# Theoretical Framework for Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: The Nigeria Experience

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## Abstract

Terrorism has become a global concern and Nigeria as a Country has experienced over a decade of incessant attacks by terror groups. Acts of terrorism by terror groups are being countered by the United Nations through the enactment of legislation for the prevention and prohibition of terrorism. State Parties to the United Nations such as Nigeria have also followed suit with counter-terrorism legislation and measures. The study examined the propelling factors of terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria. The study reveals that terrorism and counter-terrorism do not occur in isolation but there are underlining significant factors which are otherwise called theories, which form the basis for these actions. The study concludes that in order to effectively tackle terrorism, the root cause (theories) must be addressed.

## Keywords

## 1. Introduction

Terrorism is not novel as it dates back to the olden days before the advent of modernity. However, in the last few decades, it has remained a burning issue after the occurrence of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States of America (US) and the US subsequent presence in Afghanistan. The uprising in terrorism across the globe has made it an international phenomenon (Robin & Michael, 2010).

Nigeria, which was hitherto free from terrorism, became a theatre of the menace over the last twelve years. Terrorism became recurrent especially in the Northern part of the country. Bombings, and various acts of terrorism, which

used to be alien to Nigeria, seemed to be part of the day-to-day activities in that part of the country. Boko Haram, an extremist terrorist organisation, which is known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* in arabic[1], claimed responsibility for being the perpetrator of most of these acts. Notable among their activities are the Chibok school girls' kidnap of 14th April 2014[2]; the Dapchi school girls' kidnap of February 19, 2018[3]; the kidnap and eventually beheading of Lawan Andimi, on January 21 2020[4]; the abduction and killing of a doctor's wife and a seminarian in Kaduna on February 1, 2020 (PM News, 2020); and the more recent Kankara school boys kidnap of December 11, 2020[5]; Kagara school kidnap of 17th February 2021[6]; and the Zamfara school girls kidnap of 27th February 2021 (BBC News, 2021). The sect of the Islamic State of West Africa province (ISWAP) has also been held responsible for the Owo, Ondo State terrorist attack (BBC News, 2022). Even though, there are still pockets of terrorist attacks in the North Eastern part of the Country, the general security situation in Nigeria has, however, improved especially in the last one year. International Criminal Court (ICC) ranked Nigeria as the third most terrorist ravaged country in 2019 for the fifth consecutive time, after Iraq and Afghanistan but the Country fared better in 2020 (Vanguard Newspaper, 2018), 2021, 2022 (Global Terrorism Index, 2022), It should be noted that the ICC recognised the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism measures through the combined efforts of the three services of the Armed Forces, the task forces and international organisation in combating terrorism. Nigeria used to be the epicenter of terrorism in the World but in 2023, it was the Sahel region of Sub-Saharan Africa with Countries such as

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[1]This means "Association for propagating the Prophets' teaching and Jihad".

[2]On the night of 14th April 2014, the Boko Haram Terrorist organization kidnapped 276 students of the Chibok girls school, Bornu State; 57 of those girls managed to escape in the succeeding months. BBC News (2017a) "Nigeria Chibok Abductions: What we Know" https://www.bbc.com/ accessed 05 September 2023. Amina Ali, who was identified as one of the girls also escaped in 2016 and claimed 6 of the girls had died in custody. Upon negotiations between the Nigerian Government and Boko Haram, 21 girls were freed in October 2016; one girl was rescued later and another was found. 82 more girls were released in May 2017 and one girl was rescued in January 2018.

[3]113 school girls of the Government Girls Secondary School Dapchi were abducted by the Boko Haram terrorist organization; 107 of the girls were later released by the group after negotiations with the Nigerian government; 5 of the girls died during the abduction and 1 of the girls-Leah Sharibu still remains in custody.

[4]Pulse News (2020), "Murder of Lawan Andimi a shame on Federal Government says CAN president" http://www.pulse.ng/ accessed 2nd March 2020. Lawan Andimi, the President of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Adamawa State was kidnapped on January 21 2020 and was eventually murdered.

[5]The Economist (2020) more than 300 school children are abducted in Nigeria http://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/12/19/more-than-300-schoolchildren-are-abducted-in-nigeria accessed on 20 October 2023. On the night of 11th December 2020, more than 300 boys were abducted from a Government Boys Science School in Katsina State, the boys were later freed upon negotiation by the Federal Government of Nigeria with the Boko Haram organization.

[6]Aljazeera News, "Kidnappers Release 42 Abducted from School in Nigeria" https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/27/kidnappers-release-42-abducted-from-school-in-nigeria accessed on 1st March 2023. On 17th February 2021, 42 people, including school children, their teachers and relatives were kidnapped from a Government school. One person was killed during the raid. The abductees were later released upon negotiation by the Federal Government and the Boko haram organization.

Burkina Faso and Mali (Global Terrorism Index, 2023).

## 2. Theories of Terrorism/Counter-Terrorism

It is apposite to examine some theories of terrorism as posited by scholars, which explain the propelling factors to engaging in acts of terrorism and the mechanisms utilized in combating the act.

### 2.1. Relative Deprivation Theory

According to Ted Robert Gurr, this theory provides a gap between expected and achieved welfare, rather than an absolute standard of deprivation, which creates collective discontent. It also hinges on inferiority on the path of individuals who find other people's welfare superior to them (Gurr, 2011). This simply means that there is a difference between what ought to be and what actually is; the haves and the have not. Gurr further posits that collective discontent caused by a sense of relative deprivation results in political violence. This collective discontent spurs men to violence (Richardson, 2011). When the progress of an individual or a group is frustrated and runs contrary to the expectation, the individual or group may result to violence to achieve their aim. Although Gur popularised the theory, relative deprivation can actually be traced to ancient Greece, where Aristotle posited that revolution is orchestrated by a relative sense of inequality; the quest for a political or economic equality on the path of those who feel deprived and the quest more political and economic power, which results in inequality on the part of the elites. According to Richardson, it was an era when Aristotle justified revolution. Morrison posited that this theory had long existed and it is existed in socio-political and economic context because it focuses on feelings and actions (Morrison, 1971), situating this theory within the context of terrorism connotes that the feeling of deprivation or neglect; the sense of inequality by an individual or a group of people as compared with others may trigger terrorism in order to achieve the initial objective. Gurr categorized deprivation into three:

1) Aspirational deprivation: This is a situation whereby the value expectations rise but capabilities remain the same. This occurs in situation of civil rights movements, where a class of people demands rights already available to another class of people. This results to frustration among the class of people.

2) Decremented deprivation: The value expectations of a class of people do not change but decrease over time. This situation happens in times of war or natural disaster.

3) Progressive deprivation: This is an interplay of the above two categorization. Value expectation cannot keep up with value capabilities. This occurs when a hitherto booming economy suddenly declines. This will cause discontent among the people. A typical example in this present day is the fall of crude oil in the global market. For nations like Nigeria, whose economy is largely dependent on crude oil, the Government's capabilities to deliver economic goods to the people

has declined while the people's expectations are on the increase. Thus, the people feel deprived and neglected.

## 2.2. Frustration-Aggression Theory

Frustration-Aggression Theory is commonly used in Terrorism studies. Dollard, the proponent of the theory states that frustration occurs when pleasure is blocked and aggression is always a consequence or natural response to frustration, which is directed at persons or objects perceived to be the cause of the frustration (Dollard et al., 1939). Therefore, terrorism as an aggressive action occurs as a result of frustration. Frustration emerges when there is a blockage or an impediment to goal accomplishment. This theory is closely linked with Ted Robert Gurr's Relative Deprivation Theory. The theory proposes that when an individual is deprived of his progressive advancement, it leads to frustration and the end result is violence or aggression. Rahmati and Momtaz define aggression as a physical hostility meant to hurt others (Rahmati & Momtaz, 2013). Scholars have also defined aggression in some other ways aside physical aggression which may be verbal. To Coakley, aggression may be verbal directed at inflicting pain. Whichever way, aggression is directed at hurting another. Rahmati and Momtaz classified aggression into two: effective aggression and instrumental aggression. Geen linked effective aggression to harm, which is precipitated by negative emotional condition. Anderson and Huesmann, further state that reactive aggression occurs as a result of prior provocation, which is accompanied by anger (Anderson & Huesman, 2003). Galtung opines that there are some conditions that may trigger aggression, when people are in a state of inequality in a socio-political and economic setting and conflict naturally follows. Galtung's position correlates with Davies's proposition on the occurrence of conflict as a result of non-actualization of a person's expectations either politically or economically. Therefore, violence is the natural end product of frustration. However, this theory has been criticized.

## 2.3. State Failure Theory

According to Rotberg, a state exists to deliver social services to people living within her borders and also to secure her territory and safeguard her citizens. When a State fails, it means it is incapable of discharging her responsibilities. Loss of legitimacy coupled with the inability to protect and curb or govern its citizens is one of the elements of a totally failed State (Rotberg, 2002). Aside from a loss of legitimacy, Rotberg included variables such as economic stagnation, and political instability whilst supporting the argument that in a failing or failed State, corruption flourishes, the economy remains at its lowest ebb and the State is not able to provide basic needs and services to her citizens. Political leaders upsetting democratic ideals, disrespect for the rule of law and undermining the independence of the judiciary. According to Piazza, a failed or failing State is unable to deliver political goods and lawlessness reigns supreme. The

State lacks the power to command the citizens' respect therefore, war and threat of secession by non-state actors are rife. Thus, such states provide a safe haven for terrorists to thrive (Piazza, 2008). Uzodike and Maiangwa, opined that the loss of legitimacy indicates a totally failed State. The perception of the State as being illegitimate by a majority of the citizens, make them become aggrieved and result to rebellion (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2012). Onapajo and Uzodike further opined that in a failed or failing State, the porosity of the State borers is exploited by aggrieved citizens to smuggle in arms and ammunitions and to polarized the State. The State poses a huge security threat to her own citizens, neighbouring States and to the world. Many States in Africa, if not totally failed are failing (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). Rotberg refers to such States as weak. The weak States, unlike the failed States, may still be able to deliver to her citizens some economic and political goods, however scholars such as Menkhaus opined that whether failed, failing or weak States, a hostile environment provides a fertile ground for terrorists to operate freely (Menkhaus, 2003). According to Oviasigie, the collapse of law and order enables terrorists to flourish and perpetrate heinous crimes such as kidnapping (Oviasigie, 2013).

## 2.4. Functionalist Theory

This is a theory that sprang from sociology. It is observed by scholars that conceptualizing terrorism through the lens of sociology has been under-utilised, compared to other fields such as psychology or political science (Cinoglu & Ozeren, 2010). Sociology entails the social relationship and social institutions of a society and the study of relationships and behaviours of a group of people in a society. Turk opined that the importance of terrorism to sociology has not been emphasized like other fields (Turk, 2004). Durkheim, the founding father of the Functionalist School posits that society cannot exist without systems or institutions (Durkheim, 1933). He perceived terrorism as a crime or social problem, which results in shock to the entire society. It is therefore, imperative to have collective cooperation by everyone in the society in preventing *anomie*[7]. The Functionalist school believes social norms are important in countering terrorism. Some rebellious individuals in the society violate the laid down rules and regulations, which a society holds as sacrosanct. If this group of individuals is not checkmated, their bond grows and they continue to flout the rules defiantly. Therefore, there is a need for social change to combat these deviant behaviours. An adoption of new methods is needed to protect the society. According to Cinoglu and Ozeren, after the 9/11 terrorism shock in the US, America experienced a change by the establishment of new institutions and enactment of new laws to intercept future terrorist attacks. In this sense, terrorism can be said to be functional because it encourages the society to invent new methods or undergo changes, which are beneficial to the society. Whenever, the society experiences an intrusion or shock through terrorism, the functionalists believe that the ex-

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[7]Anomie is a state of disorder, where people no longer obey the rules and regulations of a society but results to violence and crimes.

pected reaction is to resist or intervene through laws or institutions and adherence to rules and regulations of a given society.

## 2.5. Intergovernmentalist Theory

The Intergovernmentalist Theory of Stanley Hoffman is centered on integration, which can be used as a vehicle for curbing extremism (RS Global, 2018). Hoffman approaches the theory from a liberal point of view and posits that institutions are vital for the enthronement of justice. He further posits that the end result of promoting liberalism is democratization, sovereignty and regional integration. Hoffman views the intergovernmentalist theory from four stand points: Nation-State, International Milieu, Internal Conditions for integration and External Conditions for Integration.

1) Nation-State

The Nation-State is the main actor in the theory because it is a sovereign State, which possesses legitimate powers to govern a group of people within a defined territory. A Nation-State is very important because it determines people's rights, welfare, benefits and integration with other regions.

2) International Milieu

This involves the relation and interaction among nations. The cooperation among states is likened to different chessboards that are interconnected. This cooperation may be occasioned by relations in world trade, collective security, uniform policy, etc. The inter relationship among nations facilitates integration.

3) Internal Conditions for Integration

The promotion of regional integration first requires internal integration within a Nation-State in order to achieve a holistic success. Everyone must be concerned with the unity and integration of the State as one rather than promoting factional interests as against national interest. To this end, actors must avoid cleavages that disintegrate a nation.

4) External Conditions for Integration

External conditions for integration connote a unity of purpose on the part of States for regional integration. There must be mutual cooperation among States in order to achieve solutions and they must share common political goals.

## 3. A Critique of the Theories

Five typologies of theories have been considered above viz: Relative Deprivation theory; Frustration-Aggression Theory, State Failure Theory, Functionalist Theory and Inter-governmentalist Theory. An appraisal of the theories reveals that each of the theories in some manner, describes the Nigerian situation but the best fit, which aptly describes the Nigerian terrorism situation is the State failure theory and the Functionalist theory. The State failure theory explains the resultant to terrorism while the Functionalist theory places reliance on laws and institutions in combating extremism.

The Relative Deprivation Theory justifies the resultant to violence and con-

flicts owing to the gap between the expectation of the people and the reality. In examining the Nigerian situation under relative deprivation, there is a feeling of neglect and inequality among a group of people, who are discontent that their economic and political needs are being deprived. These people perceive that some others are enjoying the economic and political benefits from the State, while they are being neglected.

Boko Haram does not see any good that Western education has brought. Rather, it believes that Western education is responsible for all kinds of vices in the society. This frustration particularly among the youths in Northern Nigeria resulted in violence principally because the societal need is not being met. The perception of the educated elites as being superior and oppressive resulted in frustration and this spurred the group to aggressiveness and violence. Thus, there is an attempt by terrorist groups especially Boko Haram to reverse the perceived anomaly and return the society to what ought to be as opposed to what it is, by use of force or violence. According to Mark and Folger (Mark & Folger, 1984), the criticism of this theory is that the exact moment when violence may occur as a result of relative deprivation still remains unpredictable. At what point would violence erupt? To what extent can people endure before violence erupt?

With reference to the Frustration-Aggression theory, frustration is occasioned by factors such as poverty, unemployment, corruption and other vices, which cause aggression among people, who feel abandoned and therefore fight back by being rebellious against the established power—in this case, the Nigerian government. However, according to Schmid (Schmid & Jongman, 2008), the inability to access the real culprits of the cause of the frustration, may tend to transfer aggression to innocent citizens whether based on a random selection or systematic selection from a specific population. Uzodike and Whetho have also linked the Increased frustration and aggression with other remote causes like the politicisation of religion in Nigeria (Uzodike & Whetho, 2011). When frustration is borne out of socio-political and economic challenges, religion become the hiding place of citizens failing States. Such religious fanaticism is the brainchild of a failed state encompassing the helplessness of the State to make the most fundamental provisions for its citizens. To Jackson, this accounts for the reason Boko Haram readily recruit and brain wash innocent citizens in the core north (Jackson, 2007). The desire by Boko Haram to turn Nigeria into an Islamic State also gives credence to this assertion. Citizens especially the non-elites run to religion to provide succor when they feel deprived of their basic needs or feel inadequate. The religious extremism of some clerics also fuel terrorism. The manipulation of already battered citizens into supporting their grievous albeit acceptable action of launching attacks and killing "non-believers". According to Berkowitz, frustration does not always lead to aggression. Factors such as fear of punishment and learning to respond in some other ways apart from aggression may prevent the occurrence of aggression (Berkowitz, 1968).

Both Frustration-Aggression and Relative Deprivation theories are inter-woven because they explain the connection between discontent and frustration, which ultimately lead to aggression and violence.

The State Failure theory connotes failure on the part of the State to provide and deliver political goods and social amenities. The State is bedeviled by sustained degradation, migration, lawlessness and impunity. Some scholars contend that Nigeria is not yet a failed State like Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia, however, this study holds the view that Nigeria tilts more towards being a failed State. Even if it cannot yet be regarded as a failed State, it is a weak or failing state. The Nigerian experience justifies Rotberg's characteristics of a failing State as being bedeviled by economic stagnation, corruption, the inability of the leaders to provide basic needs and services to her citizens, political leaders upsetting democratic ideals, disrespect for the rule of law and undermining the independence of the judiciary. In the present-day Nigeria, corruption flourishes. For over twenty years, after the return to democratic government, the anti-graft agencies have investigated or prosecuted political leaders and public servants for corruption. Some leaders of government had even been arrested and prosecuted outside the shores oof Nigeria for corruption and money laundering (BBC News, 2017b). The economy is dwindling and inflation is on the rise, people can hardly afford basic needs, poverty and unemployment are rife[8]. Although, the Nigerian Government has assured citizens of a brighter future, the Naira, which is the currency of Nigeria is getting weaker by the day (Financial Times, 2023) even against other currencies even of smaller African Countries like Ghana and Republic of Benin. People have accused the executive arm of government of interfering with the judiciary in the discharge of her duties. However, this may not appear to be quite true because the aftermath of the 2023 general elections matters decided by the apex Court in Nigeria, in respect of the different States shows that it favours the opposition parties more than the ruling political party[9]. Nonetheless, State Failure Theory justifies resorting to terrorism when the State is somewhat incapacitated to deliver political dividends and economic stability to her people. Onapajo and Uzodike posit that a weak State cannot give what it does not have albeit basic amenities such as security, education, healthcare, social infrastructure, employment opportunities and legal framework for law and order. A failed State is a creation of man and doesn't happen by accident. Nigeria is constantly bedeviled with violence, religious crisis and terrorism. The inherent features of a failing State is evident in Nigeria, characterized by corruption, poverty and terrorism. Corruption is endemic in Nigeria and a major contributing factor to making Nigeria a failing State. Ihonvbere and Shaw state that the legitimacy of the State, the credibility of its political leaders has been stripped

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[8]For a nation like Nigeria, which is largely dependent on crude oil, which has experienced a down turn in the global market, the government's capabilities to deliver economic dividends to people have dwindled and citizens' expectations are on the increase.

[9]A few examples are the Supreme Court's affirmation of the victory of Plateau State Governor Caleb Mutfang of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Kano State Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf of the New Nigeria Peoples party (NNPP) after they were sacked by the Court of Appeal.

by corruption, thereby exchanging merit and hardwork with inefficiency, ineffectiveness and disorderliness (Ihonvbere & Shaw, 1998).

The Intergovernmentalist theorists opine that regional cooperation is *sine qua non* to combating terrorism. This cooperation may be within the State or by different States. It divided the achievement of cooperation into four: Nation-State, International Milieu, Internal conditions for Integration and External condition for Integration. However, Hoffmann's theory can be criticized as difficult to achieve because The Nation-State which is empowered to determine people's rights and welfare may not act accordingly. The State may deprive her people of democratic goods, which ordinarily they her entitled to. Also, nations may not be able to achieve integration and if they do, the motive of each of the Nations may differ and it will be difficult to achieve success. The Functionalist theory proffers solutions to the menace of terrorism through legal and institutional frameworks. However, this theory is not also without criticisms. According to Merton Durkheim school of functionalism may not work out in a society as planned and might not bring about the required social change (Merton, 1957). There are dysfunctions that prevent the viability of these functions. In other words, there are factors hindering the effectiveness of these legal and institutional frameworks such as poverty, corruption, inefficient security apparatus etc. However, measures to be taken in combating terrorism via the functionalist approach should not only include robust legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks on terrorism and counter terrorism but also addressing the issues of corruption, poverty, unemployment and economic stagnation. Moreover, the security agencies should be well funded, trained and equipped to secure the Country. Cinoglu and Ozeren further posit that terrorism may impact the adherence to social values. Terrorism has a huge negative impact on people. In adhering to societal norms and values, people expect peace, stability and protection and predictability in return and when they do not get what they expected, the very basis of existence of the society and the need to conform to values would be questioned. Another criticism of the Functionalist theory, as posited by the duo is lack of trust in the system, which may provide a fertile ground for *anomie* to thrive. People may not repose their trust in the system as a vehicle to bring about the requisite changes.

## 4. Conclusion

The paper examined theories of terrorism and counter-terrorism, which are factors that propel people to terrorism and foundation for counter-terrorism. Five typologies of theories were examined in this paper: Relative Deprivation theory; Frustration-Aggression Theory; State Failure Theory; Functionalist Theory and Intergovernmentalist Theory. However, the paper revealed that the best theories in relation to the Nigerian situation are the state failure theory and the functionalist theory. The paper concludes that terrorism cannot be effectively addressed and combated without knowing the root cause and the propelling factors to such dastard act.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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