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Religious and Political Radicalism in Nigeria: Converging Networks of Violence and the Reproduction of Human Insecurity

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Abstract: Political and religious radicalism in Nigeria has developed within overlapping ecologies of violence that intensify human insecurity. This study examines how these two forms of radicalism interact to produce and reproduce human insecurity. The study employs a qualitative-analytical case study design based on documentary data, including scholarly articles, government and international organization reports, policy documents, security statistics, and credible media sources. The study analyzes the data thematically through a deductive-inductive approach and uses the Staircase to Terrorism model as its analytical lens. The findings show that political radicalism operates through electoral violence, patronage networks, identity-based mobilization, informal armed actors, and the politicization of resource conflicts, whereas religious radicalism persists through insurgencies conducted by JAS/Boko Haram and ISWAP. In 2025, Nigeria recorded 171 terrorism-related incidents and 750 deaths. ISWAP and Boko Haram accounted for approximately 80% of these deaths, while civilians constituted 67% of the victims. These two ecologies of violence converge through armed networks, kidnapping, illicit economies, and weak state protection, which drive forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, disruptions to education, and the erosion of social cohesion. This study contributes to the literature by integrating political radicalism, religious radicalism, the economy of violence, and institutional weakness into a unified empirical mechanism that explains the reproduction of human insecurity.

Keywords: Economy of violence; human insecurity; political radicalism; religious radicalism.

Abstrak: Radikalisme politik dan keagamaan di Nigeria berkembang dalam ekologi kekerasan yang saling beririsan dan memperluas ketidakamanan manusia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kedua bentuk radikalisme tersebut berinteraksi dalam memproduksi dan mereproduksi ketidakamanan manusia *(human insecurity)*. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kasus kualitatif-analitis berbasis data dokumenter, meliputi artikel ilmiah, laporan pemerintah dan organisasi internasional, dokumen kebijakan, statistik keamanan, serta media kredibel. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui pendekatan deduktif-induktif dengan *Staircase to Terrorism* sebagai lensa analitis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa radikalisme politik bekerja melalui kekerasan elektoral, patronase, mobilisasi identitas, aktor bersenjata nonformal, dan politisasi konflik sumber daya, sedangkan radikalisme keagamaan dipertahankan melalui insurgensi JAS/Boko Haram dan ISWAP. Pada 2025 tercatat 171 insiden dan 750 kematian akibat terorisme; sekitar 80% kematian terkait ISWAP dan Boko Haram, dan 67% korban merupakan warga sipil. Kedua ekologi kekerasan berkonvergensi melalui jaringan bersenjata, penculikan, ekonomi ilegal, dan lemahnya perlindungan negara, yang memicu perpindahan paksa penduduk *(displacement)*, kehilangan penghidupan, gangguan pendidikan, dan pelemahan kohesi sosial. Studi ini berkontribusi dengan mengintegrasikan radikalisme politik, radikalisme keagamaan, ekonomi kekerasan, dan kelemahan institusional dalam satu mekanisme empiris reproduksi *human insecurity*.

Kata kunci: ekonomi kekerasan; ketidakamanan manusia; radikalisme keagamaan; radikalisme politik.

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1. Introduction

Nigeria occupies a strategic position in Africa's demographic, economic, and geopolitical landscape, particularly in West Africa (Talikoa, 2026). With a population of approximately 237.5 million in 2025, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and plays an important role in regional political and economic dynamics (World Bank, n.d.). However, this strategic position coexists with a serious security paradox because Nigerians continue to face insurgency, terrorism, armed violence, communal conflict, and various threats to civilian safety. The 2026 Global Terrorism Index ranks Nigeria as the fourth country most affected by terrorism worldwide. Nigeria recorded 750 terrorism-related deaths in 2025, representing a 46% increase from the previous year, and activities involving the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram accounted for approximately 80% of these deaths (Institute for Economics & Peace [IEP], 2026). Civilians accounted for 67% of all terrorism-related deaths in the same year. This pattern shows that escalating violence not only threatens state stability but also directly endangers the continuity of community life. This situation highlights a fundamental paradox in Nigeria: its demographic scale and geopolitical significance have not been matched by the state's capacity to protect human security from persistent threats of violence.

Nigeria's security vulnerabilities have developed into a multidimensional crisis that directly affects people's lives. Armed conflict, insurgency, communal violence, and organized crime force people to leave their homes, disrupt livelihoods, restrict access to education and health care, increase the risk of violence against women and children, and weaken social cohesion (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2025). In the first quarter of 2025, Nigeria hosted 3,575,114 internally displaced persons (IDPs), with 63% located in the North-East, 20% in the North-West, and 17% in the North-Central regions. Insurgency, communal violence, and climate-related shocks drove much of this displacement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2025). In this study, these consequences are understood as manifestations of human insecurity, referring to threats to civilian safety and to the conditions necessary for sustaining everyday life, including physical security, livelihoods, access to education and basic services, community stability, and social cohesion. Human insecurity is therefore treated primarily as the outcome to be explained rather than as another form of radicalism or armed violence.

Armed groups alone do not drive Nigeria's human security crisis. Configurations of political power can also create conditions in which coercion and violence become instruments of political competition. In this study, political radicalism refers specifically to the use or legitimization of coercion, violence, exclusionary identity mobilization, and anti-democratic practices in the pursuit, consolidation, or preservation of political power. Political actors reproduce this pattern through electoral violence that intersects with patronage, elite interests, and the mobilization of ethnic and religious identities. Before the 2023 elections, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded civilians as targets in approximately 80% of violent events, while attackers also targeted candidates, party supporters, local officials, electoral facilities, and election personnel (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project [ACLED], 2023). Olumba (2024) shows that changes in the political opportunity structure, the centralization of power, nepotistic policies, and elite–militia alliances intensified violence. Therefore, weak governance and political elite practices also produce human insecurity in Nigeria by creating conditions that enable the reproduction of violence.

These political dynamics intersect with religious radicalism when religious identities, symbols, doctrines, or narratives are mobilized to legitimize violence, construct adversarial groups, or justify coercive sociopolitical objectives. In this study, religious radicalism does not refer to religious commitment or doctrinal conservatism in itself. Rather, it refers to processes through which religious ideas and identities are employed to legitimize, organize, or sustain violent action. In Nigeria, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS/Boko Haram) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) illustrate this process through insurgent violence justified through religious and ideological narratives, although their activities also interact with political, territorial, economic, and criminal dynamics (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [USCIRF], 2025). Religious doctrine alone is therefore insufficient to explain religious radicalism because intolerance, identity politicization,

inequality, social exclusion, resource conflicts, and struggles for power can create environments in which religious narratives acquire mobilizing and legitimizing functions. Jatau and Maza (2023) show that religion plays an ambivalent role in Nigeria: it can strengthen peace and democracy, while its political instrumentalization can also intensify polarization and instability. Religious radicalism is consequently treated here as a distinct process that may interact with, but should not be conflated with, political conflict, criminal violence, or broader ethnoreligious tensions.

Research on insecurity, radicalism, and violence in Nigeria has developed along three major strands. First, several studies focus on terrorism, the Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency, patterns of violence, and counterinsurgency responses. Warner and Lizzo (2023) show that the fragmentation of Boko Haram into JAS and ISWAP produced distinct organizational characteristics and patterns of violence. Consequently, treating both organizations under the single category of "Boko Haram" can obscure conflict analysis. Matfess (2023) examines another dimension by analyzing Boko Haram's violence against civilians, particularly women, and demonstrates the social and gendered dimensions of the insurgency. Oriola (2021), meanwhile, shifts attention to the state response and shows that problems related to weaponry, troop morale, patronage, intelligence leaks, and elite interests affect the effectiveness of military operations against Boko Haram. Agbiboa (2022) further extends counterinsurgency research by examining women's roles as local security actors in resisting insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. Although these studies deepen our understanding of extremist organizations, patterns of violence, and security responses, they primarily focus on the terrorism–insurgency–counterinsurgency nexus. As a result, they do not fully integrate political radicalism with the multidimensional consequences of violence for human security.

Second, research on insecurity in Nigeria has examined ethnoreligious conflict, identity politics, and the politicization of religion. Using the case of Jos, Vinson and Rudloff (2021) show that whether communities perceive conflict as a religious or ethnic issue shapes how they understand its causes and formulate solutions to violence. Oosterom et al. (2021) demonstrate that weak state accountability in addressing ethnoreligious violence sustains intergroup tensions and distrust. Jatau and Maza (2023) further show that religion plays an ambivalent role in Nigerian politics because it can strengthen peace and democracy, while political actors can also instrumentalize it to intensify polarization and instability. Tuki (2025) reinforces these findings by showing that exposure to violent conflict can intensify intergroup hostility by strengthening ingroup–outgroup boundaries and eroding social trust. Although this literature provides strong explanations of how religious and ethnic identities become arenas for the production of conflict, it has not yet adequately integrated political radicalism as a mechanism that also reproduces human insecurity.

Third, researchers have situated insecurity in Nigeria within structural problems related to governance, elite actions, state capacity, and human security. Kifordu (2022) shows that the stagnation in the transformation of the political elite hinders the development of effective governance amid ethnic conflict, insurgency, and social discontent. Oriola (2021) demonstrates that patronage, problems related to weaponry, intelligence leaks, and elite interests within security institutions affect the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram. Olumba (2024), meanwhile, finds that escalating violence in the Middle Belt does not result solely from competition over resources. Changes in the political opportunity structure, nepotistic policies, and alliances between elites and militia groups also contribute to this escalation. Akinola (2024) further argues that struggles for political power, ethnic fragmentation, and weak governance capacity have undermined human security in Nigeria. Overall, the literature provides extensive explanations of terrorism, identity conflict, political violence, and governance failures. However, researchers still tend to analyze these dimensions separately, which limits the literature's ability to explain fully how political and religious radicalism simultaneously reproduce human insecurity.

This study addresses this gap through the concept of convergence. Convergence does not refer to an organizational merger, ideological equivalence, or permanent alliance between political and religious radical actors. Rather, it refers to processes through which otherwise distinct forms of radicalism and violence interact, overlap, or become mutually reinforcing through shared mechanisms

and enabling environments. These include the politicization of religious and ethnic identities, elite relationships with armed actors, selective interactions among extremist and criminal networks, kidnapping and illicit economies, competition over resources, and limitations in state protection. Political radicalism, religious radicalism, banditry, communal conflict, and criminal violence therefore retain distinct motivations and organizational characteristics. Their interactions, however, can produce an ecology of violence in which different mechanisms reinforce civilian vulnerability and extend insecurity beyond individual violent events into everyday social life.

Based on this conceptual distinction, this study analyzes how political and religious radicalism interact with broader networks and mechanisms of violence to produce and reproduce human insecurity in Nigeria. Specifically, the study addresses the following research question: How do political and religious radicalism interact with broader mechanisms and networks of violence to produce and reproduce human insecurity in Nigeria? This formulation directs attention not only to the existence of political and religious radicalism but also to the mechanisms through which their interaction affects civilian safety, livelihoods, social cohesion, and the continuity of community life.

Theoretically, this study draws on Moghaddam's (2005) *Staircase to Terrorism*, which conceptualizes radicalization as a gradual process that begins with perceived injustice and deprivation, develops through frustration and displaced aggression, progressively narrows nonviolent options, and can ultimately lead to the legitimization of violence. The framework is used here as an analytical lens rather than as a deterministic causal model for all forms of violence examined in the study. It helps illuminate how grievances, perceived exclusion, narrowing opportunities for nonviolent action, and the legitimization of violence can interact with broader sociopolitical environments. This perspective is consistent with Hafez and Mullins (2015), who identify grievances, interpersonal networks, political and religious ideologies, enabling environments, and support structures as interacting factors in violent radicalization. Building on these perspectives, this study argues that political and religious radicalism reproduce human insecurity not simply through their independent manifestations of violence but through their interaction with identity mobilization, armed and criminal networks, illicit economies, and institutional conditions that limit effective civilian protection. These interactions do not erase the distinctions among political radicalism, religious radicalism, banditry, communal conflict, and criminal violence. Rather, their convergence creates a mutually reinforcing ecology of violence through which civilian vulnerability, displacement, livelihood disruption, educational insecurity, and weakened social cohesion are repeatedly reproduced.

2. Methods

This study analyzes the sociopolitical processes that produce human insecurity in Nigeria through the interaction between political radicalism and religious radicalism. The analysis focuses on practices, events, and sociopolitical configurations involving political actors, religious radical groups, organized violence, and the capacity of state institutions to protect citizens. This study examines the Boko Haram/JAS and ISWAP insurgencies, political violence, identity-based conflicts, and state responses as empirical contexts for understanding how radicalism generates threats to public safety, social cohesion, and the continuity of community life in Nigeria.

Based on this unit of analysis, this study employs a qualitative approach and an analytical case study design based on documentary data, with Nigeria as the case context. The study adopts this design because it does not seek to measure the prevalence of radicalism. Instead, it seeks to explain the mechanisms, relationships, and contexts that connect political radicalism, religious radicalism, and human insecurity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This approach enables the study to examine the relationships among political configurations, religious ideologies, actors' actions, and institutional capacity within a specific social context. During the interpretive process, this study uses Moghaddam's (2005) Staircase to Terrorism as an analytical lens to examine how perceptions of injustice, frustration, and the narrowing of nonviolent options can develop into the legitimization of violence.

This study draws on secondary data from various documentary sources. These sources include scholarly journal articles, academic books, reports from government agencies and international

organizations, policy documents, security statistics, and credible media reports related to political radicalism, religious radicalism, terrorism, conflict, and human insecurity in Nigeria. The use of diverse sources allows the study to compare information across documents and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of human insecurity within Nigeria's sociopolitical context.

The study collects data through documentary research by identifying and selecting sources relevant to political radicalism, religious radicalism, conflict, terrorism, and human insecurity in Nigeria. The study selects documents based on their substantive relevance, source credibility, direct connection to the Nigerian context, and capacity to provide empirical and analytical information related to the research focus. The study then compares data from scholarly articles, institutional reports, policy documents, security statistics, and credible media sources to identify consistencies, differences, and recurring patterns across sources. This procedure strengthens data validity through documentary triangulation before the study proceeds to the analytical stage.

This study analyzes the data thematically by combining deductive and inductive approaches. The analytical process includes reading and organizing the documents, coding the data, grouping codes into themes, comparing information across sources, and interpreting the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deductively, the study guides the coding process through the concepts of injustice and deprivation, frustration, the legitimization of violence, and the escalation of radicalization within Moghaddam's (2005) Staircase to Terrorism framework. Inductively, the analysis allows empirical themes to emerge from the data, including the instrumentalization of identity, political patronage, institutional weakness, intolerance, organized violence, population displacement, and civilian vulnerability. The study strengthens interpretive consistency by comparing and triangulating information across documentary sources, thereby ensuring that the conclusions do not rely on a single type of source.

3. Results

Political Radicalism and the Reproduction of Human Insecurity in Nigeria

The documentary analysis shows that political radicalism in Nigeria manifests not only through direct violence but also through coercive competition for power, the mobilization of armed groups, political intimidation, patronage, and the use of identity in struggles for political influence. These patterns appear in electoral contests, elite conflicts, and relationships between political actors and violent groups that increase security risks for communities. Iyekekpolo (2020) shows that the fragmentation of political elites along identity lines and their efforts to secure support from particular groups have increased the political relevance of radical actors, including during the early development of the Boko Haram insurgency. A similar pattern appears in the Middle Belt, where changes in the political opportunity structure, policies perceived as nepotistic, and alliances between elites and militia members contributed to the escalation of violent conflict (Olumba, 2024). In addition, before the 2023 elections, ACLED recorded more than 200 violent events involving political party members or supporters and nearly 100 deaths, demonstrating that political competition remains an important arena for the production of insecurity (Carboni & Serwat, 2023). Overall, these data show that political radicalism operates through the interaction of power struggles, identity mobilization, the use of violent actors, and weak accountability mechanisms, thereby increasing citizens' vulnerability to political violence.

Electoral violence represents the most visible manifestation of political radicalism and places civilians among the most vulnerable groups. During the 12 months preceding the 2023 elections, ACLED recorded more than 200 violent events involving political party members and supporters, which resulted in nearly 100 deaths. Perpetrators targeted civilians in approximately 80% of these events, and civilians accounted for approximately 75 of the nearly 100 fatalities (Carboni & Serwat, 2023). These violent acts included organized attacks, kidnappings, the killing of candidates and party supporters, and intimidation against political actors. Between January 2021 and February 2023, ACLED also recorded 44 violent incidents involving offices and personnel of the Independent National

Electoral Commission (INEC), including looting, arson, shootings, kidnappings, and killings. These findings show that electoral competition not only increases risks for candidates and election management institutions but also extends political insecurity into civilian life and the broader democratic sphere.

Table 1. Indicators of Political and Electoral Violence in Nigeria, 2021–2024

Period	Form of Violence	Main Actors/Targets	Number of Events	Main Casualties/Impacts
January 2021–February 2023	Attacks on electoral institutions and election administrators	Offices and personnel of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	44 events	Looting, arson, shootings, kidnappings, and killings targeting election personnel
February 2022–February 2023	Violence involving political party members and supporters before the 2023 elections	Party members/supporters, candidates, local political actors, and civilians	More than 200 events	Nearly 100 deaths; civilians were targeted in approximately 80% of events and accounted for approximately 75 fatalities
2024	Violence targeting local government officials and administrators	Governors, local officials, village heads, local council members, and government personnel	137 events	Nigeria recorded the highest number of violent events targeting local officials in Africa in 2024; violence included direct attacks, kidnappings, armed-group violence, and mob actions

Source: Adapted from Carboni and Serwat (2023), Political Violence and the 2023 Nigerian Election, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), and ACLED (2025), Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2024 Annual Report.

Political parties and candidates do not perpetrate electoral violence only through direct action. Political networks also mobilize informal armed actors to advance political interests. Carboni and Serwat (2023) report that local elites in Nigeria have used militias, criminal gangs, cult groups, and regional security organizations to intimidate voters, attack political opponents, and influence electoral processes. This pattern is particularly evident among cult groups and criminal networks that maintain ties with political actors, especially in southern Nigeria. Between January 2022 and February 2023, ACLED recorded 175 violent events involving cult militias and nearly 280 deaths. Approximately 20% of these events occurred in Lagos, while other concentrations appeared in Ogun, Osun, Delta, and several states in central Nigeria. At the same time, regional security groups such as Amotekun and Ebubeagu generated controversy because of their involvement in intimidation, violence against civilians, and alleged misuse for political purposes. These patterns indicate that political violence in Nigeria operates through networks of formal and informal actors that allow political interests to outsource violence to armed groups operating outside official party structures.



Figure 1. Impact of Violence on Polling Stations during Nigeria's 2023 Elections

Source: Ben Curtis, Africanews, 2023.

These patterns of political violence extend beyond electoral cycles and continue through struggles over authority and resources at the subnational level. ACLED recorded 137 violent events targeting local officials in Nigeria throughout 2024, the highest number in Africa that year and more than twice the number recorded in Ethiopia, which ranked second in the region (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2025). In Rivers State, violence targeting local officials doubled compared with 2023 amid a political conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and a group of legislators affiliated with his predecessor. This elite conflict also weakened administrative capacity and triggered attacks on local governments by mobs and armed groups that, in several cases, maintained ties with particular political parties or elites. Meanwhile, the North-West accounted for approximately 28% of all violence targeting local officials in 2024. Bandit groups drove much of this violence by targeting village heads and community leaders through kidnapping, extortion, and attempts to restrict local government control.

Struggles over authority and resources also intersect with escalating communal conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt. The analysis shows that violence between farming and herding communities does not arise solely from competition over land and water resources; changing political configurations also shape the conflict. Olumba (2024) finds that changes in the political opportunity structure since 2014, the centralization of power, domestic policies perceived as nepotistic, and alliances between elites and militia members acted as catalysts that transformed previously sporadic conflict into more intensive mass violence. This pattern corresponds with the documentary findings of this study, which identify links among marginalization, injustice, struggles for power, and ethnoreligious tensions in exacerbating political instability in Nigeria. Therefore, communal conflict in the Middle Belt demonstrates how resource competition can develop into a broader threat to civilian security when political favoritism, elite–militia networks, and unequal access to power intensify existing tensions.

Limited institutional security capacity further exacerbates this escalation of violence. Drawing on the experiences of Nigerian military personnel involved in counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram, Oriola (2021) identifies problems related to weaponry, intelligence leaks, low troop morale, patronage in personnel deployment, and perceptions of political and military elite interests in conflict management. These conditions reduce the effectiveness of security operations and create a widening gap between the intensity of security threats and the capacity of state institutions to protect communities. In addition, persistent Boko Haram attacks and the emergence of splinter groups affiliated with the Islamic State have increased pressure on security forces, while state operations have not fully stopped continuing violence. Therefore, the capacity of violent actors alone does not reproduce

insecurity in Nigeria. Institutional weaknesses also constrain the consistency, coordination, and effectiveness of state security responses (Oriola, 2021).

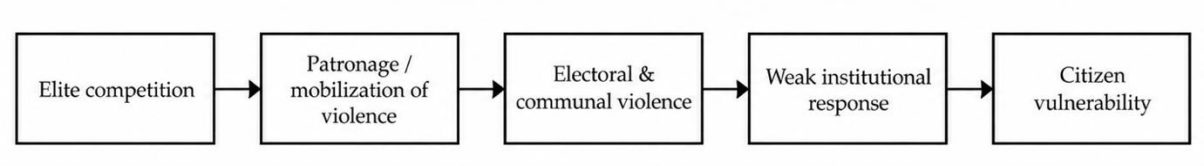


Figure 2. Empirical Pattern of the Reproduction of Insecurity through Political Radicalism in Nigeria

Source: Author's elaboration based on the documentary analysis, 2026.

Figure 2 illustrates the empirical pattern through which political radicalism reproduces insecurity in Nigeria as a sequence of interconnected processes. Elite competition initiates this process, followed by patronage practices and the mobilization of violence, which then develop into electoral and communal violence. Weak institutional responses further exacerbate these conditions and limit the state's capacity to prevent violence, control its escalation, and address its consequences. Ultimately, these interconnected processes increase civilian vulnerability by exposing communities to intimidation, violence, administrative disruption, and weakened public protection.

In conclusion, political radicalism reproduces human insecurity in Nigeria through four primary channels: electoral violence, the mobilization of informal armed actors, the politicization of social conflict, and weak accountability within security institutions. These four channels manifest through voter intimidation, attacks on candidates and local officials, the involvement of militias and criminal networks in political competition, the escalation of communal conflict, and the limited capacity of the state to provide consistent security responses. Their empirical consequences include civilian deaths, disruptions to electoral processes and public administration, increased community vulnerability, and a reduced capacity of state institutions to protect the population. These patterns demonstrate that political radicalism in Nigeria does not operate episodically. Instead, it functions through recurring practices that continually expand insecurity across citizens' social and political lives.

Religious Radicalism, Insurgency, and the Vulnerability of Civilian Life

In addition to political radicalism, the findings show that religious radicalism and insurgency remain major sources of human insecurity in Nigeria. The Global Terrorism Index 2026 ranks Nigeria as the fourth country most affected by terrorism worldwide, with 171 incidents and 750 deaths recorded in 2025 (Institute for Economics & Peace [IEP], 2026). Compared with 2024, the number of attacks increased by 43%, while terrorism-related deaths increased by 46%, reaching their highest level since 2020. The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram collectively accounted for approximately 80% of all terrorism-related deaths in Nigeria that year. These data show that violent extremism grounded in religious ideology continues to maintain strong operational capacity and poses serious threats to civilian safety and social stability in Nigeria.

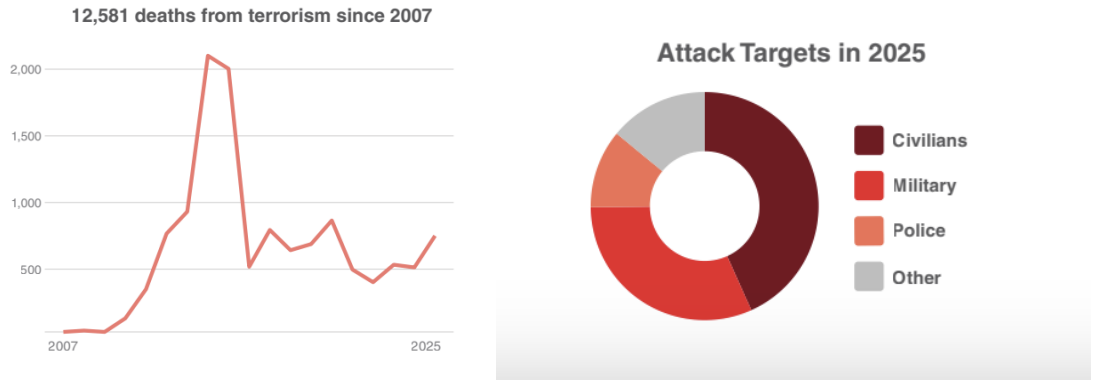
The increase in terrorist activity does not originate from a single homogeneous organization. Instead, the data show clear differences between the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram. In 2025, ISWAP again became the deadliest terrorist group in Nigeria, carrying out 92 attacks that caused 384 deaths, a sharp increase from 20 attacks in 2024. During the same period, Boko Haram carried out 43 attacks that caused 213 deaths, compared with 26 attacks and 166 deaths in the previous year (IEP, 2026). Thus, ISWAP demonstrated greater operational intensity and caused more fatalities, while Boko Haram maintained a significant and increasingly lethal attack capacity. These differences demonstrate the fragmented nature of Nigeria's insurgency landscape, in which each group exhibits distinct levels of activity, capacities for violence, and operational patterns. Therefore, any analysis of insecurity must empirically distinguish between these actors.

Table 2. Patterns of Boko Haram/JAS and ISWAP Activity in Nigeria, 2024–2025

Group	Predominant Area of Operation	Number of Attacks	Number of Deaths	Main Targets	Characteristics of Violence
Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)	Borno State and cross-border areas of the Lake Chad Basin	20 (2024); 92 (2025)	166 (2024); 384 (2025)	Military posts, convoys, and security personnel; civilians and local communities in some attacks	Relatively organized cross-border operations; armed attacks against military positions; exploitation of border areas; limited territorial control and resource extraction; and the use of technologies such as drones in recent operations
Boko Haram/*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS)	Borno State, particularly the Sambisa Forest and rural and border areas of northeastern Nigeria	26 (2024); 43 (2025)	166 (2024); 213 (2025)	Civilians, villages, and local communities, including religious communities, as well as security targets	Attacks on settlements, killings, and kidnappings; remaining JAS factions increasingly display patterns resembling banditry, including village looting and kidnapping for ransom

Source: Adapted from the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Nigeria Country Update 2025b.

These patterns of violence also show a strong spatial concentration. In 2025, Borno State became the primary epicenter of terrorism in Nigeria, accounting for 67% of all attacks and 72% of all terrorism-related deaths nationwide (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026). This concentration demonstrates that the North-East remains the main area of operation for extremist groups, particularly the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram/*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS). However, these patterns do not remain territorially isolated because violent networks also use the Nigeria–Cameroon–Chad borderlands and the Lake Chad Basin corridor to facilitate mobility, conduct cross-border attacks, and maintain operational space. The Global Terrorism Index 2026 also reports that almost 90% of Boko Haram attacks that occurred within 0–5 kilometers of an international border took place along the Cameroon–Nigeria border. Therefore, the concentration of violence in Borno simultaneously reflects the territorial and cross-border characteristics of the insurgency, which extend security vulnerabilities from the local level to the wider regional context.



(a) (b)

Figure 3. Trends in Terrorism-Related Deaths and Targets of Terrorist Attacks in Nigeria

(a) Trend in terrorism-related deaths in Nigeria, 2007–2025. (b) Composition of targets of terrorist attacks in Nigeria, 2025.

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP, 2026), Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Nigeria profile, p. 24; based on TerrorismTracker and IEP calculations.

Patterns of attacks in 2025 also indicate an increasingly pronounced shift toward civilians as the group most affected by terrorism. IEP (2026) reports that civilians accounted for 67% of all terrorism-related deaths in Nigeria in 2025, while military personnel accounted for 19%. This proportion increased sharply from 2020, when civilians accounted for 39% of terrorism-related deaths and their number was almost equal to the number of military fatalities. This shift shows that extremist violence no longer concentrates primarily on confrontations with security forces but increasingly affects noncombatant populations. This development intensifies human insecurity because civilians directly face the risks of killing, kidnapping, the loss of family members, destruction of livelihoods, and disruption of community life.

The increasing number of civilian casualties also demonstrates that religiously framed violence in Nigeria does not affect only one religious community. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reports that JAS/Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continue to perpetrate violence using religious justifications, while their victims include both Christian and Muslim communities. In 2024, for example, attacks attributed to JAS killed 14 people in Yobe State, including a pastor, while bandit groups in Zamfara killed at least 49 people, including a Muslim imam. USCIRF also documented attacks against communities, religious leaders, and places of worship representing different religious backgrounds (USCIRF, 2025a). At the same time, security forces responded slowly or inadequately in several cases, allowing violence against religious communities to persist. These findings demonstrate that religious radicalism in Nigeria generates vulnerabilities across religious groups and cannot be reduced to a binary conflict between one religion and another.

Institutional conditions that restrict freedom of religion or belief also shape these patterns of vulnerability. USCIRF (2025b) reports that 12 state governments and Nigeria's federal government continue to enforce blasphemy provisions to prosecute and imprison individuals accused of insulting religion. In 2025, authorities reportedly continued to imprison four Muslims under these provisions, including two religious leaders. In addition, Nigeria permits 12 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory to implement Sharia-based legal frameworks that contain provisions concerning blasphemy and related offenses. These institutional conditions coexist with violence perpetrated by nonstate actors such as JAS/Boko Haram and ISWAP, while government responses in several cases remain inadequate or delayed. These findings show that threats to freedom of religion in Nigeria arise not only from

extremist violence but also from regulatory configurations, law enforcement practices, and limitations in the state's capacity to protect citizens' religious rights.

The impacts of religious radicalism and insurgency directly affect multiple dimensions of social life in Nigeria. Armed-group violence continues to cause deaths, kidnappings, forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, and the destruction of homes and community infrastructure. In early 2025, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2025) recorded more than 3.5 million internally displaced persons in Nigeria, with 63% located in the North-East, 20% in the North-West, and 17% in the North-Central region. Insurgency, communal violence, and deteriorating security conditions drove much of this displacement. The effects on education are also substantial. By mid-2025, approximately 69% of school-age children living in displacement camps in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe lacked access to educational services, while continuing violence and new displacement further increased the number of out-of-school children (Oxford Policy Management, 2025; United Nations Children's Fund, 2024a). In addition, UNHCR reports indicate increasing risks for women and children, including gender-based violence, family separation, psychological trauma, and limited access to basic services. These findings demonstrate that religious radicalism in Nigeria not only causes fatalities but also disrupts family life, education, livelihoods, and social cohesion over the long term.

Convergence of Political and Religious Radicalism in the Production of Human Insecurity

The documentary synthesis shows that political and religious radicalism in Nigeria do not operate as entirely separate processes. Instead, they intersect through the politicization of identity, elite–armed actor networks, competition over resources, and the use of violence to maintain influence. Onakuse and Jatula (2021) show that the relationship between religion and politics in northern Nigeria has created a space in which religious extremism can acquire political relevance, while Jatau and Maza (2023) demonstrate that political actors can instrumentalize religion to intensify polarization and undermine peace. A similar pattern appears in conflicts in the Middle Belt, where changes in the political opportunity structure, policies perceived as nepotistic, and elite–militia alliances have accompanied the escalation of communal violence (Olumba, 2024). These findings show that human insecurity in Nigeria emerges through the convergence of political interests, the mobilization of religious identities, and mutually reinforcing networks of violence within the same social environment.

The connection between these two radicalization processes also appears in the geographical overlap between ideological insurgency and criminal violence in northern Nigeria. A joint report by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) shows that some bandit groups in the North-West maintain selective and often temporary relationships with extremist organizations such as *Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad* (JAS), Ansaru, and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which have gradually expanded their presence in the region (Ayandele et al., 2024). A similar pattern appeared during the mass kidnappings of 2024, when extremist groups operated predominantly in the North-East, while bandit groups remained concentrated mainly in the North-West, although some actors formed temporary tactical alliances (Madueke et al., 2024). These patterns show that the boundaries among ideological insurgency, banditry, and criminal violence are not entirely rigid. However, each remains a distinct entity in terms of its objectives, organizational structure, and operational base. Therefore, Nigeria produces human insecurity through overlapping ecologies of violence rather than through a single type of armed actor.

The connections among these ecologies of violence become even clearer through the development of a violence economy that sustains armed-group activities. Kidnapping, ransom payments, forced levies, robbery, and control over local resources provide important instruments for generating revenue and maintaining control over communities. ACLED data show that the North-West recorded 662 kidnapping-related events between 2019 and 2023, substantially more than the 246 events recorded in the North-East (Madueke et al., 2024). From late February to mid-March 2024, armed groups also reportedly kidnapped more than 500 people in a series of mass abductions across both regions. Bandit groups and extremist organizations use kidnapping as a source of financing, a means of exerting

pressure on communities, and an instrument for strengthening territorial influence, although their operational patterns differ. These findings show that the violence economy connects criminality, insurgency, and radicalism by sustaining the operational capacity of armed actors while expanding human insecurity through fear, asset loss, extortion, and disruption of local economic life.

Table 3. Mechanisms of the Convergence of Violence and Their Impacts on Human Security in Nigeria

Mechanism	Actors Involved	Forms of Action	Main Areas	Impacts on Human Security
Politicization of identity	Political elites, religious actors, political supporters, and ethnoreligious communities	Mobilization of religious and ethnic identities, exclusionary rhetoric, group polarization, and delegitimization of political opponents	Northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt	Social polarization, increasing intergroup distrust, greater vulnerability to communal conflict, and weakening social cohesion
Patronage and mobilization of armed actors	Local political elites, militias, criminal gangs, cult militias, and informal security groups	Voter intimidation, attacks on political opponents, mobilization of violent groups, and the use of informal actors to advance political interests	Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Delta, Rivers, and several southern and central areas	Civilian deaths and injuries, political intimidation, disruption of electoral participation, and weakening public security
Ideological insurgency	Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS/Boko Haram), and Ansaru	Armed attacks, attacks on communities and security forces, kidnappings, control of operational spaces, and ideological propaganda	Borno, the North-East, the Lake Chad Basin, and parts of the corridors toward the North-West	Civilian deaths, displacement, fear, destruction of communities, and disruption of education and livelihoods
Kidnapping and ransom	Bandit groups, criminal gangs, JAS/Boko Haram, ISWAP, and local armed groups	Individual and group kidnappings, mass abductions, ransom demands, and hostage-taking as an instrument of coercion	Primarily the North-West and North-East	Loss of life, trauma, financial burdens on families, disruption of education and mobility, and increased fear
Illegal levies and control of local economies	Bandit groups and nonstate armed actors	Forced levies on communities, extortion, robbery, and control over economic routes and local resources	Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and other areas of the North-West	Loss of assets and income, poverty, disruption of trade and agriculture, and weakened household economic resilience
Politicized resource conflict	Farming communities, herding communities,	Competition over land and water, retaliatory attacks, ethnic and religious	Middle Belt/North-Central, particularly	Deaths, population displacement, destruction of land and livelihoods,

	local militias, political elites, and their support networks	mobilization, and involvement of elite–militia networks	Plateau, Benue, and surrounding areas	intercommunal conflict, and social fragmentation
Limitations of state responses	Security institutions, government authorities, and political and military elites	Inconsistent security responses, intelligence leaks, patronage, limited weaponry, and delayed responses to attacks	Nationwide, particularly the North-East, North-West, and Middle Belt	Persistent violence, weak civilian protection, institutional distrust, and expansion of armed groups' operational space

Source: Compiled by the author based on Oriola (2021), Olumba (2024), Carboni and Serwat (2023), Ayandele et al. (2024), Madueke et al. (2024), the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF, 2025b), and the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP, 2026).

The convergence of these forms of violence ultimately produces its most visible consequence through large-scale population displacement across Nigeria. By the end of 2025, UNHCR (2026) recorded approximately 3.57 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, more than 126,000 refugees and asylum seekers residing in the country, and more than 408,000 Nigerian refugees seeking protection in neighboring countries. Different configurations of violence shape displacement patterns across regions. In the North-East, prolonged conflict involving nonstate armed groups continues to create protection risks and restrict humanitarian access. In the North-West and the Middle Belt, banditry, communal violence, and farmer–herder conflict generate new waves of displacement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2026). These findings show that human insecurity extends beyond direct exposure to attacks, kidnappings, or extortion. It also produces loss of housing, disconnection from livelihoods and social networks, and increasing dependence on humanitarian protection. Population displacement therefore provides an empirical indicator of how the convergence of insurgency, criminal violence, communal conflict, and weak state protection transforms insecurity from localized violent events into widespread social vulnerability at the national level.

The effects of displacement and violence also penetrate everyday life by disrupting education and child protection. A study in Katsina shows that increasing armed violence, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflict have disrupted livelihoods, weakened social cohesion, driven population displacement, and restricted access to education, health care, and socioeconomic opportunities (Oxford Policy Management, 2025). School insecurity also reflects this vulnerability. UNICEF reported that 19 documented attacks on schools during 2022–2023 contributed to the closure of 113 schools in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe because of deteriorating security conditions (United Nations Children's Fund, 2024b). At the same time, monitoring under the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools showed that only 37% of schools across 10 states had early warning systems for identifying threats such as attacks on schools (United Nations Children's Fund, 2024a). Therefore, human insecurity not only threatens children's physical safety but also disrupts learning continuity and weakens the capacity of educational institutions to provide safe environments. The convergence of armed violence, criminality, and weak institutional protection produces intergenerational consequences because childhood exposure to conflict simultaneously restricts access to the education necessary for building long-term social resilience.

Limitations in the state's capacity to provide consistent security protection further reproduce vulnerabilities that affect education, livelihoods, and community life. Oriola (2021) shows that Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations face organizational problems, including patronage in personnel deployment, unequal access to weaponry, low troop morale, and intelligence leaks, all of which reduce the effectiveness of responses to armed groups. These persistent problems also appear in the North-West. Throughout 2024, the Nigerian military conducted air and ground operations through Operation

Fansan Yamma and targeted several bandit-group leaders in Katsina and Zamfara. However, violence in both states increased compared with 2023 as attacks on civilians, confrontations with state forces and their allies, and competition among armed groups intensified. Armed banditry in Katsina and Zamfara contributed to a 29% increase in violence in the North-West in 2024, making the region the most violent zone in Nigeria that year (Serwat & Birru, 2025). These findings show that eliminating armed-group leaders and destroying operational bases through kinetic security responses do not automatically stop the reproduction of violence. In the context of human insecurity, limited territorial control, internal problems within security institutions, and persistent armed networks continue to expose civilians to attacks, kidnappings, extortion, and disruptions to mobility and livelihoods despite ongoing military operations.

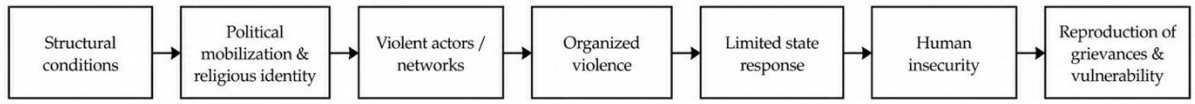


Figure 4. Mechanism of Interaction between Political and Religious Radicalism in the Reproduction of Human Insecurity in Nigeria

Source: Author's elaboration based on the documentary analysis of Oriola (2021), Olumba (2024), Ayandele et al. (2024), Madueke et al. (2024), USCIRF (2025a), IEP (2026), UNHCR (2026), and UNICEF (2024a, 2024b, 2025).

The findings therefore show that Nigeria produces human insecurity through a recurring and mutually reinforcing empirical chain. Grievances, sociopolitical exclusion, unequal access to resources, and perceptions of injustice create initial conditions that political, ethnic, and religious actors subsequently mobilize through identity. This mobilization creates opportunities for armed actors, criminal networks, bandit groups, and extremist organizations to use violence as an instrument of influence, control, and financing. As this process develops, kidnapping, extortion, attacks on civilians, and communal violence become normalized in several regions, while state institutions retain limited capacity to prevent violence, respond effectively, and address its consequences. The accumulation of these processes increases civilian vulnerability through forced displacement, prolonged fear, loss of livelihoods, disruptions to education and basic services, and weakening intercommunity relations. Thus, the findings show that political and religious radicalism do not produce insecurity independently. Instead, they interact through identity mobilization, networks of violence, illicit economies, and limitations in state protection that collectively reproduce human insecurity in the everyday lives of Nigerians.

4. Discussion

This study demonstrates that no single form of radicalism independently produces human insecurity in Nigeria. Instead, several mutually reinforcing mechanisms of violence interact to reproduce insecurity. Political radicalism operates through electoral violence, patronage, the mobilization of informal armed actors, and the politicization of resource conflicts, while religious radicalism continues to sustain a high capacity for violence. In 2025, Nigeria recorded 171 terrorist incidents and 750 terrorism-related deaths, and ISWAP and Boko Haram accounted for approximately 80% of these deaths. At the same time, civilians accounted for 67% of all terrorism-related deaths, demonstrating that the effects of violence have expanded from armed confrontations into everyday community life. The findings become even more significant when these two ecologies of violence intersect through kidnapping, armed networks, the violence economy, and limited state protection. Therefore, the main finding of this study concerns not merely the coexistence of political and religious radicalism but their convergence as a mechanism that repeatedly reproduces human insecurity in Nigeria.

Political radicalism reproduces insecurity when formal institutions fail to fully mediate competition for power and political actors instead rely on patronage, identity mobilization, and nonstate violent actors. Iyekekpolo (2020) shows that identity-based elite fragmentation and competition can give radical groups political relevance, thereby allowing social grievances to become channels of mobilization in struggles for power. A similar mechanism operates in the Middle Belt, where competition over land and resources becomes more destructive when changes in the political opportunity structure, policies perceived as nepotistic, and elite–militia alliances intensify existing tensions (Olumba, 2024). Moghaddam's (2005) Staircase to Terrorism helps explain this finding by emphasizing that experiences of injustice and deprivation do not automatically produce violence. Escalation occurs when individuals or groups increasingly perceive legitimate channels of participation as closed and then encounter environments that legitimize aggression against other groups. Therefore, the central problem does not lie solely in the existence of grievances but in their transformation through patronage networks, identity mobilization, and access to armed actors that use violence as an instrument of political competition while simultaneously weakening civilian protection.

Religious radicalism also generates vulnerabilities across communities, not because religious identity is intrinsically violent, but because armed actors use religious symbols, doctrines, and identity boundaries to legitimize violence, define adversarial groups, recruit members, and maintain organizational authority. In Nigeria, JAS/Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to use religious justifications for violent actions, but their effects do not remain confined to a single community. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2025a) documents extremist attacks against both Christian and Muslim communities, including religious leaders and places of worship. This finding aligns with Jatau and Maza (2023), who show that religion plays an ambivalent role in Nigeria: it can strengthen peace when it supports pluralism, but political actors can also instrumentalize it to deepen polarization in political and conflict settings. Changes in the targeting patterns of terrorism further demonstrate this vulnerability. In 2025, civilians accounted for 67% of all terrorism-related deaths, a sharp increase from 39% in 2020, while military personnel accounted for only 19% in 2025 (Institute for Economics & Peace [IEP], 2026). This shift shows that religious radicalism increasingly places direct pressure on social life. Consequently, human insecurity emerges not only from confrontations between armed groups and state security forces but also from the penetration of violence into community spaces, intergroup relations, religious practices, and citizens' everyday lives.

These findings also clarify the position of this study in relation to three major strands of previous literature. First, research on insurgency and counterterrorism has emphasized the persistence of Boko Haram and the limited capacity of the Nigerian military to end the conflict, including problems related to troop morale, weaponry, intelligence leaks, and institutional patronage (Oriola, 2021). The present study supports the importance of these factors but further shows that insurgency does not operate as an isolated arena of violence, as it intersects with banditry, criminal activity, and local armed networks. Second, studies of ethnoreligious conflict and identity politics have demonstrated that perceptions of religion and ethnicity shape patterns of conflict and that weak accountability can prolong communal violence in Nigeria (Oosterom et al., 2021; Vinson & Rudloff, 2021). The present study connects this perspective to a broader set of relational mechanisms by showing how identity mobilization can intersect with patronage relationships, militia networks, banditry, kidnapping, and illicit economies. These intersections are important because they demonstrate that identity-based conflict cannot be understood solely in terms of religious or ethnic differences; its consequences depend partly on the political, organizational, and material networks through which identities are mobilized.

Third, scholarship on governance and human security identifies institutional instability, elite competition, and limitations in state capacity as important conditions shaping insecurity in Nigeria (Akinola, 2024; Kifordu, 2022). This institutional dimension extends beyond the immediate security sector to the relationship between religion, governance, and public legitimacy. Ezeudu and Saadu (2025) show that religious affiliation shapes perceptions of policy initiatives and trust in government institutions in Nigeria, while concerns about religious favouritism persist within administrative

processes. Their findings demonstrate that religious identity can become relevant not only within explicitly religious or conflict-related arenas but also in citizens' encounters with public institutions and their perceptions of governmental legitimacy. This does not mean that religious favouritism, institutional distrust, or weak governance directly produces radicalization. Rather, these factors form part of the broader institutional environment within which perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, fairness, and identity are negotiated. In the present analysis, institutional weakness is therefore not treated as a form of political or religious radicalism but as an enabling condition that can weaken institutional constraints on violent actors, reduce confidence in formal mechanisms for addressing grievances, and limit effective civilian protection.

This distinction becomes particularly important when institutional conditions interact with armed and illicit networks. Evidence of selective relationships between some bandit groups and JAS, Ansaru, and ISWAP, together with the use of kidnapping as a source of financing by armed actors, indicates points of overlap between insurgent, criminal, and illicit economic networks (Ayandele et al., 2024; Madueke et al., 2024). Such relationships should not be interpreted as evidence that banditry and insurgency are organizationally or ideologically identical. Instead, they demonstrate how otherwise distinct actors and forms of violence may become connected through tactical relationships, material resources, and shared environments of limited state protection. The contribution of this study therefore lies in bringing together political radicalism, religious radicalism, identity mobilization, armed and criminal networks, illicit economies, and institutional limitations within an integrated analytical framework while preserving their conceptual distinctions. Rather than constituting a single empirical mechanism, these processes form an interconnected set of mutually reinforcing mechanisms through which different forms of violence can converge and contribute to the production and reproduction of human insecurity in Nigeria.

Theoretically, these findings both reinforce and extend Moghaddam's (2005) *Staircase to Terrorism* model. Grievances, exclusion, injustice, and limited access to effective political channels create initial conditions, but these conditions do not automatically produce radicalization. Escalation occurs when these experiences intersect with identity mobilization, elite networks, armed actors, and ideological frameworks that legitimize violence against groups constructed as adversaries. In Nigeria, the normalization of kidnapping, extortion, attacks against civilians, and communal violence shows how these processes can develop into routine and institutionalized practices of violence. This finding aligns with Hafez and Mullins (2015), who conceptualize radicalization as the outcome of interactions among grievances, interpersonal networks, political and religious ideologies, enabling environments, and support structures rather than as the consequence of a single factor. However, the Nigerian case shows that the "staircase" of radicalization does not always develop linearly at the individual level. The process also operates at the level of the sociopolitical ecology, where political competition, religious identity, the violence economy, criminal networks, and weak institutional capacity reinforce one another. The theoretical contribution of this study therefore lies in conceptualizing radicalization as a relational and cyclical process that not only moves actors toward violence but also reproduces conditions of human insecurity that can generate new grievances.

The consequences of this convergence of violence demonstrate that human insecurity in Nigeria reproduces itself rather than ending with the immediate victims of violent events. By the end of 2025, approximately 3.57 million people remained internally displaced, while prolonged violence continued to undermine livelihoods, separate families, intensify fear, and restrict access to basic services (UNHCR, 2026). The education sector demonstrates this vulnerability particularly clearly. Security conditions forced 113 schools in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe to close, while only 37% of monitored schools across 10 states had early warning systems for security threats (UNICEF, 2024a, 2024b). These effects are consistent with Bertoni et al. (2019), who find that exposure to Boko Haram conflict reduces school participation and completed years of education in northeastern Nigeria, and with Ajogbeje and Sylwester (2024), who show that both Boko Haram and farmer–herder conflicts negatively affect educational attainment. Forced displacement also changes household livelihood structures and employment opportunities, including by reducing the participation of male household heads in

agricultural employment (Babangida et al., 2026). From the perspective of insecurity reproduction, the loss of education, employment, assets, social networks, and trust in state capacity can generate new grievances, alienation, and vulnerabilities. When these conditions intersect with mobilization networks and ideologies that legitimize violence, they can recreate environments that enable radicalization. Therefore, Figure 4 should be understood as representing a reproductive cycle: violence produces human insecurity, while prolonged human insecurity reshapes social conditions that can support subsequent mobilization for violence, rather than representing a linear and deterministic causal relationship.

The policy implications of these findings require integrated interventions that extend beyond kinetic security responses. Federal and state governments, security agencies, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), religious leaders, local communities, educational institutions, and humanitarian organizations need to act simultaneously at four levels: disrupt patronage relationships between elites and armed groups while strengthening security accountability; suppress kidnapping economies, illegal levies, and networks that finance violence; expand early warning systems, school protection, and intercommunity forums; and strengthen livelihood recovery and reintegration programs for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The 29% increase in violence in the North-West in 2024, despite ongoing military operations targeting bandit groups, demonstrates the limitations of an approach that focuses primarily on eliminating armed actors (Serwat & Birru, 2025). Policymakers should measure policy outcomes through the establishment and effectiveness of oversight mechanisms, early warning systems, reintegration programs, school protection measures, and intercommunity forums. Relevant indicators should include reductions in violence against civilians, kidnappings, displacement, and school closures, as well as improvements in public trust and access to protection. Therefore, reducing human insecurity in Nigeria requires policymakers to simultaneously disrupt the relationships among grievances, identity mobilization, networks of violence, illicit economies, and institutional weakness. Without such a cross-sectoral strategy, state responses risk suppressing the symptoms of insecurity without dismantling the mechanisms that reproduce it.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that human insecurity in Nigeria is reproduced through the interaction of political and religious radicalism with broader networks, mechanisms, and institutional conditions of violence. Political radicalism is manifested through the use or legitimization of coercion and violence in political competition, while religious radicalism emerges when religious ideas, identities, and narratives are mobilized to legitimize or sustain violent action. Neither process, however, adequately explains Nigeria's human security crisis in isolation. Their consequences become more extensive when they interact with identity mobilization, patronage and elite–armed actor relationships, extremist and criminal networks, kidnapping and illicit economies, communal and resource-related conflicts, and limitations in state protection. These interactions contribute to civilian deaths and injuries, displacement, livelihood disruption, educational insecurity, restricted access to basic services, and weakened social cohesion.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in integrating political radicalism, religious radicalism, the violence economy, and limitations in state protection into a single empirical mechanism that explains the production of human insecurity. This approach extends previous studies that tend to examine insurgency, ethnoreligious conflict, armed criminality, or governance weaknesses separately. This study demonstrates that the relationships among grievances, identity mobilization, networks of violence, illicit economies, and state responses are better understood as interconnected processes rather than as a linear sequence of cause and effect. From this perspective, the study also extends the relevance of the Staircase to Terrorism from individual radicalization processes to the level of the sociopolitical ecology, where political competition, religious identities, criminality, and institutional weaknesses jointly create conditions that allow violence to reproduce itself. The findings concerning selective relationships between bandit groups and extremist organizations, together with the kidnapping economy, provide important empirical evidence of this convergence mechanism.

This study has several limitations because it employs a qualitative case study approach based on documentary and secondary data. Consequently, the study cannot directly capture the subjective experiences of civilians, former members of armed groups, security personnel, religious leaders, or political actors who participate in or experience processes of radicalization and insecurity. Variations in the quality, time periods, and geographical coverage of the sources also limit the study's ability to estimate the causal weight of each mechanism in producing human insecurity. Future research should therefore combine documentary analysis with field interviews, community surveys, actor-network analysis, and longitudinal or comparative research designs across the North-East, North-West, and Middle Belt. Such approaches can further examine how grievances develop into violent mobilization, how political and religious networks interact at the local level, and which conditions can disrupt the reproductive cycle of human insecurity in Nigeria.

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