

CIVILIAN POPULATION AND TERRORISM IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA**Ferguson-Isa Idoroerin Pearl**

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Abstract

This study examined civilian population and terrorism in Abia State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the growing concern over terrorism and terrorism-related violent activities and their implications for the safety, livelihoods, social well-being, and development of civilian populations. Specifically, the study examined the major forms and dimensions of insecurity experienced by the civilian population as a result of terrorism and related violent activities; identified the major factors contributing to terrorism and terrorism-related violence affecting civilians; and assessed the effectiveness of measures adopted by government and relevant stakeholders in protecting the civilian population. The study adopted a descriptive research design and relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic publications, government documents, reports of international organizations, security and conflict-monitoring databases, research reports, and credible media sources. Data were collected using a structured documentary review guide and analysed through qualitative content analysis, with relevant statistical information from secondary sources presented descriptively where appropriate. The findings revealed that civilian insecurity in Abia State is multidimensional, encompassing threats to life and physical safety, kidnapping and abduction, destruction of property and livelihoods, restricted movement, psychological insecurity, and disruption of social and economic activities. The study further found that terrorism and related violent insecurity are influenced by interconnected factors, including separatist-related violence, criminality, kidnapping, communal and land-related conflicts, institutional weaknesses, political grievances, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The findings also indicated that government and stakeholder interventions, including security operations, intelligence gathering, community participation, and conflict-monitoring mechanisms, have contributed to addressing insecurity but remain partially effective, as violent incidents and threats to civilian populations continue to occur. The study concludes that terrorism in Abia State constitutes not only a conventional security challenge but also a human-security, socioeconomic, governance, and development problem. It recommends stronger community-based civilian protection and early-warning mechanisms, greater attention to socioeconomic and political vulnerabilities, and improved accountability, human-rights protection, and evaluation of counter-terrorism measures.

Keywords

*Civilian Population,
Terrorism,
Civilian Insecurity,
Terrorism-related Violence,
Human Security,
Abia State,
Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

Terrorism has emerged as one of the most significant threats to human security, peace, development, and the protection of civilian populations in many parts of the world. Although terrorism is often discussed in relation to national security, counter-terrorism operations, and the activities of terrorist organizations, its most immediate consequences are frequently experienced by ordinary civilians. Civilian populations may be exposed to death, physical injuries, displacement, destruction of homes and livelihoods, disruption of education and health services, fear, psychological distress, and restrictions on freedom of movement. The United Nations therefore recognizes terrorism as a serious threat not only to international peace and security but also to human rights and

social and economic development (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee [UN CTC], 2023).

The concept of a civilian population generally refers to individuals and communities who are not members of organized armed or security forces. Civilians constitute the majority of the population in any society and depend on functioning social, political, and economic institutions for their safety and well-being. In situations of terrorism and violent conflict, however, the distinction between secure civilian life and insecurity can become blurred. Markets, schools, places of worship, transportation facilities, residential communities, and other locations where civilians ordinarily conduct their daily activities can become affected by terrorist violence. Consequently, terrorism should not be viewed only as a problem involving the state and terrorist organizations; it is also a major social problem because of its effects on families, communities, livelihoods, social relationships, and access to essential services. The relationship between terrorism and civilian populations is particularly important because civilians can experience both direct and indirect consequences of terrorist violence. Direct consequences include loss of life, injuries, abductions, destruction of property, and forced displacement. Indirect consequences may include unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, interruption of children's education, deterioration of healthcare services, reduced economic activities, and weakened community institutions. The United Nations has emphasized that terrorism produces suffering for victims and their families and that states have responsibilities to protect human rights while responding to terrorism (United Nations General Assembly, 2005, 2015).

At the global level, terrorism has affected civilian populations in different geographical and social contexts. Terrorist organizations may deliberately target civilians because attacks against non-combatants can create fear that extends beyond the immediate victims. The consequences can therefore reach entire communities, even when the number of people directly attacked is relatively small. Fear and uncertainty may alter people's everyday behaviour, reduce participation in community activities, discourage investment, and undermine confidence in public institutions. In this regard, terrorism can produce a wider climate of insecurity in which people feel unsafe even when they have not personally experienced an attack. The impact of terrorism is also closely associated with displacement and the disruption of community life. Individuals and families who flee areas affected by terrorism may lose homes, employment, social networks, and access to basic services. Displacement can consequently create additional vulnerabilities, particularly for children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and households with limited economic resources. The United Nations has recognized the importance of protecting civilians who become particularly vulnerable during situations of violence, including internally displaced persons, refugees, and children (United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2022).

The Nigerian experience provides an important context for examining the relationship between civilian populations and terrorism. Nigeria has faced serious terrorist and violent-extremist threats, particularly in the northeastern part of the country. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the terrorist insurgency in northeastern Nigeria has displaced almost 2.6 million people, while more than 36,000 people were killed in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States since the beginning of the conflict in 2009; nearly half of those killed were civilians (UNODC, 2024). These figures demonstrate that terrorism is not simply a security issue but also a major humanitarian and social development concern. Recent evidence further illustrates the continuing significance of terrorism for civilian populations in Nigeria. The Global Terrorism Index 2026 reported that Nigeria experienced an increase in terrorist activity in 2025, with terrorist attacks rising from 120 in 2024 to 171 in 2025 and terrorism-related deaths increasing to 750. The report also indicated that civilians remained the most targeted group in 2025 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026). This development highlights the continuing vulnerability of civilian populations and the need to examine not only the incidence of terrorism but also its broader social consequences.

The effects of terrorism on civilians extend beyond immediate physical insecurity. Terrorist violence can weaken social cohesion by generating suspicion, fear, and mistrust among community members. Communities may become divided along ethnic, religious, political, or other social lines, particularly where terrorist violence is associated with identity-based narratives. Such divisions can make collective action more difficult and may undermine traditional and community-based mechanisms for resolving disputes. Terrorism can therefore contribute to the erosion of social capital and community resilience. Economic consequences are another important dimension of the relationship between civilian populations and terrorism. In areas affected by persistent insecurity, individuals may be unable to farm, trade, travel, or operate businesses normally. Investors may also be reluctant to establish or expand businesses in communities perceived as insecure. The resulting decline in economic opportunities can increase poverty and unemployment, thereby creating additional vulnerabilities for households. UNODC (2024) similarly identifies terrorism and violent extremism as having immense negative consequences for economic and social development in Nigeria. Terrorism can also interfere with the delivery of social services. When insecurity affects schools, hospitals, roads, markets, and other public

infrastructure, access to essential services may decline. Educational institutions may close or operate under difficult conditions, while health facilities may experience shortages of personnel, supplies, or infrastructure. Such disruptions can have long-term implications for human development, particularly among children and young people. The effects may continue even after terrorist attacks decline because communities may require substantial time and resources to rebuild damaged infrastructure and restore public confidence.

Another important dimension concerns the psychological and social well-being of civilians. Persistent exposure to terrorism can produce fear, anxiety, uncertainty, grief, and a sense of insecurity. Families may also experience prolonged distress following the death, disappearance, injury, or displacement of relatives. At the community level, repeated violence can normalize insecurity and reduce people's expectations of safety and effective protection. These consequences demonstrate why responses to terrorism should incorporate social protection, community recovery, victim support, and psychosocial assistance alongside security measures. The protection of civilians is therefore central to effective counter-terrorism policy. International policy emphasizes that counter-terrorism measures should respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, refugee law, humanitarian law, and the rule of law. The UN Security Council has repeatedly stressed that respect for human rights and effective counter-terrorism measures are complementary rather than contradictory (UN CTC, 2023). Similarly, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy emphasizes that measures adopted to prevent and combat terrorism should comply with international legal obligations, including human rights and humanitarian law (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism [UNOCT], 2015).

This human-rights perspective is particularly important because civilian populations can potentially experience insecurity from more than one direction. While terrorist attacks may constitute the primary threat, poorly designed or excessively coercive responses can also negatively affect civilian rights and freedoms. The United Nations has consequently emphasized that counter-terrorism responses should incorporate human rights and the rule of law. This approach is important for preventing discrimination, protecting vulnerable groups, maintaining public trust, and addressing conditions that may contribute to radicalization and violence (UN CTC, 2023).

From a sociological perspective, terrorism can alter patterns of social interaction, family relationships, community organization, and social cohesion. From a security perspective, civilian protection is an essential component of sustainable peace and national stability. From a humanitarian perspective, terrorism creates needs relating to displacement, protection, food security, shelter, health, and education. From a social-work perspective, affected individuals and communities may require psychosocial support, rehabilitation, social protection, livelihood assistance, family support, and community reintegration.

2. Statement of the Problem

Terrorism and violent insecurity have become major threats to the safety and well-being of civilian populations in different parts of Nigeria. While terrorism is often conceptualised primarily as a national security challenge, its consequences are experienced most directly by ordinary people whose lives, livelihoods, social relationships and access to essential services may be disrupted by violence. Civilian populations may face killings, abductions, destruction of property, restrictions on movement, disruption of economic activities, displacement and persistent fear. The situation is particularly concerning where violent insecurity becomes prolonged because repeated exposure to insecurity can weaken social cohesion, undermine confidence in public institutions and adversely affect community development. Although terrorism in Nigeria has historically been associated strongly with the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, violent insecurity has increasingly assumed different forms in other regions. In South-East Nigeria, separatist-related violence, attacks attributed to armed groups, abductions and other forms of violent insecurity have created significant concerns for civilian protection. Amnesty International (2025) documented serious human rights violations and unlawful killings in South-East Nigeria involving multiple state and non-state actors. The organisation reported that 1,844 people were killed in the region between January 2021 and June 2023, with the deaths associated with various forms of violence, including abductions, violent clashes, riots and activities attributed to secessionist groups.

Abia State is particularly important within this context because evidence indicates that the state has experienced a substantial number of security incidents affecting civilian populations. Data reported by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2025) indicate that between January 2024 and August 2025, 96 security incidents were recorded in Abia State, resulting in 118 fatalities. Thirty-one of these incidents were coded as violence against civilians. Security incidents were recorded across all 17 Local Government Areas of the state, with Aba South, Umuahia North and Umunneochi recording relatively high numbers of incidents. The report further indicates that unidentified armed groups, IPOB, unidentified cult militias, and security forces were involved in many of the incidents coded as violence against civilians. The problem is further illustrated by the deadly attack at a military checkpoint in Obingwa Local Government Area in May 2024. According to Reuters (2024), 11 people, including five soldiers and six civilians, were killed in an attack attributed by the Nigerian military to

separatist gunmen. Although the incident involved a security installation, the death of civilians demonstrates how violent confrontations can expose ordinary residents to serious risks. This raises important questions about the extent to which civilian populations in Abia State are adequately protected from terrorism and terrorism-related violence. Beyond loss of life, terrorism and violent insecurity may produce wider socioeconomic consequences for civilians. Insecurity can restrict people's ability to travel, attend school, engage in farming, operate businesses and participate freely in community activities. In rural areas, fear of attacks may prevent farmers from accessing their farms, while in urban areas insecurity may affect commercial activities, transportation and investment. The EUAA (2025) reports that communities in parts of Abia have experienced kidnappings, farm destruction and attacks by armed groups, illustrating the potential for insecurity to affect both personal safety and livelihoods.

Another problem concerns the difficulty of distinguishing terrorism from other forms of violent insecurity. Abia State's security environment involves several actors and forms of violence, including separatist-related violence, communal conflicts, kidnapping, cult-related violence and attacks by unidentified armed groups. The EUAA (2025) notes that security incidents in Abia involved different categories of actors, making the state's insecurity situation complex. This complexity can make it difficult for researchers and policymakers to determine the specific nature, causes and consequences of terrorism affecting civilian populations. It also creates challenges for designing interventions that adequately address the different dimensions of civilian insecurity. There is also a concern about the consequences of counter-terrorism and security responses for civilian populations. Although government security agencies have a responsibility to protect citizens and restore public order, counter-terrorism measures need to respect human rights and the rule of law. Amnesty International (2025) has documented human rights abuses involving both state security forces and non-state armed actors in South-East Nigeria. This suggests that civilian protection should remain central to security interventions because measures intended to combat terrorism may lose public confidence if civilians perceive them as ineffective, discriminatory or harmful.

Furthermore, the persistence of insecurity raises questions about the effectiveness of existing institutional and community-based mechanisms for protecting civilians in Abia State. The existence of repeated incidents despite security interventions suggests the need to examine the adequacy of conventional security responses, intelligence gathering, community participation, early-warning mechanisms and local conflict-resolution structures. Effective civilian protection requires more than responding to incidents after they occur; it also requires preventive measures that address the social, political and economic conditions that may facilitate violent insecurity. The problem is therefore not simply the occurrence of terrorist or terrorism-related attacks but the broader vulnerability of civilian populations to their consequences. When civilians are exposed to persistent insecurity, the effects may extend to their physical safety, psychological well-being, livelihoods, education, freedom of movement, social relationships and participation in community development. In this regard, the problem deserves investigation from a multidisciplinary perspective that incorporates security studies, sociology, human rights and social welfare.

Despite the growing concern about insecurity in South-East Nigeria, there remains a need for more focused empirical attention to the experiences and vulnerabilities of civilian populations in Abia State. Existing reports provide valuable information on security incidents and fatalities, but there is still a need to systematically examine how terrorism and related violent insecurity affect civilians, the factors contributing to their vulnerability, and the effectiveness of measures designed to protect them. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate civilian population and terrorism in Abia State, with particular emphasis on the nature and dimensions of civilian insecurity, factors contributing to terrorism and related violence, its consequences for civilian populations, and the effectiveness of existing measures for protecting civilians.

Based on the statement of the problem the following questions were structured to address the nature of insecurity, factors contributing to terrorism, and effectiveness of measures for civilian protection.

What are the major forms and dimensions of insecurity experienced by the civilian population as a result of terrorism and related violent activities in Abia State?

What are the major factors contributing to terrorism and terrorism-related violence affecting the civilian population in Abia State?

How effective are the measures adopted by government and relevant stakeholders in protecting the civilian population from terrorism and terrorism-related violence in Abia State?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine the relationship between civilian population and terrorism in Abia State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

Examine the major forms and dimensions of insecurity experienced by the civilian population as a result of

terrorism and related violent activities in Abia State.

Identify the major factors contributing to terrorism and terrorism-related violence affecting the civilian population in Abia State.

Assess the effectiveness of measures adopted by government and relevant stakeholders in protecting the civilian population from terrorism and terrorism-related violence in Abia State.

3. Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory provides a suitable theoretical framework for explaining the study. Unlike traditional security approaches that primarily focus on protecting the state, its territorial integrity, and government institutions from external threats, human security places the individual and community at the centre of security analysis. The concept gained international prominence through the Human Development Report 1994 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which argued that security should move beyond concerns about military threats to include threats to people's everyday lives and well-being (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994).

Human Security Theory is particularly relevant to the study because terrorism is not only a threat to the state but also a direct threat to the safety and welfare of civilians. Terrorist attacks and related violent activities can expose individuals and communities to death, injury, abduction, destruction of property, displacement, fear, loss of livelihoods, disruption of education, and restricted freedom of movement. From a human security perspective, therefore, the central question is not merely whether the state has sufficient military capacity to defeat terrorist groups, but whether ordinary people are actually safe and able to live meaningful and dignified lives. The UNDP (1994) identified seven major dimensions of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, political security, and community security. These dimensions provide a useful framework for understanding the effects of terrorism on civilian populations. For instance, terrorism may undermine economic security by destroying businesses, reducing employment opportunities, discouraging investment, and preventing people from engaging in normal economic activities. It may threaten food security when farmers are unable to access their farms because of insecurity. Similarly, health security may be affected when violence damages health facilities or prevents people from accessing medical services.

The theory also emphasizes personal security, which is particularly relevant to the present study. Personal security concerns protection from physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, and other threats to individual safety (UNDP, 1994). In Abia State, reports of attacks, kidnappings, armed violence and other forms of insecurity demonstrate how civilian populations may become vulnerable to threats that affect their personal safety. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2025), for example, documented violence against civilians and other security incidents across Abia State, illustrating the importance of examining security from the perspective of those directly affected.

Community security is another dimension that strongly connects Human Security Theory to the study. Community security involves protecting people from threats to their social relationships, cultural identity, and communal life. Terrorism and violent insecurity can weaken community cohesion by generating fear, mistrust, displacement, and suspicion among residents. In communities affected by persistent violence, individuals may withdraw from social activities, traditional institutions may become less effective, and collective efforts toward community development may be disrupted. Thus, terrorism can produce consequences that extend beyond individual victims to affect the wider social structure of communities. Human Security Theory also draws attention to the concepts of freedom from fear and freedom from want. Freedom from fear relates to protection from physical violence, conflict, terrorism, and other forms of insecurity, while freedom from want concerns access to basic necessities and opportunities necessary for human well-being. The United Nations later expanded the human security approach by emphasizing protection of individuals and communities from widespread and critical threats while promoting their survival, livelihood, and dignity (United Nations General Assembly, 2012). Terrorism can threaten both dimensions simultaneously. Civilians may fear attacks while also experiencing poverty, unemployment, displacement, food insecurity, and loss of livelihood as consequences of insecurity.

The theory further provides an important basis for examining the causes of terrorism. Human security recognizes that insecurity can be associated with conditions such as poverty, exclusion, inequality, weak institutions, political instability, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services. These conditions do not automatically cause terrorism, but they can contribute to vulnerability, grievances, social instability, and environments in which violent groups may recruit or operate. For this reason, addressing terrorism requires more than military intervention; it also requires attention to the underlying social and economic conditions that affect people's security and well-being. The theory is also useful for evaluating the effectiveness of government

responses to terrorism. From a human security perspective, a security intervention should not be considered successful simply because terrorist suspects are arrested or attacks are reduced. Its effectiveness should also be assessed in terms of whether civilians feel safer, whether their livelihoods are protected, whether displaced persons can return safely, whether essential services are restored, and whether human rights are respected. The United Nations has emphasized that counter-terrorism measures should be consistent with human rights and the rule of law (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2015).

Human Security Theory can be applied directly to the three objectives of this study. First, the theory provides a framework for examining the forms and dimensions of insecurity experienced by civilians. Terrorism can affect personal, economic, health, food, political, and community security. The study can therefore investigate whether civilian populations in Abia State experience threats such as physical violence, fear, displacement, loss of livelihoods, disruption of education and healthcare, and restrictions on movement. Second, the theory helps explain the factors contributing to terrorism and related violence. Conditions such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, weak governance, political grievances, poor security provision, and limited opportunities can create environments of vulnerability. Examining these factors allows the study to move beyond the immediate occurrence of terrorist violence and consider the broader structural conditions associated with insecurity. Third, the theory provides a basis for assessing the effectiveness of measures adopted to protect civilians. Government security operations, community-based security initiatives, intelligence gathering, early-warning mechanisms, humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation, and livelihood interventions can be evaluated according to their capacity to promote civilian safety and human well-being. This is consistent with the human security approach, which considers security to be meaningful when people are protected from serious threats and are able to live with dignity.

Human Security Theory is considered appropriate for this study because the central concern is the civilian population, rather than the state alone. Terrorism directly affects individuals and communities, making their safety, livelihood, dignity, and social well-being important indicators of security. The theory therefore provides a broader analytical perspective for understanding terrorism in Abia State. Furthermore, the theory supports the argument that terrorism cannot be adequately addressed through military measures alone. Sustainable civilian protection requires an integrated approach involving security, economic development, social welfare, human rights, community participation, and good governance. Consequently, Human Security Theory provides a strong foundation for analysing the forms of insecurity experienced by civilians, the factors contributing to terrorism, and the effectiveness of measures designed to protect the population in Abia State.

4. Conceptual Review

Concept of Civilian Population

The concept of civilian population is central to the study of terrorism because civilians are often the primary recipients of the social, economic, political, and humanitarian consequences of terrorist violence. In general terms, a civilian is a person who is not a member of the armed forces or other organized armed groups participating in hostilities. The term civilian population therefore refers collectively to individuals and communities who are not directly participating in armed conflict or organized military operations. From an international humanitarian law perspective, the concept of civilian population is closely associated with the principle of distinction. Parties to an armed conflict are required to distinguish between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives. Article 50 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions provides that a civilian is any person who does not belong to categories of persons regarded as combatants, while the presence of some non-civilians within a population does not deprive the population of its civilian character (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1977). This principle establishes that civilians should not be deliberately targeted simply because they reside in an area where violence or armed confrontation occurs.

The concept of civilian population also has an important human-rights dimension. The protection of civilians is not limited to preventing physical attacks; it also involves safeguarding fundamental rights such as the right to life, liberty, security of person, freedom of movement, and access to basic social services. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person (United Nations, 1948). Terrorism can undermine these rights through violence, threats, abductions, destruction of property, displacement, and restrictions on ordinary social and economic activities.

Dimensions of Civilian Population Vulnerability

The vulnerability of civilian populations to terrorism can be examined through several dimensions. The first is physical security. Civilians may face threats to their lives and bodily integrity through attacks, abductions, bombings, shootings, or other violent acts. Physical insecurity can also force individuals to alter their daily routines and avoid places that were previously considered safe. The second dimension is economic

vulnerability. Terrorism can disrupt markets, businesses, agriculture, transportation, employment, and investment. When businesses close or agricultural activities are interrupted, households may lose sources of income. Prolonged insecurity can therefore contribute to poverty and economic dependence. The third dimension is social vulnerability. Repeated terrorist attacks can weaken social relationships and community cohesion. Fear and mistrust may develop between individuals and groups, while displacement can separate families and disrupt traditional community networks. In communities where social institutions are already weak, terrorism can further undermine collective capacity to respond to social problems. The fourth dimension is psychological vulnerability. Civilians exposed to terrorism may experience fear, grief, anxiety, uncertainty, and other forms of psychological distress. Even individuals who have not been directly attacked may experience persistent fear because of the possibility of future violence. This demonstrates that terrorism can influence civilian populations through psychological effects as well as physical violence. The fifth dimension is political and institutional vulnerability. Terrorism can undermine confidence in government institutions when citizens perceive that the state is unable to protect them effectively. Conversely, poorly designed security responses can also damage public trust when civilian rights are inadequately protected. The United Nations therefore emphasizes that effective counter-terrorism strategies should operate within the framework of human rights and the rule of law (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2015).

Civilian Protection

Civilian protection refers to measures designed to prevent or reduce threats to the lives, rights, livelihoods, and well-being of non-combatant populations. In situations involving terrorism and armed violence, civilian protection may involve security measures, early-warning systems, community policing, humanitarian assistance, protection of critical infrastructure, emergency response, displacement support, and restoration of essential services. The protection of civilians also requires cooperation between government institutions and local communities. Security agencies may possess coercive and intelligence capabilities, but local residents often possess important knowledge about their communities and emerging security threats. Community participation can therefore improve early warning, information sharing, conflict prevention, and trust between civilians and security institutions.

From a human security perspective, civilian protection should extend beyond physical survival to include freedom from fear and freedom from want. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994) explains human security in terms of protecting people from serious and pervasive threats while promoting their ability to live with dignity. Accordingly, protecting civilians from terrorism should include safeguarding their livelihoods, access to education and healthcare, social relationships, and opportunities for community development.

Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism is a complex social, political, and security phenomenon that has attracted considerable attention from scholars, governments, international organizations, and civil society. Although the term is widely used, there is no universally accepted single definition of terrorism. This difficulty arises partly because the concept is influenced by political, legal, historical, and ideological contexts. Nevertheless, most scholarly and institutional understandings of terrorism emphasize the deliberate use or threat of violence to create fear and influence a wider population or government in pursuit of political, ideological, religious, economic, or social objectives. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD), for example, conceptualizes terrorism around intentional violence or threats of violence by non-state actors, particularly where the action is intended to pursue a broader goal, intimidate a wider audience, or target civilians (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism [START], 2024). The United Nations (UN) regards terrorism as one of the major threats to international peace and security and has established the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as a framework for preventing and combating terrorism. The Strategy emphasizes that terrorism is unacceptable in all its forms and manifestations and organizes international counter-terrorism efforts around four major pillars: addressing conditions conducive to terrorism, preventing and combating terrorism, strengthening state capacity, and ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2015).

One of the fundamental characteristics of terrorism is the use or threat of violence. Terrorism involves violence or the threat of violence that goes beyond ordinary criminal behaviour because it is generally intended to achieve a broader objective. The violence may be directed against people or property, but its psychological effect can extend beyond the immediate victims. Consequently, an attack can affect an entire community by generating fear and uncertainty. The GTD's methodology similarly distinguishes terrorism from ordinary criminal violence by considering factors such as the intention behind the violence, the pursuit of broader political, economic, religious, or social goals, and the intention to intimidate or coerce a wider audience (START, 2024). Another important characteristic is the intention to create fear or intimidation. Terrorism is not concerned only with the immediate physical consequences of violence; it also seeks to influence the behaviour

of people beyond those directly affected. A terrorist incident may therefore have consequences that extend throughout a community or society. Fear may affect people's movement, economic activities, social interactions, participation in public life, and perception of government security. This psychological and social dimension makes terrorism particularly significant for studies of civilian populations.

Terrorism may also have political, ideological, religious, or social motivations. Terrorist actors may seek to influence government policies, challenge political institutions, promote ideological beliefs, advance separatist objectives, or impose particular social or religious views. The presence of a broader objective distinguishes terrorism from violence motivated solely by personal disputes or ordinary criminal gain. The GTD similarly requires consideration of whether an act is connected to political, economic, religious, or social objectives when classifying terrorist incidents (START, 2024). A further feature of terrorism is the significance of civilian and symbolic targets. Civilian populations may be deliberately targeted because attacks against ordinary people can generate widespread fear and attract public attention. Other targets may have symbolic, political, or economic importance. The effects consequently extend beyond the immediate physical location of an incident. Families, businesses, schools, communities, and public institutions may experience disruptions even when they are not directly attacked.

Civilian Population and Terrorism

The relationship between civilian population and terrorism is a significant area of study because terrorism has consequences that extend beyond the immediate perpetrators and their intended political or ideological objectives. Civilian populations are often among the groups most affected by terrorist violence, particularly because attacks can occur in public spaces, residential communities, markets, places of worship, transportation facilities, schools, and other locations where ordinary people live and conduct their daily activities. The United Nations (UN) recognizes terrorism as a direct threat to human dignity, human rights, peace, and security, while also emphasizing the need to protect civilians in counter-terrorism efforts (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2015). The most direct relationship between civilian populations and terrorism is the threat terrorism poses to civilian safety. Terrorist violence may expose civilians to death, physical injury, abduction, destruction of property, displacement, and fear. The United Nations notes that terrorist threats frequently involve vulnerable targets and public spaces because such locations are open and accessible to large numbers of people (UNOCT, 2015).

Terrorism can directly undermine the physical security of civilian populations. The deliberate or indiscriminate use of violence can result in deaths and injuries among people who are not participants in armed activities. The UN has identified protection of civilians as a fundamental concern in responding to terrorism and has emphasized that terrorist violence can have devastating human consequences (United Nations, 2005). Physical insecurity may also affect the ability of civilians to access essential facilities. People may avoid schools, markets, healthcare centres, workplaces, religious institutions, or transportation routes because they perceive these locations as unsafe. In this way, terrorism affects not only physical survival but also people's ability to carry out ordinary activities. The United Nations observes that terrorism causes lasting damage to individuals, families, and communities and those victims may require support well beyond the immediate aftermath of an attack (UNOCT, 2015). Thus, the effects of terrorism can persist even after physical violence has stopped.

Terrorism can significantly affect the economic security of civilian populations. Insecurity may disrupt businesses, agriculture, transportation, markets, employment, and investment. People may be unable to work or trade normally because of fear or restrictions on movement. Businesses may also experience reduced patronage or be forced to suspend operations. The UN notes that terrorism can undermine economic and social development and limit access to employment and other opportunities (United Nations, 2024). Consequently, terrorism can contribute indirectly to household poverty and economic vulnerability. When terrorist violence becomes persistent, civilians may leave their communities in search of safety. Displacement can result in the loss of homes, land, employment, social networks, and access to basic services. Displacement can also create secondary vulnerabilities. Individuals who leave their communities may experience difficulties obtaining food, shelter, healthcare, education, and employment. The loss of established social networks can further increase dependence on government, humanitarian organizations, relatives, or host communities.

Terrorism can disrupt the provision and accessibility of social services. Insecurity may prevent teachers, healthcare workers, social workers, and other professionals from working safely in affected communities. Schools and health facilities may also become difficult for civilians to access. The resulting disruption can have long-term effects on human development. Children may lose educational opportunities, families may experience difficulty obtaining healthcare, and vulnerable populations may have reduced access to social welfare services. Terrorism therefore affects civilian populations not only through direct violence but also through the disruption of institutions upon which everyday life depends.

However, vulnerability does not mean that civilians are passive victims. Communities can develop resilience through social networks, local leadership, early-warning systems, community organizations, and cooperation with legitimate authorities. The UN's approach to preventing violent extremism recognizes the importance of community resilience, youth engagement, civil society participation, and inclusive development (UNOCT, 2015). The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2026) reports that between January 2024 and August 2025, Abia State recorded 96 security incidents resulting in 118 fatalities, including 31 incidents coded as violence against civilians. Incidents were recorded across all 17 Local Government Areas, while the security environment involved separatist-related violence, criminality, kidnapping, communal violence, and cult or gang-related clashes.

These circumstances demonstrate the importance of distinguishing terrorism from other forms of violence while also examining their overlapping consequences for civilians. Some incidents in Abia have involved civilians being killed during attacks on security personnel or installations, while other incidents have involved kidnapping, farm destruction, and attacks on communities. Consequently, civilian populations can experience insecurity even where violence is not exclusively directed at them. The situation also illustrates the importance of examining civilian experiences rather than relying exclusively on incident statistics. A community may experience significant insecurity through fear, disruption of economic activities, restricted movement, and reduced access to services even when the number of recorded terrorist incidents is relatively small. The relationship between civilian population and terrorism should therefore be understood as multidimensional.

Although terrorism creates significant vulnerabilities, civilian populations can also play an important role in resisting and recovering from its consequences. Community cooperation, social networks, local leadership, civil society organizations, and appropriate government interventions can help communities respond to insecurity and rebuild after violent incidents. Civilian resilience is strengthened when communities have access to reliable information, social services, livelihood opportunities, effective institutions, and legitimate channels for reporting security concerns. The UN emphasizes multidimensional cooperation involving governments, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders in preventing terrorism and strengthening resilience (UNOCT, 2015).

Review of Empirical Studies

Alimba and Malgwi (2020) examined the influence of Boko Haram terrorist attacks on the livelihoods of rural dwellers in Hawul Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. The study adopted a multidisciplinary approach and combined questionnaire surveys with key-informant interviews to investigate the socioeconomic and demographic consequences of terrorism for rural populations. The study found that Boko Haram attacks significantly disrupted the livelihood activities of rural residents. Agricultural activities, which constitute an important source of livelihood in rural communities, were particularly affected because insecurity restricted people's ability to access and cultivate their farms. The study also identified destruction of livelihood resources, displacement, fear, and disruption of normal economic activities as important consequences of terrorist attacks.

Oyawale (2022) investigated the impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism on public insecurity in Nigeria from the perspectives of people directly affected by the conflict in the North-East. The study adopted a qualitative approach and conducted 41 in-depth interviews with internally displaced persons (IDPs) during four months of fieldwork. Rather than relying exclusively on conventional security indicators, the study examined how ordinary civilians understood and experienced insecurity in their everyday lives. The findings provide important evidence that civilian experiences are essential to understanding terrorism and counter-terrorism. The study demonstrated that insecurity is experienced by civilians through displacement, fear, disruption of livelihoods, and concerns about the effectiveness and consequences of counter-terrorism measures. It consequently contributes to the broader human-security perspective by shifting attention from the state and security institutions toward the lived experiences of people affected by terrorism.

Gomment (2020) examined victims of terrorism in Nigeria, with particular attention to Boko Haram and internally displaced persons. The study considered terrorism from the perspective of its victims and highlighted the extensive humanitarian consequences experienced by people exposed to terrorist violence. The study's focus on victims is significant because terrorism produces consequences that extend beyond the immediate occurrence of an attack. Civilians may lose their homes, livelihoods, social networks, and sense of security, while displacement can expose affected populations to additional socioeconomic difficulties. The study demonstrates that civilians should not be treated merely as statistics in terrorism research. Their experiences provide important information about the consequences of terrorism and the effectiveness of responses designed to protect them. The study is therefore relevant to the present research because it reinforces the importance of examining civilian vulnerability, displacement, victimization, and social consequences.

Alaba and Agbaje (2024) investigated the economic impact of terrorism on internally displaced persons in Nigeria, paying particular attention to economic differences between IDPs living in camps and those living

outside formal camps. The study examined indicators such as employment, income, and livelihood strategies. Its findings showed that displacement associated with terrorism create significant economic challenges and that the circumstances of displaced people differ according to their living arrangements. In particular, restrictions on movement and limited access to resources were identified as important challenges for displaced populations.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design and relied on secondary sources of data. Abia State constituted the area of study, while the civilian population of the state constituted the population of interest. Data were obtained from academic publications, government documents, international organizations, research institutions, security databases, and credible media reports. A structured document review guide was used to extract relevant information, while validity and reliability were enhanced through expert review, source evaluation, triangulation, and cross-checking. The collected information was analysed using qualitative content analysis and organized according to the research questions and objectives of the study. Ethical principles relating to proper citation, accurate representation of sources, confidentiality, and responsible reporting of sensitive information were observed.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

The secondary data analysis presents and interprets documentary evidence obtained from academic publications, government and institutional reports, conflict-monitoring databases, and credible international organizations. Particular attention is given to evidence concerning Abia State and the wider South-East Nigerian security environment. Because the study uses secondary data, the findings below should be understood as documented patterns rather than estimates generated from a survey of Abia residents.

Research Question One

What are the major forms and dimensions of insecurity experienced by the civilian population as a result of terrorism and related violent activities in Abia State?

The available secondary evidence indicates that civilian insecurity in Abia State is multidimensional, involving threats to life and physical safety, abduction, displacement and restricted movement, destruction of property and livelihoods, psychological insecurity, and disruption of community life. Recent ACLED-based reporting by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) recorded 96 security incidents and 118 fatalities in Abia State between 1 January 2024 and 31 August 2025. Of these incidents, 31 were coded as violence against civilians, while 51 were battles, seven involved explosions or remote violence, and seven were riots. Importantly, incidents were recorded in all 17 Local Government Areas of the state. Aba South recorded the highest number of incidents (22), followed by Umuahia North (12) and Umunneochi (8).

The secondary evidence therefore shows that civilian insecurity in Abia State has several interconnected dimensions. Physical insecurity arises from killings and violent attacks; personal insecurity is associated with kidnapping and threats to freedom of movement; economic insecurity arises from disruption of livelihoods and destruction of farms or property; while psychological and social insecurity develops through fear, uncertainty, and disruption of community life. The findings support the Human Security perspective adopted for the study. Human security goes beyond protecting territory and state institutions to protecting individuals from serious threats to their survival, livelihoods, and dignity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). The situation in Abia illustrates why terrorism and related violence should therefore be examined from the standpoint of their consequences for ordinary civilians.

Research Question Two

What are the major factors contributing to terrorism and terrorism-related violence affecting the civilian population in Abia State?

The secondary literature suggests that terrorism and terrorism-related violence in Abia State cannot be explained by a single factor. Instead, several political, socioeconomic, institutional, criminal, communal, and security-related factors interact to produce insecurity.

The secondary evidence indicates that terrorism and terrorism-related violence in Abia State emerge from a combination of factors rather than a single cause. Separatist-related violence, criminal networks, kidnapping, communal and land disputes, institutional weaknesses, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities interact within a complex security environment. This finding is consistent with the UN's comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism, which recognizes the need to address conditions conducive to terrorism while strengthening institutions and respecting human rights and the rule of law. Therefore, a purely military approach is unlikely to eliminate all forms of civilian insecurity because some of the underlying problems are political, socioeconomic, communal, and institutional.

Research Question Three

How effective are the measures adopted by government and relevant stakeholders in protecting the civilian population from terrorism and terrorism-related violence in Abia State?

The secondary evidence suggests that government and other stakeholders have adopted several measures to address insecurity, including security operations, intelligence and law-enforcement interventions, community-based responses, and broader counter-terrorism initiatives. However, their effectiveness appears to be partial rather than absolute.

On the basis of the available secondary evidence, government and stakeholder interventions can be assessed as partially effective. They have contributed to security responses, incident monitoring, and attempts to contain violent actors, but the continuing occurrence of violence against civilians indicates significant gaps. The EUAA's record of 31 incidents coded as violence against civilians in Abia between January 2024 and August 2025, together with the continuation of kidnapping, farm destruction, separatist-related violence, and communal conflict, suggests that existing interventions have not completely addressed the security problem. The findings therefore suggest that effective civilian protection requires a multidimensional strategy combining law enforcement, intelligence, community engagement, conflict prevention, socioeconomic interventions, accountability, and protection of human rights.

7. Conclusion

The study examined civilian population and terrorism in Abia State, with particular attention to the forms and dimensions of insecurity experienced by civilians, the factors contributing to terrorism and terrorism-related violence, and the effectiveness of measures adopted by government and relevant stakeholders to protect the civilian population. The study relied on secondary data obtained from academic literature, institutional reports, security databases, government-related publications, and credible documentary sources. Based on the evidence analysed, the study concludes that terrorism and related violent activities constitute a significant threat to civilian security and human well-being in Abia State.

The first major conclusion is that civilian insecurity in Abia State is multidimensional. The findings indicate that the consequences of terrorism and related violent activities extend beyond direct physical attacks. Civilians may experience threats to life, kidnapping and abduction, destruction of property, disruption of livelihoods, restrictions on movement, psychological fear, and disruption of normal community activities. The available evidence indicates that security incidents have occurred across the Local Government Areas of Abia State, demonstrating that insecurity is not restricted to a single community. The study therefore concludes that civilian security should be understood broadly to include physical, economic, psychological, social, and developmental dimensions. The second conclusion is that terrorism and terrorism-related violence in Abia State are products of multiple and interconnected factors. The findings indicate the importance of separatist-related violence, criminal activities, kidnapping, communal and land-related disputes, institutional weaknesses, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and broader political and social grievances. The study therefore rejects a single-cause explanation of terrorism. Rather, terrorism and related violent insecurity should be understood as outcomes of interactions between political, economic, social, institutional, and security conditions.

The study further concludes that the distinction between terrorism and other forms of violent insecurity is important in understanding the security situation in Abia State. Not every incident involving armed violence, kidnapping, communal conflict, cult violence, or attacks on security personnel should automatically be classified as terrorism. However, these forms of violence can overlap and collectively contribute to an environment of civilian insecurity. Consequently, effective research and policy responses require clear definitions, reliable incident documentation, and careful differentiation among terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, communal violence, and other forms of insecurity. A further conclusion concerns the economic consequences of terrorism and related violence. The findings show that insecurity can interfere with farming, trading, transportation, employment, and other livelihood activities. When civilians are unable to move freely or access farms, markets, workplaces, and businesses, their economic security becomes threatened. The study therefore concludes that terrorism should be regarded not only as a security problem but also as a development and livelihood problem. Persistent insecurity can undermine household welfare and delay community development. The study also concludes that psychological and social consequences constitute important dimensions of civilian insecurity. Continuous exposure to violence, kidnapping, threats, and reports of attacks can generate fear and uncertainty among civilians. Such insecurity can alter patterns of movement and social interaction and weaken confidence in the ability of institutions to protect citizens. Thus, the consequences of terrorism can continue even when civilians are not directly involved in a particular violent incident.

In conclusion, the study establishes that terrorism and related violent activities have significant implications for the civilian population of Abia State. The civilian population experiences insecurity through physical threats,

kidnapping, economic disruption, psychological fear, restricted movement, and social and developmental disruptions. These conditions are influenced by interconnected political, socioeconomic, criminal, communal, and institutional factors, while existing government and stakeholder responses, although important, have not been sufficient to provide comprehensive and sustained civilian protection. The study therefore concludes that sustainable peace and civilian security in Abia State require an integrated approach combining effective security measures with conflict prevention, socioeconomic development, community participation, institutional accountability, respect for human rights, and strengthened mechanisms for civilian protection.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were proposed.

The Abia State Government, security agencies, traditional institutions, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders should strengthen community-based security, early-warning, and civilian-protection mechanisms. The findings established that civilians experience insecurity through killings, kidnapping, threats, restricted movement, destruction of livelihoods, and other forms of violence. The continued occurrence of such incidents suggests that conventional security responses alone have not been sufficient. Security agencies should therefore develop stronger and lawful channels for communication with communities, through which residents can report emerging threats and receive timely security information. Community policing initiatives, neighbourhood-based early-warning systems, emergency communication channels, and regular consultations between security agencies and community representatives should be strengthened. Traditional and religious leaders, youth organizations, women's groups, civil society organizations, and other legitimate community structures can also contribute to identifying emerging conflicts and facilitating peaceful resolution.

The government should implement long-term socioeconomic, political, and conflict-prevention programmes that address conditions that may increase civilian vulnerability to terrorism and related violence. The findings indicate that insecurity in Abia State is associated with multiple factors, including separatist-related grievances, criminality, kidnapping, communal and land disputes, institutional weaknesses, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Consequently, counter-terrorism policy should not rely exclusively on military and police operations. Government should expand legitimate employment and livelihood opportunities, particularly for vulnerable young people, improve access to education and skills development, support small businesses and agricultural activities, and strengthen social protection in communities affected by insecurity. Such interventions can reduce socioeconomic vulnerability and improve the capacity of households to withstand security shocks.

The study recommends that government and security agencies establish stronger accountability and monitoring mechanisms for counter-terrorism and civilian-protection operations. The findings indicate that existing interventions have had some positive effects but remain only partially effective, as violence against civilians and other forms of insecurity continue to occur. Security operations should therefore be regularly evaluated using measurable indicators such as reductions in civilian casualties, kidnapping incidents, displacement, attacks on communities, destruction of livelihoods, and threats to freedom of movement. This would enable government to determine which interventions are producing meaningful improvements and which require modification. At the same time, all counter-terrorism and security operations should comply with human-rights standards and the rule of law. Allegations of unlawful killings, excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, or other abuses should be properly investigated, and credible violations should be addressed through appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms. Respect for human rights is important not only as a legal obligation but also because public trust and cooperation are essential to effective civilian protection.

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