

The Security-Development Nexus in Borderland Governance: A Socio-Structural Analysis of Emboldening Extremist Networks and Social Cohesion in Nigeria

By

Adewunmi Samuel Olori

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution

Faculty of Social Sciences

National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja

Nou235008112@noun.edu.ng

Abstract

This article investigates the profound impact of religious extremism on peacebuilding and social cohesion in Nigeria, specifically addressing the central question: How can robust legislative interventions contribute to building resilience against religious extremism and fostering sustainable peace? Shifting from traditional linguistic approaches, this study adopts a multi-methodological design combining Process Tracing (PT) with Social Network Analysis (SNA) to map the operational and structural expansion of extremist networks, including emerging actors like the Lukarawas. The paper is theoretically anchored in the hybrid framework of Securitization Theory and Structural Violence Theory. This dual paradigm exposes how state actors inadvertently weaponize security narratives to justify human rights violations, while simultaneously ignoring the systemic socioeconomic inequalities that feed extremist recruitment. The findings reveal that the persistence of extremist threats is directly tied to the failures of a purely kinetic, military-first approach. By failing to address underlying structural deprivations, this approach has allowed transnational terror networks to adapt and expand. Consequently, the paper proposes an integrated "Legislative Nexus" that mandates a transition from reactive militarization to proactive legislative frameworks. This framework focuses on structural human rights oversight, the socioeconomic development of marginalized areas, and the legal regulation of state securitization practices to foster long-term national resilience and social cohesion.

Keywords: Legislative Measures, Securitization, Structural Violence, Social Network Analysis, Lukarawas

Introduction

In contemporary conflict studies, the intersection of religious extremism, state fragility, and borderland governance has emerged as a defining challenge to national integration and sustainable development across Sub-Saharan Africa (Mshelia, 2024; Jibril Hassan & Abubakar, 2021). In Nigeria, the escalating trajectory of extremist violence poses an existential threat to the country's multi-religious composition (Mshelia, 2024). While foundational scholarship historically treated religious conflicts through lenses of moral decay, ideological radicalism, or linguistic manipulation (Achimugu et al., 2020; Atoi, 2023), modern insurgent groups have evolved. They now systematically adapt religious doctrines

into governance alternatives, exploiting institutional voids to challenge the secular state's monopoly on legitimate authority (Jibril Hassan & Abubakar, 2021). Crucially, this phenomenon extends into the civic space, where even formal religious institutions are occasionally weaponized, as fringe groups propagate divisive homiletics that fracture historical inter-communal pacts (Hashimu et al., 2024).

Nigeria's complex ethno-religious landscape, historically resilient due to informal local peace systems, has experienced a severe breakdown in social cohesion under the pressure of modern irregular warfare (Aluko & Adeleye, 2024; Atoi, 2023; Omari, 2020). The historical progression of radical movements, from Maitatsine in the 1980s to the institutionalized insurgency of Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), has culminated in a highly fluid security environment. This is exemplified by the late-2024 emergence of the Lukarawas faction in the north-western borderlands (Ashibi, 2024). These movements are no longer isolated domestic threats; they function as decentralized cross-border networks that deepen structural divides and dismantle the social fabric. This dynamic leaves millions displaced and triggers severe humanitarian crises across peripheral geopolitical zones (Jibril Hassan & Abubakar, 2021; Achimugu et al., 2020; Mshelia, 2024).

This systemic instability exposes critical vulnerabilities in the state's institutional responses. Successive executive and legislative actions have historically relied on a heavily securitized, kinetic-first paradigm (Aluko & Adeleye, 2024). However, heavy-handed military deployments, combined with documented human rights vulnerabilities in conflict areas (Anthony et al., 2021), have frequently alienated borderland communities. This alienation hands insurgent networks powerful narratives for recruitment (Mshelia, 2024; Aluko & Adeleye, 2024). Furthermore, treating these challenges purely as military issues overlooks the deep-seated structural violence driving them: multi-dimensional poverty, youth marginalization, and the total absence of administrative governance in border regions (Salaudeen & Ibrahim, 2024).

The domestic challenges of religious extremism inevitably spill over into regional security vectors, affecting the stability of the wider Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel (Atoi, 2023). Consequently, stabilizing the Nigerian state is a matter of intense geopolitical interest to the international community (Udezo, 2009). Given the limits of short-term military campaigns, it is vital to fundamentally re-evaluate the role of the legislature. This body must shift from a passive funder of military deployment to an active architect of structural resilience. This study examines the impact of religious extremism on Nigeria's social cohesion by looking beyond formal places of worship to analyze the deep socio-structural and spatial factors at play. By investigating the root causes of radicalization alongside contemporary state interventions, this paper offers a data-driven framework for legislative reform, offering insights relevant to policymakers and scholars across fragile and pluralistic states.

Conceptual Underpinning

Human Rights

This refers to the basic rights and freedoms inherent to every person, often enshrined in international and national legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and crucially, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended). These rights are fundamental for justice and human dignity in any society. They encompass the right to life, liberty, freedom from torture,

freedom of expression, freedom of religion, right to education, and the right to equality before the law (Dada, 2012).

As inalienable rights, they cannot be legitimately suspended or granted by any government or authority. In Nigeria, legislative frameworks and judicial oversight are critical for upholding human rights, which are necessary for human dignity, development, peaceful coexistence, and conflict prevention. Violations, such as discrimination, persecution, and violence, often perpetrated or compounded by religious extremism, can significantly undermine social cohesion and hinder peacebuilding efforts. While cultural relativists may challenge universal applicability or assert interference with national sovereignty (Dau, 2014), effective legislation and robust enforcement mechanisms are paramount in countries with weak institutions and accountability deficits to protect these fundamental rights.

Peacebuilding

This refers to a multifaceted process aimed at creating sustainable and just peace in societies emerging from conflict or those at risk of violence (Adeyeri, 2021). It transcends merely ending hostilities, focusing instead on addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, injustice, and exclusion, often through legislatively mandated programs and policies. Peacebuilding encompasses a wide array of activities, including conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, justice, and reconciliation.

Proponents argue that by addressing root causes, peacebuilding fosters more lasting and sustainable peace (Ashibi, 2024). However, effective peacebuilding initiatives demand significant financial and human resources, which can be challenging to sustain, often requiring consistent budgetary allocation and oversight by the legislature. Translating peace agreements into concrete actions on the ground is also complex, necessitating clear legislative mandates and coordination. While not all efforts succeed, peacebuilding requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments (including legislative bodies), civil society organisations, international organisations, and, most importantly, the affected communities/groups themselves.

Religious Extremism

This refers to radical and often violent ideologies and practices that significantly deviate from the moderate or mainstream beliefs or interpretations of a particular religion. It is often characterised by adherence to rigid doctrines, rejection of peaceful coexistence with other religions and cultures, intolerance and discrimination towards individuals and groups with differing beliefs or lifestyles, and the justification of violence and coercion (Hashimu et al., 2024). Religious extremism can manifest in various forms, including terrorism, sectarian violence, and discriminatory practices, often involving the misinterpretation of religious texts to promote extremist ideologies.

The division of Nigeria along religious lines often fuels tensions, creating fertile ground for the proliferation of extremist ideologies and, in turn, the emergence of religious extremist groups. The rise and motivations of groups like Boko Haram and the Lukarawas in Northern Nigeria attest to the growing tide of religious intolerance and extremist ideologies in the country. Religious extremism inevitably leads to violence, terrorism, and human rights abuses. It also cultivates deep-seated hatred and intolerance between different religious groups/communities, which can be exploited by political actors for their agendas, thereby fuelling violence and instability.

The violence associated with religious extremism is not confined to any single area in Nigeria, occurring in major cities as well as the North (Ugwulebo & Chijioke, 2024). Legislative bodies play a crucial role in framing legal responses to religious extremism, including counter-terrorism laws, hate speech legislation, and frameworks for regulating religious organisations, ensuring these measures do not inadvertently infringe upon fundamental rights or exacerbate tensions (Dada, 2012). While some argue it can be a force for change or resistance against perceived injustice, its violent manifestations necessitate robust and rights-respecting legislative countermeasures.

Social Cohesion

This refers to the bonds that integrate society, ensuring individuals and groups coexist peacefully and harmoniously. It describes the degree to which members of a society feel connected to the broader community, characterised by strong social bonds, equity, inclusion, absence of discrimination and exclusion, and a shared sense of identity and belonging (Nwoko, 2023). In Nigeria, social cohesion is indispensable for a stable and prosperous society, fostering economic growth, social development, and overall well-being. It promotes cooperation, strengthens the social fabric, and enhances resilience to conflict and other challenges.

However, factors such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, and political instability in the country consistently undermine social cohesion. While some argue that diversity can undermine cohesion, and an overemphasis on it might stifle dissent, legislative actions are vital in promoting inclusivity, ensuring equitable resource distribution, enacting anti-discrimination laws, and providing platforms for all voices to be heard, thereby actively building and protecting social cohesion (Dau, 2014).

Empirical Review

The phenomenon of religious extremism has become a pervasive global challenge, with particularly devastating consequences for peace and social cohesion in fragile states. Scholarship on the causes of religious extremism in Nigeria consistently points to a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and ideological factors. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities are frequently cited as crucial drivers, creating a fertile ground for radicalisation by making individuals susceptible to extremist narratives promising salvation or a better future (Salaudeen & Ibrahim, 2024; Jibril Hassan & Abubakar, 2021). Political grievances, including corruption, state fragility, marginalisation, and perceptions of injustice, also fuel extremist recruitment by eroding public trust in legitimate governance structures (Aluko & Adeleye, 2024; Adayeri, 2021). Ideologically, studies highlight how extremist groups selectively reinterpret religious texts to justify violence, demonise ‘others’, and construct exclusionary identities, often leveraging digital platforms for propagation (Mshelia, 2024; Omari, 2020).

The manifestations and impacts of religious extremism are equally well-documented. In Nigeria, the insurgency of Boko Haram and the activities of other splinter groups like ISWAP have led to widespread violence, large-scale displacement, and profound humanitarian crises, particularly in the North-East (Achimugu et al., 2020; Atoi, 2023). Beyond physical destruction, studies reveal the severe erosion of social cohesion and trust. Extremist narratives deepen existing ethnic and religious divides, fostering suspicion and mutual distrust between communities (Samuel & Anadi, 2021; Ojo & Sadeeq, 2023). The

psychological trauma experienced by survivors, coupled with the breakdown of traditional social support systems, further deepens societal fragmentation.

In terms of responses to religious extremism, analyses often highlight the dual approach of kinetic and non-kinetic measures. Governments frequently prioritise military operations and counter-terrorism legislation to neutralise threats (Aluko & Adeleye, 2024). While these can contain territorial expansion, studies caution against their limitations, noting potential for human rights abuses that can inadvertently fuel radicalisation and alienate affected populations (Adeyeri, 2021). This highlights a crucial challenge for the legislature in crafting counter-terrorism laws that are effective yet rights-respecting, and in providing robust oversight of security agencies to prevent abuses.

Concurrently, non-kinetic approaches, including interfaith dialogue, community-based peacebuilding initiatives, and rehabilitation programs, are increasingly recognised for their potential to address root causes and foster long-term peace (Hashimu et al., 2024). However, empirical evaluations of these initiatives often point to challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of coordination, and difficulties in scaling successful models, areas where legislative support, budgetary allocations, and policy harmonisation are critically needed.

Despite this body of literature, a significant research gap remains in thoroughly examining the subtle yet powerful mechanisms through which religious extremist narratives, especially those propagated by emerging groups like the Lukarawas outside of formal religious institutions, specifically contribute to the deterioration of trust and social cohesion. Although the existence of these narratives is recognised, there is a lack of detailed critical discourse analysis that systematically deconstructs their linguistic and ideological strategies and empirically links them to specific breakdowns in inter-communal trust and social fabric. Moreover, current literature often concentrates on the immediate consequences of violence, with less attention given to the covert, everyday ways in which extremist rhetoric, even when not overtly violent, infiltrates and undermines the relational bonds that form the foundation of society.

This analytical gap directly hampers the legislature's capacity to develop targeted counter-narrative strategies and evidence-based policy measures that address the non-violent, discursive aspects of extremism. This study aims to fill this crucial gap by employing Critical Discourse Analysis to move beyond a general understanding of extremist impacts and provide an empirical, nuanced deconstruction of how specific linguistic and ideological practices foster the erosion of peace and social cohesion. A more profound analytical focus on the discursive construction of division and mistrust, particularly concerning newer extremist phenomena, will considerably aid legislative efforts to craft more precise and effective counter-narrative strategies and peacebuilding initiatives, ensuring that policy responses are not merely reactive but proactively tackle the ideological roots of extremism.

Theoretical Framework: Securitization and Structural Violence Theory

This study is hinged on a dual structural paradigm combining Securitization Theory (the Copenhagen School) and Johan Galtung's Structural Violence Theory which in turn demonstrates that religious extremism is a cyclical problem: structural violence creates a deep pool of social grievances, which the state treats as an exceptional security emergency rather than a governance deficit. This triggers heavy-handed securitization, creating further institutional resentment and fuelling the next cycle of radicalization.

Figure 1: Dual structural paradigm

Structural Violence (Galtung, 1969)

[Socioeconomic Gaps + Exclusion] ►►►► Generates Mass Grievance Base

▼
▼
▼
Extremist Exploitation/Recruitment

Securitization (Buzan et al., 1998)

[Kinetic Over-Reaction / Abuses] ◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄◄

Securitization Theory: The State's Speech Act as a Kinetic Catalyst

Securitization theory, pioneered by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, argues that security is not an objective, static reality; rather, it is the outcome of a specific programmatic practice known as a 'speech act' (Buzan et al. 1998). When a state actor designates an internal challenge, such as a religious movement, as an existential threat, this label is used to justify moving the issue out of the realm of normal democratic politics (Buzan et al., 1998). The state then claims the authority to use extraordinary measures, including martial law, unchecked military force, and the suspension of civil protections.

In the Nigerian context, the state has repeatedly securitized religious non-conformity. By framing groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and the Lukarawas strictly as existential security issues, successive administrations have routinely justified human rights violations, extrajudicial actions, and a reliance on kinetic military solutions (Aluko & Adeleye, 2024). This study uses securitization theory to demonstrate how these state actions can inadvertently strengthen extremist networks. When the state bypasses constitutional checks, it often validates extremist propaganda that portrays the secular state as a tyrannical, illegitimate actor.

Structural Violence Theory: The Material Engine of Radicalization

To balance the state-centric focus of securitization theory, Galtung's Structural Violence Theory provides an analysis of the material conditions that drive conflict. Structural violence refers to institutionalized, systemic social configurations, including severe economic inequality, political exclusion, institutionalized bias, and restricted educational access, that prevent individuals from achieving their full potential (Galtung, 1969). This form of violence is built directly into the political and economic architecture of the state, functioning quietly but decisively to cause social fragmentation.

In Nigeria, structural violence acts as the primary recruitment engine for extremist groups. The systematic neglect of peripheral geographic zones, combined with high rates of youth unemployment and a lack of basic state services, leaves local populations highly vulnerable to radical ideologies (Salaudeen & Ibrahim, 2024). Extremist organizations exploit these structural gaps, stepping into "ungoverned spaces" to offer marginalized populations alternative security structures, informal economic support, and a sense of collective purpose (Omari, 2020).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methodological design that integrates Process Tracing (PT) with Social Network Analysis (SNA) to overcome the limitations of purely qualitative text analysis. This approach allows the study to trace chronological policy choices while mapping the decentralized structural dynamics of contemporary extremist movements across Nigeria. Process tracing serves as the primary tool for identifying the intermediate steps and causal pathways linking macro-level security decisions to long-term conflict outcomes. Rather than establishing simple statistical correlations, process tracing relies on a close analysis of institutional evidence, including administrative memos, military directives, legislative tracking files, and verified event timelines.

In this paper, process tracing tracks the specific institutional decisions that led to the emergence of newer extremist actors like the Lukarawas in late 2024. The research maps the causal sequence beginning with the implementation of kinetic joint military campaigns in the Lake Chad basin, which displaced existing terror franchises, followed by the movement of fractured insurgent nodes through local border security gaps, and ending with the exploitation of local governance vacuums and economic grievances in remote areas.

To supplement this causal analysis, Social Network Analysis (SNA) is used to map and measure the structural relationships of modern extremist networks. SNA models social organizations mathematically as graphs consisting of nodes (individual actors, local cells, or foreign funders) connected by edges (financial transfers, communication logs, or joint operations). This approach measures key network metrics, including degree centrality, betweenness centrality, and overall network density.

SNA is applied to verified intelligence briefings, regional security databases, and cross-border tracking data from international bodies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024). By mapping these data points, the methodology reveals how emerging organizations like the Lukarawas link up with existing regional factions and cross-border smugglers.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Causal Mechanics of Insurgent Migration and Border Displacement

Using process tracing, the study confirms that the emergence of the Lukarawas group in north-western Nigeria in late 2024 was a predictable outcome of regional military campaigns, rather than an isolated security incident. The data tracks a clear sequence: heavy joint military operations in the North-East and Lake Chad basin successfully disrupted the territorial holds of Boko Haram and ISWAP (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020). However, instead of permanently neutralizing these fighters, this kinetic pressure forced fragmented, experienced insurgent nodes to migrate westward into the semi-arid borders of Sokoto and Kebbi states (Ashibi, 2024). The causal chain shows that these displaced groups exploited a lack of local government infrastructure, a lack of border policing, and unresolved local conflicts over land and resources to build a new base of operations.

Figure 2: Causal pathway

[Kinetic Pressure in North-East] ►► [Insurgent Displacement] ►► [Exploitation of North-West Border Gaps]

This causal pathway highlights a persistent flaw in Nigeria's security governance: the reliance on local military operations that lack coordination with long-term regional stabilization and

border management policies. When the state treats security as a short-term military objective, it simply pushes insurgent networks from one vulnerable area to another. This finding challenges the long-term effectiveness of regional joint task forces that focus entirely on territorial reclamation without establishing stable civil governance, border controls, and local police presence in reclaimed or adjacent territories (Anthony et al., 2021). Consequently, process tracing demonstrates that without comprehensive legislative mandates that link military operations to permanent border management and local governance, kinetic campaigns will continue to displace rather than dismantle extremist threats.

Theme 2: Network Topologies, Transnational Links, and Governance Vacuums

Social Network Analysis (SNA) of regional security data reveals that modern extremist organizations like the Lukarawas are organized as decentralized, highly resilient networks rather than rigid hierarchical commands. The network data shows that these groups maintain high betweenness centrality metrics, serving as active organizational bridges between local criminal gangs in Nigeria and transnational jihadist syndicates across the wider Sahel region (Omari, 2020). This decentralized structure allows these groups to quickly route funds, share tactical information, and move weapons across borders, adapting rapidly to state countermeasures.

Figure 3: Network Mapping

[Transnational Sahel Factions]



▼ (High Betweenness Centrality)



[Lukarawas Node] ►► [Local Criminal Gangs] ►► [Resource-Deprived Youth]

Furthermore, mapping these network nodes shows that they are concentrated primarily within defined ‘ungoverned spaces’, peripheral rural zones where the Nigerian state has failed to maintain basic administrative offices, court systems, or police stations (Ashibi, 2024). In these areas, extremist actors use their high connectivity to replace the state, providing alternative security systems, settling local disputes, and injecting illicit capital into depressed local economies (Omotosho, 2014). This structural layout shows why standard, state-centric policing struggles to contain modern extremism. By failing to maintain a formal administrative presence in border regions, the state leaves an open field for decentralized networks to embed themselves within local communities, making top-down military interventions blunt and ineffective.

Theme 3: The Toll of Insurgency: Fatalities, IDP Agglomeration, and Social Capital Loss

The empirical data gathered across regional security matrices highlights the steep human and social costs inflicted by this systemic insecurity. According to verified longitudinal reporting from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024) and regional tracking logs (Ukoji & Ukoji, 2023), the active conflict environment has yielded approximately 350,000 direct and indirect fatalities since 2009. A profound sub-set of these deaths is linked to ancillary deprivation vectors, including severe malnutrition, unchecked disease vectors, and broken healthcare delivery chains targeting infant demographics inside affected zones.

This sustained violence has catalysed an immense internal migration crisis. The localized displacement footprint comprises over 2.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)

seeking internal refuge, operating alongside a peripheral migration flow of approximately 250,000 registered refugees forced outward into the border areas of Niger, Cameroon, and the Chad Republic (UNHCR, 2024).

Table 1: Metrics of insurgent conflict footprint and regional deprivation vectors

Socioeconomic & Insecurity Indicator	Quantitative Assessment/ Impact Footprint	Primary Drivers & Regional Spatial Anchors	Empirical Source(s)
Direct & Indirect Fatalities	~350,000 individuals	Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa Axis	UNHCR (2024); Ukoji & Ukoji (2023)
Internal Displacement Footprint	>2.2 million IDPs	Lake Chad Basin & Northern Peripheries	UNHCR (2024); ACCORD (2024)
Cross-Border Refugee Outflow	~250,000 refugees	Niger, Cameroon, and Chad Republics	UNHCR (2024)
Multidimensional Poverty Index	76.5% (North-East)/75.8% (North-West)	National Scale Aggregate: 62.9% (133M)	National Bureau of Statistics (2022)

This structural disruption strips communities of local social capital and destroys long-standing patterns of inter-communal cohesion. When large populations are forced into highly congested IDP camps or absorbed into host communities without adequate public infrastructure, traditional multi-ethnic security agreements, elder mediation mechanisms, and customary legal processes are fractured (Adams et al., 2023). The sudden concentration of displaced families in resource-scarce environments regularly triggers secondary conflicts over arable land, fresh water, and entry-level employment, exacerbating historical ethno-religious divides (Adams et al., 2023). This breakdown creates widespread local mistrust, destroying the social networks required to resist insurgent co-optation and leaving young people increasingly vulnerable to radicalized recruitment campaigns.

Theme 4: Socioeconomic Exploitation and the Traps of Multi-Dimensional Poverty

The study demonstrates that the spread of extremist networks matches existing maps of extreme poverty across Nigeria. Data from the Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that 133 million citizens (62.9% of the national population) live in multi-dimensional poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Akoji & Abaji, 2025). This deprivation is concentrated in the northern regions where extremist groups operate: the North-East shows a multidimensional poverty rate of 76.5%, while the North-West stands at 75.8% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Long-term unemployment, low school completion rates, and a lack of primary school access are the main drivers of this poverty index (Akoji & Abaji, 2025).

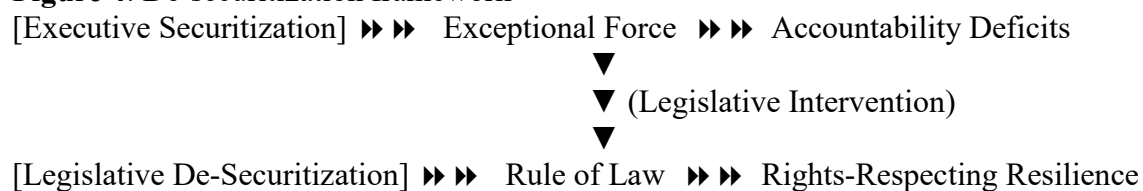
This structural deprivation validates the key assertions of Structural Violence Theory. When three-quarters of a regional population is systemically cut off from formal employment, quality education, and clean infrastructure, the state has defaulted on its basic social contract (Oyebode, 2022). Extremist networks systematically exploit this economic precarity. In under-resourced northern zones, these groups offer immediate cash pay-outs, small business loans, and a sense of identity to young people facing a lifetime of economic exclusion (Salaudeen & Ibrahim, 2024). This economic tie demonstrates that kinetic military campaigns cannot resolve the security crisis on their own; as long as systemic economic deprivation

remains unaddressed, structural violence will continue to provide a steady stream of recruits for extremist networks.

Theme 5: De-Securitization and Proactive Legislative Interventions

The final theme highlights the urgent need to move away from reactive security policies toward permanent, rights-respecting legislative governance. The research demonstrates that current counter-terrorism measures are heavily securitized, giving the executive branch wide powers to deploy military force without sufficient independent oversight, which often results in human rights friction points (Anthony et al., 2021). To break this cycle, the National Assembly must use its constitutional powers to initiate a process of de-securitization, that is, moving counter-extremism policies out of the realm of exceptional military force and into a transparent, rule-of-law framework (Buzan et al., 1998).

Figure 4: De-securitization framework



This structural shift requires establishing a robust ‘legislative nexus’ that uses the power of the budget and legislative oversight to build social resilience (Dada, 2012). The legislature must move beyond symbolic peace gestures to pass laws that mandate independent human rights monitoring for all internal security operations, protecting citizens from state abuses (Dada, 2012). Furthermore, counter-extremism funding must be structurally reallocated, shifting resources from military procurement to fund community-led peace initiatives, participatory regional development, and transparent interfaith dialogue systems (Numrich, 2019). By anchoring counter-extremism within clear statutory frameworks and economic equity, the legislature can dismantle the recruitment mechanisms used by extremist networks, helping to rebuild national social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious extremism in Nigeria is a systemic challenge driven by structural violence and prolonged by reactive, kinetic-heavy securitization. Process Tracing and Social Network Analysis show that emerging networks like the Lukarawas are highly adaptable, moving through border security gaps and embedding themselves within marginalized, under-resourced communities. Relying primarily on military operations without addressing systemic economic deprivation and weak local governance simply shifts the geographic focus of violence while leaving the root causes of radicalization intact.

To build long-term social resilience, Nigeria's counter-extremism strategy must move toward an institutional model rooted in de-securitization and structural equity. The National Assembly has a central role to play in this transition by establishing a formal ‘legislative nexus.’ By using its legislative, budgetary, and oversight powers, parliament can mandate independent human rights protections, ensure equitable resource allocation to marginalized areas, and establish permanent governance frameworks in border regions. Transitioning from short-term military operations to transparent, rule-of-law community investments is essential to dismantle extremist networks and protect national social cohesion.

It is therefore recommended that the parliament should:

1. enact a Borderlands Governance and Development Act, a statutory framework mandating the establishment of permanent civil governance structures, schools, and civic infrastructure in all border local government areas, closing the institutional vacuums exploited by networks like the Lukarawas;
2. amend national security appropriation bills to mandate that a minimum percentage of total security spending be allocated to non-kinetic programs, including community-led dispute resolution, vocational transitions for vulnerable youth, and interfaith councils;
3. enact legislation establishing an independent, civilian-led oversight board with the legal authority to monitor internal military deployments, track human rights indicators, and report directly to the National Assembly to prevent abuses that fuel radicalization.

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