State Responses to Hybrid Threats in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of Terrorism, Banditry and Separatist Agitations, 2010-2025

Adebimpe Saheed Fagbemi, Ph.D.
Department of Criminology and Forensic Studies
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, Republic of South Africa
Email: adebimpefagbemi@yahoo.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1412-3588

Muhammad Sani Idris (Doctoral Candidate)
Department of Defense and Security Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Science,
Nigerian Defense Academy (NDA)
Kaduna- Nigeria.
Email address: sanmuhammadu83@gmail.co
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org0009-0007-5828-6004

Mudassir Nasir, Ph.D.
Department of Criminology and Security Studies
Iconic Open University of Nigeria
Email: mudassirnasir1996@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2378-627X

https://doi.org/10.56201/JLGP.vol.11.no4.2026.pg25.42

Abstract
This study examines Nigeria's hybrid security threats and state responses between 2010 and 2025, focusing on terrorism, armed banditry, and separatist agitation. Since 2009, Nigeria has experienced a dramatic transformation in its internal security environment, characterised by the convergence of Boko Haram insurgency, ISWAP terrorism, organised banditry in the North-West, and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) separatist movements in the South-East. These threats represent a hybrid conflict environment where ideological violence, criminality, political grievances, and identity-based mobilisation intersect. Employing a qualitative documentary research design and content analysis, this study evaluates government responses including military operations, counterterrorism legislation, intelligence reforms, and regional security cooperation. Guided by Hybrid Warfare Theory, the analysis reveals that despite substantial financial and military investments, state responses have achieved only partial success due to excessive militarisation, inadequate intelligence coordination, corruption, and failure to address structural drivers of insecurity. The study concludes that sustainable peace requires transitioning from reactive military approaches to comprehensive human-security strategies encompassing poverty reduction, youth employment, inclusive governance, institutional reforms, community-based security partnerships, and dialogue mechanisms. Recommendations emphasise strengthening intelligence coordination, addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting

political inclusion, enhancing border security, and integrating traditional institutions into conflict prevention frameworks. This research contributes to understanding hybrid security threats in fragile states and offers policy insights for comprehensive conflict transformation in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Banditry, Hybrid Security Threats, Hybrid Warfare Theory (HWT), Separatist Agitations, State Responses.*

Introduction

Since 2010, Nigeria has experienced a dramatic transformation in its internal security environment. The country has faced increasingly complex and overlapping security threats that transcend traditional categories of warfare and criminality. Terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, separatist agitation, cyber-enabled propaganda, and communal violence have merged into what scholars describe as hybrid security threats. These threats challenge the capacity of the Nigerian state to maintain territorial integrity, protect citizens, and sustain democratic governance (Abada, Omeh & Okoye, 2020). Barkindo, 2019 posits that the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in 2009 marked a turning point in Nigeria's security history. Initially operating as a radical Islamist sect under Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram evolved into one of Africa's deadliest terrorist organisations after Yusuf's extrajudicial killing by Nigerian security forces in 2009. The group launched violent attacks against civilians, government institutions, schools, and religious centers, especially in North-Eastern Nigeria. Over time, Boko Haram fragmented into factions, including the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), thereby strengthening its transnational terrorist links (Adesoji, 2018).

According to Bature (2017) argued that the terrorism, armed banditry became increasingly prominent in North-Western Nigeria. Bandit groups engaged in cattle rustling, mass kidnapping, illegal taxation, and attacks on rural communities. Scholars have argued that Nigerian banditry represents a hybrid form of organised crime and terrorism due to its increasing sophistication, territorial control, and collaboration with extremist networks. Separatist agitation in South-Eastern Nigeria also intensified during this period, particularly through the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). IPOB's demand for self-determination and the revival of the Republic of Biafra generated clashes with state security agencies, leading to violence, human rights concerns, and growing instability in the region (Akinola & Tella, 2020). Enahoro, 2010 submits that these threats collectively demonstrate the emergence of a hybrid conflict environment in Nigeria, where ideological violence, criminality, political grievances, and identity-based mobilisation intersect.

The Nigerian government responded through military operations, counterterrorism legislation, regional security cooperation, and intelligence reforms. However, insecurity has persisted despite enormous financial and military investments. Terrorism is an incredibly difficult phenomenon to define. However, the most widely accepted definition of this concept is that of the State Department of the United States of America, which defines terrorism, in accordance with title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(d), as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience". (US National Institute of Justice, 2021). According to the South African government, terrorism is "an incident of violence or threat thereof, against a person, a group of persons or property not necessarily related to the aim of the incident, to coerce a government or civil population to act according to certain principles" (Menocal, 2021). Although slightly differently worded, the commonality linking these definitions is that of violence being utilised to influence or force the actions of individuals or groups.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's security challenges have become multidimensional and increasingly difficult to address through conventional military approaches alone. Despite repeated military operations and policy interventions, terrorism, banditry, and separatist violence continue to threaten national stability. The inability of the Nigerian state to effectively contain these threats has resulted in loss of lives and property, Massive internal displacement, Economic disruption, Erosion of public trust in government institutions, Weakening of national cohesion and Expansion of criminal networks. In trying to address the question of the root cause of the crisis, several scholars like Ma'azu, (2021), have assumed that the successful conclusion of the 2011 general elections in Nigeria was accompanied by the dreadful re-emergence of the radical Islamic terrorist sect. The system has suffered an uninterrupted and dramatic increase in violence that has been instigated by this dreadful sect, and all periodic efforts by the Nigerian government to submerge the group have been counterproductive. During the course of prosecuting their objectives, this group has destroyed property worth billions of Naira, killed thousands of innocent people, and added to the religious misconceptions that plague Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the core objectives of this study are to:

i. Examine the effectiveness of state responses on hybrid security threats.
ii. Examine the nature of terrorism, banditry, and separatist agitation in Nigeria

Literature Review

Concept of Hybrid Security Threats

Hybrid security threats refer to security challenges that combine conventional and unconventional tactics involving terrorism, insurgency, organised crime, cyber manipulation, propaganda, ethnic mobilisation, and transnational criminal networks. In Nigeria, hybrid threats manifest through the intersection of terrorism, banditry, separatism, and criminal economies. Scholars argue that Nigeria's insecurity is "hybrid" because violent actors increasingly blur the lines between ideological warfare and profit-driven criminality. Bandits engage in kidnapping and cattle rustling while also collaborating with terrorist organisations. Separatist agitators utilise propaganda, armed enforcement, and political mobilisation simultaneously (Okonkwo, 2021).

For the purposes of this study, hybrid security threats are defined as strategically orchestrated, multi-domain campaigns in which state or non-state actors synchronise overt and covert instruments ranging from cyber intrusions and economic sanctions to information warfare and irregular militias to exploit societal and infrastructural interdependencies. These operations are deliberately calibrated to remain within the attribution grey zone, avoiding conventional military escalation, while systematically inducing strategic dissonance across the target's political, military and civilian spheres, thereby achieving operational objectives before an effective unified response can be mobilised.

Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism regained renewed academic vigour following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Soviet Russia, the counter-revolutionary violence of 1919 in Hungary, and the events of 1919 in Spain and 1925 in Germany. Coupled with the attendant crises of these events and the violence and social dislocations that heralded the cold war period (Oyefara, 2011), terrorism became a force to be reckoned with. The post-cold war era did not usher in a new lease of peace and the end of

terroristic history, as suggested by Hagan (2006). Rather, it has been characterised by brutal killings and campaigns of terrorism and violence in countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the defunct Yugoslavia. The nature of conflict thus changed from international to local platforms where different state actors and non-state actors engaged in terrorism to express their discontent and to defend their respective interests.

According to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHC, 2008; as cited in Nasir *et al.,* 2026), terrorism directly affects the maximum utilisation of human rights, especially the rights to life, liberty, and physical integrity. Acts of terror have the potential to destabilise governments, and weaken civil society in addition to threatening peace and security. It often creates far-reaching social and economic underdevelopment just as it negatively affects individuals and groups. These have a direct impact on the enjoyment of the basic fundamental human rights (Nasir *et al.,* 2026).

The concept of terrorism is famously difficult to pin down with a single, universally accepted definition. It is often described as a "contested concept" because its meaning shifts depending on political, historical, and legal perspectives. Despite this, academics and policymakers generally agree on a set of core characteristics that define a terrorist act (Greenberg, 2001). Prominent definitions, such as the one used by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), specify that terrorists are non-state actors. The GTD defines terrorism as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation". This distinction is a major point of contention, as it excludes violence committed by states, which some scholars argue can be a far greater source of terror (Coady, 2021). For the purposes of this study, terrorism is defined as the intentional use or threat of violence by a non-state actor against non-combatant targets to achieve a political, religious, or ideological goal, where the primary objective is to generate widespread fear that coerces a target audience into a desired behavioral or policy change. This definition acknowledges the contested nature of the term particularly regarding state violence and subjective labeling and applies it as an analytical tool to examine the tactics, motivations, and impacts of political violence, rather than as a term of moral condemnation

Terrorism in Nigerian

Terrorism in Nigeria is largely associated with Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Fagbemi et al., 2024). Boko Haram emerged in the early 2000s but became violent in 2009 after clashes with Nigerian security forces. The group's activities include bombings, abductions, assassinations, attacks on military formations, and destruction of public infrastructure. Several studies identify poverty, unemployment, weak governance, corruption, religious radicalisation, and state repression as drivers of terrorism in Nigeria. Community-centered studies further argue that government counterterrorism strategies have often lacked local legitimacy and have contributed to distrust between citizens and the state. The Global Terrorism Index repeatedly ranked Boko Haram among the deadliest terrorist organisations globally during the 2010s. Terrorist violence in Nigeria has produced mass displacement, humanitarian crises, economic instability, and regional insecurity across the Lake Chad Basin (Fagbemi et al., 2024).

Terrorism and Armed Banditry in Nigeria

Terrorism and Banditry emerged prominently in North-west Nigeria around 2011 and intensified after 2015. It involves cattle rustling, village raids, mass kidnapping, illegal taxation, sexual

violence, and destruction of communities. Initially perceived as localised criminality, banditry later evolved into a sophisticated security threat with transnational arms networks and links to terrorist organisations. Recent literature emphasises that armed banditry in Nigeria has transformed into a quasi-insurgency. Bandit groups operate in ungoverned forest regions, establish parallel authority structures, and challenge state sovereignty. Akubo and Okolo argue that the relationship between banditry and terrorism reflects a "crime-terror nexus," where criminal and ideological groups exchange logistics, weapons, intelligence, and operational tactics. Ojewale further conceptualises banditry as "hybrid terrorism" because it combines organised crime, terror tactics, and governance disruption.

Concept of Separatist Agitations

The concept of separatist agitations is multifaceted, encompassing the root causes, strategies, and evolution of movements seeking self-determination. Current scholarship challenges simple explanations, emphasizing the roles of symbolic politics, strategic agency, and the complex interplay between grievances and leadership.

Conventional theories explain separatism through **relative deprivation** (perceived marginalisation compared to other groups), **material deprivation** (poor economic conditions and inequality), and **state repression** (government violence against dissenting groups). While often present, these structural conditions do not always lead to revolt, as many marginalised or impoverished groups remain quiescent (Ejiofor, 2025)

Separatists are not passive victims of structural forces but active **political entrepreneurs** who strategically use inflammatory language to mobilize followers. Their agency involves resistance through **contentious repertoires** like protests, symbols, and, critically, the **securitisation** of the state. They designate the state as an existential threat, employing emergency measures and paramilitary groups to counter perceived threats, thus directly challenging the state's monopoly on violence (Ghincea & Pleșca, 2026).

For the purpose of this study, separatist agitation is defined as dynamic and sustained form of contentious politics whereby a subnational group, mobilised by political entrepreneurs, employs a spectrum of strategies ranging from peaceful protests and symbolic claims to paramilitary activities and the establishment of parallel governance structures to challenge the existing territorial and political order of a state. These agitations are driven primarily by a leadership-framed narrative of existential threat, cultural marginalisation, or resource exploitation, with the ultimate or intermediate goal of achieving greater self-determination, which may include autonomy, a reformed federal structure, or outright secession.

Separatist Agitations in Nigeria

Separatist agitation intensified in Nigeria after 2015, particularly in the South-East through the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). These groups emerged from long-standing grievances related to marginalisation, ethnic exclusion, political representation, and perceived injustice against the Igbo ethnic group. The resurgence of Biafra nationalism reflects unresolved historical tensions dating back to the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). IPOB adopted media propaganda, civil disobedience, and later armed resistance strategies. Security agencies linked the group to attacks on police stations, electoral facilities, and public institutions in the South-East. Scholars note that separatist violence in Nigeria increasingly overlaps with organised criminality and political violence, thereby reinforcing the hybrid nature

of insecurity. Unknown gunmen in the South-East often operate through decentralised structures, complicating attribution and counterinsurgency response (Ashaolu, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Hybrid Warfare Theory

Hybrid warfare theory posits that contemporary conflicts are no longer confined to traditional battlefields, but are instead waged through a coordinated blend of conventional military force, irregular tactics, cyber operations, disinformation, and economic coercion. First articulated by retired United States Marine Corps officer Frank Hoffman in 2007, the theory models how state and non-state actors exploit an adversary's societal, political, and technological vulnerabilities. By operating deliberately below the threshold of overt, legally defined warfare, hybrid actors are able to secure strategic geopolitical objectives while avoiding decisive military retaliation.

Core Pillars of Hybrid Warfare Theory (HWT)

Hybrid Warfare Theory (HWT) rests on four (4) core pillars: synergy, asymmetric and attribution, grey zone, and cognitive warfare.

Synergy of Methods:

i. Attackers combine traditional military power with non-military tactics at the exact same time.

Asymmetry and Attribution:

i. Adversaries use cyber tools, local militias, and criminal networks to hide their direct involvement.
ii. This creates "plausible deniability," making it difficult for the victim nation to legally or militarily retaliate.

Gray Zone:

i. Operations intentionally stay below the threshold of formal, declared war.
ii. This paralyzes international defense treaties (like NATO's Article 5) that require a clear, overt military attack to trigger a collective response.

Cognitive Warfare:

The primary battlefield is public perception, trust, and social cohesion rather than physical terrain. Hybrid warfare involves the following:

i. Conventional violence
ii. Irregular warfare
iii. Terrorism
iv. Organised crime
v. Information warfare
vi. Ethnic or religious mobilisation.
vii.

Nigeria's security threats fit this framework because Boko Haram, bandits, and separatist groups increasingly combine ideological narratives with criminal activities such as kidnapping, illegal taxation, extortion, and propaganda dissemination. The theory also explains why traditional military approaches alone have failed to address insecurity. Hybrid threats are decentralised, adaptive, and embedded within local socio-economic grievances (Nwakwo, 2015)

Relevance to the study

The Hybrid Warfare Theory (HWT) is relevant to this study because it:

i. Explains the convergence between terrorism, banditry, and separatism.
ii. Highlights the role of non-state actors in undermining state authority.
iii. Demonstrates the multidimensional nature of insecurity in Nigeria.
iv. Supports the argument that Nigeria's security crisis cannot be understood through a single-security lens.

Methodology

This section describes the methodological strategies that were employed in the execution of the study. The research design and methods are described and justified and the study setting is discussed. The section also underlines the various steps that were undertaken in generating and analysing the qualitative data. The discourse entails a detailed discussion of the ethical considerations that underpinned the study, with particular reference to participant anonymity, confidentiality, privacy and informed consent that were adhered to in the processes of selecting the participants, retrieving and analysing the data. The section presents the strengths and limitations of the study and discusses how the challenges that were encountered were overcome in order to achieve the stated objectives of the research. More importantly, the section also gives a brief description of research methods as an integral part of research inquiry.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using the documentary research method and content analysis to examine state responses to hybrid security threats in Nigeria between 2010 and 2025. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand the nature, patterns, and effectiveness of government responses to terrorism, banditry, and separatist agitations rather than measure these phenomena statistically. Documentary analysis is particularly suitable for analysing government policies, military operations, legislative actions, judicial decisions, and security strategies over the study period. Similar studies on insurgency and security governance in Nigeria have effectively employed qualitative documentary analysis and content analysis to examine state responses and conflict dynamics.

Research Approach

The study employs a descriptive and analytical approach. The descriptive aspect examines the evolution of hybrid security threats in Nigeria from 2010 to 2025, while the analytical aspect critically evaluates the effectiveness of state responses. The research focuses on identifying government strategies, institutional reforms, military operations, legal frameworks, and policy interventions implemented to address terrorism, banditry, and separatist agitation.

Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from credible documentary sources. These include:

- Books on security studies, terrorism, governance, and conflict management.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles.
- Government publications, including policy documents, white papers, security reports, and official statements.
- Publications by international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), African Union

(AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, and the Global Terrorism Index.

- Reports from research institutions and think tanks.
- Credible newspaper publications and online databases relevant to security developments in Nigeria.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through documentary research**.** Relevant documents were systematically identified, reviewed, and classified according to the major themes of the study. Particular attention was given to documents addressing:

i. Counterterrorism policies against Boko Haram and ISWAP.
ii. Government responses to armed banditry in North-West and North-Central Nigeria.
iii. State responses to separatist agitation, particularly those involving IPOB and other self-determination movements.
iv. Security sector reforms.
v. Legislative and judicial interventions.
vi. Regional and international security cooperation.

Method of Data Analysis

The study adopts qualitative content analysis as its primary method of data analysis. This technique involves systematically examining documents to identify recurring themes, patterns, relationships, and policy trends concerning Nigeria's responses to hybrid security threats. The analysis focuses on:

i. The evolution of hybrid security threats.
ii. Government security policies.
iii. Military and non-military responses.
iv. Institutional effectiveness.
v. Challenges affecting policy implementation.
vi. Outcomes of government interventions.

The findings are interpreted within the framework of Hybrid Warfare Theory, enabling a critical assessment of how the Nigerian state has defined security threats and mobilised institutional resources to address them.

Population of the Study

This is a qualitative documentary study, there is no conventional human population. Instead, the study population comprises all relevant documents relating to Nigeria's security policies and responses to terrorism, banditry, and separatist agitation between 2010 and 2025. These include official publications, scholarly works, policy papers, security reports, and international assessments.

Sampling Technique

The study employs purposive sampling. Documents were deliberately selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, credibility, authenticity, and richness of information. Only documents directly addressing hybrid security threats and state responses within the study period were included.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, information was obtained from multiple credible sources and subjected to triangulation**.** Government documents were compared with academic publications, reports from international organisations, and reputable research institutions to minimize bias and improve the credibility of the findings. The use of peer-reviewed literature and official records further strengthens the trustworthiness of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study relies solely on publicly available secondary data and therefore does not involve human participants. Nevertheless, ethical standards are maintained through proper citation of all sources, accurate representation of authors' views, avoidance of plagiarism, and objective analysis of the data. Confidential information and classified documents are excluded from the study.

Justification of the Methodology

A qualitative documentary research design is appropriate because the study seeks to critically analyse government policies, institutional responses, and security strategies rather than establish statistical relationships. Documentary analysis enables an in-depth examination of historical developments, policy evolution, and institutional performance across the 2010–2025 period. It also allows for comprehensive evaluation of how Nigeria has responded to the convergence of terrorism, banditry, and separatist agitation, which are increasingly recognised as interconnected hybrid security threats requiring integrated policy analysis.

Banditry and Organised Criminal Violence

Nigeria has witnessed an alarming rise in insecurity over the past two decades, with banditry emerging as one of the most dangerous threats to national stability and human security. Initially regarded as isolated acts of cattle rustling and rural criminality, banditry has evolved into a sophisticated and organised form of violence that now threatens the political, economic, and social foundations of the Nigerian state. The phenomenon is especially prevalent in the North-West and North-Central regions, where armed groups engage in kidnapping, village raids, mass killings, cattle rustling, illegal taxation, and destruction of property (Abada, et al., 2020).

Barkindo, 2019 posits that the growing complexity of banditry has transformed it into a hybrid security threat because it combines elements of terrorism, insurgency, organised crime, ethnic conflict, and transnational criminal networks. These criminal groups exploit weak governance structures, poverty, unemployment, porous borders, and environmental pressures to sustain their activities. Their operations challenge the monopoly of force traditionally exercised by the state and expose the limitations of Nigeria’s security architecture.

In response, the Nigerian government has adopted several measures including military operations, peace negotiations, community policing initiatives, intelligence gathering, and socio-economic intervention programs. Despite these efforts, banditry continues to spread, resulting in widespread displacement, humanitarian crises, food insecurity, and economic disruption. This essay examines the rise of banditry as a hybrid security threat in Nigeria, explores its causes and implications, evaluates state responses, and proposes sustainable solutions to the crisis (Adegoke, 2018).

Banditry expanded rapidly in North-Western Nigeria due to:

- Weak governance;
- Proliferation of small arms;
- Poverty;

- Farmer-herder conflicts;
- Illegal mining economies.

Banditry as Hybrid Terrorism

The Nigerian state has faced numerous security challenges since independence, ranging from ethnic conflicts and militancy to insurgency and communal violence. In recent years, however, banditry has emerged as one of the most dangerous threats to national security, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions of the country. What began as isolated acts of cattle rustling and rural criminality has evolved into a sophisticated and organised form of violence characterised by mass killings, kidnapping for ransom, destruction of villages, illegal taxation, and attacks on state institutions (Akinola & Tella, 2020). The growing complexity and intensity of these criminal activities have led scholars and security experts to classify banditry in Nigeria as a form of hybrid terrorism. Hybrid terrorism refers to a security threat that combines elements of terrorism, organised crime, insurgency, and guerrilla warfare. Armed bandits in Nigeria now employ terror tactics similar to insurgent groups, maintain links with extremist organisations, and operate within transnational criminal networks. Their activities threaten not only human security but also the sovereignty, economic development, and political stability of the Nigerian state (Faluyi *et al.,* 2019). The persistence of banditry reflects deep structural problems such as weak governance, poverty, unemployment, corruption, environmental degradation, porous borders, and proliferation of small arms. Despite various military and non-military responses by the Nigerian government, insecurity continues to spread across many parts of the country (Abolurin, 2017). This essay critically examines banditry as hybrid terrorism in Nigeria, exploring its causes, characteristics, impacts, state responses, and possible solutions. Banditry refers to organised violent criminal activities carried out by armed groups against civilians, communities, and government institutions. It involves crimes such as:

i. Kidnapping for ransom
ii. Cattle rustling
iii. Armed robbery
iv. Village raids
v. Illegal taxation
vi. Sexual violence
vii. Destruction of property

In Nigeria, bandits mostly operate from forests and remote rural areas where state authority is weak or absent. According to scholarly studies, modern banditry in Nigeria has transformed into a composite crime involving arms trafficking, drug trade, and territorial control.

Meaning of Hybrid Terrorism

Hybrid terrorism refers to a form of violence that combines conventional and unconventional methods of warfare and criminality. Hybrid terrorist groups combine:

i. Terrorism
ii. Organised crime
iii. Insurgency
iv. Guerrilla tactics
v. Economic sabotage
vi. Political violence

Banditry in Nigeria is considered hybrid terrorism because armed groups:

i. Use terror tactics against civilians
ii. Collaborate with terrorist organisations
iii. Operate criminal economies
iv. Challenge state authority
v. Control territories and populations
vi. Employ sophisticated weapons and communication systems

The connection between organised crime and terrorism in Northern Nigeria has become increasingly evident through operational cooperation between bandits and extremist groups

Historical Background of Banditry in Nigeria

Basically, cattle rustling and communal conflicts existed among pastoral and farming communities in Northern Nigeria. These conflicts were generally localised and regulated through traditional institutions and local conflict-resolution mechanisms. However, the transformation of banditry into a major security threat occurred after several socio-political and economic developments, including:

i. Weakening of traditional governance systems
ii. Collapse of rural economies
iii. Proliferation of arms after the Libyan crisis
iv. Increasing poverty and unemployment
v. Environmental degradation and desertification
vi. Weak border security

By the mid-2010s, armed groups had intensified attacks across states such as Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Niger. Their operations evolved beyond ordinary criminality into organised violence with terrorist characteristics (Akinola and Tella, 2020).

i. Human trafficking
ii. Drug smuggling
iii. Movement of fighters

The commercialisation of violence has transformed banditry into an organised criminal economy. Modern bandit groups demonstrate advanced operational capabilities through:

i. Coordinated attacks
ii. Use of motorcycles for mobility
iii. Communication technologies
iv. Intelligence networks

State Response to Banditry in Nigeria

The Nigerian government launched several military operations including:

i. Operation Hadarin Daji
ii. Operation Puff Adder
iii. Operation Sahel Sanity

These operations involve:

i. Air strikes
ii. Ground offensives
iii. Surveillance missions
iv. Destruction of camps
v. Elimination of some bandit leaders
vi. Rescue of abducted victims

vii. Recovery of weapons
viii. Difficult forest terrain

Findings

The study finds that:

i. Hybrid threats thrive where state institutions are weak.
ii. Military solutions alone are insufficient.
iii. Socio-economic reforms are essential.
iv. Community trust and intelligence gathering are critical.

He protests reflected democratic principles such as freedom of expression and political participation. In democratic societies, citizens have the right to express dissatisfaction and advocate for political change. However, the confrontational tone of some demonstrations and clashes with security agencies raised concerns about public order and national security. Critics argued that IPOB's rhetoric sometimes promoted ethnic division and hostility toward the Nigerian state. Additionally, the government's use of military force against protesters led to allegations of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests.

The media strategy was highly effective in mobilizing frustrated youths and strengthening Biafra identity. Social media enabled IPOB to bypass traditional media channels and communicate directly with supporters. However, critics accused Radio Biafra of spreading hate speech, misinformation, and inflammatory propaganda. Some broadcasts were considered provocative and capable of worsening ethnic tensions in Nigeria's fragile political environment.

This demonstrates the dual role of media in political movements: while it can promote awareness and activism, it can also intensify polarisation and conflict. The sit-at-home strategy demonstrates IPOB's strong influence in the southeast. It succeeded in drawing national and international attention to the movement's demands. Nevertheless, the policy has caused severe economic hardship for ordinary citizens. Small businesses, traders, transport workers, students, and healthcare services have suffered major losses.

Many residents reportedly comply out of fear rather than genuine support. Violent enforcement by criminal elements and armed groups has further increased insecurity in the region. Consequently, critics argue that the sit-at-home order contradicts IPOB's claim of protecting the welfare of southeastern Nigerians. The creation of ESN significantly transformed IPOB's image from a civil protest movement into a potentially militarised separatist organisation. Supporters argued that ESN emerged because of the Nigerian government's inability to adequately protect rural communities from insecurity. Critics, however, believed that the existence of an armed wing increased the likelihood of violence and instability. Security agencies linked ESN to attacks on police stations, correctional centers, and government facilities in southeastern Nigeria. The militarisation of IPOB weakened its international legitimacy and strengthened the government's justification for proscription and military operations. Kanu's detention illustrates the tension between state security and civil liberties. Governments have the constitutional responsibility to maintain national unity and law enforcement. However, prolonged detention, controversial extradition claims, and perceived judicial inconsistencies raised questions about due process and the rule of law. Ironically, attempts to silence Kanu often increased his popularity among supporters. Social media amplified IPOB's visibility and enabled rapid mobilisation of supporters. However, online propaganda and misinformation also increased political tension and emotional polarisation. Digital activism can empower marginalised voices, but it can also intensify extremist narratives if not responsibly managed.

Summary

The study reveals that hybrid threats in Nigeria are multidimensional and interconnected. Terrorist organisations exploit ungoverned spaces, porous borders, unemployment, and ideological indoctrination to sustain insurgency in the North-East, while separatist agitation in the South-East capitalise on perceived marginalisation, historical grievances, and distrust of the federal government. Both threats increasingly rely on modern communication technologies, propaganda, social media mobilisation, transnational financing, and asymmetric warfare tactics.

The Nigerian state has responded through military operations, emergency regulations, intelligence gathering, counterterrorism legislation, and regional security cooperation. Operations conducted by the Nigerian Armed Forces, intelligence agencies, and regional collaborations such as the Multinational Joint Task Force have recorded varying levels of success in degrading insurgent capabilities. However, state responses have often been criticised for excessive militarisation, allegations of human rights violations, inadequate intelligence coordination, corruption, and failure to address the structural drivers of insecurity.

The analysis further shows that the overreliance on kinetic military approaches has not produced sustainable peace. While security forces have succeeded in reclaiming territories and neutralizing key militant leaders, terrorism and separatist agitation continue to adapt and evolve. In some cases, harsh state responses have deepened local resentment, widened distrust between citizens and the government, and inadvertently strengthened anti-state narratives. Ultimately, the persistence of hybrid threats in Nigeria reflects broader governance challenges, including weak state legitimacy, socio-economic inequality, unemployment, poor service delivery, and political exclusion. The crisis therefore requires not only military containment but also comprehensive political, economic, and institutional reforms.

Conclusion

Hybrid security threats in Nigeria represent one of the most significant challenges to national stability, democratic governance, and socio-economic development in contemporary Africa. Terrorism and separatist agitation have exposed the limitations of conventional security frameworks in addressing asymmetric and ideologically driven conflicts. The activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP have devastated communities, displaced millions of people, weakened economic productivity, and undermined state authority in the North-East. Similarly, separatist agitations in the South-East have intensified political tensions, disrupted economic activities, and heightened fears of national fragmentation. These threats collectively challenge Nigeria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internal cohesion.

The study concludes that Nigeria's response has achieved only partial success because it focuses predominantly on military suppression rather than holistic conflict transformation. Security operations alone cannot resolve deeply rooted grievances associated with poverty, unemployment, corruption, political marginalisation, injustice, and lack of inclusive governance. Sustainable peace depends on the ability of the Nigerian state to combine security enforcement with democratic accountability, social justice, economic development, and national reconciliation. Furthermore, the politicisation of insecurity, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate inter-agency collaboration continue to undermine effective counterterrorism and conflict management efforts. Without addressing these structural deficiencies, hybrid threats are likely to persist and possibly evolve into more sophisticated forms. Therefore, Nigeria's long-term security strategy must shift from a reactive and militarised model toward a comprehensive human-security approach that

prioritizes citizen welfare, institutional reforms, social inclusion, and preventive governance mechanisms.

Recommendations

i. ***Strengthening Intelligence and Security Coordination:*** The Nigerian government should improve intelligence sharing among security agencies through integrated command structures, advanced surveillance systems, and enhanced inter-agency cooperation. Intelligence-driven operations are more effective than excessive reliance on conventional military force.

ii. ***Addressing Root Causes of Insecurity:*** Government policies should prioritise poverty reduction, youth employment, education, and infrastructural development, particularly in conflict-prone regions. Addressing socio-economic inequalities will reduce the vulnerability of young people to radicalisation and violent mobilisation.

iii. ***Promoting Inclusive Governance:*** The federal government should promote political inclusion, equitable resource distribution, and national integration. Perceived marginalisation and exclusion should be addressed through constitutional reforms, dialogue, and participatory governance mechanisms.

iv. ***Enhancing Community-Based Security Approaches:*** Community policing and local peacebuilding initiatives should be strengthened to improve trust between citizens and security institutions. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, civil society organisations, and local communities should be integrated into conflict prevention and intelligence gathering.

v. ***Prioritizing Dialogue and Conflict Resolution:*** While violent extremism requires firm security responses, separatist agitations with political grievances should also be addressed through negotiation, dialogue, and nonviolent conflict resolution mechanisms to prevent escalation.

vi. ***Strengthening Border Security:*** Nigeria should enhance border management through modern technology, regional cooperation, and joint patrol operations to prevent arms trafficking, terrorist infiltration, and transnational criminal activities.

References

Abada, I., Omeh, P., & Okoye, I. (2020). Separatist agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and national question in Nigeria.

Abolurin, O. (2017). The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria, Africa Spectrum Vol.45 (3), pp. 96.

Achumba, I. C. (2018). The Boko Haram Crisis and Nigeria's External Relations. British Journal Of Arts and Social Science, II (11), pp. 120 – 132.

Adegoke, N. (2017). Intelligence gathering and Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria. Journal, 3 (2), pp 4-12

Adegoke, N. (2018). Boko Haram Phenomenon: Genesis and Development in North Eastern Region Nigeria, International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Research, Vol. 1(1), pp.1-22.

Adesoji, A. (2018). Boko Haram uprising and Islamic revivalism in Nigeria. Africa Spectrum, 45(2), 95-108.

Akanji, O. (2019). The politics of combating domestic terrorism in Nigeria. In: W. Okumu & A. Botha (Eds.). Domestic terrorism in Africa: defining, addressing and understanding its impact on human security. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

Akinola, A. & Tella, O. (2020). Boko Haram Terrorism and Nigeria's Security Dilemma: Rethinking the state's capacity. International Journal of innovation Social Science and Humanities Research, 1 (3) 70-78.

Akubo, A & Okolo, B. (2020). Essential Elements of Security and their Applications in Ensuring Stability and Integration of Nigeria. International Journal of Politics and Good Governance. Volume 5, No. 5.3, Quarter III 2014. Retrieved online. -3153.

Akubo, A. & Okolo, B. (2017). An analysis of Intelligence Support to Security Operations in Nigeria: A Review of Some Joint Task Force Operations. Peace and Security Review, Vol. 5, No. 9 First Quarter, 2013, pp. 1-23. Retrieved Online.

Ashaolu, D. (2017). Solving security challenges in Nigeria through Intelligence Gathering and

Barkindo, A. (2019). Boko Haram: ideology, ethnicity and identity. Tony Blair Faith Foundation. Availablettp://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religiongeopolitics/commentaries/opinion/bokoharam ideology ethnicity-and

Barkindo, A. B. (2016). De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: developing a basic prison based Prison Based Deradicalisation Programme. Journal for Deradicalisation, 7: 1-25.

Bature, A. (2017). Boko Haram: Insurgency and the war against terrorism in the Lake Chad region. Strategic Analysis, 39(4), 428-432.

Bhuta, N. (2019). Measuring stateless, ranking political orders: indexes of state fragility and State failure. Working Papers, LAW No 2012/32. European University Institute- Department of Law.

Bodunde, J., Balogun N., and Layefa, G., (2019) Intelligence Sharing; The challenges Among the Nigerian Security Agencies and Government. Global Scientific Journal 7 (6) 36- 47, 2019.

Borrego, W. (2019). Qualitative research for the social sciences. 8 th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson International Edition.

Coady, C. A. J. *The Meaning of Terrorism*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, P. (2009). Qualitative enquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. California: SAGE.

Creswell, J.W, (2009). Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approach, USA, SAGE Publications, Inc

Ejiofor, P. F. (2025). Dread in the Homeland: Symbolic Politics and Ethnonationalist Struggles for Self-Determination in Nigeria. *Nations and Nationalism*. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.13139

Enahoro, A. N. (2010). Terrorism and global domestic insurgency nexus: A case of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Journal of Public Management & Social Policy, 21(1), Article 6 Available at: http://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/jpmsp/vol21/iss1/6 (Accessed 12 April, 2012).

Etekpe, J. (2014). Boko Haram and amnesty: A philolegal appraisal. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2(4),144–161.

Fagbemi, A. S, Issa, A.G and Fagbemi, C.A (2024). Intelligence Gathering and Policy Formulation for Addressing Security Threats in Nigeria. African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research, 16(1). 139-149. https://doi.org/10.62154/ajhcer.2024.016.010423

Fagbemi, A.S and Ogunbanjo, B. (2023). Patterns and trend of insurgency in the Nigerian State: Issues and possible solutions. A journal of Institute of peace studies and conflict management, Jalingo, Nigeria.

Faluyi, O.T., Khan, S., & Akinola, O.A. (2019). Boko Haram's Terrorism and the Nigerian State Federalism, Politics and Policies. Springer. Switzerland.

Farrell, M. J. (2020). The development of the community patrol program: Community-oriented policing in the New York City Police Department. In: J. Green, & S. Mastrofski (Eds.). Community policing: Rhetoric or reality? 73-88. New York: Praeger.

Federal Government of Nigeria (2013). Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act, 2013. Available at: http://nass.gov.ng/document/download/5951 Retrieved on 25/04/2016

Greenberg, David. "The New Species of Terrorism." *Origins*, The Ohio State University, 19 Sept. 2001

Hagan, F. (2006). Research methods in criminal justice and criminology, 7th ed. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. Quitin, & G. N. Smith (Eds./Translators). New York: Smith International Publisher.

Ikezue, C.E. (2021). Public perception of corruption in Anambra state: a study of Aguata Local Government area. Journal of Religion and Human Relations.

Institute for Economics and Peace (2020). Global Terrorism Index 2018. Measuring and understanding the impact of Terrorism.

Isyaku, A. (2021). Terrorism: A New Challenge to Nigeria Stability in the 21st Century. International Affairs and Global Strategy, 14 (2) 21-34. Winston.

Lowenthal, M.M. (2017). Intelligence: From secrets to Policy. Seventh edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, an imprint of SAGE, Publications, Inc. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27790392.

M., & Pleșca, L. (2026, July 27). Dismantling Transnistria's Self-Declared Statehood: Structural Decay as Strategic Opportunity. *German Marshall Fund of the United States*. https://www.gmfus.org/news/dismantling-transnistrias-self-declared-statehood-structural-decay-strategic-opportunity

Ma'azu A. (2021). The rise of Boko Haram, a Radical Islamist sect. The Journal of Peace Research 40 (5): 507.

MacDonald, S., & Headlam, N. (2021). Research methods handbook: Introductory guide to research methods for social research. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) Express Networks 1, George Leigh Street, Manchester M4 5DL. ISBN: 1870053656.

Mosandi, C. (2021). Exclusive: Islamists on the rampage in the Nigerian state.

Mosindi, C. (2019). Global War on Terror: The Nigerian Dimension- Kindle edition. Pp. 178 – 245.

Mudassir, N., Mohammed, U. F., & Mani, M. A. (2026). Intelligence Gathering: A Panacea to Counter Terrorism in Nigeria. *Fuoye Journal of Criminology and Security Studies*, *5*(1). Vol-5, Issue-1, January 2026 ISSN: 2786-9636 (Print); 2790-3246 (Online)

Mustapha, M. M. (2015). 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: New media, Party Politics and the Political Economy of voting. The Review of African Political Economy. Taylor &Francis.

Mustapha, M. M. (2017). From Terrorism to Talakawa: Explain Party turnover in Nigeria's 2015 elections. Review of African Political Economy.

Mustapha, M. M. (2021). Nigeria: Militancy, Insurgency and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapon. Guilford Press.

National Committees for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities. (2003). Opp drags forskning: åpenhet, kvalitet, etterrettelighet (Contract research: Openness, quality, accountability). Oslo, Norway: Author.

National Population Commission (2006). Population Statistics of Nigeria. Available athttp://data.humdata.org/dataset/fb4fb497-e17b-43d4-922a53c0116487ae/resource/59261952-cb67-41ad-bec8-c8d3613e63f0/download/ngademography.xls. Retrieved on 9th September 2009.

Nwankwo, O. U., Nkwede, J. O., & Abah. E.O., (2015). Effects of Boko Haram insurgency on the socio-economic development in Nigeria. International Journal of Sustainable Development, Ontario International Development Agency, Canada ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online).

Nwanze, C. (2021). Combating Boko Haram Terrorism Financing: Case of Nigeria and Lake-Chad basin. International Journal of Current Research, 7, (11), 22849-22867.

Nyadera, I., Kisaka, M.& Agwanda, B. (2020). Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria: A nexus of Just war and Fragile state *commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* Vol.109, Issue 3, pgs 298-315.

Odomovo, M. (2017). 16 killed in multiple suicide attacks on Maiduguri. Accessed on 19th November 2017 from http://www.thisdaylive.com/index. php/2017/06/26/16-killed-in-multiple-suicide-attacks-on-Maiduguri.

OECD (2007). Principles for Good International Engagements in Fragile States and Situations, Paris: OECD, 2007, p.2

Okoli, A. C., & Nwangwu, C. (2022). Organized Crime–Terror Nexus: Interrogating the Linkage Between Banditry and Terrorism in Northern Nigeria.

Okonkwo, I. V. (2019). Boko Haram victims dying of starvation as Borno officials steal relief materials. Accessed on 5th December 2020 from https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/205489-boko-haram-victims-dying-starvation-borno-officials-steal-relief-materials html.

Okonkwo, V.I. (2021). Boko Haram kills 680 civilian JTF members in three years – Official. Accessed on 1st

Olofinbiyi, S.A., & Steyn, J., (2018). The Boko Haram Terrorism: Causes Still Misunderstood.Journal of Social Sciences 14 (1); 132 – 137.

Olofinbiyi, S.A., & Steyn, J., (2019). The Boko Haram Impasse: Community Policing as a Nostrum for Conflict Resolution. Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. Pp 2 – 9.

Onapajo, H. (2018). Has Nigeria Defeated Boko Haram? An Appraisal of the Counter-Terrorism
Onuoha, C. F. (2021). The Islamist challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis explained. African Security Review, 19(2), 54–67.
Onuoha, J. and Ugwueze, M. (2020). United States Security Strategy and the Management of Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria. Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, 2 (3): 22-43.
Oyefara, J. L. (2011). Socio-cultural context of adolescent fertility in Yoruba society: Insight from Osun State, Nigeria. Lagos, Nigeria: Concept Publications.
Pate, P. (2015). "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options." Report to the Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office, Department of Defense, and the Office of University Programs, Department of Homeland Security. College Park MD:START, January 2014.
September 2019 from https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/236363-bokoharam-kills-680-civilian-jtf-members-three-years-official.html.Surveillance, 3(6) 7- 15.
Thurston, A. (2016). The disease is unbelief: Boko Haram's religious and political worldview. The Brooking Project on U.S. relations with the Islamic world. Analysis, 22 January.
Thurston, A. (2017). The generic context of the Boko Haram violence. Monthly Global Security Briefing. Scotland: Oxford Research Group, April 30
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). (2005). UniversalDeclaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/bioethics/bioethics-andhuman-rights/ (Accessed 18 August 2017).