

## AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VALUES AND SOCIAL ETHICS IN COMBATING TERRORISM AND VIOLENT CRIMES IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*This empirical study examines the relevance and applicability of African traditional values and social ethics as complementary frameworks for combating terrorism and violent crimes in Nigeria. Drawing on mixed-methods research that integrates structured interviews with 420 community leaders, traditional rulers, security practitioners, and civil society actors across six geopolitical zones, alongside an analysis of secondary data from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics, the Global Terrorism Index, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) the study assesses how indigenous value systems, including Ubuntu philosophy, communal solidarity (Omoluabi), restorative justice mechanisms, and ancestral prohibitions on violence, function as preventive and rehabilitative resources against political violence and crime. Findings reveal that communities with robust traditional governance structures and practising active indigenous social ethics demonstrate statistically significantly lower rates of violent crime recruitment ( $p < .05$ ) and enhanced community-based early warning mechanisms. The study further identifies the erosion of traditional value systems by globalisation, urbanisation, and political marginalisation as a critical vulnerability that extremist organisations exploit for radicalisation. The article recommends the institutionalisation of hybrid security governance frameworks that systematically integrate African traditional ethics with formal law enforcement, policy reform in community policing, and investment in indigenous knowledge preservation. The findings contribute to localisation debates in counter-terrorism and criminology, with significant policy implications for Sub-Saharan Africa.*

**Keywords:** African traditional value, social ethics, terrorism, violent crime, counter-terrorism, community policing, indigenous governance.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria occupies a paradoxical position in the global security landscape. As Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, it possesses an extraordinary reservoir of cultural heritage, communal solidarity, and indigenous ethical frameworks that have historically governed social behaviour, conflict management, and community cohesion across hundreds of ethnic nationalities. Yet, in the contemporary period, the country has simultaneously become one of the most severely affected nations in the world by terrorism and organised violent crime. The Boko Haram insurgency, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), banditry in the North-West, farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, and cult-related violence in the South, collectively constituting a multi-dimensional security crisis, have resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, the displacement of over three million persons, and the decimation of livelihoods across multiple regions (Global Peace Index, 2024; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024).

The Nigerian state's response to these threats has been predominantly militaristic and law-enforcement-oriented, relying on conventional counterinsurgency operations, emergency rule, and legislative instruments such as the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022. While such measures are necessary, their insufficiency has been widely documented. Scholars and practitioners have increasingly recognised that a purely securitised response fails to address the socio-cultural, normative, and ethical vacuums that facilitate radicalism, sustain criminal enterprise, and undermine community resilience (Alozieuwa, 2022; Omeje, 2021; Tar & Mustapha, 2023). There is, therefore, a compelling imperative to explore complementary frameworks that are culturally resonant, community-embedded, and ethically grounded.

African traditional values, encompassing indigenous philosophical systems such as Ubuntu (I am because we are), the Yoruba concept of Omoluabi (a person of good character), the Igbo principle of Obi Onye (communal conscience), and the Hausa-Fulani ethic of Mutunci (honour and dignity), constitute a rich moral architecture that has long regulated individual conduct, adjudicated disputes, and enforced social norms across Nigerian communities (Metz, 2022; Nwoye, 2021). These systems embody collective responsibility, intergenerational accountability, restorative justice, and the sanctity of human life as foundational principles. Yet their potential as preventive and rehabilitative resources within counter-terrorism and crime-reduction strategies remains insufficiently theorized and empirically investigated.

This article addresses this gap by empirically investigating how African traditional values and social ethics function, or can function, as instruments of violence prevention, community resilience, and post-conflict rehabilitation in Nigeria's security context. Specifically, it pursues four research questions: (1) What traditional value systems and ethical frameworks remain operationally relevant in contemporary Nigerian communities? (2) How do these frameworks function as inhibitors of radicalisation and violent crime at the community level? (3) What conditions determine their effectiveness or ineffectiveness? (4) How can they be systematically integrated into formal counter-terrorism and crime-reduction policies?

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it advances localisation perspectives in criminology and conflict studies by demonstrating that indigenous epistemologies constitute legitimate, evidence-based resources for security governance. Practically, it provides policy-relevant recommendations for Nigerian government institutions, security agencies, and civil society organisations seeking sustainable, culturally appropriate approaches to violence reduction.

## Literature Review

### African Traditional Values: Conceptual Foundations

African traditional values refer to the constellation of normative principles, ethical commitments, and ontological orientations that have historically shaped social life across African societies. These are not static, monolithic constructs but dynamic, context-specific systems that vary across ethnic and linguistic communities while sharing common meta-ethical commitments (Metz, 2022). Ubuntu philosophy, perhaps the most widely theorised of these systems, articulates ontology of relational personhood: the self is constituted through and realised in community with others (Ncube, 2022). This communalist ethic generates obligations of mutual care, collective responsibility, and solidarity that directly counter the atomistic, alienated social conditions that criminological research identifies as predictors of violence (Nwoye, 2021).

The Yoruba concept of Omoluabi, literally, the child of a worthy father, but idiomatically, a person of honourable, virtuous character, encapsulates a comprehensive social ethics encompassing diligence, honesty, respect for elders, and non-violence (Motadegbe and Ibiyemi, 2025). In Igbo cosmology, the principle of Omenala (customary law) establishes community-sanctioned prohibitions on violence, theft, and anti-social behaviour backed by both social and spiritual sanction. The Hausa-Fulani concept of Mutunci (dignity and honour) similarly inculcates non-aggression, hospitality, and communal responsibility as masculine virtues (Tar & Mustapha, 2023). These value systems, operating through socialisation, ritual, storytelling, and community governance, have historically served as powerful regulators of behaviour.

### Terrorism and Violent Crime in Nigeria: Scale and Drivers

Nigeria ranked eighth globally in the Global Terrorism Index 2024, with over 3,500 terrorism-related deaths recorded in 2023 alone (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). The Boko Haram insurgency, which originated in Borno State in 2009, has killed over 40,000 persons and displaced more than 2.3 million since its inception (UNHCR, 2023). ISWAP, which split from Boko Haram in 2016, has intensified attacks on military and civilian targets across the Lake Chad Basin. Concurrently, armed banditry in Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, and Sokoto States has resulted in mass abductions, destruction of agrarian livelihoods, and the collapse of rural governance structures. The South-East has witnessed an escalation of political violence associated with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), while cult-related violence remains endemic in Rivers, Delta, and Cross River States (Alozieuwa, 2022).

Scholarly analyses of the drivers of these phenomena consistently identify socio-economic marginalisation, inequality, weak state institutions, ungoverned spaces, ethnic and religious grievances, and identity politics as root causes (Omeje, 2021; Ogonnaya, 2022). Critically, several scholars argue that the erosion of traditional social structures and value systems, accelerated by colonialism, post-independence political centralisation, and rapid urbanization, has weakened the informal social controls that previously inhibited radicalisation and organised violence (Alozieuwa, 2022; Okafor, 2023). The collapse of community-level accountability mechanisms, elder authority, and indigenous conflict resolution institutions has created governance voids that extremist organisations and criminal networks exploit.

### Indigenous Approaches to Security and Justice

A growing body of scholarship, particularly in post-colonial security studies and indigenous criminology, argues for the recognition and integration of traditional governance and ethical systems into formal security frameworks (Brigg, 2021; Mutisi, 2021). In the African context, research from Rwanda on gacaca courts, from South Africa on Truth and Reconciliation, and from Northern Uganda on Mato Oput (Acholi restorative justice) demonstrates that indigenous justice mechanisms can successfully rehabilitate perpetrators, restore community cohesion, and

interrupt cycles of violence in ways that formal judicial systems cannot (Nwoye, 2021; Brigg, 2021). These mechanisms derive their legitimacy and effectiveness from cultural embeddedness, community ownership, and moral authority rather than coercive state power.

In Nigeria specifically, studies have documented the role of traditional rulers in mediating farmer-herder conflicts (Olayode, 2022), the effectiveness of Zakat institutions in addressing the economic marginalisation that feeds radicalisation in the North (Tar & Mustapha, 2023), and the use of Eze (Igbo traditional courts) in resolving communal disputes (Okafor, 2023). However, empirical studies that systematically assess the relationship between the vitality of traditional value systems and measurable security outcomes, particularly rates of violent crime, radicalisation vulnerability, and community resilience, remain limited. This article addresses that empirical gap.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969), as extended to collectivist social contexts by Agnew (2011), posits that individuals are deterred from deviant behaviour by social bonds, attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. African traditional values function precisely through the cultivation and maintenance of these bonds: communal solidarity, obligations to family and lineage, internalisation of ethical norms, and participation in community rituals and governance. The erosion of these bonds, as occurs under conditions of rapid urbanisation and cultural dislocation, predicts increased vulnerability to radicalisation and criminal recruitment.

Second, Restorative Justice Theory (Zehr, 2015) provides a framework for understanding how indigenous African justice mechanisms differ from, and in some respects surpass, punitive state-centered approaches. Restorative justice focuses on repairing harm, restoring relationships, and reintegrating offenders into community—objectives that align directly with Ubuntu ethics of interdependence and forgiveness. This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding the potential of traditional mechanisms in post-conflict rehabilitation and in reducing recidivism among former combatants and criminal offenders.

Third, the Localisation of Security Governance framework (Ljungkvist & Johansson, 2022) argues that sustainable security requires the meaningful integration of local cultural resources, indigenous institutions, and community knowledge into formal security architecture. This framework moves beyond tokenistic 'community policing' to advocate for structural recognition of traditional governance as a legitimate and complementary pillar of security governance. It provides the analytical language for the policy recommendations this study advances.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The convergent design enables the triangulation of findings across data sources, strengthening the validity and reliability of conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data collection was conducted between January 2023 and September 2024.

#### **Study Sites and Sampling**

The study was conducted across six states purposively selected to represent Nigeria's six geopolitical zones and to capture diverse security contexts, ethnic compositions, and levels of traditional governance vitality: Borno (North-East; high terrorism impact), Zamfara (North-West; high banditry impact), Plateau (North-Central; farmer-herder conflict), Enugu (South-East; cult/IPOB context), Rivers (South-South; oil-related violence), and Osun (South-West; comparative stability, strong traditional institutions). This design enables both within-site depth and cross-site comparative analysis.

A stratified purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 420 participants across five categories: traditional rulers and council members ( $n = 84$ ), community leaders and elders ( $n = 105$ ), law enforcement officers with community liaison responsibilities ( $n = 63$ ), civil society and non-governmental organisation (NGO) practitioners in peace and security ( $n = 84$ ), and former violent offenders participating in deradicalisation programmes ( $n = 84$ ). This diversity was designed to capture multiple perspectives on the research questions.

#### **Data Collection Instruments**

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising 58 items across four domains: (a) awareness and practice of traditional values and social ethics (14 items; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ); (b) perceived community security and resilience (12 items;  $\alpha = .83$ ); (c) attitudes toward violence and extremism (16 items;  $\alpha = .89$ ); and (d) engagement with formal and informal justice mechanisms (16 items;  $\alpha = .81$ ). A five-

point Likert scale was used throughout. The instrument was validated through expert review by five specialists in African philosophy, criminology, and security studies, and piloted with 40 participants in Kano State (not included in the main sample).

Qualitative data were collected through 72 semi-structured interviews (approximately 60–90 minutes each) and 18 focus group discussions (6–10 participants per group, approximately 90 minutes each). Interviews explored participants' conceptualisation of traditional values, their experience of these values' effects on security behaviour, barriers to their operationalisation, and proposals for integration with formal mechanisms. All interviews were conducted in the preferred language of participants (English, Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba) with professional interpreters where required, and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and professionally translated. Secondary data were drawn from the Global Terrorism Index 2020–2024 (Institute for Economics and Peace), the Nigeria Security Tracker (Council on Foreign Relations), the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics Crime Statistics Reports (2020–2023), and the UNODC Nigeria Country Reports (2021–2024).

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 28. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships between traditional value vitality indices, community resilience scores, and violence susceptibility measures. Comparative analyses across geopolitical zones employed one-way ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey tests. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2022). Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, then organised into themes and subthemes through iterative review. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted with 15 participants, and an audit trail of analytical decisions was maintained. NVivo 14 software facilitated data management and coding. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during the interpretation phase using a joint display approach.

### **Results**

#### **Vitality of traditional value systems across study sites**

The Traditional Values Vitality Index (TVVI), derived from the quantitative survey, revealed significant variation across study sites ( $F(5, 414) = 47.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$ ). Osun State recorded the highest mean TVVI score ( $M = 4.21, SD = 0.53$ ), reflecting the robustness of Yoruba traditional institutions and the Omoluabi value system. Borno State recorded the lowest ( $M = 2.34, SD = 0.78$ ), reflecting the severe disruption of traditional governance structures by the Boko Haram insurgency. Enugu ( $M = 3.87, SD = 0.61$ ) and Plateau ( $M = 3.24, SD = 0.69$ ) occupied intermediate positions. Post-hoc analyses indicated that Osun differed significantly from all other sites ( $p < .05$ ), while Borno differed significantly from all other sites ( $p < .001$ ).

Qualitative findings corroborated these patterns. A traditional ruler from Osun State stated that the Council of Obas maintains regular fora where the ethics of Omoluabi are taught to young men, and that youths who complete the initiation process almost never join criminal organisations. This perception was consistent across interviews with law enforcement officers in Osun, who described traditional rulers as the first line of prevention, noticing behavioural changes in young community members before formal authorities became aware. By contrast, respondents in Borno described a catastrophic collapse of traditional governance: the insurgency deliberately targeted traditional rulers and elders as symbols of opposing authority, eliminating the community's moral gatekeepers.

#### **Traditional values as inhibitors of radicalisation**

Multiple regression analysis examined the predictive relationship between traditional value vitality and radicalisation susceptibility (measured through the validated Community Radicalisation Vulnerability Scale, adapted from Khosrokhavar (2022) for the Nigerian context). The full model was statistically significant ( $F(6, 413) = 38.74, p < .001, R^2 = .36$ ), accounting for 36% of the variance in radicalisation vulnerability. Traditional value vitality was the strongest individual predictor ( $\beta = -.42, p < .001$ ), outperforming unemployment ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ), access to education ( $\beta = -.18, p = .003$ ), and government trust ( $\beta = -.14, p = .021$ ).

Three traditional value dimensions were particularly significant in inhibiting radicalisation. First, communal identity and belonging (Ubuntu/communal solidarity): communities with strong communal bonds exhibited significantly lower rates of reported youth recruitment by extremist groups ( $r = -.54, p < .001$ ). Interview data explained the mechanism: young people firmly embedded in communal identity structures have an alternative source of meaning, belonging, and dignity that extremist recruiters cannot easily displace. A former Boko Haram associate participating in a deradicalisation programme in Maiduguri articulated this: the recruiter told me I had

no future and that my community did not care for me. If I had still been involved in the community age-grade, I would have known that was a lie.

Second, elder authority and moral gatekeeping: communities where elder authority remained respected and institutionally embedded reported stronger informal monitoring of youth behaviour and more effective early warning of radicalisation. An NGO practitioner in Plateau State noted that communities with active traditional councils were able to identify and intervene with at-risk youth an average of three to six months before formal security agencies became aware of a threat. Quantitative data showed that TVVI scores were positively correlated with community self-reported early warning capacity ( $r = .61, p < .001$ ).

Third, spiritual and cosmological prohibitions on violence: across all study sites, respondents identified fear of spiritual or cosmological sanction, variously expressed as ancestral displeasure, divine retribution, or ritual pollution, as a meaningful deterrent to violence. A female community leader in Enugu explained that in Igbo tradition, shedding innocent blood invites Ajo Nsi (evil pollution) that destroys both the perpetrator and the family. While younger, urbanised respondents expressed more ambivalence about the force of these beliefs, the majority of respondents across age groups (67.4%,  $n = 283$ ) indicated that traditional prohibitions on violence remained personally meaningful.

### **Indigenous justice mechanisms and crime reduction**

In communities where indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms remained active, the study found statistically significantly lower self-reported rates of retaliatory violence ( $M = 1.87, SD = 0.69$ ) compared to communities where such mechanisms had been displaced or rendered inactive ( $M = 2.94, SD = 0.84; t(418) = -14.62, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.40$ ). This finding was consistent across geopolitical zones and particularly pronounced in farmer-herder conflict contexts in Plateau State, where communities with active traditional mediation councils reported 43% fewer violent incidents in the 12 months preceding the survey compared to those relying exclusively on formal law enforcement.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions with former violent offenders revealed that restorative justice processes grounded in traditional ethics, requiring public acknowledgement of harm, community service, and reconciliation rituals, produced higher self-reported rates of sustained behavioural change (71.4%) compared to participants' experiences of formal incarceration (24.6%). A participant in a deradicalisation programme in Rivers State described his experience of a community cleansing ceremony as more powerful than prison because it forced me to look at what I did and what I owed, not just to the victim's family but to the whole community and to the ancestors.

### **Barriers to the operationalisation of traditional values**

The study identified five principal barriers to the effective operationalisation of traditional values in security contexts. First, demographic change and urbanisation have disrupted the intergenerational transmission of traditional values. Survey data indicated that respondents under 35 years of age scored significantly lower on the Traditional Values Internalisation Scale ( $M = 3.12, SD = 0.74$ ) compared to those over 50 ( $M = 4.18, SD = 0.58; t(418) = -15.34, p < .001$ ). Second, the politicisation of traditional institutions, particularly the appropriation of chieftaincy by partisan political interests, has eroded their moral authority and perceived neutrality. Thirty-eight per cent of survey respondents indicated that they did not trust traditional rulers in their community to act impartially in security matters.

Third, gender exclusion within traditional governance structures limits their representativeness and reach. Focus group participants in all six sites noted that women, who often possess the most detailed knowledge of youth behaviour and community dynamics, are systematically excluded from formal deliberative processes in traditional councils, reducing the effectiveness of early warning and intervention. Fourth, resource constraints limit the capacity of traditional institutions to sustain their activities, maintain sanctions systems, or compete with the material inducements offered by criminal organisations and terrorist groups. Fifth, legal ambiguity regarding the status of traditional adjudication in Nigerian law creates tensions between formal and informal justice systems, often leading to the marginalisation or criminalisation of traditional processes.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the proposition that African traditional values and social ethics constitute significant, if under-utilised, resources in the prevention and management of terrorism and violent crime in Nigeria. The statistically significant relationship between traditional value vitality and reduced radicalisation vulnerability—with traditional value vitality explaining 42% of the variance in radicalisation susceptibility when controlling for socioeconomic variables, is particularly notable and advances empirical

knowledge beyond the largely theoretical or case-study-based literature previously available (Alozieuwa, 2022; Metz, 2022; Nwoye, 2021).

These findings are consistent with, and extend, Social Control Theory (Agnew, 2011; Hirschi, 1969) by empirically demonstrating that the social bonds generated by traditional value systems, communal belonging, elder accountability, cosmological obligation, function as meaningful deterrents to violence in the specifically African cultural context. The evidence suggests that these bonds are not merely residual cultural artefacts but active, operationally significant mechanisms that communities and policymakers can deliberately cultivate and strengthen.

The demonstration that communities with active indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms experience significantly lower rates of retaliatory violence contributes to Restorative Justice Theory (Zehr, 2015) by providing the first large-scale empirical evidence from the Nigerian context of the crime-reduction effects of traditional restorative practices. The magnitude of the effect (Cohen's  $d = 1.40$  for the comparison of retaliatory violence rates) is substantively large and carries significant policy implications. It suggests that investments in the revitalisation and institutionalisation of traditional justice mechanisms could yield security dividends comparable to, or exceeding, equivalent investments in formal law enforcement.

The identification of urbanisation, the politicisation of traditional institutions, gender exclusion, and legal ambiguity as barriers to operationalisation aligns with and deepens the Localisation of Security Governance framework (Ljungkvist & Johansson, 2022). These barriers are not insurmountable: they are amenable to deliberate policy intervention. Critically, however, the findings suggest that interventions must be designed to address these structural barriers, not merely to add cosmetic 'community engagement' activities to existing securitised approaches.

The finding that traditional value vitality is lowest in Borno State, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency, and highest in Osun State, which enjoys comparatively high stability, is consistent with the theoretical prediction that the deliberate destruction of traditional governance structures is itself a strategic objective of terrorist organisations, recognising that these structures represent a primary obstacle to their social penetration. This finding has important implications for counterinsurgency strategy: rebuilding traditional governance and cultural institutions in post-conflict zones should be recognised as a security imperative, not merely a humanitarian or developmental concern.

The gender exclusion barrier deserves particular emphasis. A growing literature on women's roles in countering violent extremism (CVE) documents women's unique and often superior capacities for early warning, social monitoring, and intervention in radicalisation processes (UN Women, 2022). The systematic exclusion of women from traditional governance structures thus represents not only a justice deficit but security vulnerability. Reforming traditional institutions to include women's voices, in ways consistent with endogenous cultural processes rather than externally imposed, should be a priority for both traditional governance reformers and security practitioners.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study advances six evidence-based policy recommendations directed at Nigerian federal and state governments, security agencies, traditional institutions, and development partners.

First, the federal and state governments should enact a Traditional Institutions Security Partnership Framework that legally recognises, resources, and regulates the role of traditional institutions in community security governance. This framework should establish formal channels for information sharing between traditional councils and law enforcement, provide capacity-building support for traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and establish accountability mechanisms to prevent the politicisation of traditional institutions in security contexts. Second, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Ministry of Education should develop a curriculum on African traditional values and social ethics for primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. The emphasis on Ubuntu, Omoluabi, Omenala, and Mutunci in educational settings would reinforce the intergenerational transmission of traditional values and address the demographic erosion of traditional value systems identified in this study.

Third, the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) and the Ministry of Interior should pilot hybrid community policing models in high-violence zones that integrate Nigeria Police Force community liaison officers with traditional councils, deploying evidence-based training in the intersection of indigenous governance, early warning, and criminal law. Plateau State's communities with active traditional mediation councils provide an existing model for scaling.

Fourth, the National Council for Arts and Culture and state governments should establish Traditional Knowledge Security Funds to support the documentation, transmission, and institutional revitalisation of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, with special priority for communities in Borno and Zamfara States where traditional governance has been most severely disrupted by violence.

Fifth, all security-related programmes engaging traditional institutions must mandate the meaningful participation of women in traditional governance bodies, not as consultative appendages but as decision-making members—and should partner with women's organisations with established community credibility to leverage women's unique CVE capacities.

Sixth, the National Human Rights Commission and the Justice Sector Reform Secretariat should develop a legal framework that clarifies the complementary jurisdiction of traditional courts in non-capital criminal matters, establishes minimum standards for due process in traditional adjudication, and creates a formal referral pathway between traditional and formal justice systems, reducing the legal ambiguity that currently marginalises traditional mechanisms.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; while the correlational findings are theoretically consistent with causal mechanisms, longitudinal or experimental research is required to establish causality definitively. Second, the self-report nature of the survey data introduces potential social desirability bias, particularly for items concerning attitudes toward violence and trust in traditional institutions. Although anonymous administration and assurances of confidentiality were employed to mitigate this, some bias may persist.

Third, the study's findings may have limited generalisability to Nigeria's rapidly urbanising megacities, such as, Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Port Harcourt and so on where traditional governance structures are more fragmented and the demographic composition more heterogeneous than in the study's predominantly urban and semi-urban sites. Future research should specifically examine the role of diasporic, adapted, or reconstructed forms of traditional values in urban security contexts. Fourth, the security conditions in Borno and Zamfara States imposed constraints on data collection and sampling that may have introduced selection effects, potentially underrepresenting communities most severely affected by violence.

### **Conclusion**

This article has provided empirical evidence that African traditional values and social ethics constitute significant, measurable, and policy-relevant resources in the prevention and management of terrorism and violent crime in Nigeria. The vitality of traditional value systems, particularly their capacity to generate communal belonging, maintain elder accountability, sustain cosmological deterrents to violence, and operationalise restorative justice, is strongly and significantly associated with reduced radicalisation vulnerability and lower rates of violent crime at the community level. The deliberate erosion of these systems by terrorist organisations, and their inadvertent erosion by urbanisation and political manipulation, represents a critical security vulnerability that Nigeria's counter-terrorism and crime-reduction strategies have insufficiently addressed.

The study's findings advance both theoretical knowledge and practical policy. Theoretically, they extend Social Control Theory and Restorative Justice Theory to the African cultural context, providing large-scale empirical grounding for the Localisation of Security Governance framework. Practically, they provide an evidence base for a paradigm shift in Nigeria's security governance toward hybrid, culturally embedded approaches that systematically integrate the moral authority, community knowledge, and restorative capacities of African traditional institutions with the coercive and legal resources of the formal state.

Africa's security challenges are real, severe, and urgent, but so too are Africa's indigenous resources for meeting them. The Ubuntu principle, that a person is a person through other persons ('Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'), is not merely a philosophical sentiment. It is a practical programme for rebuilding the social fabric through which violence is prevented, harm is repaired, and communities reclaim their futures. Nigeria's path to sustainable security must run, at least in part, through this indigenous wisdom.

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