

Public Policy Responses to Insecurity in Nigeria: Assessing the Effectiveness of Legal and Institutional Frameworks for National Security.

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Abstract- Nigeria has faced an escalating spectrum of internal security threats, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East to armed banditry in the North-West and farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central region. In response, the Nigerian state has enacted a series of legal instruments, notably the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 and the Nigeria Police Force Act 2020, and established institutional mechanisms including the National Counter Terrorism Centre and inter-agency coordination platforms. Despite these policy responses, empirical data indicate a paradox of proliferating frameworks alongside deepening insecurity. Drawing on securitization theory and institutional theory, this paper examines the conceptual underpinnings, legal architectures, and institutional arrangements that define Nigeria's public policy approach to national security. Through an empirical analysis of Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) statistics, displacement figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and documented security incidents from 2023 to 2025, the study assesses the effectiveness of existing frameworks. Findings reveal significant gaps between policy formulation and implementation, characterized by institutional fragmentation, overlapping mandates, capacity deficits, and a persistent disconnect between coercive security measures and human security needs. The paper argues that without structural reforms that prioritize institutional coordination, political will, and community-centered security governance, Nigeria's legal and institutional responses will remain insufficient to stem the tide of violence. The study concludes with policy recommendations emphasizing integrated security governance, legal accountability, and the operationalization of human security principles.

Keywords: national security, public policy, insecurity, legal framework, institutional effectiveness, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's security landscape has undergone profound deterioration over the past two decades, transforming from a state of localized unrest into a complex emergency characterized by multiple, overlapping conflict systems. What began in 2009 as an insurgency led by Boko Haram in the North-East has metastasized into a nationwide crisis encompassing armed banditry in the North-West, farmer-herder violence in the North-Central, separatist agitations in the South-East, and maritime piracy in the Niger Delta. The empirical magnitude of this crisis is staggering.

According to data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a total of 17,109 fatalities were recorded as having been caused by security incidents across Nigeria during the period from 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025.

Concurrently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that, as of August 2025, 3,575,114 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 23,732 refugee returnees were living in Nigeria. These figures underscore a fundamental paradox: despite the enactment of expansive legal frameworks and the maintenance of one of Africa's largest military and paramilitary apparatuses, the Nigerian state has been unable to guarantee the security and welfare of its citizenry. In response to these challenges, successive administrations have pursued public policy interventions aimed at restoring territorial integrity and civilian safety.

The legal architecture has been significantly revised, most prominently through the enactment of the

Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022, which repealed the earlier 2011 legislation, and the Nigeria Police Force Act 2020, which replaced the colonial-era Police Act of 1943. Institutionally, the government established the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) under the Office of the National Security Adviser, alongside various joint military task forces and inter-ministerial coordination committees. Yet, violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in Nigeria has reached its highest intensity in years, with civilian fatalities in the first half of 2025 already surpassing the entire death toll recorded in 2024 across the North-West, North-East, and North-Central regions .

This paper examines the central research question: To what extent have Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks for national security been effective in responding to the country's multifaceted insecurity? The study argues that while Nigeria possesses an extensive and increasingly sophisticated legal and institutional architecture for national security, effectiveness remains constrained by implementation gaps, institutional fragmentation, and a failure to align coercive capacities with human security imperatives.

The analysis proceeds in six parts. Following this introduction, Section 2 establishes the conceptual and theoretical framework, delineating the meanings of insecurity and national security and anchoring the study in securitization and institutional theories. Section 3 maps the evolving legal frameworks for national security. Section 4 examines the institutional architecture. Section 5 presents an empirical assessment of effectiveness using recent conflict data. Section 6 identifies critical gaps and challenges, and Section 7 offers conclusions and recommendations.

II. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptualizing Insecurity and National Security
Insecurity, as a conceptual category, defies narrow reduction to the absence of armed conflict. Rather, it encompasses a multidimensional condition in which individuals, communities, and states face threats to their survival, well-being, and dignity. In the

Nigerian context, insecurity manifests through terrorism, organized banditry, communal violence, kidnapping for ransom, and state-inflicted violence, creating what scholars have termed a “vicious cycle of internal insecurity” (Osumah, 2013). This cycle is self-reinforcing: states responses that rely primarily on kinetic force often generate collateral civilian harm, erode public trust, and inadvertently legitimize non-state armed groups as alternative providers of protection or governance.

National security, traditionally conceived, privileges the territorial integrity and sovereign authority of the state, emphasizing military defense and the monopoly of legitimate violence (Buzan et al., 1998). However, the human security paradigm, as articulated by the United Nations Development Programme (1994), shifts the referent object of security from the state to the individual, encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security.

In Nigeria, the tension between these two paradigms is acute. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in Section 14(2)(b), declares that the “security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government,” suggesting a constitutional commitment to human security. Yet, in practice, national security policy has historically prioritized regime stability and territorial control over civilian protection and welfare. Public policy, in the Lasswellian tradition, refers to a purposive course of action pursued by governmental actors to address collective problems.

In the security sector, public policy involves the formulation, legitimation, implementation, and evaluation of decisions concerning the allocation of coercive resources. Effectiveness, therefore, cannot be measured merely by legislative output or institutional creation; it must be assessed by the degree to which policy outcomes align with stated objectives of threat reduction and civilian safety.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical lenses: securitization theory and institutional theory. Securitization theory, developed

by the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998), posits that security is not an objective condition but a speech act through which political actors construct issues as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures. In Nigeria, the state has securitized a range of phenomena, from Boko Haram insurgency to ethno-religious militancy and, more recently, banditry, justifying states of emergency, military deployments, and the suspension of normal legal procedures. While securitization can mobilize resources and political attention, it risks militarizing governance, conflating dissent with terrorism, and diverting attention from structural drivers of conflict such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation.

The theory prompts an examination of whether Nigeria's security responses represent proportionate, evidence-based interventions or politically motivated escalations that bypass democratic deliberation. Institutional theory, particularly as elaborated by North (1990) and Scott (2001), distinguishes between formal institutions (constitutions, laws, organizational structures) and informal institutions (norms, cultural practices, patronage networks). North (1990) argues that the performance of economies and politics is shaped fundamentally by the quality of their institutions, specifically, the alignment between formal rules and informal constraints. Nigeria's security governance illustrates a profound institutional dissonance: while formal legal frameworks are extensive, informal practices, including ethnic patronage in security appointments, corruption in defense procurement, and the politicization of intelligence, undermine institutional coherence.

Ekeh's (1975) seminal analysis of the "two publics" in Africa remains instructive here. Ekeh argued that colonialism created a bifurcated moral universe in which primordial loyalties to ethnic or kinship groups supersede civic obligations to the state. In Nigeria's security sector, this manifests in the infiltration of security agencies by ethno-regional interests, the protection of politically connected criminals, and the differential application of state violence across communities.

Finally, the concept of security governance (Krahmann, 2005) provides a framework for understanding the shift from state-centric security provision to networked governance involving multiple actors. In Nigeria, the security landscape includes not only formal state agencies but also vigilante groups (such as the Civilian Joint Task Force in the North-East and Yan Sakai in the North-West), international peacekeeping partners, and private security firms. Krahmann's framework suggests that effectiveness depends on coordination, legitimacy, and accountability within this network. Nigeria's challenge lies not in the absence of security actors but in the absence of enforceable coordination mechanisms capable of harmonizing their activities.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

3.1 Constitutional Foundations

The foundational legal text for national security in Nigeria is the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Section 14(2)(b) establishes the security and welfare of the people as the primary purpose of government, while Sections 217–220 delineate the composition, functions, and funding of the Armed Forces of the Federation. Section 214 establishes the Nigeria Police Force as the primary law enforcement agency, and Section 215 vests operational control in the Inspector-General of Police, subject to presidential and gubernatorial directives. These constitutional provisions create highly centralized security architecture, with the federal government retaining exclusive jurisdiction over the military, police, and intelligence services.

This centralization has generated persistent tensions, particularly as state governors, who bear significant political responsibility for local security, lack command authority over federal security deployments in their states.

3.2 The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022

The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act (TPPA) of 2022 represents the most significant revision of Nigeria's counter-terrorism legislation since the 2011 Act. Enacted in May 2022, the TPPA

repealed the Terrorism Prevention Act 2011 (as amended) and introduced several structural and substantive innovations. Foremost among these is the establishment of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) within the Office of the National Security Adviser as the national coordinating body for counter-terrorism and violent extremism. The Act expands the definition of terrorism to include acts against nuclear facilities, cyber-terrorism, and the financing of terrorist activities, while explicitly excluding acts committed in pursuance of protests, demonstrations, or work stoppages, provided such acts are not intended to cause death or serious injury.

The TPPA also aligns Nigeria with international standards, particularly the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations, by strengthening anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing provisions. The Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022 was enacted alongside the TPPA to create a comprehensive financial integrity framework. An Inter-Ministerial Committee on AML/CFT/CPF, chaired by the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, was established to provide policy oversight. Despite these advances, the TPPA retains provisions that human rights organizations have criticized as overly broad. The definition of terrorism, while more detailed than its predecessor, still risks capturing legitimate dissent or journalistic activity. Furthermore, the Act's emphasis on punitive measures has not been matched by equivalent provisions for deradicalization, victim support, or community reintegration.

3.3 The Nigeria Police Force Act 2020

The Nigeria Police Force Act 2020 was enacted in September 2020 during a period of heightened public outcry exemplified by the #EndSARS protests against police brutality. The Act made provisions for the transformation of the Police from a common agency of enforcement to a professional force prioritizing accountability, transparency, and the protection of fundamental human rights. Key provisions include the codification of use-of-force guidelines emphasizing de-escalation tactics and non-lethal measures, the establishment of a Police Complaints Response Unit (PCRU) to handle public

complaints against officers, and the mandating of human rights compliance officers within every police division. Section 54 of the Act explicitly prohibits police officers from creating reasonable suspicion for search or detention on the basis of manner of dress, hairstyle, or tattoos.

The Act also introduces welfare improvements, including restrictions on indebtedness among officers and provisions for periodic psychological evaluations. However, implementation has faced significant challenges, including institutional resistance, inadequate funding, and entrenched systemic issues. The persistence of extrajudicial killings, extortion, and militarized policing tactics suggests that the Act's progressive provisions have not yet permeated operational culture.

3.4 The Armed Forces Act and Other Statutory Instruments

The Armed Forces Act, Cap A20, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, governs the composition, command structure, and operational conduct of the Nigerian Army, Navy, and Air Force. While the Act provides the legal basis for internal security operations, it does not contain robust provisions for civilian oversight of military conduct in domestic theaters. The National Security Agencies Act establishes the Department of State Services (DSS), the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), creating a tripartite intelligence architecture that operates under the coordination of the National Security Council. The National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy 2021, alongside with the Cybercrimes, (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 addresses the digital dimension of national security. However, as Yusuf et al. (2026) observe, significant gaps persist between cybersecurity policy design and implementation, driven by institutional fragmentation and capacity deficits.

3.5 Policy Documents: National Security Strategy 2019

The National Security Strategy (NSS) 2019, launched by the Office of the National Security Adviser, marked a conceptual shift from a purely state-centric security doctrine to one that ostensibly incorporates

human security dimensions. The Strategy identifies economic security, food security, and environmental sustainability as integral components of national security. It also acknowledges the need for a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach. Yet, the NSS 2019 has suffered from weak operationalization. The document lacks binding statutory force, and its implementation matrix has been undermined by budgetary constraints, bureaucratic inertia, and the absence of a dedicated monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

4.1 The Military and Paramilitary Complex

Nigeria’s security apparatus is one of the largest in sub-Saharan Africa, comprising the Nigerian Army, Navy, and Air Force; the Nigeria Police Force; the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC); the Nigeria Immigration Service; and the Nigeria Customs Service. In response to the Boko Haram insurgency, the military has deployed Joint Task Forces (JTFs), such as Operation Lafiya Dole (subsequently renamed Operation Hadin Kai) in the North-East, and established Forward Operating Bases across the North-West and North-Central regions. Despite these deployments, the military remains overstretched, simultaneously engaged in counter-insurgency, counter-banditry, and communal conflict containment.

4.2 Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Institutions

The intelligence community is structured around the DSS (domestic intelligence), NIA (external intelligence), and DIA (military intelligence). The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) serves as the coordinating hub, though in practice, inter-agency intelligence sharing remains problematic due to bureaucratic rivalries and classification protocols. The establishment of the NCTC under the TPPA 2022 was intended to streamline counter-terrorism coordination. However, the NCTC’s placement within ONSA rather than as an autonomous statutory body limits its authority to compel cooperation from other security agencies.

4.3 Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanisms

Formal coordination mechanisms include the National Security Council, chaired by the President; the National Defence Council; and State Security Councils chaired by governors. Additionally, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) brings together forces from Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin to combat cross-border insurgency. However, regional coordination has been jeopardized by geopolitical tensions, most notably the withdrawal of Nigerien troops from the MNJTF in 2025. Domestically, the absence of a unified command structure means that police, military, and paramilitary forces often operate with overlapping and sometimes contradictory mandates, leading to jurisdictional conflicts and operational inefficiencies.

V. EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS

5.1 Trends in Violent Fatalities and Displacement (2023–2025)

An empirical assessment of Nigeria’s security policy effectiveness requires moving beyond legislative inventories to examine outcome indicators. Between January 2024 and August 2025, ACLED recorded 7,127 security incidents, including battles, explosions, riots, and violence against civilians, resulting in 17,109 fatalities nationwide. The geographic concentration of violence is stark: Borno State recorded 813 incidents, Zamfara 760, and Katsina 746, while states such as Gombe and Jigawa recorded fewer than 30 incidents each.

This distribution suggests that federal security deployments have not succeeded in containing violence to isolated pockets; rather, conflict has become endemic in specific ecological and geopolitical corridors. Displacement figures provide a complementary measure of effectiveness. As of August 2025, Nigeria hosted over 3.5 million IDPs, with the North-East accounting for 2,252,348 displaced persons, the North-West for 718,126, and the North-Central for 604,640. The persistence of mass displacement, despite years of military operations and billions of naira in security expenditure, indicates that state responses have failed

to generate the conditions necessary for safe return and sustainable reintegration.

5.2 Case Study 1: Counter-Insurgency in the North-East

The North-East remains the zone with the highest conflict-related mortality rate in Nigeria. Between January 2023 and October 2025, the region recorded 7,743 fatalities across 1,743 incidents. While fatalities peaked in 2023 at 3,039 deaths and showed a modest decline to 2,337 by October 2025, the insurgency has not been defeated; it has merely shifted tactics.

The Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) has increasingly adopted a governance-style model, targeting military positions and critical infrastructure while exerting control through taxation and resource monopolization. The Nigerian military's strategy has relied heavily on kinetic operations and the establishment of "garrison towns", heavily fortified urban centers surrounded by vulnerable rural areas ceded vast rural hinterlands to insurgent governance, creating a patchwork of state and non-state authority.

The garrison-town strategy has effectively bifurcated the North-East into fortified urban centers and ungoverned rural spaces where ISWAP and remnant Boko Haram factions impose taxation, adjudicate disputes, and recruit from displaced populations. Between 2023 and 2025, ACLED documented at least 347 civilian fatalities resulting from military airstrikes conducted with limited ground intelligence in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, further eroding public trust and generating new displacement cycles. The kinetic-heavy approach has also neglected the governance vacuum left by destroyed local government structures; in many liberated areas, civil administrators remain absent, and basic services, healthcare, education, and markets, have not been restored.

Consequently, the military's tactical successes in reclaiming territory have not translated into strategic victory, as insurgents continue to exploit state fragility through asymmetric tactics, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and targeted

assassinations of soft targets such as farmers, teachers, and aid workers.

5.3 Case Study 2: Counter-Banditry in the North-West

The North-West has emerged as Nigeria's most lethal conflict zone in terms of non-state armed violence, with Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto states recording 760, 746, and 612 incidents respectively between January 2024 and August 2025. Unlike the ideologically driven insurgency in the North-East, armed banditry in the North-West originated in cattle rustling and localized disputes but has metastasized into a sophisticated political economy of violence centered on kidnapping for ransom, illegal gold mining, and extortion.

The scale of violence is staggering: ACLED data indicate that the North-West accounted for 4,891 fatalities during the review period, surpassing the North-East in absolute civilian victimization. The geographic concentration of violence along the Rugu Forest and Kuyanbana Forest corridors, vast, ungoverned territories spanning multiple state borders, has rendered conventional military operations ineffective. The federal government's primary response has been kinetic, epitomized by Operation Hadarin Daji and subsequent aerial bombardments of identified bandit camps. While these operations have eliminated high-profile bandit leaders, they have failed to dismantle the organizational architecture of banditry, which operates through decentralized networks with fluid leadership structures. The designation of bandit groups as terrorist organizations under the TPPA 2022 has provided expanded legal tools for prosecution and asset seizure, yet prosecutions remain rare, and the financial tracking mechanisms envisioned by the Act have not penetrated the informal cattle and gold markets that launder bandit revenues.

Compounding the challenge is the proliferation of vigilante groups, notably the Yan Sakai in Zamfara and Katsina, which have engaged in extrajudicial killings and ethnic profiling of Fulani communities, thereby transforming banditry into an ethno-communal conflict. The state's reliance on these

informal security providers, without adequate legal oversight or human rights training, has generated cycles of reprisal violence and further delegitimized formal security institutions. The 2020 Police Act's provisions on community policing and use-of-force guidelines have not been operationalized in the North-West, where police stations remain underfunded, under-staffed, and frequently overrun by bandit attacks.

The empirical reality is one of state retreat: in many rural local government areas, the only visible authority is that of the bandit chief or the vigilante commander, not the Nigerian state.

5.4 Case Study 3: Farmer-Herder Conflict and Communal Violence in the North-Central

The North-Central region presents a distinct conflict ecology characterized by farmer-herder violence, ethno-religious communal clashes, and reprisal killings in Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba states. While the region recorded fewer total incidents than the North-East or North-West, the lethality of individual events is pronounced, with massacres frequently claiming dozens of lives in single attacks. As of August 2025, the North-Central hosted 604,640 IDPs, a figure that underscores the chronic instability of the region despite the absence of a unified insurgent or bandit organization comparable to ISWAP or the North-West syndicates.

The policy response to farmer-herder conflict has been marked by ad hoc militarization rather than structural intervention. Successive administrations have deployed military task forces, such as Operation Safe Haven in Plateau and Operation Whirl Stroke in Benue and Taraba, yet these deployments have been reactive, arriving after mass atrocities rather than preventing them. A critical failing has been the perceived partiality of security forces; communities frequently accuse the military and police of protecting herder militias while disarming farming communities, allegations that have eroded the legitimacy of state intervention and fueled the proliferation of ethnic militias.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), launched in 2018 as a policy alternative to

the failed Ruga settlement scheme, envisioned the establishment of ranching facilities and pastoralist sedentarization. However, implementation has been negligible due to funding shortfalls, state-level resistance, and the absence of a legal framework compelling compliance. The 1999 Constitution's placement of land use under state jurisdiction, combined with the federal government's exclusive control over security agencies, has created a governance gap in which neither level of government possesses the combined authority and resources to resolve land-use conflicts. The result is a securitized stalemate: farmer-herder disputes are treated as security emergencies requiring military containment rather than agrarian and environmental problems demanding land reform, climate adaptation, and alternative livelihood programs.

Empirically, the North-Central case demonstrates the limits of coercive security policy when applied to resource-based communal conflicts. ACLED data show that fatalities in the region remained consistently high between 2023 and 2025, with spikes during the planting and harvest seasons when competition for land intensifies. The persistence of displacement, particularly in Benue's camps for internally displaced persons, indicates that military presence alone cannot generate the conditions for agricultural recovery or inter-communal reconciliation.

VI. CRITICAL GAPS AND CHALLENGES

6.1 The Formulation–Implementation Divide

Nigeria's security policy architecture suffers from a profound disjuncture between formal policy design and operational execution. The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022, the Nigeria Police Force Act 2020, and the National Security Strategy 2019 represent conceptually sound frameworks that align, in varying degrees, with international best practices and human security principles. However, the translation of legislative text into institutional practice has been systematically undermined by bureaucratic inertia, fiscal constraints, and political interference.

The NCTC, though statutorily empowered, lacks the budgetary autonomy and personnel capacity to coordinate counter-terrorism activities across the fragmented intelligence and security landscape. Similarly, the Police Complaints Response Unit established under the 2020 Act remains under-resourced and operates without independent prosecutorial authority, rendering it incapable of addressing systemic police brutality.

6.2 Institutional Fragmentation and Jurisdictional Overlap

The institutional architecture for national security is characterized by overlapping mandates, competing bureaucratic interests, and the absence of a unified command structure. The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) is nominally the coordinating hub, yet it possesses no statutory authority to compel compliance from the DSS, NIA, DIA, or the Armed Forces. Inter-agency intelligence sharing remains constrained by classification protocols, ethnic patronage networks, and institutional rivalries that prioritize turf protection over collaborative threat assessment. At the operational level, the simultaneous deployment of the military, police, NSCDC, and paramilitary units in internal security theaters has generated jurisdictional confusion, with incidents of friendly fire, contradictory operational orders, and the abdication of policing responsibilities to the military, a role for which the Armed Forces Act provides minimal civilian oversight mechanisms. The federal-state tension constitutes an additional layer of fragmentation. State governors, who bear direct political accountability for local security outcomes, lack command authority over federal security deployments within their jurisdictions.

The constitutional centralization of security institutions, combined with the politicization of security appointments, has produced a governance arrangement in which federal agencies are unresponsive to state-level intelligence and local security needs. This dissonance is particularly acute in the North-West and North-Central, where governors have resorted to funding extralegal vigilante groups and negotiating informal truces with

bandit leaders, practices that undermine the rule of law and create parallel governance structures.

6.3 Capacity Deficits and Resource Misallocation

Despite allocating approximately 15 percent of the federal budget to defense and security in recent fiscal years, Nigeria's security sector remains plagued by equipment shortages, inadequate training, and poor personnel welfare. The military is overstretched, simultaneously conducting counter-insurgency in the North-East, counter-banditry in the North-West, and communal conflict containment in the North-Central, while maintaining commitments to the Multi-National Joint Task Force and internal stability operations in the South-East and Niger Delta. This operational overextension has degraded troop morale and increased reliance on poorly regulated auxiliary forces.

Corruption within the defense procurement chain has further eroded operational capacity. Procurement scandals, ranging from the misappropriation of funds earmarked for arms purchases to the acquisition of substandard equipment, have deprived frontline units of the tactical resources necessary for asymmetric warfare. The institutional theory framework articulated in Section 2.2 is instructive here: informal practices of patronage and rent-seeking have supplanted formal procurement rules, creating a security apparatus that is well-funded on paper but under-equipped in practice.

6.4 The Human Security Deficit

Perhaps the most consequential gap in Nigeria's security governance is the persistent disconnect between coercive state capacity and human security needs. National security policy remains overwhelmingly state-centric, privileging the elimination of enemy combatants over the protection of civilian populations. The empirical data presented in Section 5 demonstrate that despite years of military operations, civilian fatalities and displacement figures remain catastrophically high. State violence, including extrajudicial killings by security forces, sexual exploitation in IDP camps, and the destruction of livelihoods during scorched-earth counter-insurgency operations, has itself become a

driver of insecurity, generating the very grievances that sustain recruitment into non-state armed groups. The securitization lens reveals that the state's construction of insecurity as an existential threat requiring extraordinary military measures has diverted resources and policy attention from structural drivers of conflict, including youth unemployment, climate-induced land degradation, educational collapse, and governance deficits. The TPPA 2022's emphasis on punitive counter-terrorism measures, for instance, is not matched by equivalent provisions for deradicalization, psychosocial support for victims, or community reintegration programs. Similarly, the NSS 2019's rhetorical commitment to economic and food security has not been operationalized through binding budgetary allocations or inter-ministerial coordination.

6.5 Accountability and Political Will

Effectiveness in security governance is ultimately contingent on accountability mechanisms that constrain arbitrary power and ensure consequences for failure. In Nigeria, accountability for security sector malfeasance remains rare. Human rights violations by military and police personnel are seldom investigated, and when investigations occur, prosecutions are rarer still. The absence of robust civilian oversight, whether through independent parliamentary committees, judicial review of security operations, or civil society monitoring, has fostered a culture of impunity that undermines both operational discipline and public trust. Political will, conceptualized here as the sustained commitment of executive leadership to prioritize citizen security over regime security, has been inconsistent.

Security appointments frequently reflect ethno-regional balancing rather than meritocratic criteria, and politically connected individuals implicated in financing or enabling non-state violence have enjoyed de facto immunity. Without a fundamental reorientation of the political incentives surrounding security governance, from patronage-based loyalty to performance-based accountability, structural reforms to legal and institutional frameworks will continue to fail at the implementation stage.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

This paper has examined the legal and institutional frameworks through which the Nigerian state has responded to an escalating spectrum of internal security threats. The analysis reveals a central paradox: Nigeria possesses an increasingly sophisticated and expansive architecture of security laws, policies, and institutions, yet empirical indicators of violence, fatalities, displacement, and the geographic spread of conflict, continue to worsen. The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022, the Nigeria Police Force Act 2020, the National Security Strategy 2019, and the establishment of the National Counter Terrorism Centre represent genuine advancements in formal institutional design.

However, these frameworks have been systematically undermined by implementation deficits, institutional fragmentation, capacity shortfalls, and a persistent state-centric bias that privileges coercive force over civilian protection. Drawing on securitization theory, the study finds that the Nigerian state has constructed insecurity as an existential threat requiring militarized responses, a framing that has legitimized emergency measures while diverting attention from the governance and developmental failures that sustain violence. Institutional theory, meanwhile, illuminates the dissonance between formal rules and informal practices: extensive legal frameworks coexist with patronage networks, procurement corruption, and ethnic factionalism that hollow out institutional coherence. The empirical assessment of conflict data from 2023 to 2025 demonstrates that kinetic-heavy strategies in the North-East, North-West, and North-Central have produced tactical gains, denying insurgents and bandits control of major urban centers, without achieving strategic stability. Violence has not been defeated; it has mutated, spread, and embedded itself within local political economies.

The fundamental conclusion is that Nigeria's security crisis is not primarily a problem of legal or institutional absence, but of institutional dysfunction

and governance failure. Without structural reforms that address the political economy of security governance, enhance inter-agency coordination, and align coercive capacities with human security imperatives, the proliferation of legal frameworks will remain a symbolic exercise rather than an effective response to violence.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

First, integrated security governance requires the establishment of a unified national security command structure with statutory authority to coordinate intelligence, military, police, and paramilitary operations. The NCTC should be elevated from an administrative unit within ONSA to an autonomous statutory body with binding coordination powers, dedicated funding, and direct accountability to the National Assembly. Concurrently, the constitutional framework should be amended to grant state governors limited command authority over federal security deployments within their states, creating a federal-state security partnership that aligns operational resources with local intelligence.

Second, legal accountability mechanisms must be strengthened. The Police Complaints Response Unit should be transformed into an independent Police Accountability Commission with prosecutorial powers and guaranteed budgetary autonomy. Military conduct in internal security operations should be subject to mandatory judicial review, and the Armed Forces Act should be amended to incorporate robust civilian oversight provisions. The definition of terrorism under the TPPA 2022 should be narrowly construed through judicial guidelines or legislative amendment to prevent the criminalization of legitimate dissent, journalism, and civil society activism.

Third, the operationalization of human security principles requires a rebalancing of security expenditure away from purely kinetic operations toward preventive and protective interventions. This includes the funding of deradicalization and reintegration programs for defected combatants, psychosocial and economic support for victims of violence, and the restoration of civil governance and basic services in liberated territories. The National

Security Strategy 2019 should be given statutory backing through an enabling act that mandates budgetary allocations for its human security components and establishes a independent monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

Fourth, community-centered security governance should be formalized through the legal recognition and regulation of vigilante groups, coupled with the implementation of community policing models under the 2020 Police Act. Local security architectures, incorporating traditional rulers, women's groups, youth associations, and religious leaders, should be integrated into formal intelligence gathering and early warning systems. The debate on state policing, long stalled by federal resistance, should be reopened as a mechanism for responsive, accountable law enforcement at the subnational level.

Fifth, structural drivers of conflict must be addressed through coordinated inter-ministerial action on land reform, climate adaptation, livestock modernization, and youth employment. The National Livestock Transformation Plan should be revived with adequate funding and legal enforcement mechanisms, while farmer-herder disputes should be adjudicated through specialized land tribunals rather than militarized containment. Environmental degradation in the Lake Chad basin and the Middle Belt should be addressed through sustainable resource management programs that reduce competition over arable land and water.

Sixth, regional and international cooperation should be revitalized. The withdrawal of Nigerien forces from the MNJTF in 2025 underscores the fragility of regional security arrangements. Nigeria should leverage its diplomatic leadership within ECOWAS and the African Union to restore multilateral counter-insurgency cooperation, harmonize cross-border intelligence sharing, and coordinate displacement management. International partners should be engaged not merely as military donors but as technical assistants in security sector reform, anti-corruption institutional building, and humanitarian response.

In sum, Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks for national security contain the structural potential

for effective governance, but this potential remains unrealized. Effectiveness will require not more laws or more institutions, but better institutions, ones that are coordinated, accountable, adequately resourced, and fundamentally oriented toward the security and welfare of the Nigerian people.

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