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State Failure: Dissecting the Inglorious Decades of Unresolved Insurgency and Terrorist Attacks of Boko Haram in Nigeria (2002 - 2022)

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Abstract
Since the year 2002, most states in the northern part of Nigeria have been confronted with wanton destruction of lives and property arising from the activities of the dreaded terrorist group, popularly known as Boko Haram. The Islamic sect known as the *Yusuffiyya Movement* has led the campaign against Western education in the country and has recruited the young, the old, and even mercenaries to engage the Nigerian state security forces, causing unmatched displacements within the population. The study adopts both frustration-aggression and state failure theories to explain the emergence of several groups with the same ideology that have carried out dastardly acts of killings, kidnappings, and attacks on national installations, among others. Meanwhile, the dimension of the insurgency in the southern part is in the form of economic sabotage, where kidnapping of expatriates, the vandalization of petroleum pipelines, and farmers-herdsmen clashes in other places were mostly perpetuated. Lately, subnational governments have introduced state-sponsored security outfits such as *Amotekun* in the southwest and *Ebube Agu* in the southeast to restore peace and security in most theatres of violence. The study identified national and subnational governments' efforts towards peace and security on the one hand and the impact the violent situations have had on statehood on the other. The study adopted a historical method to gather and present data that was descriptively analyzed. Furthermore, it suggested a reinvigoration of security efforts, more attention to the provision of social and welfare services by the government, and an all-inclusive approach that would involve sub-national government and the local citizens in eradicating the menace of the *Boko Haram* sect.

Keywords
State, Crisis, Insurgency, Terrorism, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION
The first major task and responsibility of the state is to protect lives and property, and when there is a compromise and underperformance in such, it is described as failure. There are several key indicators used to determine if a nation-state is failing or has already failed. These include issues like security, the lack of rule of law or constitutional governance, the erosion of state legitimacy, rising factionalism, and the growing grievances among different groups within the country (Denis, 2023; Wosu & Destiny, 2020; Ekumaoko & Ezemenaka, 2020; and Nwosu, 2011). Thus, a nation that cannot exercise authority over its territory and fulfill the administrative and organizational tasks required to govern its people, resources, and others, such as the legislature, judiciary, bureaucracy, and armed forces, has lost its integrity to be called a state. Other factors that signal state failure include weak governance or the collapse of key state institutions. This often results in power and economic benefits being controlled by a small, elite group and their allies, driven more by greed and personal gain than by the needs of the people. It also involves poor economic management, leading to widespread corruption and waste. There's often a disconnect between the country's achievements and its potential, along with a lack

of a shared national identity. Additionally, the absence of strong, active civil society organizations highlights the fragility of the state (Blanton, Feinman, Kowalewski, & Fargher, 2020; Adebayo, 2021; Mgbenwelu, 2002; and Iyayi, 2002).

The exact date when the *Boko Haram* sect first emerged remains unclear, particularly when relying on media reports. However, Nigerian authorities had been aware of the group since 1995 when it was named *Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra* (Taiwo, 2008). The group has at some point in time been called the Nigerian Taliban, the *Yusufiyyah sect*, and *Boko Haram,* which can be translated from the Hausa language as "Western education is forbidden." This is why the term "*Nigerian Taliban*" is used loosely by locals and with a lot of disgust in most cases, as the commoners detest the sect's idea and belief system. Based on performance and other aspects, the group is believed to have no correlation or affiliation with the *Afghan Taliban,* which is otherwise similar to this group in many ways (Serrano & Pieri, 2014).

Boko Haram began its armed confrontation with the state forces on December 24, 2003 when the sect attacked police stations and other buildings in the Geiam and Kanamma local government areas of Yobe State. The group occupied these buildings for several days, occasionally hoisting the flag of *Afghanistan's Taliban* movement in these centers. It was only through a combined military and police tactical operation dubbed Operation Flush to evict the group, which led to the deaths of 18 people, besides arresting all the remaining members. *Boko Haram* fled the village by December 31, 2003, and relocated to other states in the northern part of Nigeria, abandoning an automobile that had 'Taliban' inscribed on it. In 2004 the group established a base known as '*Afghanistan*' in Kanamma village in the state of Yobe, in the north of Nigeria close to the border with the Republic of Niger (Afowadeji, 2009). Some of these incidents that caught the attention of the world were the abduction of about 276 school girls from their school in Chibok, Borno state, in the administration of Jonathan, and 113 school girls abducted at Government Girls Secondary and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State 19th February 2018 (Eze, 2023; ICG, 2018; Habila, 2017; and Obasi and Obe, 2016).

There were several attacks by the sect in both the northern and the southern parts of the country, and most of these attacks were on soft targets such as private citizens, market women, schools, places of worship, football fields, game centres, and social gatherings. Over 2,300 teachers and 1,400 schools throughout Nigeria's three northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe have been victims since 2009 (UNICEF, 2017). Furthermore, the northcentral state of Kaduna recorded bloody attacks by bandits at the Kaduna International Airport in March 2022 by which attacks led by ISWAP. Two days later, the fighters attacked the Abuja-Kaduna Train in Kajuru and killed eight passengers, while several others were abducted. Some victims would later be freed after ransoms had been paid by their families, religious organizations, social groups, or the state, in some cases. However, others were either killed or moved to different camps in different states where the sect has organized camps.

In the southwestern part of the country, on the 5th of June 2022, terrorists attacked the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, and slaughtered over 40 worshippers just after a Sunday mass. Other attacks were in the form of economic contestations between farmers and herdsmen in the struggle over the destruction of farm produce on farmlands and river paths in the region. As earlier mentioned, the threat in the southern part is more in the form of economic sabotage. Gilbert (2014) observes that over 12,000 people have been killed, and 8000 injured with further negative impact on food security as farmers have run away from farm, due to constant attack especially of the northern region which is the food basket of Nigeria and Nigeria being the largest supplier of staples cereals in Africa (USAID, 2014).

The national government of Nigeria has confronted the menace of the sect in its way by introducing conventional and nonconventional approaches, however, the unabated attacks have further shown the incapacity to contain the violent activities of terrorism and insurgents (Okoli & Iortyer, 2022; Nyadera, Kisaka, & Agwanda, 2020). This has led to interventions by the subnational governments, especially the southwestern and southeastern regions, that have established the *Amotekun* and the *Ebube Agu* security outfits to confront the sect. With the introduction of state-sponsored security outfits to restore peace and security in most of the theatres of violence, the terrorists' activities subsided, though the ideology still exists. The study identified the response of the national and subnational governments toward the restoration of peace and security, as well as the impact of the attacks on governance and statehood. The historical research method was adopted in carrying out this study, and the examination of the activities of terrorist sects was analyzed using findings from secondary sources. Sections such as understanding the terrorist acts from the prism of frustration-aggression and state failure theories, thriving terrorism in Nigeria, and evidence of state failure? national and subnational responses to terrorism in Nigeria, impact of terrorist and insurgency attacks on human security, and the closing remarks that contain some recommendations.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERRORIST ACTS FROM THE PRISM OF FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION, AND STATE FAILURE

The study adopted both conflict and frustration-aggression theories. The frustration-aggression hypothesis is grounded in the psychodynamic approach. It submits that frustration can lead to aggression. The theory, first developed by John Dollard and his colleagues in 1939, was later expanded by Yates (1962) and Berkowitz (1963). Drawing from psychological principles of motivation and behavior, the theory explains how violent behavior can arise when people are unable to meet their basic human needs. It is based on the idea that everyone has fundamental needs they try to satisfy, and when these needs are blocked by individuals or groups, it can lead to violent responses (Dollard et al., 1939). The theory highlights the gap between what people want and what they actually receive. The larger the gap between desires and reality, the stronger the violent reaction tends to be. When expectations are frustrated, a group becomes especially

vulnerable to engaging in violent or destructive actions or can easily be manipulated into causing a crisis (Feierabend, 1972). This theory was based on the belief that there is aggression when an individual is frustrated. They argue that when an individual or group is deprived or denied what he or she rightfully expects to have then he or she has no otherwise than expressing his or her frustration indirectly either directly on those who frustrated him or her or on those who contribute to the frustration in one way or the other (Yate, 1962 and Berkowitz, 1963).

State Failure emanates from conversations around the weak performance of government in addressing corruption, security, and insufficient welfare services. The underperformance of the government has resulted in the loss of trust, which has brewed frustration and led to the use of violence by rebels, militia groups, as well as the rise of the *Boko Haram* terrorist sect, which has sought to attack and bring down the constituted authorities at national and sub-national levels. Robert (2004) explains that the failure of the state in its responsibilities led to the rise of the terrorist sects. Apart from ideological attacks against Western education, the extremist group sought to establish a government within the Nigerian state. The group collects taxes and rates from citizens in the form of cash, livestock, motorcycles, and other materials. The administrative and political dimensions in the activities of the group show an interest in social and political engagements. Thus, the environment of disagreement and discontent is often exploited by the insurgent group.

THRIVING TERRORISM IN NIGERIA – EVIDENCE OF STATE FAILURE?

The rise of *Boko Haram* and its operations marked a significant shift in the pattern of religious uprisings in northern Nigeria. Prior to 2009, the group had been relatively unknown, but in July of that year, they launched an unprecedented wave of violence. The Economist (2009) described it as resembling the Taliban's tactics and called it the most serious outbreak of religious violence Nigeria had seen in years. The fighting, which took place between July 26 and 30, 2009, affected five northern states. The aftermath was devastating: a total of 3,512 people were affected and forced to flee their homes, 1,264 children lost their parents, and over 392 women lost their husbands. Besides the people's loss of life, twenty-eight policemen, five prison guards, and an unspecified number of soldiers died. Violence also premised itself in a variety of destruction, having led to the destruction of 48 buildings, 3 primary schools, over 12 churches, and even a magistrate's court (The Economist 2009).

Meanwhile, Amnesty International (2014) reports that in the efforts to combat Boko Haram, this paper has also shown that the Nigerian Army has committed major human rights abuses and acts that are in violation of the principles of international humanitarian law. Amnesty International (2015) has estimated that since May 2013, one and a half million people, particularly women, children, and the elderly, have been displaced because of the escalated military force. Some of them ran to other areas of the country, some even fled to other countries within the sub-region. The situation is not any different; the report notes that cholera outbreaks in Maiduguri and Biu, two towns hosting IDP camps, killed over a hundred people, and many of them are children who live in harsh and inadequate living conditions in the camps. According to Ocha in 2016, more than 20000 have been killed since the conflict began in 2009, thousands of women and girls kidnapped, and children forced into becoming so-called suicide bombers for Boko Haram. At the height of the conflict, over 2.1 million people were displaced within Mali and over 200,000 others sought asylum in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger after being driven out of their homes (Ocha, 2016).

The actions of Boko Haram have caused widespread destruction across Nigeria, particularly through the use of explosives and firearms, resulting in horrific loss of life. The growing number of terrorist attacks in various parts of the country has had severe consequences on Nigeria's economy, growth, and human development (Awake, 2016). According to Sahara Reporters (2018), Boko Haram has taken the lives of over 30,000 civilians and military personnel, and this number has likely continued to rise as attacks are now almost a daily occurrence. This level of violence led the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) to rank Nigeria as the third most terrorized country in the world in 2018 (Sahara Reporters, 2018). Additionally, the spread of small arms and light weapons has become a growing concern, with the activities of organized terrorist groups fueling a dangerous threat to regional trade. Border towns, especially in the northeastern part of the country, have become hotspots for trafficking arms, stolen goods, drugs, and even hostages, further intensifying the crisis (Sagir, 2013).

NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL RESPONSES TO TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

In the early stages of the conflict between Boko Haram and security forces, the Nigerian government primarily relied on the police to contain the group's activities. Before 2010, Boko Haram's actions were largely focused on civil disobedience, social protests, and religious resistance against local norms and institutions. Initially, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) used roadblocks and mass arrests in an effort to control the group's actions (Walker, 2012). However, the NPF's failure to effectively manage the threat led the government to establish a Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2003. By then, Boko Haram had escalated its attacks, actively targeting and burning down police stations in Yobe (Irin News, 2012). In 2007, the JTF launched 'Operation Flush' to curb Boko Haram's activities in the northeastern region (Rafael & Zacharias, 2014). The turning point came in 2009, when the JTF killed the group's founder, Yusuf. His death sparked significant controversy, both locally and internationally. Yusuf had been captured alive and briefly held in police custody, but he was reported to have 'mysteriously' died shortly afterward (William, 2015).

Some believe that the unlawful killing of Yusuf made the Boko Haram group transform into this new type of operation. After the death of Yusuf, the second leadership of the group was taken over by Abubakar Shekau; this escalated the conflict to a more murderous and brutal stage. Within a year, Boko Haram evolved a new strategy whereby

they started carrying out suicide bombings, which led the Nigerian government to establish the Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) in 2011 (Vanguard, 2011). The SMJTF comprises officers from the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Department of State Security (DSS), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), and the Defense Intelligence Agencies (DIA).

President Muhammadu Buhari said in December 2015 that Boko Haram had been 'technically defeated' (BBC News, 2014) while in January 2016 he declared that Boko Haram was on the retreat (Levinus, 2016). Boko Haram has since been pushed to the corner, and by the end of the year 2015, Nigerian forces had reclaimed most of the territories from the terrorists, and thus it became hard for the group to stage attacks against federal forces. To a large extent, this change of tide could be attributed to the participation of forces from other countries, most notably the South African mercenaries known as STTEE (Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection), as highlighted in Colin (2015). These men were experienced fighters who fought in the bush warfare in South Africa and directed Nigerian counter-terrorism units, with the strategies of chasing the insurgents to a nearby area and immediately withdrawing to another area in a bid to pin them down.

In the year 2015, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which included troops from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, joined the fight, further strengthening Nigeria's efforts. The battle-hardened troops, particularly from Chad and Niger, played a critical role in advancing into Nigerian territory, dislodging Boko Haram insurgents and delivering more lasting results (This Day Live, 2015). In 2020, the southwestern region launched the *Amotekun*, and by 2021, the southeastern region introduced the *Ebube Agu* security outfits, respectively. All these were to protect lives and property, as well as create the enabling environment for the potential of the citizens to be fully accomplished. However, the focus on military solutions has overshadowed genuine efforts towards peace and security, and in any case, political and economic undertones have made every effort futile (Galadima 2020; Nwankpa, 2020)

IMPACT OF TERRORIST AND INSURGENCY ATTACKS ON HUMAN SECURITY

The consequences of violence are always devastating and far-reaching. To understand the impact of the insurgency on human security, The study need to look at it from a broader perspective, focusing on the basic needs that every individual has. These include access to food and agriculture, healthcare, shelter, education, and protection, essential elements for a person's well-being and survival (Nnama, Ugwuoke, Njemanze, & Akwarad, 2020; and Odalonu & Obani, 2020).

Impact of the attacks on agriculture

This study has found that *Boko Haram* has affected agriculture in Nigeria, most especially in the areas that are famous for the production of food in the country. The states that experienced the most attacks from the insurgents are Yobe, Adamawa, and Borno States, which mainly produce the following crops: cowpeas, rice, millet, tomatoes, onions, yams, corn, and sorghum, besides animal produce like cattle, sheep, goats, and fish. Consequently, farmers cannot cultivate the soil as and when they want, since they always have to look out for the attackers. This is so because many cannot even move a few kilometers, and many others have had to be displaced. Due to Boko Haram's aggression in the past year and the consequent displacement of over 1.5 million people, mostly farmers, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This has also affected the transport and distribution of food between the northeast and the south due to interference in the trade. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has further observed that these disruptions are already accounting for some of the highest sources besides inflation risks affecting Nigeria's economy. Members of the sect stopped the flow of some food items like beans, pepper, and tomatoes, and reduced the transfer of some other items. Consequently, the prices of food would skyrocket (Eme, Onyishi, Uche, and Uche 2014; Osagie 2013). The prices of food continued to rise, and individuals and households' purchasing power could not match the increase, thus, the compromise for sufficient and nutritious food for a healthy life further endangered the nation. The 2015 Humanitarian Needs Overview, based on a SMART survey conducted by the national government and UNICEF in the spring of 2014, highlighted that food and nutrition insecurity are the primary threats to human security. It emphasized that addressing these challenges, along with the urgent need to combat the insurgency, is critical to safeguarding the well-being of the population.

Impact of the attacks on Health

The nation needs a healthy citizenry to grow and develop. According to the Violence and Health report of the World Health Organization, published in 2002, at least a million people die and several others are incapacitated by different types of violence in Nigeria annually. The Boko Haram insurgency has contributed significantly to this toll, claiming many lives and leaving thousands injured. On April 14, 2014, a bomb blast in Nyanya District of Abuja killed at least 75 people and injured over 215 others (Awortu, 2015). Another twin blast occurred on October 2, 2015, in the Kuje and Nyanya areas of Abuja, causing more deaths and injuries. As a result of the increasing number of casualties, hospitals and healthcare centers have become overcrowded, putting immense pressure on medical equipment, causing breakdowns, and forcing healthcare workers to work long hours, often while fatigued.

In addition to physical injuries, survivors of violence and warfare often face severe psychological consequences. According to Briggs (2010), these include psychiatric disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety conditions, drug-related ailments, schizophrenia, psychosis, depression, and other affective disorders (Nnama, Ugwuoke, Njemanze & Akwarad, 2020). These mental health challenges can persist long after the violence ends, disrupting the

normal lives of those affected. Furthermore, Boko Haram has targeted and destroyed healthcare facilities, leaving citizens without essential medical care. Health workers, who themselves are often targeted, are sometimes forced to flee their offices for safety, further exacerbating the healthcare crisis.

In the Northeast, Boko Haram has displaced the population, which has led to the cut-off of health facilities to the needy individuals. The report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA (2014), reveals that Boko Haram has attacked many health facilities and threatened health care givers, making the health care system almost dysfunctional. Hospitals and clinics in three north-eastern Nigerian states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, including those run by the international medical charity Médecins sans Frontières, were reduced to just 37 percent by March 2014. For example, Doctors Without Borders organization provided treatment to more than 4,000 people after they were affected by cholera in September 2014 in Borno state. As of September 16, 2015, although the representatives of the EHRC identified only 172 cholera cases and 16 deaths in the camps, the actual number of affected people in three internally displaced persons camps in Eleneb was considerably higher (The Guardian, 2015).

Further, according to USAID (2014), all the health facilities in the Chibok community had been shut down by carrying groups, and the available medical supplies for Adamawa were either substandard or nonexistent. This shortage of resources, as noted by the Assessment Capacities Project (2015), has compounded the challenges in providing care. For those who are still able to access medical services, the cost of treatment often limits access for the poorest populations, worsening the situation. As a result, the region has seen a rise in communicable diseases, affecting both the local population and those displaced into neighboring states and countries (Musa, 2015).

Impact of the attacks on Shelter

The destruction caused by the Boko Haram insurgency has left an unimaginable number of homes in ruins, displacing millions of people across the country. As stated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2015), 2,167,592 people have been displaced in Nigeria as a result of the insurgency. These are people who have fled their homes and found other areas, but in these places, they are in dire need of shelter and later resettlement. More specifically, the Boko Haram crisis is increasing the number of people who become displaced regularly, and the issues of shelter and accommodation are likely to surface as a more sensitive and prevalent security threat more often. The HNO (2014) stated that many of the IDPs live in temporary structures, including schools, churches, and buildings that were uncompleted or abandoned. These spaces are often overcrowded and lack essential amenities like water, sanitation, and proper cooking facilities. The conditions are especially difficult for women, who face heightened risks of privacy violations and gender-based violence. Additionally, the overcrowded living situations have led to an increase in theft, sexual violence, and the spread of communicable diseases, further compounding the hardships faced by these displaced communities.

Impact of the attacks on Education

Boko Haram has been particularly known to have a huge influence on the educational system since the group has been targeting students and schools and colleges, many of which have been attacked in the past, leaving many dead, injured, or kidnapped. According to the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO, 2014), education has been affected by the conflicts and insecurity; children are unable to access education, education infrastructures and facilities have been attacked or damaged, and teachers are unable to teach. The National President of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, Michael Olukoya, said more than 600 teachers have been killed on the occasion of Teachers' Day, on October 5, 2015 (Pulse.ng, 2015). Before August 2013, at least 882 classrooms were destroyed in Borno State, and all the schools were closed from June-September 2013 in Yobe State as reported by Awortu (2015. The worst attack happened on 14th April, 2014, where more than 200 female students of the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok were kidnapped (Hassan, 2014). Such acts of terror coupled with other instances of violence led many parents to keep their children at home or never to enrol them in any learning institution, making matters worse, even the already struggling education sector in the region. Despite these challenges, the number of school-age children continues to grow, highlighting the urgent need for educational support and safety for students and teachers in these conflict-affected areas.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The violent attacks by members of the Boko Haram sect on the citizens of Nigeria resulted in wanton loss of lives and property. The sect, apart from the ideological basis of antagonizing Western education, took advantage of the failure of the government in the fight against corruption, and the provision of social and welfare amenities, among others, to launch an attack against the state (Makai, Fadola, & Sholademi, 2024). Subsequently, the National government's response was not effective, and subnational governments had to also introduce regional security outfits such as the *Amotekun and Ebube Agu* to protect the lives and property of the people. The establishment of military installations, Joint Task Force (JTF), the Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) in 2011 that consisted of personnel from the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Department of State Security (DSS), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and the Defense Intelligence Agencies (DIA), Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) that was established to complement the efforts of the military in degrading Boko Haram insurgency, The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) which comprises of the troops from neighboring countries Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin was not enough to eliminate the insurgents (Onuoha, Ogu, & Victor, 2024). Also, Nigeria's immense contribution to curbing and eradicating terrorism and insurgency in the region and continent of Africa has not stopped the *Boko Haram* menace. Sadly, the country sometimes depended on mercenaries and

military forces from neighboring countries to fight the insurgents. Evidently, without addressing technical reforms in the military and improving the capacity of the police as well as involving the local population, the menace of the sect may persist (Ike, Antonopoulos & Singh, 2025; Makai, Fadola, & Sholademi, 2024; and United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

Despite all the efforts of both National and subnational governments, this forced the farmers to leave their homes, with others indicating that more than 1.5 million people have been rendered homeless due to the acts of *Boko Haram*. Moreover, more than a million people die, let alone those who are also maimed through various forms of violence. The members of the sect have attacked numerous health facilities and health workers, school buildings have been destroyed, farmers could no longer go to their farms, as deemed, and many have been forced to displacement camps with inadequate provisions, International Organization on Migration (2015). However, there is a need for the national and subnational governments to strengthen their synergy to combat the sect in their numerous attacks against the state. Also, the fight against corruption must be reinvigorated, and the provision of social welfare and other needs of the people must be consciously provided.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

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