

Terrorism and Political Economy in Nigeria: Understanding the Boko Haram Insurgency

by

Olisemeke Solomon, Vincent Eseoghene Efebeh, Francis Ayegbunam Ikenga

Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Science,

Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Email: olisemekechukwudijr@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria through the lens of political economy, with emphasis on how governance failures, socio-economic deprivation, and political exclusion have contributed to the emergence and persistence of terrorism. While Boko Haram is often framed as a religious extremist group, this study argues that its activities are deeply rooted in structural conditions such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, weak institutions, and regional inequality, particularly in Nigeria's North-East. Using a qualitative research design and content analysis of secondary sources, the study explores how these factors interact to create an enabling environment for radicalization, recruitment, and insurgent financing. Findings reveal that Boko Haram exploits widespread economic hardship, youth unemployment, and educational inequality to sustain its operations. Furthermore, governance deficits, including corruption and poor service delivery, have weakened state legitimacy and intensified public grievances. The study also highlights the economic, social, and political impacts of the insurgency, including displacement, infrastructure destruction, reduced agricultural productivity, and declining investment. It concluded that military responses alone are insufficient to address the insurgency. Instead, a holistic approach that integrates security measures with poverty reduction, institutional reform, inclusive governance, and regional cooperation is essential for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram; Terrorism; Political Economy; Nigeria; Insurgency

Introduction

Terrorism has emerged as one of the most significant security and development challenges confronting contemporary states, particularly in developing countries where governance weaknesses, socio-economic inequalities, and political instability create conditions conducive to violent extremism. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency represents one of the most devastating manifestations of terrorism in the country's history. Since its emergence in the early 2000s and its violent uprising in 2009, Boko Haram has carried out sustained attacks against civilians, government institutions, security forces, schools, religious centers, and economic facilities, resulting in thousands of deaths, widespread displacement, and extensive destruction of property (Agbibo, 2013; Adesoji, 2010).

Although Boko Haram is often viewed through the lens of religious extremism, growing scholarship suggests that the insurgency is deeply rooted in broader political and economic conditions. The political economy perspective argues that terrorism does not emerge in isolation but is influenced by the interaction of governance failures, poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, corruption, and unequal access to political and economic opportunities (Okoli, 2013; Nwankpa, 2015). In northern Nigeria, particularly the North-East region, persistent socio-economic deprivation, weak state institutions, and perceived political marginalization have created conditions that facilitate radicalization and recruitment into extremist movements (Igbokwu et al., 2015; Agbiboa, 2013).

The rise of Boko Haram has coincided with severe developmental challenges in the affected regions. Despite Nigeria's status as Africa's largest economy, significant disparities exist between the northern and southern regions of the country. High levels of poverty, youth unemployment, illiteracy, and inadequate infrastructure have contributed to widespread frustration and social discontent among young people, many of whom constitute the primary recruitment base for extremist groups (Evans & Kelikume, 2019; Onuoha, 2014). These socio-economic realities provide support for arguments that terrorism is often sustained by structural conditions that create grievances and weaken citizens' confidence in the state.

Beyond its security implications, Boko Haram has had profound economic and governance consequences for Nigeria. The insurgency has disrupted agricultural production, trade, investment, education, and public service delivery, particularly in the North-East region. Communities have been displaced, businesses destroyed, and substantial government resources redirected toward military operations and humanitarian assistance (Abubakar & Young, 2019; Okafor & Piesse, 2018). These developments have hindered economic growth and complicated efforts toward sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Furthermore, the persistence of Boko Haram despite extensive military operations raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategies. While military interventions have reduced the group's territorial control at various times, they have not fully addressed the underlying political and economic factors that contribute to the insurgency's resilience (Thurston, 2017; Owojori et al., 2021). Consequently, understanding Boko Haram solely as a security threat provides an incomplete explanation of its emergence and persistence.

Against this background, this study examines Boko Haram through the lens of political economy. It seeks to explore how governance failures, economic deprivation, political exclusion, corruption, and institutional weaknesses have contributed to the emergence and sustainability of the insurgency. By analyzing the relationship between terrorism and political economy in Nigeria, the study provides a broader understanding of Boko Haram and contributes to discussions on sustainable strategies for countering violent extremism and promoting national development.

Literature Review

Terrorism

Terrorism refers to the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, particularly against civilians, to achieve political, ideological, or religious objectives (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2017). It is characterized by violence, fear creation, and the pursuit of political goals. Similarly, Laqueur (2001) views terrorism as a strategy employed by non-state actors to achieve objectives that cannot be attained through conventional political means.

In Nigeria, terrorism is largely associated with Boko Haram, whose activities include bombings, abductions, and attacks on civilians and state institutions. These actions are intended not only to cause destruction but also to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the Nigerian state (Nwankpa, 2025). Boko Haram's activities are often linked to insurgency, which involves organized armed rebellion against an established government.

While early studies attributed Boko Haram's violence mainly to religious ideology (Adesoji, 2010), recent scholarship emphasizes structural factors such as poverty, unemployment, poor governance, corruption, and social inequality (Tuesday, 2017). These conditions create an environment that facilitates recruitment into extremist groups and sustains insurgent activities. According to Mbanwusi (2024), Boko Haram's operations have also devastated economic activities in North-Eastern Nigeria, worsening poverty and instability.

The political economy perspective argues that terrorism is not merely a security problem but also a product of governance failures and socio-economic deprivation. Consequently, military responses alone are insufficient. Sustainable solutions require governance reforms, economic inclusion, and community development initiatives alongside security measures (Uduo & Obaji Akpet, 2024). Thus, understanding terrorism within a political economy framework provides deeper insight into the persistence of Boko Haram and the challenges of combating insurgency in Nigeria.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*, emerged in northern Nigeria in the early 2000s under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf (Ikenga & Efebeh, 2013). The group opposed Western education and secular governance, attracting followers through its criticism of corruption, poverty, and governance failures in the North-East (Adesoji, 2010; Britannica, 2026).

Initially a religious movement focused on preaching and mobilization, Boko Haram became a violent insurgent group after the killing of Yusuf by security forces in 2009. Under Abubakar Shekau, the group adopted armed rebellion, carrying out bombings, assassinations, and mass abductions, including the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2017; Uadiale, 2025).

Scholars argue that Boko Haram's emergence and persistence are linked to structural challenges such as poverty, unemployment, political exclusion, and weak governance in the North-East

(Igbokwu et al., 2015; Uadiale, 2025). These conditions have provided opportunities for recruitment and radicalization, particularly among unemployed youths (Mbanwusi, 2024).

Between 2010 and 2015, Boko Haram expanded its operations and temporarily controlled territories in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2017). In 2015, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, leading to the formation of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Internal disagreements later resulted in a split between the ISWAP faction and the faction loyal to Shekau (Pham, 2016; Britannica, 2026).

Beyond security concerns, Boko Haram has had severe socio-economic consequences. The insurgency has disrupted trade, agriculture, education, and healthcare, displaced millions of people, weakened local governance, and reduced investment in the region (Mbanwusi, 2024; Efebeh & Johnson, 2023). As a result, the insurgency continues to reinforce the cycle of poverty and instability that contributed to its emergence.

Table 1: Major Boko Haram Attacks (2009–2025)

Year / Date	Attack / Event	Location	Impact / Notes
July 2009	Start of Boko Haram insurgency	Borno State	Armed rebellion begins after a conflict with security forces.
2010 (Sept)	Jail break, Bauchi attack	Bauchi	Group frees ~721 prisoners; begins large-scale violence.
Nov 4, 2011	Multi-site bombings	Yobe State, Nigeria	Massive bombings on police, churches, and government buildings.
Jan 20, 2012	Kano attacks	Kano, Nigeria	Large-scale attacks on multiple targets.
Aug 19, 2013	Dumba massacre	Dumba, Borno State	~35 civilians killed outside a mosque.
Sept 18, 2013	Benisheik massacre	Benisheik, Borno State	~159 people killed in a coordinated attack.
Apr 14, 2014	Chibok schoolgirls abduction	Chibok, Borno State	~276 girls abducted from school dormitories; global attention.
May 26, 2014	Battle of Buni Yadi	Buni Yadi, Yobe State	Boko Haram overruns the town, kills soldiers and policemen.
Aug 6, 2014	Fall of Gwoza	Gwoza, Borno State	Boko Haram seizes control, declares territory; hundreds killed.
Nov 24, 2014–Mar 17, 2015	Damasak massacre	Damasak, Nigeria	Sustained assault with many civilian deaths and displacement.
Jan 3–7, 2015	Baga massacre	Baga, Borno State	Up to 2,000 killed; one of the deadliest attacks.
2015 (various)	Expanded terror campaign	North-East Nigeria	Multiple raids, killings, and bombings against villages & security forces.
Jan 30, 2016	Dalori attack	Dalori, Borno State	~86 killed; mass arson and bombings.
2018–2020	Continued	North-East &	Persistent attacks and splintering

	insurgency	borders	into ISWAP and factions.
Sept 2023	Attack in Yobe State	Yobe State, Nigeria	~37 civilians killed in local assault.
Sept 4, 2024	Major attack in Yobe	Yobe State	~81 killed; significant late insurgent assault.
2025 (Apr–Oct)	Multiple attacks on communities & soldiers	Borno State, Nigeria	Series of assaults on Izge, Marte, Rann, Darul Jamal, Ngamdu, etc., dozens killed, buildings burned.
Jul 6, 2025	Malam Fatori attack	Borno State	~9 civilians killed and others injured.
Mar 26, 2025	Coordinated base attacks	Wajiroko & Wulgo, Borno State	Militants attack two military bases, killing soldiers and overrunning positions.

Source: The Guardian (2015); Adagbabiri & Okolie (2017); Idisi & Orhero (2025); AP News. (2025)

Recognizing Boko Haram as more than a security problem underscores the importance of a political economy perspective, which situates terrorism within broader socio-political and economic structures. This approach shifts analysis from purely ideological or military frameworks to one that considers the interactions between poverty, governance, political exclusion, and social marginalization in explaining both the emergence and endurance of Boko Haram (Igbokwu et al., 2015; Idisi & Orhero, 2025). Understanding these interconnections is crucial for designing effective counter-insurgency strategies that go beyond military force to address the root causes of radicalization and support sustainable peace and development in Nigeria’s North-East.

Political Economy of Boko Haram

Boko Haram should be understood not only as a religious extremist group but also as a product of poverty, weak governance, political exclusion, and socio-economic marginalization in Nigeria’s North-East (Akinyetun, 2021; Igbokwu et al., 2015). The political economy perspective argues that structural inequalities and state failures create conditions that encourage insurgency and violent extremism.

The North-East experiences high levels of poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, weak healthcare systems, and limited educational opportunities compared to other regions of Nigeria (World Bank, 2024; Efebeh & Johnson, 2023). These conditions generate frustration and feelings of exclusion, making vulnerable populations more susceptible to recruitment by Boko Haram (Evans & Kelikume, 2019). Youth unemployment is particularly significant, as many young people are attracted by promises of financial support, social belonging, and a sense of purpose (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2017).

Weak governance and corruption further contribute to the insurgency. Poor service delivery, political marginalization, and declining public trust in government institutions have reduced state legitimacy, allowing Boko Haram to present itself as an alternative source of authority in some

communities (Akinyetun, 2021; Idisi & Orhero, 2025). Corruption and poor resource management also limit development efforts and reinforce socio-economic inequalities (Evans & Kelikume, 2019).

Studies show that areas characterized by poverty, weak institutions, and limited economic opportunities tend to experience more persistent Boko Haram activities (Evans & Kelikume, 2019). Therefore, addressing the insurgency requires not only military action but also poverty reduction, institutional reforms, economic empowerment, and political inclusion to tackle the root causes of extremism.

Socio-Economic Conditions and the Rise of Terrorism in Nigeria

The rise of terrorism in Nigeria is closely linked to socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and educational inequality. These conditions create grievances and vulnerabilities that extremist groups exploit for recruitment and support, particularly in the North-East.

i. Poverty and Economic Marginalization

Poverty remains a major factor contributing to terrorism in northern Nigeria. The North-East suffers from widespread poverty, weak infrastructure, inadequate social services, and limited economic opportunities (Elomien et al., 2023). Such deprivation weakens state legitimacy and creates resentment among marginalized communities.

Insurgent groups exploit these conditions by presenting themselves as alternatives to a government perceived as neglectful and ineffective (Onuoha, 2014). Regional economic inequalities between northern and southern Nigeria have further deepened feelings of exclusion and frustration, creating an environment where extremist narratives can flourish (Adesoji, 2018). Consequently, poverty and economic marginalization have become important drivers of Boko Haram recruitment and support (Chidozie et al., 2024; Ani et al., 2024).

ii. Youth Unemployment and Radicalization

Youth unemployment is another significant contributor to terrorism in Nigeria. Limited industrial development, weak private-sector growth, and inadequate vocational opportunities have left many young people unemployed, particularly in northern Nigeria (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014).

Unemployed youths often experience frustration, social exclusion, and loss of confidence in state institutions, making them vulnerable to extremist recruitment (Agbibo, 2013). Boko Haram has frequently exploited this situation by offering financial rewards, social status, and a sense of belonging to recruits (Omoju et al., 2023). Therefore, unemployment should be viewed not only as an economic challenge but also as a security concern requiring targeted youth empowerment and job creation programmes.

iii. Illiteracy and Educational Inequality

Illiteracy and educational inequality have also contributed to the growth of terrorism in northern Nigeria. The region records lower literacy rates and school enrolment levels due to poverty, inadequate educational infrastructure, and limited government investment in education (Omoju et al., 2023).

Boko Haram's anti-Western education ideology finds greater acceptance in communities where access to formal education is already limited (Adesoji, 2018). Illiteracy reduces individuals' ability to critically assess extremist propaganda, increasing vulnerability to radicalization (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Furthermore, attacks on schools and the displacement of communities have worsened educational challenges and expanded the population of out-of-school children in the region (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018).

Thus, poverty, youth unemployment, and educational inequality remain major socio-economic conditions that have contributed to the rise and persistence of terrorism in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges through inclusive development, employment generation, and educational investment is essential for sustainable peace and security.

Governance and Political Factors in the Boko Haram Insurgency

The Boko Haram insurgency cannot be fully understood without examining the governance and political conditions that facilitated its emergence and persistence. Beyond poverty and unemployment, governance failures, corruption, and political marginalization created an environment that weakened state legitimacy and public confidence in government institutions. The inability of the Nigerian state to provide adequate security, social services, and economic opportunities generated grievances, particularly in northern Nigeria, where Boko Haram originated. Scholars argue that Boko Haram's rise is closely linked to weak state capacity, political neglect, and governance deficits that limited the state's ability to address developmental inequalities and security challenges (Thurston, 2017; Okoli & Iortyer, 2014).

i. Weak State Institutions and Governance Failures

Weak state institutions are widely recognized as a major factor in the rise and persistence of Boko Haram. Effective governance requires institutions capable of maintaining security, enforcing laws, and delivering public services. However, institutions in northeastern Nigeria have often been unable to perform these functions effectively, creating governance vacuums that insurgent groups exploit. Edeh and Ugwueze (2014) contend that Boko Haram reflects deeper governance problems, including institutional incapacity to address security threats, socio-economic inequalities, and development challenges.

Institutional fragility has undermined the effectiveness of agencies such as the police, judiciary, and local administrative authorities, which are frequently under-resourced, poorly coordinated, and vulnerable to political interference (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). Similarly, inadequate provision of education, healthcare, and infrastructure in many rural communities has reinforced

perceptions of state neglect, allowing extremist groups to present themselves as alternative sources of authority and social order (Agbiboa, 2013).

Weak coordination among security agencies has further reduced the effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts. Poor intelligence sharing, bureaucratic rivalry, and operational inefficiencies have created security loopholes that insurgents exploit (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). Additionally, limited financial autonomy and administrative capacity at the local government level have weakened grassroots governance, especially in conflict-prone areas (Agbiboa, 2013). Consequently, strengthening institutions, improving service delivery, and enhancing law enforcement capacity are regarded as essential components of sustainable counter-terrorism strategies.

ii. Corruption and Mismanagement of Public Resources

Corruption and the mismanagement of public resources have significantly contributed to the Boko Haram insurgency by weakening governance structures and eroding public trust. Resources intended for development and security are often diverted through corrupt practices, exacerbating poverty, unemployment, and social discontent (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). According to Suleiman and Karim (2015), corruption has perpetuated a cycle of poor governance that creates conditions conducive to extremist recruitment.

Corruption has also undermined the effectiveness of Nigeria's security sector. Mismanagement of funds allocated for military procurement, training, and counter-terrorism operations has sometimes limited the operational capacity of security forces, enabling Boko Haram to exploit these weaknesses (Agbiboa, 2013). Furthermore, widespread corruption contributes to public disillusionment with government institutions and weakens state legitimacy, which insurgent groups often exploit by portraying themselves as alternatives to a corrupt political order (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012).

Development programmes aimed at addressing poverty and improving living conditions have likewise been affected by corruption. Funds intended for infrastructure, healthcare, education, and empowerment initiatives are often mismanaged, preventing communities from benefiting from such interventions and allowing socio-economic grievances to persist (Edeh & Ugwueze, 2014). Weak accountability mechanisms and a culture of impunity further reinforce perceptions of injustice and government unresponsiveness (Agbiboa, 2013). Consequently, transparency, accountability, and effective resource management are widely considered essential for improving governance and addressing insecurity.

iii. Political Exclusion and Marginalization

Political exclusion and marginalization have also contributed to the emergence of Boko Haram. Political exclusion occurs when groups perceive themselves as being denied meaningful participation in governance, access to state resources, and political opportunities. Northern Nigeria has historically experienced lower levels of development and access to social services than some other regions, contributing to feelings of neglect and exclusion (Edeh & Ugwueze, 2014).

According to Thurston (2017), Boko Haram emerged within a context of political frustration and dissatisfaction with state authority. Many citizens viewed political elites as failing to address regional developmental challenges, thereby fostering anti-state sentiments that extremist groups could exploit. Similarly, Agbiboa (2013) links Boko Haram's rise to the inability of political leaders to tackle poverty, unemployment, and inequality in northern Nigeria.

The manipulation of religious and ethnic identities in political competition has further deepened social divisions and created opportunities for extremist mobilization (Thurston, 2017). Political exclusion is particularly evident among youths, many of whom perceive political institutions as dominated by elite patronage networks, leading to feelings of alienation and vulnerability to radicalization. Limited community participation in governance has also weakened trust in government institutions, enabling insurgent groups to present themselves as defenders of marginalized populations (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012).

Therefore, inclusive governance that promotes equitable resource distribution, political participation, regional development, and social inclusion is critical for addressing the political roots of terrorism in Nigeria (Edeh & Ugwueze, 2014).

Economic Dimensions of Boko Haram Activities

The Boko Haram insurgency cannot be fully understood without examining the economic foundations that sustain its operations. Terrorist groups require financial resources to recruit members, acquire weapons, fund logistics, and maintain organizational networks. Scholars argue that financial resources serve as the operational backbone of insurgent organizations, enabling them to sustain attacks and resist counter-terrorism efforts (Okoli, 2013; Piazza, 2017). Boko Haram has developed a complex financial structure supported by criminal enterprises, coercive taxation, external funding networks, and participation in illicit regional markets.

Initially, Boko Haram relied on donations from sympathizers, religious supporters, and contributions from members through informal religious and patronage networks (Onuoha, 2014). However, as counter-insurgency measures disrupted these channels, the group diversified its revenue sources by engaging in kidnapping, smuggling, extortion, cattle rustling, and informal taxation across the Lake Chad Basin (Attah, 2024). This evolution reflects a broader trend in which insurgent groups combine ideological objectives with criminal economic activities to sustain their operations (Piazza, 2017; Zenn, 2020).

i. Terrorism Financing and Funding Sources

Financing remains essential to Boko Haram's operational survival. Early funding came primarily from wealthy sympathizers, religious donors, and member contributions through informal financial systems (Onuoha, 2014). Some studies also suggest that certain political actors may have indirectly supported the movement during its early stages, although such claims remain contested (Agbiboa, 2013).

As security forces targeted these funding channels, Boko Haram increasingly relied on criminal activities. Bank robberies, attacks on government facilities, and looting provided early sources of

cash and weapons (Zenn, 2020). Kidnapping for ransom later became one of the group's most lucrative revenue streams, targeting civilians, government officials, humanitarian workers, and foreign nationals to generate substantial payments (Isiaka & Ojedokun, 2024).

The group also imposes informal taxes on communities under its control, requiring residents to pay levies to engage in farming, fishing, and trade. In addition, insurgents often seize livestock, agricultural products, and other valuables during attacks, integrating violent insurgency with economic exploitation (Piazza, 2017). The diversification of these funding strategies highlights the growing convergence between terrorism and organized crime.

ii. Illegal Economic Activities (Kidnapping, Smuggling, and Extortion)

Illegal economic activities constitute a major pillar of Boko Haram's financial structure. Kidnapping has evolved from a politically motivated tactic into a significant source of revenue through ransom payments. The profitability of abductions has contributed to what scholars describe as a "kidnapping economy" in parts of northern Nigeria, where weak law enforcement enables insurgent groups to exploit vulnerable populations (Attah, 2024; Isiaka & Ojedokun, 2024).

Extortion is another important revenue source. Traders, farmers, fishermen, and transport operators in areas under insurgent influence are often forced to pay protection fees, enabling Boko Haram to establish parallel governance structures and exert economic control over local communities (Okoli, 2013).

Smuggling and trafficking also contribute significantly to the group's finances. The porous borders of the Lake Chad Basin facilitate the movement of fuel, livestock, weapons, and agricultural products through illicit trade networks (Zenn, 2020). Similarly, cattle rustling provides additional income as stolen livestock are sold in regional markets to finance insurgent activities (Piazza, 2017). Through these activities, Boko Haram has become deeply integrated into regional criminal economies.

iii. External Support and Transnational Networks

Beyond local criminal enterprises, Boko Haram benefits from external support and transnational networks that facilitate the movement of funds, weapons, and fighters across borders. A major development was the group's 2015 allegiance to the Islamic State, leading to the formation of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). This affiliation strengthened its access to international extremist networks, training opportunities, and potential financial support (Zenn, 2020).

Transnational criminal networks operating across Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon also facilitate Boko Haram's economic activities by enabling cross-border smuggling and resource transfers with limited state oversight (Agbibo, 2013). Informal financial systems such as hawala networks further assist in moving funds outside formal banking channels, making financial transactions difficult to monitor (Adisa, 2024).

Recent studies additionally highlight concerns about the possible use of digital financial technologies, including cryptocurrencies and online crowdfunding platforms, for terrorist financing (Okafor & Ezeani, 2025). These transnational financial and logistical connections demonstrate that Boko Haram is not merely a local insurgent movement but part of a wider regional and international security challenge.

In summary, Boko Haram's economic resilience is sustained through a combination of donations, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, informal taxation, smuggling, cattle rustling, and external support networks. These diverse funding mechanisms provide the financial resources necessary for recruitment, weapons acquisition, and operational continuity despite sustained counter-terrorism efforts (Okoli, 2013; Piazza, 2017; Zenn, 2020).

Impact of Boko Haram on Nigeria's Political Economy

The Boko Haram insurgency has had significant consequences for Nigeria's political economy, extending beyond violence to undermine development, weaken institutions, distort economic activities, and deepen socio-economic inequalities. Over the years, the insurgency has displaced millions of people, reduced agricultural productivity, discouraged investment, and increased government spending on security at the expense of social development (Okafor & Akinbobola, 2024). Scholars note that insurgencies generate both direct costs, such as loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure, and indirect costs, including weakened human capital, reduced investor confidence, and slower economic growth (Collier, Hoeffler, & Rohner, 2017).

i. Effects on Economic Development and Local Communities

One of the most severe consequences of Boko Haram's activities has been its impact on economic development in northeastern Nigeria. Persistent violence has displaced millions of people, disrupting livelihoods and increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance (Okafor & Akinbobola, 2024). Displacement weakens labour markets, reduces household incomes, and increases poverty.

Insurgent attacks have disrupted farming, trade, and small-scale businesses, resulting in declines in local economic output (Kure & Olaniyan, 2023). Many farmers have abandoned their lands due to insecurity, reducing food production and contributing to food shortages and rising prices (Benson & Amuwo, 2022). In addition, prolonged violence has weakened social networks and trust that traditionally supported trade, credit, and community development, making economic recovery more difficult (Akinyemi & Akinboade, 2025).

The insurgency has also strained public service delivery. Large portions of government expenditure have been redirected toward security operations, leaving fewer resources for education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social welfare programmes (Ogu & Ezekwesili, 2024). Consequently, the conflict has weakened local economies, increased poverty, and constrained sustainable development.

ii. Impact on Agriculture, Trade, and Investment

Agriculture, which serves as a major source of livelihood in northeastern Nigeria, has been severely affected by Boko Haram's activities. Attacks on rural communities have forced farmers to abandon farmlands, limited access to agricultural inputs, and disrupted market activities (Ojelabi, 2023). Studies indicate that agricultural output in states such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe has declined significantly since the onset of the insurgency (Mohammed & Musa, 2023).

Trade has also suffered as insecurity along major transport routes increases the risks of attacks, extortion, and hijacking. These challenges raise transportation costs, reduce trade volumes, and weaken regional market integration (Eze & Okafor, 2025). As a result, commercial activities across northern Nigeria and neighbouring countries have been negatively affected.

Furthermore, persistent insecurity has discouraged both domestic and foreign investment. Investors are often reluctant to commit resources to areas perceived as unstable, leading to lower investment inflows, slower job creation, and limited industrial growth in affected regions (Olajide & Adeyemi, 2024). Reduced investment also contributes to unemployment and economic grievances, which may increase vulnerability to radicalization.

At the national level, the combined effects of declining agricultural productivity, disrupted trade, reduced investment, and increased security spending have negatively affected economic growth and diversification (Ojelabi, 2023). Although some scholars argue that conflict can stimulate policy reforms under certain conditions, the scale of insecurity in northeastern Nigeria has largely constrained such opportunities (Collier et al., 2017). Therefore, addressing the economic consequences of Boko Haram requires integrated security, reconstruction, and development strategies that promote long-term stability and inclusive growth.

Social Impacts of Boko Haram

Boko Haram's insurgency has generated severe social and economic consequences, particularly in northeastern Nigeria. The conflict has disrupted livelihoods, weakened social structures, and reversed development gains across affected communities. Agriculture, a major source of income and food supply in the region, has been severely affected as farmers abandon their fields due to insecurity and fear of attacks. This has reduced agricultural output, increased food insecurity, and raised food prices in states such as Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe (Mbanwusi, 2024; Adelaja et al., 2019).

Trade and commercial activities have also suffered significantly. Insecurity, road closures, and market disruptions have restricted the movement of goods and people, forcing many traders and small business owners to relocate or cease operations. The destruction of roads, bridges, and marketplaces has further weakened economic activities and discouraged investment in the region (Adelaja et al., 2019; Eme & Ugwu, 2024). Consequently, economic growth and development have slowed considerably.

Education has been one of the sectors most affected by the insurgency. School closures, destruction of educational facilities, and mass displacement have interrupted learning for

millions of children. Many tertiary institutions have also experienced disruptions due to attacks and security concerns, reducing educational quality and limiting future opportunities for young people (Olatunbosun-Alakija et al., 2016; Ejiogu, 2020). These setbacks have negatively affected human capital development and increased the risk of long-term poverty.

Mass displacement remains another major consequence of the conflict. Millions of people have been forced from their homes, with many residing in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or host communities that often lack adequate access to food, healthcare, and other essential services (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2017). The large number of displaced persons has also placed additional pressure on host communities and limited available resources.

The insurgency has further weakened social cohesion and psychological well-being. Exposure to violence, loss of family members, destruction of property, and forced displacement have contributed to widespread trauma, anxiety, and social fragmentation (Ayodele et al., 2024). Traditional support systems have been disrupted, making community recovery and resilience more difficult (Olatunbosun-Alakija et al., 2016).

In addition, Boko Haram has negatively affected Nigeria's international image and development partnerships. Persistent insecurity has led some international organizations and NGOs to reduce or suspend operations in affected areas, limiting support for health, education, and social welfare programmes (Mbanwusi, 2024).

Overall, Boko Haram's activities have created a multidimensional social crisis characterized by disrupted livelihoods, weakened education, mass displacement, psychological trauma, and declining development opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of security measures, economic recovery programmes, educational rehabilitation, social protection, and community resilience initiatives to support long-term development and stability.

Challenges in Combating Terrorism in Nigeria

Combating terrorism in Nigeria, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency and its affiliates, remains a complex task despite military and regional efforts. While security operations have achieved some successes, challenges such as weak intelligence systems, human rights concerns, and regional security dynamics continue to undermine effective counter-terrorism measures (Fatem & Adebola, 2024; Olatunji, 2023).

1. Security and Intelligence Limitations

A major challenge is the weakness of Nigeria's intelligence and security architecture. Effective counter-terrorism depends on timely intelligence, technological surveillance, and strong coordination among security agencies. However, poor information sharing among the military, police, Department of State Services (DSS), and other agencies has often limited operational effectiveness (Olatunji, 2023; Adekanye, 2025). Boko Haram's use of decentralized cells, encrypted communications, and cross-border movements further complicates intelligence gathering and threat detection.

Nigeria also faces limitations in surveillance technology, cyber capabilities, and specialized training for asymmetric warfare. Many security units lack the equipment and expertise needed to counter insurgent tactics effectively (Sani & Bello, 2024). In addition, corruption and institutional weaknesses reduce accountability, lower morale, and weaken public confidence in security operations (Isiyaku & Musa, 2023).

2. Human Rights Concerns in Counter-terrorism

Human rights violations during counter-terrorism operations remain another significant challenge. Reports of arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and excessive use of force have attracted criticism from both local and international organizations (Alabi & Chukwu, 2023; Adeyemi, 2024). Such practices weaken the legitimacy of security operations and reduce public cooperation with law enforcement agencies.

Studies show that communities affected by abuses are less likely to provide intelligence to security agencies, thereby limiting counter-terrorism effectiveness (Musa & Okonkwo, 2025). Although the government has introduced human rights training programmes, weak enforcement and limited accountability continue to undermine progress (Adeyemi, 2024). Scholars therefore advocate community-based policing, judicial oversight, and stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure human rights-compliant counter-terrorism operations (Chukwu & Nwosu, 2023).

3. Regional Security Dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin

The Lake Chad Basin, which includes Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, presents unique challenges for counter-terrorism efforts. Porous borders, weak state presence, poverty, and environmental pressures create conditions that insurgent groups exploit (Touval & Zenn, 2024; Ojo & Okeke-Ihejirika, 2023).

Key challenges include cross-border movements by insurgents, differences in military capabilities and priorities among regional states, and weak coordination despite initiatives such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (Fatem & Adebola, 2024; Okere, 2024). Climate change and shrinking water resources in the Lake Chad region have intensified resource competition and local grievances, creating opportunities for extremist recruitment (Ojo & Okeke-Ihejirika, 2023).

Large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees further increase social vulnerability and humanitarian challenges (IOM, 2024). In addition, Boko Haram and ISWAP maintain links with transnational smuggling and trafficking networks that generate revenue and facilitate the movement of weapons and fighters (Zenn, 2020; Touval & Zenn, 2024).

Overall, Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts are constrained by intelligence weaknesses, human rights concerns, and complex regional security dynamics. Addressing these challenges requires stronger intelligence systems, improved interagency cooperation, respect for human rights, and deeper regional collaboration to tackle both the operational and structural causes of terrorism (Fatem & Adebola, 2024; Olatunji, 2023).

Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring and understanding complex social, political, and economic phenomena within their natural contexts. Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of meanings, experiences, and relationships rather than the measurement of variables through numerical data. The design was considered suitable because the study sought to examine the political and economic factors underlying the emergence, persistence, and impacts of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore the interconnections between terrorism, governance, poverty, unemployment, corruption, political exclusion, and state capacity. It also facilitated an in-depth understanding of how these factors contribute to the rise and sustainability of Boko Haram and how they affect Nigeria's socio-economic development and governance. Through the use of documentary sources such as scholarly publications, government reports, policy documents, security reports, and publications from international organizations, the study generated rich descriptive data for analysis.

The research design was particularly appropriate because it allowed for a comprehensive examination of Boko Haram beyond military and security perspectives, focusing instead on the broader political economy context in which the insurgency operates. By relying on existing documentary evidence, the study provided a holistic understanding of the causes, consequences, and responses to terrorism in Nigeria.

Method of Data Analysis

The study employed content analysis as the method of data analysis. Content analysis is a systematic qualitative technique used to examine, interpret, and categorize textual information to identify recurring themes, patterns, concepts, and relationships within the data (Krippendorff, 2019). Using this method, data obtained from journal articles, books, government publications, security reports, policy documents, newspapers, and reports from international organizations were carefully reviewed and analyzed. The collected materials were organized according to the major themes of the study, including the factors responsible for the rise and persistence of Boko Haram, the socio-economic and governance impacts of the insurgency, and the effectiveness of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategies.

The process involved identifying relevant information from the documentary sources, coding the data into thematic categories, and interpreting the findings in relation to the study objectives and research questions. Particular attention was given to recurring issues such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, governance deficits, political exclusion, insecurity, economic disruption, displacement, and counter-terrorism policies. Content analysis was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to systematically examine a large volume of documentary materials and derive meaningful insights regarding the relationship between terrorism and political economy in Nigeria. The method also enhanced the reliability of the study by allowing for the comparison of evidence from multiple sources, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of Boko Haram insurgency and its broader implications for national development and governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the political economy of terrorism in Nigeria with a focus on the Boko Haram insurgency. The findings revealed that Boko Haram's emergence and persistence cannot be adequately explained solely through religious extremism or security perspectives. Rather, the insurgency is deeply rooted in structural socio-economic and political conditions, including poverty, unemployment, weak governance, corruption, political exclusion, regional inequality, and inadequate state capacity. These factors have created an environment of frustration, marginalization, and vulnerability that extremist groups have exploited for recruitment and mobilization.

The study further established that Boko Haram has had far-reaching consequences for Nigeria's socio-economic development and governance. The insurgency has destroyed infrastructure, disruption of economic activities, displacement of populations, educational decline, humanitarian crises, and weakened public institutions, particularly in the North-East region. These impacts have not only undermined development efforts but have also eroded public confidence in government institutions and hindered long-term national stability.

In addition, the study found that Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategies have achieved some success in reducing Boko Haram's territorial control and operational capabilities. However, the continued existence and adaptability of the insurgency demonstrate that military responses alone are insufficient. The persistence of underlying political and economic challenges continues to provide conditions that sustain violent extremism. The study, therefore, concludes that Boko Haram represents both a security threat and a political economy challenge that requires comprehensive and sustainable interventions. Addressing the root causes of insecurity through inclusive governance, socio-economic development, and institutional strengthening is essential for achieving lasting peace and stability in Nigeria. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, it is evident that the Boko Haram insurgency is driven by complex political, economic, and governance-related factors that cannot be effectively addressed through military measures alone. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed to address the root causes of the insurgency and promote sustainable peace, security, and socio-economic development in Nigeria:

1. The government should prioritize socio-economic development and youth empowerment in the North-East region. Comprehensive poverty reduction programmes, job creation initiatives, vocational training, and improved access to quality education should be implemented to reduce the socio-economic conditions that make young people vulnerable to extremist recruitment. Investments in agriculture, small-scale enterprises, and infrastructure development should also be strengthened to promote economic inclusion and regional development.
2. The Nigerian government should strengthen governance institutions and improve accountability mechanisms. Efforts should be made to combat corruption, enhance transparency in public administration, improve service delivery, and ensure equitable distribution of resources across regions. Strengthening state institutions and promoting inclusive governance will help restore public trust, reduce feelings of marginalization, and address some of the structural grievances that fuel insurgency.

3. Counter-terrorism strategies should adopt a holistic approach that combines security measures with development and community-based interventions. While military operations remain necessary, greater emphasis should be placed on intelligence gathering, community engagement, deradicalization programmes, conflict prevention, and regional cooperation. Integrating security policies with social and economic development programmes will improve the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of efforts to combat Boko Haram and other extremist groups in Nigeria.

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