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ASSESSMENT OF THE NATURE AND FREQUENCY OF INSURGENT ATTACKS IN BORNO AND YOBE STATES, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the nature and frequency of Boko Haram insurgent attacks experienced by households in a conflict-affected region of Northern Nigeria. Using survey data from 329 household heads, the findings revealed seven major forms of insurgency: arson, sporadic shooting, kidnapping, suicide bombing, bombing with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), forced recruitment, and threats. Sporadic shooting (45.62%) was the most prevalent attack type, followed by arson (30.54%) and IED bombing (13.41%), while kidnapping occurred least frequently. These patterns align with earlier studies, showing consistency in Boko Haram's operational tactics within the region. Analysis of attack frequency indicated that threats were the most recurrent, averaging ten occurrences per household, reflecting the insurgents' strategy of psychological intimidation and fear induction. Other attack types such as suicide bombing and sporadic shooting occurred with moderate frequency, averaging three and two incidents respectively. Sex-disaggregated results showed notable variations in exposure between male and female respondents. Since household heads reported experiences affecting all members of their households, the findings provide a broader understanding of the community-level impact of insurgency. The study highlights the pervasive and multifaceted nature of insurgent violence and underscores the need for targeted security interventions, psychosocial support, and resilience-building strategies across affected communities.

Keywords: Boko Haram, insurgency, arson, sporadic shooting, IED bombing, terrorism frequency, Northern Nigeria, household security, psychological intimidation.

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Introduction

Insurgency has become one of the most devastating security threats confronting the global community, significantly disrupting social order, economic stability and human development. Over the last two decades, terrorist groups such as the Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban have intensified attacks involving bombings, kidnappings and mass shootings across the Middle East, Europe, and parts of Asia, resulting in widespread displacement and loss of lives (Schmid, 2020). The increasing complexity and frequency of insurgent operations globally have drawn attention to the need for deeper understanding of the nature of attacks, their frequency, and their implications for civilian populations. Scholars argue that insurgency thrives in areas characterised by weak state structures, socio-economic grievances, and ideological extremism, making it a persistent global security issue (Mendelsohn, 2019).

Across Africa, insurgency and terrorism have equally become pressing challenges, with notable hotspots in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and parts of Central and West Africa. Armed groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, and various jihadist organisations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have executed violent attacks targeting civilians, government institutions and international actors (Botha, 2018). In West Africa, the rise of extremist networks operating across porous borders has increased regional insecurity and humanitarian crises. These groups employ tactics ranging from sporadic shootings and suicide bombings to mass abductions, thereby weakening community cohesion and exacerbating poverty (Matfess & Williams, 2021). The African context therefore underscores the need for empirical investigations into the dynamics of insurgent activities at local and regional levels.

In Nigeria, insurgency particularly the Boko Haram conflict remains one of the most prolonged and destructive internal security challenges in the country's history. Since its escalation in 2009, Boko Haram has been responsible for thousands of deaths, large-scale displacements, destruction of infrastructure, and severe disruptions to education, agriculture and livelihoods in the northern region (Adebajo, 2020). The group's operations are characterised by suicide bombings, arson, attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), kidnappings and forced recruitment, which collectively instill fear and psychological distress among civilians (Zenn, 2021). Studies have consistently shown that the intensity and patterns of Boko Haram attacks vary across communities and demographic groups, highlighting the importance of localised analyses (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014).

The northeastern region of Nigeria, where Boko Haram originated, has witnessed the highest concentration of violent attacks, but the effects have also extended to

neighbouring states and rural communities that lack adequate security presence. Rural households, in particular, face heightened vulnerability due to limited access to protective structures, weak early-warning systems and high reliance on farming and open-space livelihood activities (Ojo & Oluwatayo, 2022). Frequent threats, sporadic shootings, and forced displacement have disrupted agricultural productivity, social cohesion and community resilience. Understanding the nature and frequency of such attacks at the household level is therefore essential for targeted policy formulation and effective response strategies.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the nature and frequency of insurgent attacks experienced by households in the study area, drawing insights from respondents' lived experiences. By analysing the specific forms of attacks such as arson, shootings, suicide bombing, IED attacks, kidnapping and threats this study provides empirical evidence that can support the development of more responsive security interventions. Additionally, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature on insurgency in Nigeria and across Africa by emphasising the need for context-specific assessments. Such insights are critical for supporting government agencies, humanitarian organisations and community-based actors seeking to strengthen resilience and mitigate the long-term impacts of insurgency on civilian populations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Yobe State is located from Latitudes 11^{O} 45"N - 13^{O} 30"N of the Equator and Longitudes 9^{O} 30"E - 12^{O} 30"E of the Greenwich meridian. The State shares borders with three States; to the eastern boundary is Borno State, to the west is Jigawa and Bauchi States while to the north is international border with Niger Republic (Chinedu and Olaolu, 2010). Borno State lies between Latitudes 10°30' and 14°30' N, and Longitudes 11°30' and 14°45' E. The State occupies the greatest part of the Chad Basin and shares boundary with the Republics of Niger to the north, Chad to the north-east and Cameroon to the east. Within the country, its neighbours are Adamawa to the south, Yobe to the west and Gombe to the south-west (Ijere and Daura, 2000).

This study will be conducted in four local government areas (LGAs) of northeastern Nigeria, namely: Gaidam LGA in Yobe state, has its headquarters in Gaidam Town with an area of 4,311km^2; Gujba LGA in Yobe state, has its headquarters in Buni Yadi with an area of 3,871km^2; Magumari LGA in Borno state, has its headquarters in Magumari Town with an area of 4,856km^2 and Gubio LGA in Borno state, has its headquarters in Gubio Town with an area of 2,464 km^2 (National Population Commission [NPC], 2007). Yobe State has area coverage of about 45,502 km^2, while Borno State has area coverage of about 92,898 km^2 (NPC 2007).

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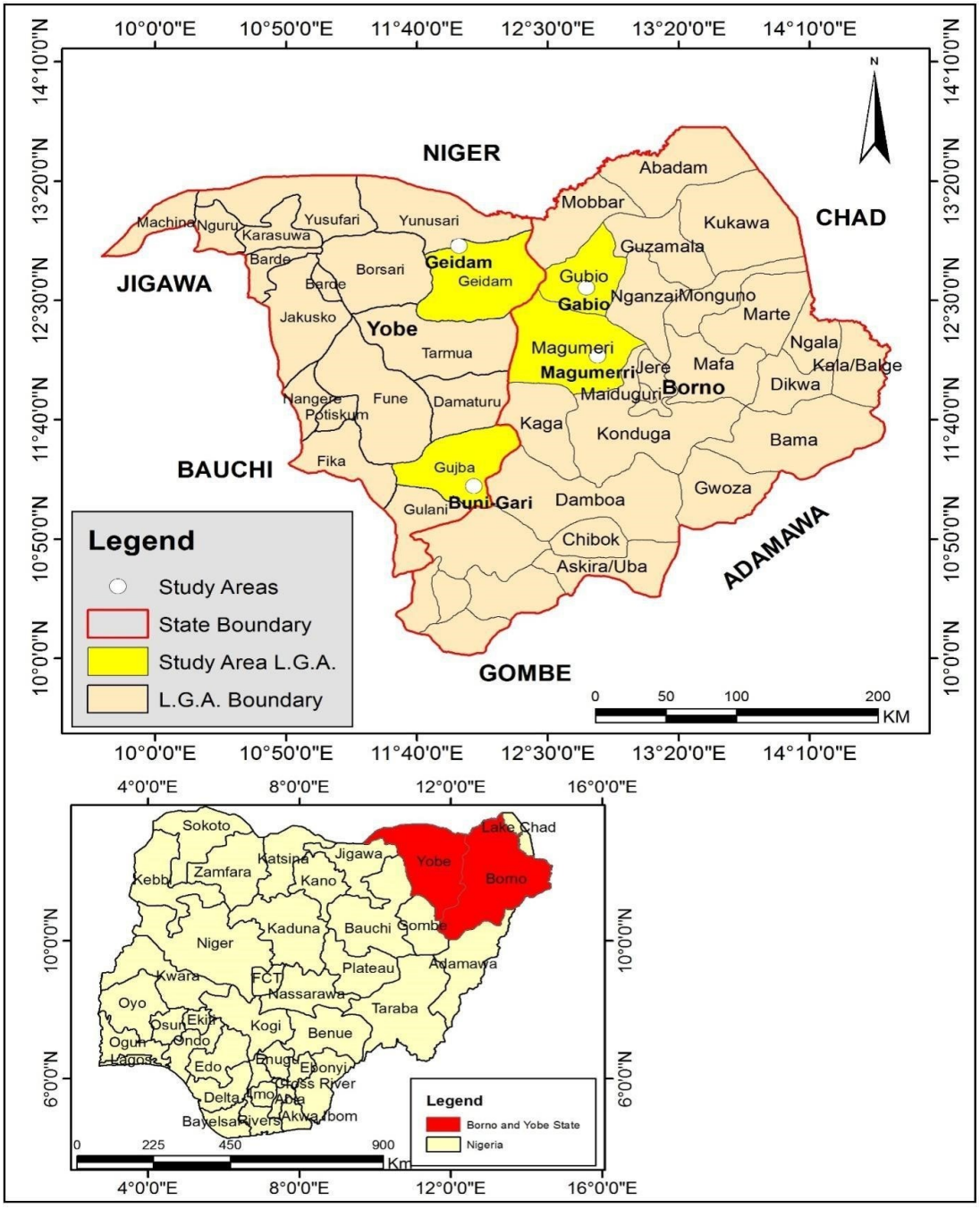


Figure 1: Borno and Yobe States
Source: Adapted From Administrative Map of Nigeria

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was carried out using primary data collected from household heads in the insurgency-affected study area. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information on the nature and frequency of insurgent

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attacks experienced by respondents and their households. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the participating communities and households, ensuring adequate representation of both male- and female-headed households. Data collected were coded and analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations to determine the prevalence and frequency of different forms of insurgent attacks. The results were presented in tables for clarity, and the analysis enabled the identification of key patterns and variations in insurgency experiences across the sampled population.

RESULTS

Nature and frequency of insurgency

In recent time, the *Boko Haram* terrorists have targeted men and women in carrying out major operations against civilians in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, examining the nature and frequency of insurgency could lead to efficient policy implications regarding the fight against insurgency. Thus, this section examines the nature and frequency of insurgency across respondents.

Nature of insurgency encountered by respondents

The nature or commonest forms of attacks by the terrorists in the study area is categorized into seven which are arson, sporadic shooting, kidnapping, suicide bombing, bombing with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), forced recruitment and threats. Of all the forms of attacks observed among the respondents as seen in the Table 1, sporadic shooting (45.62%) was the most prevalent followed by arson (30.54%) and bombing with IEDs (13.41%) while the least common nature of the attacks was kidnapping. Such forms of attacks agree with Okoli and Iortyer (2014) which in their findings reported that terrorists adopted arson, mass killing by gunfire, suicide bombing, use of improvised explosives, hostage-taking (kidnapping), jail break and forced enlistment/recruitment of combatant in executing their diabolical designs. The similarity to the work of Okoli and Iortyer (2014) could be attributed to the fact that both studies were conducted in northeastern Nigeria on *Boko Haram* insurgency.

Frequency of insurgent attacks experienced by respondents

The frequency of the attacks by the terrorists defer from one form of attack to another with important variation among the respondents. As seen in Table 1, a respondent averagely experienced arson once, sporadic shooting twice, kidnapping once, suicide bombing thrice, bombing with improvised devices twice, forced recruitment once and threats 10 times. Threat being the most frequent implies that the terrorists derive joy in psychologically weakening their victims through instilling of fear which invariably makes

them avoid going to farms, markets, social gatherings and carrying out other livelihood activities.

Table 1: Nature and frequency distribution of insurgency based on sex

Variable *Female (n1=35)* *Male (n2=294)* *Pooled (n=329)*

Nature of insurgency	F	%	F	%	F	%
Arson	11	20.37	153	31.68	164	30.54
Sporadic shooting	28	51.85	217	44.93	245	45.62
Kidnapping	0	0.00	2	0.41	2	0.37
Suicide bombing	4	7.41	36	7.45	40	7.45
Bombing with						
improvised						
explosive devices	8	14.81	64	13.25	72	13.41
Forced Recruitment	0	0.00	7	1.45	7	1.30
Threats	3	5.56	4	0.83	7	1.30
Average number						
of occurrences	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Arson	1	0	1.18	0.5	1.17	0.48
Min	1		1		1	
Max	1		3		3	
Sporadic shooting	2.93	2.81	2.16	1.86	2.25	2.01
Min	1		1		1	
Max	10		11		11	
Kidnapping	0		1.42	0.84	1.38	0.8
Min	0		1		1	
Max	0		3		3	
Suicide bombing	3.25	0.5	2.83	1.44	2.87	1.38
Min	3		1		1	
Max	4		6		6	
Bombing with						
improvised devices	1.86	1.25	1.59	1.1	1.63	1.11
Min	1		1		1	
Max	4		4		4	
Forced Recruitment	0		1.33	0.82	1.33	0.82
Min	0		1		1	
Max	0		3		3	
Threats	1	0	10.67	7.5	9.67	5.5
Min	1		2		2	
Max	1		700		700	

Source: Author's estimates from survey data (2016)

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SD = Standard deviation
F = Frequency

It is noteworthy that, household heads are used as the respondents hence their responses covered their household. As such, it means that though they may not have been directly kidnapped, forcefully recruited or shot, a member of their household has suffered such attacks.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that insurgency in the study area is characterized by a diverse range of violent tactics, with sporadic shooting, arson, and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks emerging as the most common forms experienced by households, while threats remain the most frequently occurring. The results demonstrate that insurgent activities exert profound psychological, social, and economic impacts on households, affecting not only the respondents but also members of their families who may have been directly or indirectly victimized. The patterns observed align with broader evidence on Boko Haram's operational strategies in Northern Nigeria, underscoring the persistence and complexity of insurgent violence in the region. The study highlights the urgent need for context-specific security interventions, enhanced community protection mechanisms, and sustained efforts to strengthen resilience among vulnerable populations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of strengthened, community-centered security strategies that prioritize early-warning systems, rapid response mechanisms, and increased security presence in highly vulnerable rural areas. Government agencies and security operatives should intensify intelligence gathering and collaborate closely with local vigilante groups to disrupt insurgent movements and prevent repeated attacks. Psychosocial support services are also essential to address the long-term trauma associated with frequent threats and violent encounters, while livelihood restoration programmes should be introduced to help affected households rebuild economic stability. Furthermore, continuous public awareness, peace-building initiatives, and community resilience training should be promoted to reduce vulnerability to insurgent influence and enhance preparedness against future attacks.

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