THE EVOLUTION OF THE TERRORIST THREAT AND ITS IMPACT ON NIGERIA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE (2009 - 2024)

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i3.05

Abstract

The evolution of terrorist threats in Nigeria between 2009 and 2024 is examined in this paper, along with its effects on political institutions, governance, and electoral processes. The study's assumption is that terrorism in Nigeria has evolved beyond its traditional definition as a security threat to become a transformative force that is changing the political climate of the nation. The study uses an interpretive approach to capture the complexity of the phenomenon by utilising secondary data from recent academic literature and policy reports in addition to qualitative data obtained through Key Informant Interviews with military officers, security personnel, and community leaders. The results show that, in addition to undermining democratic institutions, changing terrorist threats have altered their operational logic through hybrid and adaptive governance structures. The prevailing narrative of state failure is challenged by evidence that governance in conflict-affected areas persists in modified forms including both state and non-state actors. Similarly, political actors and local communities are seen to disrupt and simultaneously modify electoral processes, suggesting a dynamic interplay between democratic practice and insecurity. The study also shows how terrorism has accelerated informal reorganisation of intergovernmental authority while escalating tensions within federal relations. By adding the idea of adaptive governance, the study theoretically improves state fragility theory and reconciles the coexistence of institutional weakness and resilience. By going beyond deficit-oriented assessments and providing a more nuanced understanding of terrorism as a process of political transformation, it adds to the body of scholarship. The study's conclusion suggests a move away from strictly military solutions and toward integrated approaches that include institutional adaptability, governance change, and locally based policy interventions.

Introduction

The type, extent, and consequences of terrorist threats have drastically changed in Nigeria since 2009, radically altering the country's political environment. What started out as a small-scale insurgency in the Northeast, mostly linked to the emergence of Boko Haram, has developed into a complicated, multifaceted security problem marked by operational sophistication, territory dispersal, and ideological fragmentation. By integrating Nigeria into larger transnational terrorism networks and changing the strategic calculations of both state and non-state actors, the rise of splinter organisations like the Islamic State West Africa Province has furtherinternationalised the danger.

The roots, philosophy, and tactics of terrorism in Nigeria have been thoroughly studied by previous research, which frequently concentrated on Boko Haram as a single phenomenon (Zenn, 2020; Thurston, 2018). These studies have shed important light on recruitment tactics, radicalisation processes, and the humanitarian effects of terrorism. Regarding the long-term development of terrorist threats and their cumulative effect on Nigeria's political environment between 2009 and 2024, there is still a significant void in the literature. In particular, terrorism's transformative consequences on political institutions, governance structures, electoral processes, and state legitimacy have not received enough attention, despite earlier research treating it as a security concern.

From an academic perspective, the gap is caused by the lack of integrative frameworks that link Nigeria's political transformation to the development of terrorism. The majority of the literature lacks a cogent analytical synthesis that reflects the dynamic interplay between changing terrorist threats and political adaptability; instead, it is either security-centric or politically descriptive. Additionally, there is little discussion of current trends, such as the decentralisation of violence, the emergence of hybrid threats, and the politicisation of counterterrorism tactics in the post-2015 democratic era (International Crisis Group, 2023).

In practice, the difference is even more noticeable. The majority of Nigeria's policy responses have been fragmented, militarised, and reactive, frequently failing to address the underlying political effects of terrorism, such as weaker governance, disrupted elections, and dwindling public confidence in state institutions. Research that not only identifies these issues but also suggests workable solutions that combine political and security reforms is desperately needed. Therefore, by offering a thorough analysis of how the development of terrorist threats has altered Nigeria's political landscape and by suggesting context-specific policy responses, this study is driven by the need to close both academic and practical gaps.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria continues to struggle with a changing terrorist threat that has seriously threatened its political stability and governance systems, even after more than ten years of counterterrorism efforts. Fundamental flaws in state capability, institutional resilience, and policy coherence have been shown by the persistence and evolution of terrorism. Public trust in democratic institutions has declined, governance has been jeopardised, and electoral procedures have been interrupted in the impacted areas.

The issue is not just that terrorism exists, but also that its changing character and wider political ramifications have not been sufficiently recognised and addressed. Current strategies

have mostly ignored the political aspects and ramifications of terrorism in favour of treating it as a military issue. As a result, the tactics used to combat the danger do not align with its nature. Effective policy formulation has also been hampered by the absence of a thorough analytical framework that connects the development of terrorist threats to political changes. Without this knowledge, interventions continue to be inadequate and disjointed, which feeds the cycles of political unrest and bloodshed. By offering a complex approach that incorporates security and political viewpoints, this study aims to address this issue.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the evolution of terrorist threats in Nigeria from 2009 to 2024 and to analyze their impact on the country's political landscape.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Analyze the evolution and changing patterns of terrorist threats in Nigeria within the specified period.
2. Examine the impact of these evolving threats on political institutions, governance, and electoral processes.

Clarification of Key Concepts

(i) Terrorism is the use of violence or the threat of violence by non-state actors to accomplish political, ideological, or religious goals; it frequently targets civilians in an effort to instill fear and force social or political change.

(ii) The term "evolution of terrorist threat" refers to how terrorist actions have changed over time in terms of organization, ideology, tactics, and geographic distribution.

(iii) The structure, procedures, and dynamics of political institutions, governance, election systems, and governmental legitimacy within a particular society are all included in the political landscape.

(iv) The methods, policies, and actions used by governments and other players to stop, oppose, and react to terrorist activity are referred to as counterterrorism.

Methodology

To capture the breadth, complexity, and context-specificity of the changing terrorist threat and its political ramifications in Nigeria, the study uses qualitative data from secondary sources and Key Informant Interviews. Sensitive security dynamics, institutional reactions, and lived experiences are all part of the issue being studied, and they cannot be sufficiently measured or reduced to numerical indicators. The flexibility and interpretive depth needed to examine meanings, perceptions, and relationships among important actors within the conflict environment are thus provided by qualitative approaches. The study purposively selected twelve key informants and they were coded from KII-01 to KII-12 respectively.

The strategic roles held by the respondent's military officers, Department of State Services employees, and community leaders make the use of Key Informant Interviews especially warranted. These players have operational experience, insider knowledge, and contextual awareness of the nature of terrorist threats and how political and security institutions respond to them. Their viewpoints give the study access to subtle insights about institutional limitations, decision-making procedures, and ground-level realities that are sometimes lacking in official reports or quantitative information. Additionally,

by triangulating viewpoints from the security and civilian domains, interviewing a variety of informant categories strengthens the findings' trustworthiness.

By offering a more comprehensive analytical basis and allowing the study to place its conclusions within the context of current scholarly discourse, the inclusion of secondary data enhances the primary qualitative evidence. Validated information on trends, patterns, and theoretical interpretations of terrorism and governance in Nigeria can be found in scholarly literature, policy studies, and institutional publications. By identifying gaps that the primary data aims to fill, the utilisation of such sources guarantees that the study is based on existing information. Therefore, by enabling triangulation, improving validity, and offering a thorough grasp of the research problem, the combination of Key Informant Interviews with secondary data increases the methodological rigour of the study. It makes it possible for the researcher to connect scholarly analysis with experiential insights, resulting in discoveries that are both theoretically and practically sound.

Review of Related Literature

Beyond descriptive narratives, recent research on terrorism in Nigeria has examined structural causes, regional dynamics, and global connections. A thorough description of Boko Haram's evolution and its alliance with international jihadist movements may be found in Zenn (2020). Thurston (2018) investigates the group's internal dynamics and ideological underpinnings.

The wider ramifications of terrorism have started to be addressed in more recent research. The disintegration of armed organisations and the rise of new security issues in Nigeria are highlighted by the International Crisis Group (2023). In their analysis of the sociopolitical causes of insurgency, Onapajo and Ozden (2020) focus on economic marginalisation and governance flaws. However, rather than treating political effects as primary analytical issues, these studies frequently consider them as secondary outcomes. The ways in which terrorism modifies state-society relations, electoral outcomes, and political behaviour have not received much attention. Furthermore, there isn't a forward-looking viewpoint in the literature that combines policy recommendations with empirical investigation. By offering a comprehensive analysis that links the development of terrorism with political changes, this work fills theoretical and practical gaps in the literature. As a result, the part offers the paper's theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

The State Fragility Theory serves as the analytical foundation for our investigation. According to State Fragility Theory, a state's incapacity to carry out essential tasks like security, governance, and service delivery fosters an environment that is favourable to conflict and instability (Rotberg, 2021). Although this theory has been used in earlier research to explain the rise of terrorism in Nigeria, this study expands on its application by analysing how the development of terrorist threats exacerbates state fragility and modifies political systems. This study highlights the reciprocal relationship between terrorism and political transformation, in contrast to previous works that concentrate on causation.

The study expands the theoretical framework to take into consideration dynamic interactions between changing threats and institutional responses by incorporating political variables and temporal analysis. This method offers a foundation for creating creative policy solutions and a more thorough grasp of the issue. The following section assessed the development of

terrorist threats in Nigeria within this framework.

The Evolution of Terrorist Threats in Nigeria from 2009 to 2024

Scholarly analysis of the development of terrorist threats in Nigeria between 2009 and 2024 indicates a discipline that is conceptually disjointed and analytically uneven despite being increasingly rich in empirical data. The evolution of Boko Haram from a localised insurgent movement into a sophisticated and adaptable terrorist network is a crucial theme that permeates the literature. Boko Haram's trajectory has been shown to represent organisational change, ideological recalibration, and strategic realignment with international jihadist organisations, according to early accounts and later modifications by Zenn (2020) and Thurston (2018). By showing how the group's disintegration resulted in the creation of the Islamic State West Africa Province, which imposed new systems of government, taxation, and territorial control in portions of northeastern Nigeria, more recent research expands on this story (International Crisis Group, 2023). Although these studies offer strong descriptive explanations, they frequently give organisational evolution precedence over systemic consequences. The inadequate examination of how these changes impact the larger security ecosystem particularly with regard to state reactions, civilian adaptability, and intergroup competition represents the analytical gap. By conceptualising terrorist growth as a reorganisation of the entire conflict environment rather than just organisational change, our study overcomes this constraint and emphasises the interaction between various violent actors and state institutions.

The geographical spread of terrorist activity outside of the Northeast is another major topic in the literature. According to recent research, terrorist organisations and bandit networks frequently form alliances that allow violence to move into the North West and North Central regions (Olojo, 2023). This growth has been seen as proof of Nigeria's security architecture's porosity and the adaptability of non-state armed organisations. According to empirical research, these groups take advantage of economic hardship, local grievances, and poor governance to gain traction in new areas (Okoli&Ogayi, 2021). Nevertheless, a large portion of the current literature undervalues the independent dynamics of new groups by treating this dispersion as a linear extension of Boko Haram's effect. A homogenised understanding of terrorism results from the literature's frequent failure to break down the structures, motivations, and operational logics of these actors. This study identifies a gap in the failure to conceptualize geographical diffusion as a process of hybridization, where terrorism intersects with criminality, communal conflict, and resource competition. The research challenges the prevailing narrative and offers a more nuanced understanding of the changing danger situation by promoting this viewpoint.

The impact of radicalisation and ideology in sustaining terrorist activities is another topic that has drawn scholarly interest. According to recent research, religious narratives, social networks, and digital platforms have a significant role in recruiting and brainwashing (Adesoji, 2022). These pieces demonstrate how extremist message is flexible and appealing to under-represented groups. However, the analytical emphasis on ideology frequently ignores the interaction between pragmatic factors like coercion, economic incentives, and survival and ideological commitment. According to empirical data, a large number of recruits join terrorist organisations as a result of institutional

weaknesses and a lack of other options rather than ideological convictions (Mercy Corps, 2021). The gap in the literature lies in the tendency to dichotomize ideological and material drivers, thereby obscuring the complex motivations underlying participation in terrorism. This study addresses this limitation by adopting an integrative approach that situates ideology within a broader matrix of socio economic and political factors, thus offering a more comprehensive explanation of recruitment dynamics.

The literature has also engaged extensively with the evolution of counterterrorism strategies in Nigeria, particularly the reliance on military force. Studies by Ewi (2023) and International Crisis Group (2023) argue that the state's militarized response has achieved limited success, often resulting in civilian casualties, human rights violations, and the alienation of local communities. Quantitative data demonstrating ongoing levels of violence in spite of higher military spending and activities lends credence to these conclusions. However, the prevailing critique tends to frame the problem as one of implementation rather than conceptualization. There is limited interrogation of the underlying assumptions that inform Nigeria's counterterrorism approach, particularly the prioritization of kinetic measures over political and institutional reforms. The gap therefore lies in the absence of a critical examination of the epistemological foundations of counterterrorism policy. This study advances the debate by questioning the dominant security paradigm and proposing a reorientation towards strategies that integrate governance, development, and community engagement.

Another critical issue concerns the impact of terrorism on state legitimacy and governance. Recent studies have demonstrated that prolonged insecurity has eroded public trust in government institutions, weakened state authority, and created spaces for alternative forms of governance by non-state actors (Agbiboa, 2022). These findings underscore the political consequences of terrorism, including reduced electoral participation and increased reliance on informal security arrangements. However, the literature often treats these outcomes as secondary effects rather than central components of the terrorist threat. There is a lack of systematic analysis linking the evolution of terrorism to specific changes in political behavior and institutional performance. This study identifies a gap in the insufficient theorization of the relationship between terrorism and political transformation. By foregrounding this relationship, the research seeks to reposition terrorism as a fundamentally political phenomenon with far reaching implications for state formation and democratic consolidation.

The issue of internationalization has also gained prominence in recent scholarship, particularly in relation to the affiliation of Nigerian terrorist groups with global jihadist networks. Studies indicate that such affiliations have facilitated the transfer of resources, expertise, and strategic guidance, thereby enhancing the operational capacity of local groups (Zenn, 2020). While this perspective highlights the transnational dimensions of the threat, it often downplays the agency of local actors and the specificity of the Nigerian context. The literature tends to adopt a top down approach that views local groups as extensions of global networks, rather than as actors with their own agendas and constraints. This study identifies a gap in the need for a more balanced analysis that recognizes both global influences and local dynamics. By adopting a bottom up perspective, the research aims to provide a more accurate account of how international linkages

shape but do not determine the evolution of terrorism in Nigeria.

Finally, the literature has begun to explore the role of technology and digital communication in the evolution of terrorist threats. Recent studies highlight the use of social media, encrypted messaging, and online propaganda to facilitate coordination, recruitment, and fundraising (Bloom &Lokmanoglu, 2022). These findings point to the increasing sophistication of terrorist groups and their ability to adapt to changing technological environments. However, the focus on digital tools often overlooks the structural conditions that enable their effective use, such as weak regulatory frameworks, limited state capacity, and socio economic inequalities. The gap lies in the tendency to treat technology as an independent variable rather than as part of a broader socio political context. This study addresses this limitation by situating technological adaptation within the wider framework of state fragility and governance challenges, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of its role in the evolution of terrorism.

In synthesizing these strands of literature, it becomes evident that while significant progress has been made in documenting the evolution of terrorist threats in Nigeria, substantial gaps remain in terms of conceptual integration, analytical depth, and policy relevance. This study contributes to the field by addressing these gaps through a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that links organizational transformation, geographical diffusion, ideological dynamics, counterterrorism strategies, political implications, international linkages, and technological adaptation. In doing so, it advances both academic understanding and practical responses to one of the most pressing security challenges facing Nigeria. The next section discussed the impact of these threats on Nigeria's political landscape.

The Impact of Terrorist threats on Nigeria's Political Landscape

Examining the body of research on how terrorist threats affect political stability in Nigeria finds a prevalent analytical tendency to link terrorism to institutional deterioration and state fragility. According to recent research, ongoing terrorist attacks compromise the state's ability to uphold law and order, which erodes political stability and exacerbates governance issues (Agbiboa, 2022; Ewi, 2023). Population displacement, election process disruption, and deterioration in public trust in democratic institutions have all been caused by frequent attacks in the Northeast and growing insecurity in other areas, according to empirical research (International Crisis Group, 2023). Even while these studies provide strong evidence that terrorism and instability are related, they frequently define political stability narrowly, mainly as the continuation of governmental power or the lack of violence. The deeper aspects of stability, such as institutional flexibility, political legitimacy, and the tenacity of democratic norms, are overlooked by such a paradigm. This study highlights a crucial lacuna in the literature by failing to rethink political stability as a disputed, dynamic process influenced by both state and non-state actors. By presenting this viewpoint, the paper contends that terrorism actively modifies the circumstances under which stability is negotiated and upheld rather than just destabilising political systems.

The effect of terrorism on electoral politics and democratic engagement is another crucial topic. According to recent academic research, terrorist violence has resulted in lower voter turnout, voter apathy, and occasionally the postponement

or relocation of elections in impacted areas (Onapajo, 2021). According to quantitative research, voting habits are changed by insecurity, which frequently helps incumbents who use security narratives to maintain power (Adebayo, 2022). Nevertheless, these assessments frequently take a deterministic stance, presuming a consistent and direct link between terrorism and election results. The differences in political behaviour among various social groups and geographical areas, as well as the function of local agency in mediating these effects, have not received much attention. Furthermore, the literature frequently ignores the manner in which political players use terrorism as a tool to control narratives and election processes. This study finds a gap in the inadequate examination of the political economy of elections in an unstable environment. It makes the case that terrorism interacts with pre-existing political institutions and incentives to produce unique, context-specific results that are impossible to describe using generalised models.

The impact of terrorism on intergovernmental relations has been increasingly acknowledged in Nigerian federal relations literature. According to studies, conflicts and coordination issues have been brought about by the federal government's concentration of security authority and the state governments' inadequate capabilities (Suberu, 2020). One form of conflict that has been identified as weakening cooperative federalism and aggravating governance deficiencies is the deployment of federal security forces without sufficient consultation with subnational actors (Ojo, 2023). Although these studies emphasise significant institutional limitations, they frequently view federal connections as static structures rather than dynamic processes. The way that terrorism itself alters the federation's power and responsibility structure is not given enough consideration. For example, the rise of regional security programs like EbubeAgu and Amotekun points to a reorganisation of federal dynamics motivated by the perceived shortcomings of centralised responses. The failure of the literature to theorise terrorism as a catalyst for federal reorganisation is identified by this study. It asserts that formal and informal renegotiations of authority are necessary due to the changing threat environment, changing Nigerian federalism in ways that go beyond traditional constitutional arrangements.

Another concern is how terrorism affects governance, especially with regard to state presence and service delivery. Previous research has shown how terrorist attacks impair government agencies' capacity to function efficiently in impacted areas, disrupt administrative operations, and destroy infrastructure (Ewi, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023). Declining human development metrics and a greater reliance on non-state actors for essential services have been connected to these disruptions. However, a large portion of the literature has a deficit-oriented viewpoint that highlights state failure without sufficiently analysing the adaptive tactics used by both state and non-state actors. The reconstruction of government in insecure environments, including the formation of hybrid governance structures including traditional authorities, community organisations, and even armed actors, has not received much attention. The transformative dimensions of government under terrorist danger are not given enough emphasis, according to this study. It contends that terrorism creates new forms of legitimacy and authority that coexist with and occasionally subvert established state structures rather than merely undermining government.

Another crucial aspect of the literature is the issue of legitimacy and state-society relations.

According to recent research, terrorist acts and the state's reaction to them have both contributed to the decline of public confidence in government institutions (Agbiboa, 2022). Affected populations' sentiments of injustice and estrangement have been exacerbated by reports of security forces violating human rights. Although these studies offer valuable insights, they frequently view legitimacy as a one-way property that the state either possesses or loses. The changeable and negotiated nature of legitimacy in conflict situations is not adequately captured by this binary paradigm. A more complex understanding of how interactions between the state, citizens, and non-state actors create, challenge, and redefine legitimacy is required. By presenting legitimacy as a relational and processual notion, this study fills this vacuum and allows for a more thorough examination of its development in connection to terrorism.

The financial and economic effects of terrorism on federal relations and government are another area of study. Research shows that while economic infrastructure degradation lowers income collection and exacerbates fiscal imbalances, rising security spending takes funds away from development priorities (World Bank, 2022). These results highlight the tangible limitations that terrorism places on governance. However, rather than treating these economic repercussions as essential elements of the political process, the literature frequently views them as external shocks. The impact of fiscal pressures on policy agendas, intergovernmental negotiations, and political decision-making has not received much attention. In order to fully comprehend the effects of terrorism on governance, this study highlights a gap in the integration of political and economic analysis. It asserts that financial limitations influence the incentives and capabilities of state actors at many levels and are not just a result of insecurity but also a catalyst for political change. Scholars have also focused on how external initiatives and international actors shape governance responses to terrorism. Research has looked at how foreign military support, development assistance, and multilateral collaboration affect Nigeria's efforts to combat terrorism (Williams, 2022). Although these assessments emphasise the significance of foreign assistance, they frequently take a state-centric stance that ignores the local effects of such interventions. The impact of outside intervention on domestic political processes, such as those pertaining to sovereignty, accountability, and policy autonomy, has not received much attention. This study highlights a gap in the literature's inadequate discussion of how local and global governance systems interact. It makes the case that, despite their necessity, foreign interventions may have unforeseen repercussions that profoundly alter domestic political connections and systems.

It is clear from synthesising these literary threads that current research offers insightful but insufficient information about how terrorist threats affect Nigeria's political stability, federal relations, and governance. The main emphasis on sector-specific and descriptive research has led to a disjointed comprehension of the issue. By providing an integrated and critical viewpoint that places terrorism within the larger political and institutional context, this study adds to the body of literature. This research offers a more complex and thorough framework for comprehending the complex effects of terrorism on Nigeria's political landscape by challenging the presumptions, methods, and conclusions of earlier studies.

Key Informant Interview

The major informants' perspectives were presented, evaluated, and triangulated with a large body of literature in this part. This was predicated on the goals of the study.

What is the evolution and changing patterns of terrorist threats in Nigeria within the specified period?

KII 001: According to the respondent, there has been a noticeable shift in terrorist threats in Nigeria since 2009 from a localised insurgency motivated by ideological extremism to a decentralised network of violent actors working in several locations. The response claims that although Boko Haram first focused its activities on Borno State, it eventually broadened its operational area through tactical adaptation and fragmentation, giving rise to new organisations like the Islamic State West Africa Province. According to the respondent, this change has made the threat harder to contain and less predictable. Zenn (2020), who contends that Boko Haram's fragmentation greatly increased its operational flexibility and geographical reach, concurs with this viewpoint.

KII 002: The responder claims that growing cooperation between criminal networks and insurgent groups, especially in the North West region, is indicative of Nigeria's evolving pattern of terrorist threats. The respondent claims that what was once thought of as banditry has changed into a type of hybrid terrorism with strategic coordination and ideological overtones. According to the respondent, this convergence has made counterterrorism measures more difficult by making it harder to distinguish between organised crime and political violence. Okoli and Ogayi (2021), who highlight the increasing convergence of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria, endorse this viewpoint.

KII 003: The reply argues that terrorist organisations' operational plans have changed dramatically, moving from traditional armed operations to asymmetric warfare tactics including targeted assassinations, suicide bombers, and improvised explosive devices. The respondent claims that these strategies are intended to maximise psychological damage and erode public trust in the government. The reply goes on to say that the use of female and child suicide bombers is an unsettling adaption meant to take advantage of cultural weaknesses. Thurston (2018) supports this viewpoint by highlighting how Boko Haram's methods have changed strategically over time.

KII 004: The respondent claims that a structural flaw in Nigeria's security architecture is indicated by the geographic expansion of terrorist operations from the Northeast into the North Central and North West areas. The reply claims that inadequate state presence, permeable borders, and local grievances that create an ideal environment for recruiting all contribute to this spread. According to the respondent, terrorism has evolved from a regional issue to a national security crisis due to the spread of violence. The International Crisis Group (2023), which details the growing extent of insecurity throughout Nigeria, supports this stance.

KII 005: The responder claims that as economic incentives and survival tactics have grown in importance, ideological motivation is no longer the only factor driving terrorist actions in Nigeria. The answer claims that rather than strong ideological convictions, poverty, unemployment, and a lack of state backing are the main reasons why people join terrorist organisations. According to the respondent, recruiting and involvement in terrorist actions have changed as a result of this change. Mercy Corps (2021), which concludes that economic

issues are crucial in Boko Haram recruiting, supports this viewpoint.

KII 006: The respondent argues that the creation of the Islamic State West Africa Province has added aspects of territorial administration and governance to the terrorist threat in Nigeria. The respondent claims that this group has challenged the Nigerian state's authority by establishing social services, judicial, and taxation systems in regions under its control. According to the respondent, this development signifies a change from insurgency to the establishment of a proto-state. Zenn (2020), who highlights ISWAP's governance tactics, supports this viewpoint.
KII 007: The respondent claims that the development of terrorist threats in Nigeria has been greatly impacted by technical developments. The respondent claims that terrorist organisations are using digital media more frequently for recruitment, propaganda, and attack planning. According to the respondent, these groups' efficacy and reach have increased due to the digital dimension, making them more resistant to conventional counterterrorism tactics. Bloom and Lokmanoglu (2022), who highlight the significance of digital communication in contemporary terrorism, support this viewpoint.

KII 008: According to the responder, the Nigerian government's counterterrorism tactics have not kept up with the threat's changing nature. The respondent claims that the ongoing use of military force has not addressed the root causes of terrorism and has occasionally made the issue worse through violations of human rights. The respondent argues that in order to successfully combat the evolving patterns of terrorist activity, a more all-encompassing strategy is required. Ewi (2023), who criticises the shortcomings of militarised counterterrorism strategies in Nigeria, supports this viewpoint.

KII 009: The respondent argues that regional and transnational factors, such as the impact of international jihadist networks, are intimately related to the development of terrorist threats in Nigeria. The answer claims that local groups have access to resources, training, and strategic direction thanks to their ties with international organisations. The reply claims that the threat's scope and complexity have increased as a result of this internationalisation. Zenn (2020), who emphasises the international ties between ISWAP and Boko Haram, supports this viewpoint.

KII 010: According to the responder, the development of terrorist threats is significantly influenced by community-level dynamics. The respondent claims that rivalry for resources, ethnic conflicts, and local grievances all contribute to the rise of terrorism. The respondent argues that terrorist organisations have been able to infiltrate communities because these problems have not been addressed. Agbiboa (2022), who studies the sociopolitical backdrop of violence in Nigeria, supports this viewpoint.

KII 011: According to the responder, the general security situation has gotten worse as a result of the terrorist groups' growing rivalry and bloodshed. The respondent claims that while different factions fight for land, resources, and influence, they frequently get into violent altercations. The respondent argues that the issue has become more complicated and challenging to resolve as a result of this internal fragmentation. International Crisis Group (2023), which highlights the internal conflicts among Boko Haram factions, supports this viewpoint.
KII 012: The respondent argues that wider systemic flaws in state capability and governance are reflected in the development of terrorist threats in Nigeria. The respondent

claims that the state's failure to provide fundamental amenities, economic opportunity, and security has made it possible for terrorism to flourish. According to the respondent, resolving these structural problems is crucial to successfully combating the danger. Rotberg (2021), who connects state instability to the continuation of violent conflict, supports this viewpoint.

What is the impact of these evolving threats on political institutions, governance, and electoral processes of Nigeria?

KII 001: According to the respondent, the development of terrorist threats in Nigeria has severely undermined political institutions' authority and ability to carry out their duties, especially in areas affected by conflict where government presence has become minimal and occasionally symbolic. The answer claims that the weakening of institutional authority has left gaps in governance, which are frequently taken advantage of by non-state actors that impose substitute systems of legitimacy and control. Agbiboa (2022), who argues that ongoing insecurity weakens governmental authority and promotes the development of alternative governance forms, supports this viewpoint.

KII 002: The respondent claims that because terrorist threats are unpredictable and adaptable, Nigerian governance has become more reactive than strategic, forcing policymakers to put short-term security concerns ahead of long-term institutional development and policy coherence. The reply goes on to say that this reactive stance has led to poor coordination across government entities and dispersed policy responses. This stance is consistent with Ewi (2023), who claims that Nigeria's counterterrorism initiatives are primarily reactive and lack strategic coherence. KII 003: The respondent claims that terrorism has seriously hampered Nigeria's electoral processes, especially in the Northeast, where voter turnout has decreased as a result of population displacement and fear of violence. The answer goes on to say that these disturbances undermine democratic consolidation and jeopardise the validity of election results. Onapajo (2021), who discovers that insecurity considerably lowers voter turnout and undermines election credibility, supports this viewpoint.

KII 004: According to the respondent, the changing nature of terrorist threats has resulted in the militarisation of governance, where security agencies have a substantial impact on political decision-making, overshadowing democratic norms and civilian institutions. The respondent claims that this development raises questions regarding the sustainability of democratic governance and the balance of power. The International Crisis Group (2023), which emphasisesthe growing predominance of military approaches in Nigeria's governing framework, supports this viewpoint.

KII 005: According to the respondent, terrorism has strained Nigeria's federal relations by highlighting the shortcomings of centralised security systems and forcing subnational governments to look for alternative security arrangements, often at odds with federal authorities. According to the respondent, this has resulted in discussions about state policing and a reorganisation of intergovernmental ties. Ojo (2023) supports this claim by arguing that disputes over security obligations between the federal and state governments have increased due to instability.

KII 006: According to the respondent, the public's confidence in political institutions has been damaged by the ongoing terrorist threats because people believe that the government

cannot guarantee their safety and well-being. The reply goes on to say that citizen participation and adherence to governmental regulations are threatened by this decline in trust. This stance is in line with Agbiboa's (2022) contention that a decline in public trust in state institutions is a result of insecurity.

KII 007: The respondent notes that political behaviour has been impacted by terrorist threats because they have made it possible for security issues to be politicised, allowing political players to use insecurity as a tool for legitimisation and mobilisation, especially during election campaigns. The reply claims that this politicisation weakens impartial decision-making and distorts policy agendas. Adebayo (2022), who claims that security narratives are frequently used for political advantage in Nigeria, concurs with this viewpoint.

KII 008: The respondent argues that because formal state structures have limited reach, governance in conflict-affected areas has increasingly relied on informal and hybrid systems involving community leaders, vigilante groups, and traditional institutions. The answer contends that although these arrangements offer stability in the short term, they also pose concerns about sustainability and accountability. The International Crisis Group (2023), which highlights the expanding involvement of non-state players in local governance, supports this viewpoint.

KII 009: According to the responder, the financial consequences of counterterrorism operations have limited governance by shifting funds from development initiatives to security spending, which has an impact on economic expansion and service provision. The answer goes on to say that this leads to a vicious cycle in which insecurity is made worse by underdevelopment. The World Bank (2022), which emphasises the financial implications of insecurity and its effects on development, supports this viewpoint.

KII 010: According to the respondent, the development of terrorist threats has revealed institutional flaws in Nigeria's political system, such as a lack of accountability, poor coordination, and corruption, which make it difficult to respond to insecurity effectively. According to the respondent, these flaws both contribute to and result from terrorism. This stance is consistent with Ewi's (2023) assessment that institutional flaws provide a significant obstacle to Nigeria's counterterrorism initiatives. KII 011: According to the responder, terrorism has changed the character of political representation because elected officials in impacted areas frequently work from safer locations away from their constituents, which weakens the bond between representatives and voters. The respondent claims that democratic accountability and responsiveness are compromised by this disconnection. Onapajo (2021) supports this viewpoint by pointing out that insecurity interferes with citizen engagement and representative functions. KII 012: According to the respondent, despite the detrimental effects, the growing terrorist threat has also spurred some institutional innovations, including as enhanced intelligence sharing and regional cooperation, which, if maintained and appropriately managed, might boost governance. According to the respondent, these changes show that institutions may be able to adapt when faced with challenges. Williams (2022), who argues that terrorist difficulties have strengthened cooperation and institutional learning in West Africa, supports this viewpoint.

Discussion of Findings

The evidence gathered from the key informant responses shows that Nigeria's changing terrorist threat has had a multifaceted

impact on political institutions, governance structures, and an electoral process that goes beyond what most of the literature currently in publication can explain. The results indicate that terrorist threats have not only undermined political institutions but also altered their operational logic and legitimacy frameworks in response to the research question on the nature of this influence. Previous research emphasises the erosion of authority and ability and interprets institutional deterioration as a result of violence and insecurity (Agbiboa, 2022; Ewi, 2023). The current findings, however, take a different stance by showing that institutional reform is an adaptive process in which state and non-state actors renegotiate authority, legitimacy, and governance responsibilities rather than just a passive result. Therefore, this study deviates from the prevailing deficit-oriented narrative by contending that political institutions under terrorist pressure transform into hybridised forms that blend formal authority with informal mechanisms of negotiation and control, thereby redefining what institutional resilience means in situations of long-term insecurity.

The results show that terrorism has forced a change from traditional state-centric governance to fragmented and layered governance systems in response to the study topic on governance. Prior research has mostly defined governance under terrorism as the absence, collapse, or failure of state functions (International Crisis Group, 2023). The growth of alternative governance modes incorporating community actors, vigilante groups, and traditional institutions is overlooked by such viewpoints, even if they represent significant realities. By claiming that governance in conflict-affected places is not absent but rather has evolved into a complex ecology of players and practices that coexist and vie for legitimacy, the current study departs from this viewpoint. This viewpoint emphasises the necessity of conceptualising governance as a negotiated and context-dependent process, challenging the widely held belief that effective governance must be solely state-driven. By combining knowledge from empirical observations with a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of governance in insecure environments, the study adds to the body of literature.

The results show that terrorism has seriously hampered electoral legitimacy, representation, and participation in relation to the research issue on election processes. Previous research has demonstrated that insecurity impacts electoral outcomes and lowers voter turnout (Onapajo, 2021; Adebayo, 2022). The current study, however, expands on this concept by showing that local political dynamics, political players' strategic actions, and communities' adaptive reactions mitigate the impact of terrorism on elections. Therefore, this study contends that election processes under terrorist threat are formed by a complex interaction of fear, resilience, and political manipulation, challenging the deterministic perspective of previous works. Additionally, the results show that political actors frequently use insecurity as a tool to sway election narratives and results a factor that has received little attention in the literature to date. The study offers a more complex view of how terrorism alters democratic processes beyond simple disruption by emphasising this connection.

Both convergence and divergence are revealed when these results are synthesised in respect to the theoretical framework of state fragility theory. The current literature's thesis, which is based on state fragility theory, asserts that terrorism makes it more difficult for the state to carry out essential tasks, which results in instability and poor governance (Rotberg, 2021). Despite these obstacles, state and social actors

demonstrate adaptive capacities that allow governance and political processes to continue, albeit in modified forms, according to the antithesis that emerges from the empirical facts. This study's synthesis, which suggests that the development of terrorist threats results in a dual effect of weakening and transformation, is based on this tension between fragility and adaptation. This study conceptualises fragility and resilience as coexisting phenomena that influence the political environment in intricate and frequently contradictory ways, as opposed to seeing them as mutually exclusive.

By balancing these viewpoints and adding the feature of adaptive governance, the work advances a more sophisticated application of state fragility theory. This study shows that fragility can coexist with innovation and adaptation, resulting in the formation of new institutional arrangements and governance practices, whereas earlier implementations of the theory focused on decline and dysfunction. Compared to previous research that views fragility as a terminal condition rather than a dynamic process, this theoretical contribution marks a shift. The study offers a more thorough framework for comprehending how terrorism affects political institutions by fusing actual data with theoretical understandings.

In the end, this study takes a different stance from earlier research by focusing on change rather of just deterioration. The paper acknowledges that terrorism has a major detrimental influence on political stability, governance, and electoral processes, but it also contends that these effects lead to new forms of political interaction, organization, and adaptability. By emphasising the significance of interacting with current local governance systems and developing adaptable capacities within political institutions, this viewpoint not only closes important gaps in the literature but also provides useful policy implications. By offering a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the changing relationship between terrorism and political processes in Nigeria, the study advances both scholarly discussion and policy development.

Conclusion

This study's main thesis is that, rather than being a solely destructive security event, the evolution of terrorist threats in Nigeria between 2009 and 2024 represents a transformative political process. The paper shows that terrorism has concurrently degraded, altered, and in some ways reconstructed political institutions, governance arrangements, and electoral processes through the use of empirical data and critical engagement with previous scholarship. The prevailing perspective in the literature, which has primarily framed terrorism in Nigeria within a deficit paradigm that emphasises institutional erosion, governance failure, and democratic regression, is fundamentally different from this position (Agbiboa, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2023; Ewi, 2023). Even while these viewpoints capture significant aspects of the crisis, their analytical limitations derive from their incapacity to take into consideration the adaptive and transformational potential of political institutions functioning under persistent instability.

The study's conclusions show that Nigeria's political institutions have undergone processes of functional recalibration and hybridisation in addition to deteriorating under the strain of changing terrorist threats. This calls into question the widely held belief in previous research that institutional weakness equates to institutional collapse. Rather, the data suggests that institutions endure by incorporating localised adaptations, negotiated authority, and informal practices, resulting in a complex and

multi-layered political system. By showing that authority is not only reduced but also transferred among various actors within the political system, this stance goes beyond the arguments put out by Agbiboa (2022), who highlights the degradation of state authority.
In a similar vein, the study challenges the widely held belief that terrorism creates governance voids marked by the breakdown or absence of the state (International Crisis Group, 2023). The results show that hybrid arrangements comprising state and non-state actors, operating within a contested but functional framework of authority and legitimacy, reconstruct government in conflict-affected areas. This presents a more nuanced perspective of governance as a dynamic and negotiated process and challenges the state-centric bias found in previous studies. By rethinking governance under insecure situations as an adaptable system rather than a collapsed structure, the study adds to the body of literature.

The study expands the discussion of election processes beyond the prevalent focus on decreased participation and voter suppression (Onapajo, 2021; Adebayo, 2022). While admitting these interruptions, the results show that communities that create coping strategies to maintain participation and political actors who take advantage of instability actively alter election dynamics. This calls into question the deterministic presumptions of earlier research and emphasises the action of voters and elites in navigating election processes in dangerous situations. Therefore, by focusing on transformation rather than just disruption, the study provides a more nuanced explanation of how terrorism interacts with democratic behaviours.
By questioning its widespread use as a framework of decline and dysfunction, the study theoretically advances state fragility theory (Rotberg, 2021). The results of this study add the crucial component of adaptive governance, resolving the seeming conflict between fragility and resilience, even though the theory's emphasis on diminished state capacity is still pertinent. According to the synthesis put forth in this study, institutional innovation and political recalibration coexist with fragility as a dynamic state. Compared to previous uses of the theory, which typically approach fragility as a static endpoint rather than a dynamic process, this is a substantial shift.

The main conclusion drawn from this analysis is the necessity of a paradigm change in both policy and academia, with an emphasis on adaptive transformation rather than institutional restoration. In response to terrorist threats, Nigeria's political institutions and governance systems are already undergoing processes of change, and policymakers should acknowledge that effective intervention necessitates engagement with these changing realities rather than attempts to impose strict, centralised models of control. This means creating electoral strategies that are resilient to insecurity while preserving democratic integrity, decentralising security responsibilities in a way that improves local responsiveness, and incorporating hybrid governance structures into formal policy frameworks.

Overall, by redefining the effect of terrorism on Nigeria's political environment as a process of transformation marked by the coexistence of fragility and adaptation, this study significantly adds to the body of literature. It offers a more thorough and analytically sound framework for comprehending the intricate relationships between changing terrorist threats and political systems by critically interacting with and expanding on previous research. This viewpoint not only closes important gaps in the research but also provides useful information for creating

more context-sensitive and successful policy responses.

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