

Introduction

The primary responsibility of governments is to preserve the state, maintain order, as well as the socio-economic well-being of the citizens. To achieve these responsibilities, most states employ the elements of national power, which include both soft and hard power means. These approaches have often been undermined by the impact of bigotry, which, to a large extent, has aided the exacerbation of contemporary security situations. Some of these contemporary security situations are in the form of terrorism, banditry, and insurgency, among others, which negatively affect the national security of states globally. The intricate relationship between bigotry and terrorism is a pressing concern that significantly impacts national security across the globe. Bigotry, as a social concept, refers to strong, irrational intolerance or prejudice toward individuals or groups based on characteristics like race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. By breeding intolerance and resentment, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion, and other prejudices, which are expressed as racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and homophobia, bigotry fuels terrorism that capitalizes on societal divisions. Terrorism, on the other hand, connotes the use of subversive actions by criminals within, to force political change using propaganda, killings, kidnapping, and destruction of properties, amongst others. This dynamic of bigotry and terrorism creates situations that alter the socio-economic well-being of a state, thereby negatively affecting national security. National security refers to the measures a state takes to ensure the safety and stability of its society, economy, and institutions against threats. The dynamics of the intricacies between bigotry on terrorism and national security are evident not only in broad international contexts but also within the African continent, where diverse ethnic and religious identities intersect with socio-political grievances. Globally, the impact of bigotry on terrorism can be illustrated by the rise of extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, which have successfully exploited sectarian divides to garner

support and carry out attacks. For instance, in Iraq and Syria, Sunni and Shia Muslims' historical enmity has been manipulated by these terrorist organizations to justify acts of violence and promote sectarian strife (Kalyvas, 2015). The consequences extend beyond immediate violence, destabilizing governance and undermining social cohesion and economic progress. This pattern is mirrored in various regions around the world, showcasing how bigotry cultivates fertile ground for terrorism, thus posing significant challenges to national security.

In Africa, the ramifications of bigotry on terrorism are particularly pronounced. In Kenya, the marginalization of certain communities has led to youth radicalization and recruitment by terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab, which often frame their narratives around grievances related to inequality and social injustice (Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010). The persistence of bigotry and its interplay with terrorism in Africa further complicates national security efforts. The resultant violence leads to weakened governance, as resources are diverted toward combating security threats rather than fostering economic growth and social services (World Bank, 2020). As communities become embroiled in cycles of violence and retribution, the potential for regional stability diminishes, illustrating the profound implications of bigotry not just on immediate security but on the overarching trajectory of national and continental security.

Statement of the Problem

The impact of bigotry and terrorism on national security in Nigeria presents a serious and complex issue. Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and regional identities contribute to social tensions, which are sometimes exacerbated by discriminatory attitudes and systemic bias. Bigotry creates an environment where terrorism can thrive, as marginalized groups become more vulnerable to radicalization and insurgency. Furthermore, both bigotry and terrorism hinder national security efforts by fostering distrust and reducing cooperation with security agencies.

Bigotry, rooted in ethnic, religious, and regional divides, has intensified Nigeria's challenges with terrorism, thereby impinging on national security. The dynamic is evident in the ongoing Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgency, ethnic violence in the Northcentral and separatist movements in the Southeast. Such divisions, often fueled by systemic discrimination, contribute to widespread insecurity. Discriminatory practices not only alienate communities but also provide environments for terrorist recruitment, as seen in regions where perceived marginalization drives individuals towards insurgent groups. For instance, the Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency, which began in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2009, is often seen as a response to bigotry linked to perceived marginalization of the Muslim-majority North. Economic disparity, lack of infrastructure, and limited political representation in Northern Nigeria created grievances that insurgents exploited to recruit members, positioning themselves as a resistance to a government perceived as biased towards the Christian-majority South (Onuoha, 2014). This sense of marginalization, which many Northerners view as a form of religious and regional bigotry, fueled insurgency, resulting in over 37,000 deaths and the displacement of millions across Nigeria and neighboring countries (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Similarly, the Northcentral Northwestern regions, home to both Muslim Fulani pastoralists and Christian farming communities, have witnessed an escalation in violent conflicts that are often framed around bigotry linked with ethno-religious clashes. Initially arising from disputes over land and resources, these conflicts have been intensified by ethnic bigotry, with communities perceiving one another as existential threats. The perception led to retaliatory violence, displacement, and significant loss of life. In 2021 alone, over 600 people were killed in Benue and Plateau states due to these intercommunal clashes, which contribute to Nigeria's broader national security challenges (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Furthermore, in Southeastern Nigeria, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitation gained support largely from the Igbo ethnic group, which has long perceived itself as marginalized by Nigeria's central government. The IPOB call for an independent Biafran state stems from grievances over political and economic exclusion, bigotry, which many Igbo interpret as ethnic discrimination by the Federal Government. In 2017, Nigeria designated IPOB a terrorist organization, and since then, there have been frequent clashes between the group's supporters and Nigerian security forces, particularly with the armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). This conflict diverts resources from other national security concerns, and the resulting violence has contributed to national instability (Amnesty International, 2021).

Bigotry within security agencies also hinders Nigeria's Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency (CTCOIN) efforts, as discriminatory profiling and biased responses reduce cooperation from affected communities. For instance, the Muslim communities in the North often feel targeted by CTCOIN, which are sometimes perceived as disproportionately focusing on Muslims while neglecting other threats (Ali, 2021). This perception undermines trust between the government and citizens, making it difficult to gather intelligence and prevent a coordinated response to terrorism. Likewise, the #EndSARS protests in 2020 highlighted these issues, with some groups arguing that the movement was dominated by Southern, Christian voices, further exacerbating ethnic and religious divides (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2022). Consequently, Nigeria's national security is compromised, as bigotry as well as terrorism undermine unity and weaken the state's ability to address internal security challenges effectively.

The problem of bigotry's impact on terrorism and national security in Nigeria is pressing, as discriminatory practices and systemic bias perpetuate insecurity and division. Nigeria's security challenges, from Boko Haram's insurgency to ethnic violence in the Northcentral and separatist

agitations in the Southeast, are compounded by bigotry that fosters distrust and impedes effective security responses. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach. This context presents an opportunity to critically assess the impact of bigotry and terrorism on Nigeria's national security. The critical question in the research is: How do bigotry and terrorism interact to impact Nigeria's national security, and what are the implications for governance and social cohesion?". The paper is motivated by a desire to provide solutions that would aid in addressing the impact of bigotry, which facilitates terrorism and impinges on Nigeria's national security. The objective of the paper is to examine how bigotry through ethnic, religious, and ideological intolerance fuels terrorism, undermines national unity, and poses complex challenges to national security, while proposing a way forward to mitigate these threats. The assessments in the paper will contribute to identifying gaps and recommending a way forward for improvement.

Conceptual clarification

The variables for the discussion are bigotry, terrorism, and national security. These form the crux of the paper and would be conceptualized with their nexus discussed.

Bigotry

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), bigotry refers to "intolerance toward those who hold different opinions or are members of a particular group" (APA, 2020). This definition emphasizes two core elements, intolerance and group membership. Intolerance here means an unwillingness to accept differences, while group membership refers to the way bigotry targets specific communities based on shared characteristics. Stewart (2018) critiqued the definition for its lack of specificity regarding structural or societal factors that can reinforce bigotry. It tends to focus on personal intolerance without acknowledging systemic discrimination, which can perpetuate bigotry through laws, policies, and cultural norms. This individualistic

approach may thus oversimplify the issue by neglecting the role of societal institutions in maintaining bigotry and is not suitable for the paper.

Gibson (2008) conceptualised bigotry as “an unreasoned intolerance toward those holding different opinions or belonging to different social groups,” and links it to political and ideological extremism, with implications for democratic stability and social cohesion. Its definition emphasises unreasonable intolerance, group opinion, and extremism as the attributes of bigotry. Thus, bigotry in the context of the paper is a tough, unreasonable obstinacy, prejudice toward individuals or groups based on characteristics like race, religion, ethnicity, gender, culture, or sexual orientation, central to group cohesion.

Terrorism

According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism is defined as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (FBI, 2020). Key elements in the definition include unlawful force or violence, intimidation or coercion, and political or social objectives. Silke (2018) critiqued the definition for its lack of specificity in defining what qualifies as “unlawful” force or violence, which can vary based on national laws and interpretations. Additionally, the definition can be criticized for being state-centric, as it tends to exclude state-sponsored acts of violence, often labeling them as legitimate acts of war. This can lead to a biased application where non-state actors are criminalized while similar acts by state entities are justified under different terms and not adopted for the paper.

The United Nations (UN) defines terrorism as “any act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants to intimidate a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act” (United Nations, 2004). The main

elements here are intention to cause harm, targeting civilians or non-combatants, and the goal of intimidation or coercion. However, Schmid (2011) criticised the definition and argued that it does not adequately address the root causes or political grievances that may lead to terrorism, focusing solely on the violent methods rather than the underlying motives. Additionally, this definition's vagueness around "any act" has been criticized as overly broad, potentially encompassing a wide range of political activities that may not involve violence but are still labeled as terroristic under certain interpretations. Despite the criticism, the UN's definition is widely accepted in international discourse, making it valuable for creating cooperative counterterrorism frameworks across nations. By focusing on the intention to harm civilians, it emphasizes the moral and ethical violation involved in terrorism, highlighting the need for international protection of non-combatants. The element of coercion also emphasizes that terrorism is fundamentally a tool for achieving specific aims through fear and violence. It is thus adopted for the paper.

National Security

According to Walter Lippmann, national security is defined as "a nation's ability to protect its physical, economic, and political sovereignty against external threats" (Lippmann, 1943). The definition emphasizes 3 main elements: protection of physical territory, economic stability, and political sovereignty, focusing primarily on threats from other states. Critics argue that this traditional definition is overly narrow, focusing on state-centric and military-based threats while neglecting contemporary security challenges, such as cyber threats, terrorism, and environmental crises (Baldwin, 1997). The emphasis on external threats also downplays internal security issues that can destabilize a nation, such as economic inequality or social unrest. This perspective has been seen as outdated, particularly in an era where non-state actors and transnational threats are increasingly prevalent. It is thus not adopted for the paper.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines national security as “the ability of a state to protect the well-being of its citizens by addressing both traditional and non-traditional security threats, including economic, environmental, health, and political challenges” (UNDP, 1994). The main elements here are citizen well-being, a broad array of threats, and a focus on both internal and external challenges. One main criticism of this definition is its potential to dilute the focus of national security policies. With so many diverse elements included, states may face challenges in prioritizing threats, leading to a diffusion of resources and attention (Krause & Williams, 1996). Additionally, the expansive nature of this definition may blur the lines between security and other areas of governance, potentially overburdening national security institutions with issues better managed by other sectors. Despite the criticisms, the definition is adopted for the paper based on its holistic view, recognizing the interconnectedness of security issues and the need to address a variety of threats beyond just military ones. It also emphasizes the protection of citizens’ quality of life, capturing contemporary issues like climate change, economic stability, and public health as essential to national security. This approach aligns with the growing consensus that national security extends beyond traditional threats, promoting an inclusive framework for policy development.

Nexus between Bigotry, Terrorism, and National Security in Nigeria

The nexus between bigotry, terrorism, and national security in Nigeria is complex, as ethnic, religious, and regional divisions are entrenched in history, fueling terrorist activities, which in turn have compounded national security challenges. Nigeria’s diverse social fabric includes more than 250 ethnic groups, with deep religious divides predominantly between the Muslim-majority North and the Christian-majority South. This diversity has sometimes contributed to bigotry, which has driven or intensified terrorism, thereby undermining Nigeria’s national security.

The emergence of Boko Haram and ISWAP in Northeastern Nigeria highlights how bigotry and marginalization drive terrorist activities. The neglect of the group's ideology from inception, which some northern groups perceive as a form of religious and regional bigotry, fueled Boko Haram's recruitment by framing itself as a defender against an unjust government that favors Christian-dominated Southern regions (Onuoha, 2014). Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency pose significant threats to Nigeria's national security, with attacks on schools, markets, government, and military installations. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) (2023), Boko Haram and ISWAP are responsible for over 37,000 deaths since 2011, displacing millions in the Northeast and destabilizing the entire Lake Chad Region. This underscores how bigotry fosters an environment where terrorism thrives, directly impacting national security by increasing violence, instability, and displacement.

The recurrent violence between Fulani pastoralists (mostly Muslim) and predominantly Christian farming communities, particularly in Nigeria's Northwest and Northcentral regions, is another example of bigotry fueling terrorism, banditry, and insecurity. These conflicts, initially centered around land and resource disputes, have escalated with religious and ethnic bigotry, framing the violence as part of a broader Muslim-Christian divide. This perception has contributed to retaliatory attacks on both sides, with armed Fulani groups often labeled as "terrorist" militias. Between 2020 and 2021, violent clashes in states like Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna intensified, resulting in hundreds of deaths and displacement. Some experts argue that the Nigerian government's inconsistent response has worsened tensions, as Christian farming communities accuse the government of favoritism toward Fulani groups. This perceived bias contributes to mistrust in state security institutions, undermining Nigeria's national security by weakening public trust and facilitating the rise of local militia groups (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Ethnic bigotry has also fueled separatist movements, particularly in the Southeastern region, where the IPOB and ESN call for an independent Biafran state. The Biafra agitation, largely supported by the Igbo ethnic group, traces its roots back to perceived ethnic discrimination and economic marginalization by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), which is seen as favoring Northern ethnic groups. The IPOB has gained support due to a long history of marginalization and economic underdevelopment in the Southeast. The FGN classified the IPOB and the ESN as a terrorist organization. These groups are linked to violent clashes with Nigerian security forces and mandated a weekly sit-in at home every Monday in solidarity for the release of their acclaimed leader, Nnamdi Kalu, by the FGN. The government's military crackdown in the Southeast has led to further alienation among the Igbo, intensifying calls for autonomy and exacerbating national security challenges by diverting resources needed to address Nigeria's developmental goals (Amnesty International, 2021).

In response to Boko Haram and ISWAP activities, anti-Muslim sentiment has grown in certain Southern regions, with some communities increasingly viewing Muslims as potential security threats. This generalization has intensified bigotry against Northern Muslims, sometimes resulting in discriminatory attitudes and policies at local levels. Such internal division hinders a unified national response to terrorism, weakening Nigeria's national security. For example, the #EndSARS protests in 2020 revealed these divisions, with ethnic and religious tensions surfacing during the demonstrations. Some Northern groups claimed the movement was biased against Northern Muslims, further fueling mistrust across regions and limiting national solidarity. Such polarization complicates Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, as it prevents cohesive national responses to internal security challenges (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2022).

The interaction of bigotry, terrorism, and internal division has stretched Nigeria's national security capacity, diverting attention and resources from core security operations. The government's emphasis on militarized solutions often fuels local grievances rather than addressing underlying issues like poverty, unemployment, and religious discrimination. Thus, the persistence of bigotry, whether rooted in historical ethnic and religious discrimination or contemporary political tensions, contributes to radicalization, regional conflicts, and separatist movements, all of which undermine Nigeria's national security. Consequently, situations that encourage bigotry provide breeding grounds for terrorism and other grievous crimes and hamper national security and vice versa. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between bigotry and terrorism, as well as an indirect relationship between bigotry and terrorism with national security.

Theoretical framework

Several theories could be used to explain the nexus between bigotry and terrorism on national security. Some of these theories include, Relative Deprivation Theory, the Social Identity Theory, the Frustration-Aggression Theory, the Clash of Civilizations Theory, and the Structural Violence Theory. However, the paper adopted the Structural Violence Theory (SVT).

Social identity theory, propounded by Tajfel & Turner (1979), posits that individuals derive a significant part of their identity from group memberships. Inter-group conflict and bigotry can arise when one group perceives another as a threat to its identity, status, or resources. This can lead to prejudice, discrimination, and in some cases, acts of terrorism or violence. In Nigeria, ethnic and religious affiliations significantly shape identity, contributing to divides that have fueled both inter-ethnic violence and insurgency. The theory has been criticised for being too narrow, as it doesn't fully explain the impact of systemic political or economic factors.

The SVT, propounded by Johan Galtung (1969), posits that social structures and institutions that marginalize, discriminate against, or exploit certain groups can lead to violence. Structural violence manifests in forms of bigotry that systematically disadvantage certain groups, contributing to social tensions, terrorism, and undermining national security. In Nigeria, issues like poverty, unemployment, and unequal political representation are significant forms of structural violence that fuel terrorism and inter-group conflicts, especially in marginalized regions (Galtung, 1969).

One major criticism of SVT is that it may overlook the role of individual agency and ideology in terrorism. Not all individuals or groups facing structural violence resort to terrorism. Some choose peaceful forms of protest or political advocacy. Additionally, focusing on systemic issues may lead to delayed responses to immediate security threats, as structural reforms are often long-term solutions (Farmer, 2004).

Despite the criticism, SVT provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how systemic issues, such as economic inequality, political exclusion, and ethnic marginalization, foster conditions for terrorism and bigotry. In Nigeria, where economic disparities and regional neglect are prevalent, this theory is particularly applicable in explaining why groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and IPOB gain traction among marginalized populations. These movements undermine Nigeria's security by diverting resources to internal conflicts and fostering distrust among its citizens. By focusing on structural factors, this theory encourages policy solutions that address root causes, such as economic reforms and inclusive governance for enhanced national security.

Methodology

The paper employed a qualitative research design in critically assessing the Impact of bigotry on terrorism and national security in Nigeria. This design was chosen to allow

for the effective gathering of data and analysis of the nexus between bigotry, terrorism, and national security. The paper sampled the various literature and events on the subject matter. Data collected and used in the results and discussion segment spanned January 2013 to January 2024, covering 11 years. This is based on the fact that this period has witnessed increasing evidence of the impact of bigotry on terrorism, which has affected the national security of Nigeria. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from existing databases of literature from journals, reports, and books, as well as agencies on the subject matter. These data were analysed qualitatively by describing the nexus, patterns, and trends of the variables.

Result and Discussion

The paper, in its results and discussion, critically assessed the impact of bigotry on terrorism and national security. The assessment discussed radicalization and recruitment, legitimization of extremist narratives, polarization and internal division, undermining intelligence and security efforts, and increased risk of domestic terrorism. These are elucidated subsequently.

Radicalization and Recruitment

Bigotry often acts as a breeding ground for radicalization. Marginalized individuals or groups subjected to societal bigotry may feel alienated, turning to extremist ideologies as an outlet for their frustrations. Research shows that discrimination and exclusionary practices contribute to radicalization by fostering resentment against the state and society (Neumann, 2013). For example, marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities in Europe has been linked to recruitment by terrorist organizations, with radical groups exploiting feelings of isolation and exclusion to recruit members (Neumann, 2013). In Nigeria, Bigotry, manifest as religious, ethnic, or regional discrimination, significantly impacts radicalization and recruitment for terrorist organizations. Bigotry contributes to marginalization and social exclusion, making certain groups more

vulnerable to extremist narratives that exploit grievances. Radicalization and recruitment into terrorist organizations are thus fueled by deep-seated feelings of alienation and resentment toward perceived injustices. This dynamic presents a major challenge to national security, as terrorist groups gain strength and legitimacy in marginalized communities/societies.

Bigotry and discrimination contribute to a sense of social alienation, particularly among youth in marginalized regions. In Northern Nigeria, for example, pervasive poverty, limited economic opportunities, and poor infrastructure have contributed to a widespread perception of government neglect, which many see as a form of regional and religious discrimination. Boko Haram has leveraged these grievances, positioning itself as a defender of marginalized Northern Muslims. This recruitment strategy has been effective in a region where discontent runs high, as evidenced by Boko Haram's significant following among young people disillusioned with their socio-economic conditions (Onuoha, 2014). Boko Haram's messaging resonates in communities that feel overlooked by the federal government, fueling radicalization and recruitment as individuals see joining the group as a way to confront perceived injustice and way of life.

Ethnic and religious bigotry are also exploited by groups like ISWAP/Boko Haram and the IPOB to foster division and build support. Boko Haram frames its struggle as a religious battle against a government perceived to favor the Christian-majority South, while IPOB appeals to the Igbo ethnic group by framing its cause as a resistance against marginalization by the Nigerian state. These narratives capitalize on pre-existing biases, portraying the FGN as an oppressive force working against particular religious or ethnic groups. This divisive messaging draws individuals into radical ideologies, particularly those who already feel excluded or victimized by the state (Amnesty International, 2021).

Furthermore, the growth of social media has amplified the impact of bigotry on radicalization. Extremist groups use online platforms to spread narratives of discrimination and injustice, particularly targeting youth who may feel disconnected from traditional support systems. These platforms allow groups to easily disseminate propaganda that emphasizes ethnic, religious, or regional grievances, framing their terrorist narratives. The radicalization and recruitment driven by bigotry and discrimination destabilize Nigeria's national security. Terrorist organizations that successfully exploit societal divisions gain legitimacy, increase in size, and become more challenging for the government to combat. The rise of local militia groups in response to perceived neglect and discrimination also diverts national security resources, weakening the state's capacity to address other pressing security concerns, such as organized crime (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The conflicts and instability created by these radicalized groups hinder economic development, limit foreign investment, and undermine social cohesion, further challenging Nigeria's national stability

Legitimization of Extremist Narratives

Bigotry can also legitimize extremist narratives. Terrorist groups often frame their violence as a defense against perceived oppression, using instances of bigotry to validate their cause. This phenomenon has been observed in the Middle East, where terrorist organizations like ISIS portray themselves as defenders of persecuted Muslims, mobilizing sympathizers through claims of Western bigotry (Roy, 2017). Such narratives undermine state legitimacy and intensify national security challenges by fostering a larger base of sympathizers who may not directly engage in terrorism but provide support. In Nigeria, bigotry, manifested as systemic ethnic, religious, and regional discrimination, plays a substantial role in legitimizing extremist narratives. When certain groups perceive themselves as marginalized or oppressed due to bigotry, extremist organizations

exploit these grievances to justify their ideologies and actions. This dynamic poses a significant threat to Nigeria's national security, as it legitimizes violence and radical ideologies, increases recruitment into terrorist organizations, and destabilizes the nation.

Bigotry fosters divisions among communities, which extremist groups manipulate to create an “us vs them” narrative. For instance, Boko Haram/ISWAP has framed its insurgency by highlighting perceived injustices to reinforce its claims of representing a “persecuted” Northern Muslim population, legitimizing its violent activities as a form of resistance (Onuoha, 2014). Additionally, ISWAP portrays the Nigerian government as anti-Muslim, capitalizing on instances of alleged abuses against Muslims to strengthen its legitimacy (Amnesty International, 2021). This narrative encourages those who feel religiously targeted to view ISWAP as a legitimate protector of their faith, thus justifying violent resistance against the state.

The perception of political exclusion, often linked to ethnic bigotry, further legitimizes extremist movements. In the Southeast, the IPOB's rhetoric frequently references historical grievances from the Biafran War, portraying its separatist cause as a justified response to what it deems a discriminatory state. This framing has garnered IPOB widespread support from some sections of the Igbo society who believe the group represents their fight against systemic oppression, further legitimizing IPOB's extremist narratives (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2022). Additionally, economic bigotry, often perceived as unequal development policies favoring specific regions, also legitimizes extremist rhetoric. In Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta, for instance, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) emerged as a militant group claiming to fight for the rights of the region's impoverished communities. These communities feel neglected despite the wealth generated from their resources. The MEND's narrative portrays the FGN as exploiting the region's resources without addressing local poverty or infrastructure needs (International Crisis

Group, 2022). This perception of economic bigotry legitimized MEND's violent tactics in the sight of some Niger Delta communities, who view the group as defenders against a predatory state.

Polarization and Internal Division

Bigotry exacerbates internal divisions within a state, weakening social cohesion and making national security harder to maintain. For instance, the demonization of certain groups based on ethnicity or religion can fracture society, making unified responses to security threats more challenging. Research in Nigeria highlights that ethnic and religious bigotry fuels sectarian violence, which has given groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and IPOB more leverage for recruitment among disillusioned populations (Onuoha, 2014). This internal division diverts resources from other pressing security concerns as the state must deal with increased civil unrest. Bigotry, which creates polarization and internal divisions, deepens existing ethnic and religious fault lines in Nigeria, thereby undermining national security. Extremist groups exploit existing divisions to incite violence, deepening societal rifts and obstructing efforts toward unity and stability. This internal division creates fertile ground for terrorism, as it drives a wedge between communities and erodes trust in the state, enabling terrorist groups to grow in influence and legitimacy. For instance, the Boko Haram/ISWAP narrative not only reinforces existing religious divides but also polarizes communities by portraying the conflict as a religious war (Onuoha, 2014). As a result, the gap between Northern and Southern Nigerians widens, weakening the nation's unity and security.

Bigotry also challenges the concept of a unified national identity, as groups prioritize religious or ethnic affiliations over Nigerian nationality. In regions like the Northcentral, where conflicts between Fulani herders and Christian farmers are often perceived through an ethnic lens, discrimination and distrust between communities have led to the rise of local militias that view

themselves as defenders against ethnic or religious threats (International Crisis Group, 2022). This erosion of a shared national identity intensifies polarization, as communities become increasingly isolated and opposed to each other, thereby destabilizing national cohesion. Regional bigotry, particularly perceptions of marginalization, drives separatist ideologies like that of the IPOB, who promote a separatist agenda based on perceived discrimination against the Igbo ethnic group in Southeastern Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2021). This regional exclusion fuels the polarization between the Southeast and the FGN, contributing to internal division and undermining national security

Bigotry also weakens trust between communities and hinders cooperation in combating common security threats. In communities with a history of ethnic or religious conflict, cooperation with security forces is often seen as aligning with one's enemies, leading to further isolation. For example, in parts of the Northcentral and Northeast, residents are reluctant to share information with authorities, fearing reprisals from terrorist/militant groups or from neighboring communities who view them with suspicion (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2022). This mistrust creates security blind spots, allowing terrorist organizations to operate more freely and grow their influence.

Undermining Intelligence and Security Efforts

Bigotry within security and intelligence agencies can compromise CTCOIN efforts. Discriminatory profiling often leads to the wrongful targeting of certain groups, making it harder to accurately identify genuine threats. Bigotry-driven profiling also alienates communities that could otherwise serve as valuable partners in intelligence gathering. A study on CTCOIN in the United States highlights that bigotry toward Muslim communities led to a lack of cooperation, reducing authorities' effectiveness in identifying radical elements (Hamm, 2013). In Nigeria, bigotry significantly undermines intelligence and security efforts by creating distrust between

communities and security agencies, leading to gaps in intelligence gathering, ineffective responses, and weakened national security. In situations where communities feel marginalized or discriminated against, they are less likely to cooperate with authorities, providing a fertile ground for terrorist organizations to operate undetected. This situation has had severe repercussions in Nigeria, where regional, ethnic, and religious divides hinder CTCOIN efforts and allow insurgent groups to gain footholds.

Effective intelligence gathering often relies on community cooperation, but bigotry erodes trust between communities and the state. In Nigeria's Northeast, for instance, where Boko Haram/ISWAP operate, the government's perceived bias against Muslim communities has fostered distrust (Onuoha, 2014). Many communities in this region, which feel targeted by CTCOIN operations, are reluctant to share intelligence with security forces. This lack of cooperation allows terrorist groups to evade detection, further complicating CTCOIN efforts. Groups like Boko Haram/ISWAP narratives discourage local support for security agencies, with some residents viewing cooperation with the government as a betrayal of their community. As a result, intelligence operations are less effective. Additionally, bigotry within the security apparatus itself also results in biased profiling and discriminatory practices, leading to alienation of minority communities. For example, in Nigeria's Southeast, where separatist groups like IPOB have a stronghold, some local Igbo communities often perceive security forces as agents of a hostile, ethnically biased government (Amnesty International, 2021). This perception fosters resentment and discourages these communities from collaborating with law enforcement, weakening intelligence operations and reducing effectiveness in CTCOIN.

Religious and ethnic bigotry restricts access to certain areas for security forces, often due to perceived sectarian biases. In Nigeria's Northcentral, local communities sometimes refuse

cooperation with security agencies, suspecting that they are partial to certain groups (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2022). These tensions reduce security forces' ability to gather intelligence and act effectively, leading to unchecked violence in these regions. Bigotry-driven regional divisions within Nigeria's security framework lead to fragmented CTCOIN efforts. For example, Southern and Northern Nigeria have distinct political and religious profiles, which sometimes lead to conflicting priorities within the security agencies (Akinola, 2020). This fragmentation results in inconsistent intelligence-sharing practices, which hinder the development of a unified response against terrorist threats.

Increased Risk of Domestic Terrorism

Bigotry leads to domestic terrorism, with hate-fueled ideologies driving individuals or groups to commit violent acts against minority populations. Right-wing extremism, fueled by racial or religious bigotry, has surged in countries like the United States, posing one of the greatest domestic terrorism threats (Jones, 2021). This form of terrorism threatens national security by creating a climate of fear and undermining trust in law enforcement and national institutions. In Nigeria, bigotry, manifesting through ethnic, religious, and regional discrimination, increases the risk of domestic terrorism by creating a hostile environment where marginalized groups are more susceptible to radicalization. This toxic environment fosters resentment and alienation, which extremist groups exploit to recruit individuals and amplify anti-government sentiment. The interplay between bigotry and domestic terrorism in Nigeria has led to a rise in homegrown terrorist threats, as societal divisions provide fertile ground for the growth of extremist ideologies. Bigotry leads to the alienation of communities that feel excluded or discriminated against, which makes them more vulnerable to radicalization. Bigotry also strengthens secessionist sentiments, as marginalized groups are more inclined to consider violent means to address their grievances.

Bigotry also weakens trust in state institutions, particularly when security agencies are perceived as biased or partial. Bigotry amplifies polarizing narratives, making people more receptive to extremist ideologies that promise to defend their identity or beliefs. Boko Haram and other groups in Nigeria exploit these narratives to justify violence as a form of resistance against an allegedly biased state (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2022). These narratives deepen societal divisions and increase the risk of homegrown terrorism by drawing individuals toward extremist views that validate violence as a solution.

Conclusion

The problem of bigotry's impact on terrorism and national security in Nigeria is pressing, as discriminatory practices and systemic bias perpetuate insecurity and division. Nigeria's security challenges, from Boko Haram's insurgency in the Northeast, banditry and ethnic violence in the Northwest and Northcentral, and separatist agitations in the Southeast, are compounded by bigotry that fosters distrust and impedes effective security responses. The nexus between bigotry, terrorism, and national security in Nigeria is characterized by religious and ethnic divisions that fuel and sustain terrorist activities. The persistence of bigotry, whether rooted in historical ethnic and religious discrimination or contemporary political tensions, contributes to radicalization, regional conflicts, and separatist movements, all of which undermine Nigeria's national security. Addressing the identified challenges of bigotry, which exacerbate terrorism, would significantly enhance national security in Nigeria. The implementation of the proffered way forward would help address bigotry, which has exacerbated terrorism towards enhanced national security in Nigeria.

Way Forward to Addressing the Impact of Bigotry on Terrorism for Enhanced National Security in Nigeria

Addressing the impact of bigotry on terrorism and national security requires a multifaceted approach. These approaches are highlighted subsequently.

Socioeconomic Development in Marginalized Areas. Investing in education, vocational training, and job opportunities in economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities would help alleviate the conditions that lead to radicalization. Unemployment, poverty, and lack of opportunity are significant drivers of radicalization. Programs designed to provide skills, entrepreneurship support, and employment will offer alternatives to vulnerable individuals, reducing the appeal of extremist recruitment.

Community-Led Counter-Radicalization Initiatives. Empowering community leaders, local influencers, and religious figures to address issues of bigotry and promote inclusive narratives is vital. These local voices have the trust of their communities and can communicate the dangers of radical ideologies effectively. Thus, collaborative efforts, where government agencies partner with community organizations to develop targeted counter-radicalization programs, would help address the underlying grievances that lead to extremism.

Education Reform and Awareness Campaigns. Reforming educational curricula to promote tolerance, inclusivity, and critical thinking would foster resilience against radical ideologies. Integrating peace education and awareness campaigns in schools and universities would encourage youths to understand and appreciate diversity, counteracting the divisive effects of bigotry. Such programs should include workshops, seminars, and social media campaigns highlighting the destructive nature of radicalization and promoting a shared national identity.

Developing and Promoting Counter-Narratives. Extremist groups capitalize on bigotry by framing their actions as defenses of certain religious or ethnic identities. To counter this, governments should work with media and religious leaders to promote narratives that emphasize

unity and shared national identity through an effective and implementable strategic communications strategy. Public campaigns that showcase stories of peaceful coexistence and shared achievements between diverse communities would help delegitimize extremist narratives.

Engaging with Religious Leaders to Dispel Extremist Ideologies. Religious leaders play an influential role in shaping beliefs and values. By working with these leaders to dispel extremist interpretations of religious texts, the government would weaken extremist narratives. Religious leaders should be encouraged to emphasize messages of peace, tolerance, and community unity, dissuading individuals from joining extremist groups under the guise of religious duty.

Social Media Monitoring and Intervention. Social media plays a critical role in spreading extremist narratives. By monitoring and intervening on these platforms, authorities would limit the reach of divisive and bigoted messages. Governments should work with social media companies to report and take down harmful content while promoting content that counters extremism and bigotry.

Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue Programs. Programs that bring together different ethnic and religious groups would help reduce polarization by promoting mutual understanding and trust. Dialogues would be organized at the grassroots level, involving community members in discussions about shared challenges and opportunities. Such dialogues reduce misconceptions and prejudices, laying the foundation for peaceful coexistence.

Media Responsibility and Positive Representation. The media has a powerful role in shaping public perception. Encouraging media outlets to cover stories that reflect Nigeria's diversity positively and fairly would help reduce polarization. Media content should avoid sensationalism that emphasizes ethnic or religious differences and instead focus on stories that unite and inspire, thereby reducing stereotypes and misunderstandings that fuel division.

Civic Education and National Unity Programs. Instituting civic education programs that emphasize national unity and a shared identity is essential in fostering a cohesive society. National unity programs, particularly for youth, would help instill a sense of patriotism and solidarity, discouraging divisive identities. By promoting the idea that Nigeria's strength lies in its diversity, such programs would reduce internal divisions.

Bias-Free Policing and Inclusive Security Practices. To gain the trust of marginalized communities, security agencies must adopt bias-free policing practices. Training programs that promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity among security personnel will reduce perceptions of bigotry within law enforcement, encouraging greater cooperation from communities. When communities feel equally protected, they are more likely to support intelligence and security efforts.

Community-Based Intelligence Networks. Engaging community leaders and local influencers in intelligence-gathering efforts would enhance the effectiveness of CTCOIN measures. Establishing local intelligence networks that respect community sensitivities and encourage voluntary information-sharing is crucial. Community policing strategies should be highly effective, as local leaders and trusted individuals are often better positioned to provide timely intelligence on extremist activities.

Transparency and Accountability in Security Operations. Ensuring transparency and accountability within security agencies would build trust between citizens and the government. Independent oversight mechanisms that investigate cases of abuse or bias within security forces would reduce community resentment and promote fair treatment. Accountability mechanisms, such as human rights monitoring and internal reviews, help build confidence in security agencies.

Community Resilience Programs. Building community resilience against extremist ideologies is essential for reducing domestic terrorism risks. Programs that empower local communities to identify and respond to radicalization independently would prevent extremist influences from taking root. Training community members in resilience techniques, conflict resolution, and early identification of radicalization indicators would foster a proactive response to domestic terrorism.

Collaboration with International Counter-Terrorism Agencies. Nigeria would benefit from collaborating with international counter-terrorism organizations to gain insights and support in combating domestic terrorism. International partnerships would provide training, resources, and intelligence sharing capabilities to address the threat of homegrown terrorism more effectively. Working with organizations like the AU and UN Counter-Terrorism Committee would strengthen Nigeria's capacity to counter domestic terrorism comprehensively.

