (Eme & Akubor, 2016). The continuous cycle of violence, the displacement of communities, and the diversion of resources away from critical social and economic programs have all contributed to the erosion of public trust in the government and the democratic process (Golder, 2014).

As Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenge of terrorism, it is crucial for policymakers and researchers to critically examine the complex interplay between terrorism, political governance, and the socio-economic realities of the country (Golder, 2014). Only through a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics can effective and sustainable solutions be developed to address the root causes of terrorism and promote lasting peace and stability in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Terrorism has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges to political stability and governance in Nigeria. Over the years, the country has witnessed an alarming rise in terrorist activities, ranging from the Boko Haram insurgency to acts of banditry and kidnapping. These activities are not only threatening national security but also undermine democratic governance, disrupt socioeconomic development, and instill fear among citizens.

Alarming, evidence suggests that terrorism is sometimes weaponized by political actors for electoral manipulation, power consolidation, and destabilization of opposition strongholds. The use of terrorism as a tool of political governance raises critical questions about the integrity of democratic institutions and the effectiveness of leadership in Nigeria. Furthermore, the socio-economic consequences of such practices, including loss of lives, mass displacement, and weakened institutional frameworks, demand urgent scholarly investigation.

Objectives

1. To examine the use of terrorism as a tool for political manipulation and governance in Nigeria.
2. To analyze the socio-economic and institutional consequences of terrorism-driven governance practices.
3. To propose effective strategies for addressing the exploitation of terrorism in political governance.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, relying on secondary data sources to examine the role of terrorism as an instrument of political governance in Nigeria. The analysis draws upon scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports from reputable think tanks and international organizations. These sources provide in-depth insights into the historical, political, social, and economic factors that have contributed to the rise of terrorist groups in Nigeria, as well as how political actors have leveraged these groups for their gain.

Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory

Elite Theory posits that a small group of influential individuals, often referred to as elites, hold the majority of political, economic, and social power in any society. These elites, who may include politicians, military leaders, and business magnates, shape policies and governance to serve their interests, often at the expense of the broader population (Mosca, 1939; Pareto, 1901). The theory suggests that power is not distributed equally among citizens but is concentrated in the hands of a few who dominate decision-making and control key resources.

Assumptions of Elite Theory include:

1. Society is divided into the ruling minority (elites) and the majority who are governed.
2. The elite seeks to maintain its dominance and influence through institutional and systemic controls.
3. Political power is often used to protect the interests of elites, sometimes involving coercion or manipulation (Alkhateeb, 2024).

Terrorism as an Instrument of Political Governance in Nigeria can be analyzed through the lens of Elite Theory by examining how political and economic elites exploit terrorism to maintain or enhance their power. The interplay between elites and terrorism in Nigeria manifests in the following ways:

Manipulation of Terrorist Groups for Political Gain: Some Nigerian elites allegedly sponsor or tolerate terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, bandits, or militant factions to destabilize regions, weaken opposition, or consolidate power. For instance, during election periods, reports suggest that some political actors align with violent groups to intimidate voters or disrupt electoral processes (Akinola, 2015). This aligns with the Elite Theory's proposition that the ruling class manipulates systemic vulnerabilities for personal benefit.

Exploitation of Insecurity to Divert Attention: Elites may exploit terrorism to divert public scrutiny from governance failures, corruption, or economic mismanagement. Prolonged insecurity

creates a climate where citizens focus on survival rather than holding leaders accountable. This reinforces the elite's grip on power, as the populace is distracted from systemic governance issues.

Marginalization and Control of the Masses: Terrorism creates socioeconomic instability, which disproportionately affects marginalized groups. By fostering or failing to address insecurity, elites maintain a system where the masses are disenfranchised and less likely to challenge the status quo. This aligns with the theory's assertion that elites manipulate power dynamics to sustain control over resources and decision-making.

Weakening of State Institutions: Elites benefit from weak institutions that lack the capacity to counter terrorism effectively. When state resources are diverted to fight terrorism rather than building institutions, elites retain the ability to operate with minimal oversight, perpetuating cycles of corruption and underdevelopment.

Elite Theory provides a compelling framework for understanding how terrorism is weaponized as an instrument of political governance in Nigeria.

Dimensions of Terrorism

Terrorism is widely defined as the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often against civilians, to achieve political, religious, or ideological goals. It is characterized by acts intended to create fear, disrupt societal norms, and coerce governments or populations into compliance (Schmid, 2017). In Nigeria, terrorism manifests through insurgencies like Boko Haram, which targets civilians, educational institutions, and security forces, aiming to establish an Islamic state (Harmon, 2000).

The dimensions of terrorism include political, religious, and economic motivations. Politically motivated terrorism seeks to influence governance, policy, or political stability. Religious terrorism, such as that driven by extremism, aims to impose specific ideologies. Economic terrorism involves sabotage of resources or infrastructure to disrupt economic stability (Venda, 2016). These dimensions are interlinked, as terrorist activities often exploit societal vulnerabilities, including poverty and weak governance.

Political Governance: Concepts and Practices

Political governance refers to the processes and systems through which power is exercised in managing a nation's resources and addressing societal needs. Effective governance is characterized by accountability, rule of law, transparency, and participatory decision-making (World Bank, 1994). In Nigeria, political governance has faced challenges such as corruption, weak institutions, and political instability, which have impeded sustainable development (Aghedo and Oarhe, 2012). Governance practices in Nigeria are often marred by power struggles and electoral violence, with political actors sometimes exploiting societal divisions for personal gain. The interplay between governance and security remains critical, as governance failures can exacerbate insecurity and violence, while terrorism disrupts governance structures.

DISCUSSION

Historical Context of Terrorism in Nigeria

Terrorism in Nigeria has deep historical roots, evolving through various phases and influenced by sociopolitical, economic, and religious factors. The post-independence era saw the

emergence of violent groups rooted in ethnic and regional grievances, such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), where factions employed acts resembling terrorism to achieve their objectives (Falola and, 2008). However, contemporary terrorism in Nigeria is largely associated with religious extremism, particularly the activities of Boko Haram, which began as a radical Islamic group advocating for Sharia law which is not true, but escalated into one of the deadliest terrorist organizations globally (Abimbola, 2016).

The activities of Boko Haram gained prominence in 2009 when its founder, Mohammed Yusuf, was killed during a crackdown by Nigerian security forces. This led to the group's radicalization under Abubakar Shekau, resulting in a violent insurgency characterized by bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians, schools, and government installations. The group's abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 brought global attention to its atrocities, symbolizing its targeted assault on education and societal stability (Zenn, 2014). Over the years, Boko Haram has splintered into factions, with one of its offshoots, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), further intensifying the insecurity in northern Nigeria.

In addition to Boko Haram, Nigeria has faced other forms of terrorism, such as militant activities in the Niger Delta region. Groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) emerged in response to perceived neglect and environmental degradation by oil companies, employing acts of sabotage, kidnapping, and attacks on oil infrastructure to push their agenda (Freedom, 2016). Similarly, rising banditry and kidnapping in northwestern Nigeria represent new dimensions of terrorism, with heavily armed groups terrorizing rural communities and exploiting governance gaps for financial and political gains. Currently, terrorism in Nigeria has transcended religious or regional boundaries, posing a national threat. It has contributed to widespread displacement, economic instability, and the erosion of public trust in governance. The inability of successive governments to adequately address the root causes of terrorism—such as poverty, unemployment, and weak institutions—has allowed these groups to thrive (Adebayo, 2013). This persistent insecurity underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat terrorism and strengthen Nigeria's governance systems (Marc-Antoine, 2014).

Terrorist Groups and Activities

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, is the most prominent and dangerous terrorist group in Nigeria. Formed in 2002, the group aims to establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria and has carried out numerous attacks, bombings, and kidnappings targeting civilians, security forces, and government institutions. Boko Haram has been responsible for thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people in Nigeria (Maingwa et al., 2012).

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

ISWAP is a splinter group that broke away from Boko Haram in 2016. It has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and has become increasingly active in the Lake Chad region, targeting military outposts and carrying out attacks on civilians (Zenn, 2020). ISWAP has been a

significant threat to the Nigerian government's efforts to combat terrorism and has contributed to the ongoing instability in the region.

Ansaru

Ansaru is a militant Islamist group that emerged in 2012 and has carried out attacks against the Nigerian military and foreign nationals. The group, which has links to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, has been responsible for kidnappings, assassinations, and other acts of violence (Onuoha, 2013). Ansaru's activities have further destabilized the security situation in northern Nigeria.

Lakurawa

The Lakurawa group who are from Libya, Niger and Mali was initially invited by local leaders in almost five local government that share borders with such countries, e.g Tangaza, Benji, Selami, Garabawa and Ilaila LGAs of Sokoto State in 2017 to address the growing threats by bandits from Zamfara State. However, when the news broke in 2018 that the group was actually a terror group masquerading as herdsmen, the Sokoto State Police Command, in a bid to please Buhari's administration, debunked the news, claiming that they were non-violent herders who "came to the area largely owing to availability of water for their animals" (This Day Newspaper, 2024). The emergence of Lakurawa, a new terror group in the North-west, has compounded the state of insecurity caused by bandits that have been terrorising the zone. With the obvious failure of the police and other federal security agencies to stop this emerging internal security threat. With no end in sight in the war against Boko Haram, bandits and other terrorist groups, a new terrorist group called 'Lukarawa' has also emerged in the North-west geopolitical zone (This Day Newspaper, 2024).

Terrorism as a Tool of Political Governance

Terrorism in Nigeria has increasingly become a mechanism through which political actors manipulate insecurity for personal or group advantage. By exploiting terrorism, individuals and groups seek to gain leverage in governance, influence public opinion, and consolidate power. This deliberate manipulation of violence exacerbates insecurity, undermines democratic principles, and weakens state institutions. The interplay between terrorism and governance highlights the need to address the political underpinnings of insecurity in Nigeria (Bowie, 2021).

Electoral Violence and Intimidation

Terrorism has been used as a means to disrupt electoral processes in Nigeria. Political actors have reportedly employed violent groups to intimidate opponents and suppress voter turnout in regions where their popularity is low. For instance, during elections, acts of violence such as bombings and attacks on polling stations have been linked to attempts to manipulate outcomes. This strategy not only undermines the legitimacy of elections but also instills fear in voters, depriving them of their democratic rights. Such practices erode public trust in the electoral process and perpetuate political instability.

Use of Terrorist Groups for Political Gain

In some instances, political elites have been accused of covertly supporting or tolerating terrorist groups to advance their agendas. This includes funding or providing logistical support to

insurgents to destabilize opponents' strongholds or maintain control over certain regions. For example, the alleged links between politicians and militant groups in the Niger Delta illustrate how terrorism can be instrumentalized for political purposes. This manipulation deepens societal divisions and sustains cycles of violence, as these groups often become independent threats beyond their initial political utility (Bowie, 2021).

Impact of Terrorism on Governance

Weakening of Institutions

Terrorism undermines governance by eroding the capacity of institutions to function effectively. In Nigeria, frequent attacks on security forces, government buildings, and infrastructure weaken the state's ability to provide basic services and maintain order. Corruption and mismanagement within the security sector further exacerbate institutional fragility, as resources allocated for combating terrorism are often misappropriated. This institutional weakness creates a governance vacuum, allowing non-state actors to gain influence and legitimacy in affected regions (Ekhomu, 2020).

Diversion of Public Resources

The financial burden of counterterrorism operations significantly strains public resources. Funds that could be used for education, healthcare, and infrastructure development are diverted toward military operations and rebuilding destroyed communities. For example, the Nigerian government has spent billions of dollars on military campaigns against Boko Haram, often at the expense of other critical sectors. This diversion of resources not only hampers economic growth but also exacerbates inequalities, creating conditions that fuel further insecurity (Ekhomu, 2020)..

Undermining Democratic Processes

Terrorism disrupts democratic processes by fostering an environment of fear and insecurity. In Nigeria, insurgent attacks have led to the postponement of elections and restricted political participation in certain regions. Moreover, the exploitation of terrorism to suppress opposition or justify authoritarian measures erodes democratic norms and concentrates power in the hands of a few. This cycle of insecurity and political manipulation diminishes citizens' faith in democracy and weakens the foundations of good governance.

Consequences of Using Terrorism in Political Governance

The use of terrorism as a tool in political governance carries profound and far-reaching consequences. In Nigeria, where terrorism intersects with political agendas, the resulting impacts are evident in the socioeconomic and humanitarian spheres. These effects not only hinder development but also undermine national cohesion and public confidence in governance.

Socioeconomic Consequences

Economic Instability

The utilization of terrorism for political purposes destabilizes economies by disrupting economic activities and weakening productive sectors. In Nigeria, terrorism-related violence, particularly in the northeastern region, has led to the destruction of infrastructure, farmland, and businesses, crippling local economies (Adebayo, 2013). This instability extends to the national level, as the

costs of counterterrorism operations strain government budgets, diverting resources from essential developmental projects.

Decline in Foreign Investment

A climate of terrorism discourages foreign investment, as investors perceive heightened risks in affected areas. The persistent attacks by groups like Boko Haram and bandits in northern Nigeria have deterred international corporations from operating in the region. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the inflow of foreign direct investment has significantly declined in regions plagued by insecurity (NBS, 2021). This erosion of investor confidence hinders economic growth, exacerbating existing developmental challenges.

Rise in Poverty and Unemployment

Terrorism exacerbates poverty and unemployment by disrupting livelihoods and economic opportunities. The displacement of communities and destruction of economic resources deprive many of their means of sustenance. For instance, farmers in terrorism-affected areas face reduced agricultural output due to insecurity, leading to food shortages and increased poverty levels (Mike, 2015). The lack of economic opportunities, in turn, fuels a vicious cycle where vulnerable populations may be recruited into terrorist activities.

Social and Humanitarian Impact

Displacement of Citizens

The use of terrorism in governance results in mass displacement, as citizens flee violence and insecurity. In Nigeria, the insurgency in the northeast has displaced millions, creating a humanitarian crisis marked by overcrowded refugee camps and strained resources (IDMC, 2022). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) often live in dire conditions, with limited access to basic services, further compounding their suffering.

Loss of Lives and Property

Terrorism as a political tool exacts a heavy toll in terms of human lives and property. Thousands of Nigerians have been killed in terrorist attacks, leaving behind grieving families and communities. Additionally, the destruction of infrastructure, homes, and businesses has long-term repercussions on rebuilding efforts. The 2014 Chibok schoolgirl abduction and countless attacks on villages underscore the devastating loss of both human potential and societal stability (Zenn, 2014).

Deterioration of Public Trust in Governance

The persistent use of terrorism undermines public trust in government institutions. When citizens perceive that political actors are complicit in fostering insecurity for personal gain, it erodes confidence in the government's ability to protect lives and property. This lack of trust further alienates the populace, creating apathy and resistance to governance initiatives (Ogundiya, 2016). In Nigeria, accusations of political complicity in terrorism have fueled widespread disillusionment, undermining social cohesion and stability.

Counterterrorism and Governance Reforms in Nigeria

Efforts to combat terrorism in Nigeria have involved various policies, strategies, and collaborations aimed at addressing insecurity. However, despite these efforts, the persistent

challenges of insurgency and violence highlight the need for comprehensive governance reforms. A multifaceted approach combining counterterrorism measures, institutional strengthening, and international collaboration is essential to mitigate terrorism and its impact on Nigeria's governance and development.

Current Counterterrorism Efforts

Nigeria has adopted several counterterrorism policies and strategies, including military operations, deradicalization programs, and legislative measures. The *National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST)* and military campaigns like *Operation Lafiya Dole* have been central to efforts against groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Ekhomu, 2020). While these efforts have resulted in notable successes, such as the recapture of territories previously controlled by insurgents, significant gaps remain. Failures in intelligence coordination, underfunding of security agencies, and inadequate community engagement have hindered the effectiveness of these measures, allowing terrorism to persist (Muhammad, 2012).

Need for Political Reforms

Handling terrorism in Nigeria requires robust political reforms that strengthen institutions and ensure accountability. Weak governance structures and corruption often undermine counterterrorism efforts, with funds allocated for security frequently misappropriated. Reforms must focus on building resilient institutions capable of delivering justice and security effectively. Transparency and accountability are critical to restoring public trust in governance and ensuring that resources are deployed appropriately. Furthermore, reforms should prioritize inclusive governance to address grievances and reduce the socio-political factors that fuel terrorism (Ekhomu, 2020).

Role of International Partnership

International collaboration plays a crucial role in Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. Partnerships with global organizations, regional bodies, and foreign governments have facilitated intelligence sharing, capacity building, and funding for counterterrorism initiatives. The *Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)*, comprising Nigeria and neighboring countries, has been instrumental in combating cross-border terrorism. However, sustainable success requires deeper engagement with international partners to address root causes, such as poverty and radicalization, and to enhance Nigeria's capacity for long-term counterterrorism measures (Alexander, 2017).

Facts:

- i. The fact of the matter is that governance developed interest on terrorist, careless about the masses.
- ii. It is another way of syphoning resources in the name of insecurity.
- iii. Creating more tension in other to divert the attention of the pupils for their mission.
- iv. The nexus between the elite political gladiators and terrorist who serve as their instrument source of wealth is to cordial robust, they serve as political commuters.

Findings

- i. Terrorism in Nigeria has deep historical roots, with the emergence of violent groups rooted in ethnic, regional, and religious grievances in the post-independence era. Contemporary

terrorism is largely associated with the activities of Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group that escalated into one of the deadliest terrorist organizations globally.

- ii. Boko Haram, along with its splinter group the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have been responsible for thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions in Nigeria through bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians, security forces, and government institutions. Other terrorist groups, such as Ansaru and the newly emerged Lakurawa, have further contributed to the insecurity in the country.
- iii. Terrorism has increasingly become a mechanism through which political actors manipulate insecurity for personal or group advantage. This includes using terrorist groups to disrupt electoral processes, suppress opposition, and consolidate power. The intersection of terrorism and governance has had profound socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences, including economic instability, decline in foreign investment, rise in poverty and unemployment, mass displacement of citizens, and a deterioration of public trust in governance.
- iv. Efforts to combat terrorism in Nigeria have involved military operations, deradicalization programs, and legislative measures. However, these efforts have been hampered by failures in intelligence coordination, underfunding of security agencies, and inadequate community engagement.

Conclusion

Terrorism in Nigeria has deep historical roots and has evolved to become a complex challenge that intersects with political governance. The activities of groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and other emerging terrorist organizations have had devastating consequences, contributing to widespread insecurity, economic instability, and the erosion of public trust in government. The exploitation of terrorism for political gain has further exacerbated the crisis, undermining democratic processes and weakening state institutions. Addressing this multifaceted problem requires a comprehensive approach that combines effective counterterrorism measures with significant governance reforms and international collaboration. Only through a holistic and sustained effort can Nigeria break the cycle of violence and instability and build a more secure and prosperous future.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made. Government should:

- i. Prioritize transparency and accountability to restore public trust and ensure that resources allocated for counterterrorism efforts are used judiciously.
- ii. Implement policies and programs that address the underlying socioeconomic and political factors that fuel radicalization and terrorism, such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization.
- iii. Improve coordination and information-sharing among security agencies such as Department of State Services (DSS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Intelligence Agency (NIA), Joint Task Force (JTF) – North East and Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF): Nigeria collaborates with Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and

- Benin to fight Boko Haram to enhance the effectiveness of counterterrorism operations and disrupt terrorist networks.
- iv. Expand deradicalization programs that focus on rehabilitation and reintegration of former terrorists, and foster greater community engagement to build trust and resilience against extremist ideologies.
 - v. Deepen partnerships with regional and global actors such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), INTERPOL, the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), and the European Union (EU), to mobilize resources, technical expertise, and actionable intelligence. These partnerships should be leveraged to strengthen international support and address the transnational dimensions of terrorism affecting Nigeria, including threats posed by Boko Haram, ISWAP, and other extremist networks operating across borders.

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