

Artificial Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Prospects, Pitfalls, and the Future of Security Strategy

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly recognized as a transformative tool in counter-terrorism, offering capabilities such as predictive analytics, automated surveillance, and enhanced intelligence gathering. However, Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy remains largely reliant on conventional military tactics, limiting the effective integration of AI-driven solutions. This study examines the prospects, challenges, and strategic future of AI in Nigeria's counter-terrorism framework, assessing its potential to enhance security operations while addressing operational and ethical concerns. Using the collective security theory, the study adopts a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data to analyze the effectiveness and limitations of AI deployment. Findings reveal that inadequate infrastructure, limited technical expertise, weak inter-agency collaboration, and concerns over AI-driven surveillance hinder its full implementation. Despite these challenges, the study argues that a structured AI adoption strategy supported by institutional reform, policy-driven investments, and international collaboration can significantly enhance Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts. Strengthening AI governance, improving inter-agency coordination, and leveraging global best practices will be essential for AI to serve as a sustainable and effective security strategy. To optimize AI's potential, the Nigerian government must prioritize investment in AI infrastructure, foster partnerships with global AI innovators, and institutionalize inter-agency collaboration through a centralized intelligence-sharing framework. Furthermore, the deployment of AI in counter-terrorism must be governed by robust ethical and legal safeguards to protect civil liberties and build public trust, ensuring long-term security stabilization.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Counter-Terrorism, Security, Collective Security Theory, Nigeria

Introduction

The evolution of terrorism has compelled states to rethink security strategies, particularly where non-state actors like Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) deploy technology, decentralized networks, and asymmetrical tactics to outmaneuver conventional responses (Nte, Okinono, Isa, Amadedon, & Oba, 2023). Globally, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a strategic asset, offering predictive analytics, real-time surveillance, and autonomous threat detection to bolster intelligence-led operations. However, in Nigeria, AI adoption remains nascent, constrained by infrastructural gaps, weak policy frameworks, and ethical concerns (Ogedengbe, James, Afolabi, Olatoye, & Eboigbe, 2023).

Since Boko Haram's insurgency escalated in 2009 and ISWAP's emergence thereafter, Nigeria has witnessed mass displacement and insecurity despite efforts such as the Multinational Joint

Task Force (MNJTF). These conditions expose persistent gaps in the counter-terrorism framework (Ogedengbe et al., 2023). While AI-driven tools like drone surveillance, facial recognition, and data mining have reshaped counter-terrorism elsewhere, their application in Nigeria remains fragmented and underutilized (Ade-Ibijola & Okonkwo, 2023). Reliance on conventional military tactics, bureaucratic inertia, and fragile intelligence-sharing mechanisms continue to undermine innovation. This underdevelopment is exacerbated by corruption, poor governance, and limited technical expertise. Moreover, concerns about privacy, politicization, and algorithmic bias raise critical questions about AI's place in a democratic security framework (Ade-Ibijola & Okonkwo, 2023). Though AI holds promise to transform Nigeria's counter-terrorism capacity, its success hinges on resolving institutional, logistical, and ethical constraints. While literature on counter-terrorism in West Africa highlights regional cooperation and technological needs, the institutional barriers to AI integration remain insufficiently addressed (Andrew & Odum, 2024; Medu et al., 2023; Okpaleke *et al.*, 2023). Challenges such as disjointed agencies, inadequate legal frameworks, and lack of a coherent national AI policy persist (Adela, 2023).

This study critically examines the role of AI in Nigeria's counter-terrorism architecture its practical prospects, inherent risks, and long-term implications by focusing on its contributions to intelligence gathering, predictive analytics, and operational responsiveness, within the broader context of structural and ethical constraints.

Conceptual clarifications

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence refers to the simulation of human cognitive functions by machines, particularly computer systems capable of learning, reasoning, and decision-making without direct human input (Mannuru *et al.*, 2023). Techniques such as machine learning, natural language processing, and deep learning enable AI to interpret complex data, detect patterns, and generate actionable predictions. In counter-terrorism, AI is a strategic enabler for intelligence gathering, surveillance, and predictive analytics. It supports capabilities such as facial recognition for suspect identification, drone surveillance for real-time monitoring, and data mining to uncover communication patterns associated with terrorist activities (Mannuru et al., 2023). By analyzing vast datasets beyond the capacity of human analysts, AI enhances the speed and precision of threat detection. In Nigeria, where resource limitations hamper conventional security operations, AI offers a promising solution to bridge manpower and intelligence gaps. However, its integration into national defense remains slow, hindered by weak infrastructure, low technical capacity, and unresolved ethical concerns. The tension between national security imperatives and individual privacy rights continues to shape debates around AI surveillance and governance.

Counter-Terrorism

Counter-terrorism encompasses the range of strategies adopted by states and institutions to prevent, disrupt, and respond to terrorist threats. These measures may include military action, intelligence operations, legal frameworks, and diplomatic engagement. In recent years, the field has expanded to include cyber-warfare, digital surveillance, and cross-border intelligence sharing (Tin et al., 2023). Nigeria's counter-terrorism experience, shaped by the emergence of Boko Haram and ISWAP, has exposed serious limitations in intelligence coordination, infrastructure, and technological readiness (Ikyer, 2023). These insurgent groups have inflicted mass casualties and destabilized entire regions, prompting increased demand for technologically advanced responses (Tin et al., 2023). AI offers an opportunity to overcome some of the inefficiencies of

human-driven intelligence by automating surveillance, accelerating data processing, and improving early-warning systems.

AI Applications in Security

AI's application in the security sector spans predictive modeling, surveillance automation, and threat detection. In counter-terrorism, these technologies are deployed in several key areas (Al-Khassawneh, 2023):

- **Predictive Analytics:** AI systems forecast terrorist activity by identifying behavioral patterns in travel, communication, and financial transactions. These models enable security agencies to act preemptively based on historical and real-time data.
- **Drone Technology:** AI-integrated drones enhance surveillance, particularly in inaccessible or insecure regions. These UAVs can identify threats through image analysis and support targeted security responses.
- **Facial Recognition:** Used to monitor public areas and track suspects, facial recognition aids in identifying known militants at border posts, transport hubs, or large gatherings.
- **Data Mining:** AI extracts meaningful intelligence from unstructured sources such as social media, telecoms, and open-source data, facilitating the identification of terrorist networks and the prevention of coordinated attacks.

In Nigeria, however, these applications remain underutilized due to financial constraints, limited infrastructure, and institutional inertia. Although the government has expressed commitment to integrating AI in national security, implementation is slow, and conventional methods still dominate operational procedures.

The AI Counter-Terrorism Frameworks

The application of artificial intelligence (AI) in counter-terrorism has dramatically reshaped security operations, particularly in conflict-prone countries like Nigeria. As insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to destabilize vast regions, AI offers a critical tool for improving intelligence gathering, surveillance, and operational response, thereby enhancing human security (Khan et al., 2023; Olayemi & Adebayo, 2022). AI's primary contribution lies in its capacity to analyze large datasets through predictive analytics. By identifying patterns in real-time, AI can forecast potential terrorist activities and provide preemptive solutions (Olayemi & Adebayo, 2022). This is particularly vital in Nigeria's expansive, insurgent-controlled areas, where AI can help anticipate and neutralize threats before they materialize (Khan et al., 2023). Drones, integrated with AI, further augment this capability by conducting surveillance and precision strikes in remote areas, reducing collateral damage and enhancing operational efficiency (Nwachukwu & Eke, 2023; Udoh & Faleye, 2024). Additionally, AI-driven data mining plays a pivotal role in identifying terrorist networks. Through the analysis of unstructured data ranging from social media to encrypted communications—AI can uncover hidden relationships within terrorist organizations, enabling security agencies to dismantle these networks proactively (Udoh & Faleye, 2024). Nwachukwu & Eke (2023) underscore how AI tracks the digital footprint of insurgents, enhancing intelligence-gathering efforts.

However, the deployment of AI in counter-terrorism is not without its challenges. Ethical concerns about privacy and civil liberties are paramount. The use of surveillance technologies like drones and facial recognition may infringe on individual rights, particularly in a context where governance

structures are weak and accountability mechanisms inadequate (Olayemi & Adebayo, 2022). Furthermore, the risk of AI misidentifying civilians or making erroneous predictions remains a critical concern, potentially leading to wrongful harm (Nwachukwu & Eke, 2023). Infrastructural limitations in Nigeria exacerbate these issues. The country's vast geography and insufficient technological infrastructure hinder the effective deployment of AI-driven counter-terrorism solutions (Udoh & Faleye, 2024). For AI to be fully operational, reliable communication networks, access to real-time data, and trained personnel are essential—resources that are often lacking in conflict zones. The socio-political landscape also plays a crucial role in AI's integration. In a nation like Nigeria, plagued by political instability, corruption, and ethnic tensions, there is a legitimate concern that AI could be misused for political repression (Lee, 2021; Olayemi & Adebayo, 2022). Such fears can undermine public trust, particularly if AI surveillance disproportionately targets specific groups, thereby hindering effective counter-terrorism operations.

While AI offers promising avenues for strengthening counter-terrorism efforts in Nigeria, scholars argued that its implementation must be handled with caution. Predictive analytics, drones, and data mining can significantly enhance operational precision and disrupt terrorist activities (Khan et al., 2023; Udoh & Faleye, 2024). However, addressing ethical concerns, infrastructural barriers, and political dynamics is essential to ensure AI's responsible use.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Theory of Collective Security as articulated by Hans Kelsen (1944), which posits that peace is best sustained when states respond to threats collectively rather than in isolation. The core idea that an attack on one constitutes a threat to all resonates strongly with contemporary counter-terrorism in West Africa, where terrorism operates fluidly across national borders. Nigeria's experience with groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP illustrates the inadequacy of unilateral responses. Multilateral initiatives like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin, reflect this collective approach. Yet, as Adela (2023) observes, their impact is often constrained by weak coordination and political mistrust. Regional institutions such as ECOWAS and the African Union have made efforts through intelligence sharing, joint operations, and harmonized policies. Medu et al. (2023) argue that such efforts thrive only when member states show political will and commit to shared security priorities. Similarly, Okpaleke et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of integrating digital tools—like AI and drone technology through cooperative frameworks to enhance regional capacity. Beyond military tactics, soft-power strategies such as regional de-radicalization programs and coordinated counter-narratives are essential (Ogunnubi & Aja, 2024). Terrorist threats today are both physical and ideological, and no state can confront them alone. Maniszewska (2024) rightly notes that facing AI-enabled terrorism demands shared technological resources and cross-border collaboration. The theory offers both a conceptual and practical lens for understanding Nigeria's security efforts. It reframes national security as a regional responsibility—demanding mutual trust, collective investment, and sustained cooperation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach grounded in secondary data to examine the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategies. Relying on peer-reviewed literature, official policy documents, and institutional reports from bodies such as the UN, AU, and ECOWAS, the research employed structured documentary analysis sourced from databases like JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Guided by thematic content analysis, the study

identified patterns around predictive technologies, drone deployment, surveillance systems, and institutional constraints. The interpretivist lens enables an apt understanding of context-specific dynamics, while comparative insights situate Nigeria's approach within broader regional and global counter-terrorism frameworks.

Result of the Findings

Predictive Analytics and the Integration of AI in Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has increasingly become a pivotal force in reshaping modern counter-terrorism, particularly through its application in predictive analytics. In Nigeria, where terrorist networks such as Boko Haram and ISWAP have exploited porous intelligence infrastructures, AI-driven systems offer unprecedented potential in tracking and preempting threats. Leveraging machine learning algorithms, AI is capable of processing vast and disparate datasets—from communication intercepts and financial transactions to social media activity—thereby identifying patterns that human analysts may overlook (Zakari, 2024). The exponential growth in digital connectivity across Nigeria provides a robust data environment for such predictive mechanisms, yet the lack of a unified data architecture significantly undermines the real-time efficacy of these tools. As seen in figure 1 below, predictive analysis of AI in counterterrorism has remained very low.

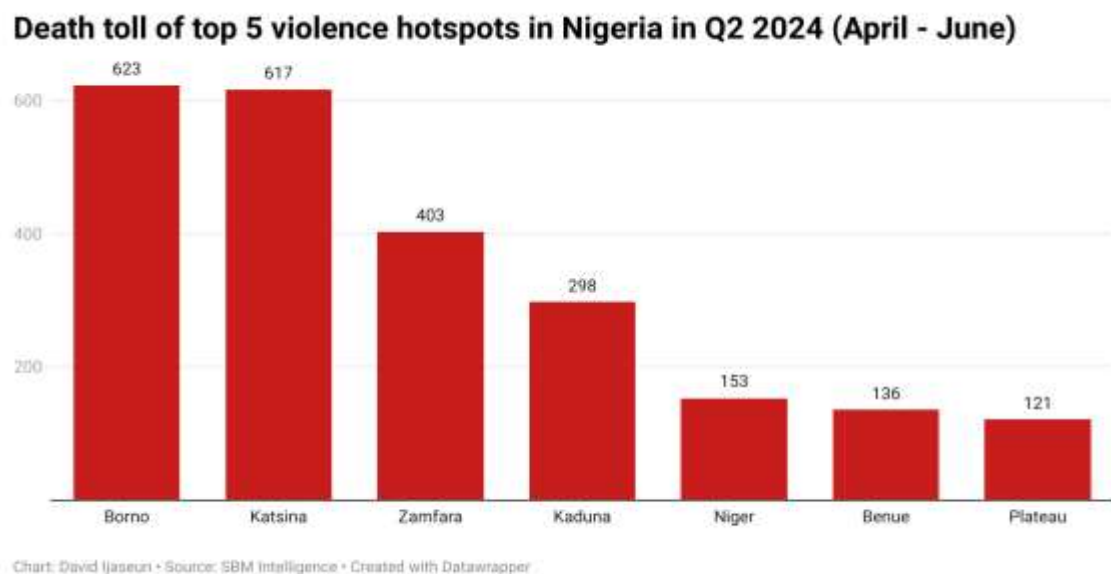


Figure 1: Death Toll of Top 5 Violence Hotspot in Nigeria in Q2 2024 (April-June)

Source: [David](#) (2024)

Figure 1 illustrates the death tolls in the most violent regions of Nigeria, with Borno leading, followed by Katsina, while Plateau records the lowest number with 121 deaths. These violent incidents are primarily attributed to Boko Haram terrorist activities. Notably, the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) has begun integrating AI and machine learning into its operations, particularly for financial crime investigations that intersect with terrorist financing (Okeke, Agbonghae, & Green, 2024). This initiative reflects a broader federal ambition to digitize intelligence architecture, but progress remains uneven. Infrastructural deficits most acutely, unreliable internet access and power supply continue to stifle large-scale AI deployment,

particularly in terrorism-prone northern regions. Moreover, the scarcity of technically trained personnel capable of deploying, managing, and interpreting AI systems poses a structural limitation that weakens institutional uptake.

As shown in figure 2, the northern Nigeria remains the major victims of terrorism attacks notably the northeast, northwest and north central.

Death Counts by Geopolitical Zones (Q1 2024)

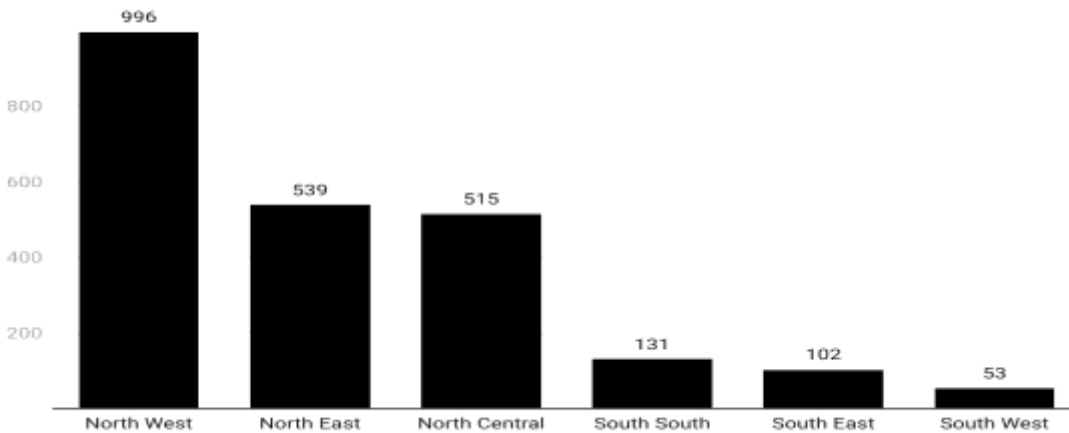


Chart: David Ijaseun • Source: ICIR, BD Intelligence • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Death Count by Geopolitical Zones (Q1 2024)

Source: (David, 2024)

Figure 2 illustrates the impact of Boko Haram activities on civilians, with death tolls rising, particularly in the Northwest, where both terrorist and bandit operations are prominent. This is followed by the Northeast, North Central, and other regions.

AI's operational utility is further demonstrated in surveillance and real-time monitoring which is not the case in northern Nigeria. Through integration with drone technology, satellite imagery, and facial recognition systems, AI enables state forces to monitor conflict zones and detect insurgent movements with increased precision (Owojori, Akinyemi, & Azman, 2023). In terrains previously inaccessible to the state, such technologies reduce response latency and allow for targeted interventions. Early warning systems powered by AI can synthesize diverse data streams to identify emergent threats and forecast potential attacks, enhancing preemptive capability and reducing civilian vulnerability.

However, these advancements raise profound ethical concerns. As Maniszewska (2024) cautions, the deployment of AI in national security must be tempered by strong governance frameworks. In Nigeria, where public trust in security agencies remains fragile due to historical abuses and systemic opacity, the absence of oversight mechanisms could convert protective technologies into tools of repression. The expansion of AI surveillance without regulatory safeguards risks exacerbating civic mistrust and undermining the legitimacy of counter-terrorism operations. Hence, the integration of AI must proceed alongside the establishment of transparent data governance protocols, inter-agency coordination, and accountability structures that uphold civil liberties. While AI enhances Nigeria's predictive and operational capacity in counter-terrorism, its effectiveness is conditioned by infrastructural readiness, technical proficiency, inter-agency

synergy, and normative frameworks. Addressing these structural and ethical deficits is critical to transforming AI from a theoretical promise into a strategic asset for national and human security.

The Role of AI in Improving Intelligence Gathering for Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria

Intelligence gathering is fundamental to counter-terrorism efforts, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to significantly enhance Nigeria's capabilities in this regard. AI technologies, such as automated data collection and real-time analysis from diverse sources social media, surveillance systems, and communication networks enable quicker and more accurate threat detection (Arumede & Edwin, 2024). AI-driven tools like video analytics can identify suspicious activities, such as loitering or unauthorized access, facilitating proactive responses before attacks occur (Arumede & Edwin, 2024).

The lack of advanced intelligence gathering in counterterrorism in Nigeria has compounded the issue of human security and protection in Nigeria leading to significant fatalities over the years.

BORNO: Despite a decline in violent fatalities over the past nine years, a significant number of people in Borno continue to lose their lives to conflicts, riots, and other forms of violence

Number of Fatalities from Violence in Borno State, 2015 - 2023



Source: ACLED | Analysis: Dataphyte Research

Figure 3: Fatalities from Boko Haram activities in Borno State

Source: Funmilayo (2024)

Figure 3 depicts the level of humanitarian crises in Borno, widely regarded as the epicenter of terrorist activities in Nigeria. The figure highlights fluctuations in the severity of these crises, showcasing periods of both decline and resurgence in humanitarian challenges within the region. AI significantly has failed to enhance human security within Nigeria's counter-terrorism operations by not providing advanced surveillance, predictive analysis, and early warning systems that can help prevent terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, we argued that its successful implementation requires addressing the ethical challenges posed by mass surveillance and ensuring that AI technologies are deployed in ways that respect the rights and freedoms of Nigerian citizens.

One of the primary hurdles is the fragmented nature of Nigeria's security agencies, which often operate in isolation, leading to inefficiencies in intelligence sharing and analysis. As noted by Okeke et al. (2024), overcoming this fragmentation requires a unified approach where agencies collaborate and share intelligence. Moreover, Nigeria's insufficient technological infrastructure and underdeveloped data collection systems complicate the adoption of AI. Afolayan (2024) suggests the establishment of a National Intelligence Sharing Policy to address these gaps, including improved training and infrastructure.

In conflict zones, particularly the northern regions controlled by insurgent groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP, AI proves invaluable. AI-powered drones and surveillance systems enhance the ability to monitor remote and hostile territories, providing high-resolution imagery and real-time data on insurgent movements (Umaru & Wilson, 2023). These technologies facilitate precision strikes, improving response times and minimizing collateral damage, a contrast to traditional military delays (Ogunnubi & Aja, 2024). AI also plays a crucial role in the protection of reclaimed territories by monitoring borders and critical infrastructure. Autonomous systems can detect infiltration attempts and predict potential insurgent actions, aiding in the stabilization of liberated areas (Umaru & Wilson, 2023). Additionally, AI supports post-conflict reconstruction by providing insights into areas most in need of resources, helping to rebuild governance and restore public trust (Botha, 2025).

Despite these advantages, the implementation of AI in Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy is hindered by infrastructure deficits and a lack of skilled personnel. As Adela (2023) emphasizes, effective AI application relies on inter-agency coordination, which remains a challenge in Nigeria. Nevertheless, with the right reforms, AI can significantly enhance Nigeria's counter-terrorism capabilities, improving intelligence gathering, operational efficiency, and long-term stability.

AI Operational Capabilities of Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Forces

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly advanced Nigeria's counter-terrorism capabilities, especially in the areas of intelligence analysis, logistical optimization, and inter-agency coordination. AI technologies enable the rapid processing of vast datasets, extracting actionable insights from diverse sources such as satellite imagery, intercepted communications, and social media platforms (Ikeanyibe *et al.*, 2023; Okpaleke *et al.*, 2023). This capacity for real-time data analysis enhances the identification of terrorist networks, monitoring insurgent movements, and detecting emerging threats before they fully materialize. By shifting from a reactive to a proactive stance, AI provides Nigerian security forces with the ability to anticipate potential threats, which has proven invaluable in reducing operational failures and preempting attacks. For example, AI-driven video analytics assist in the real-time detection of abnormal behavior such as loitering or unauthorized access allowing security agencies to respond promptly (businessday.ng).

Beyond intelligence gathering, AI has revolutionized military logistics and operational planning in counter-terrorism efforts. AI algorithms enable commanders to simulate various operational scenarios, forecasting the likely outcomes of different tactical decisions and optimizing resource deployment (Suleiman & Omojuwa, 2025). This predictive capability ensures that personnel and equipment are allocated where they are most needed, reducing both response times and operational costs. By improving logistical efficiency, AI enhances Nigeria's capacity to swiftly address evolving threats and allocate resources in a targeted manner, thereby minimizing resource waste.

AI has also played a crucial role in improving coordination between Nigeria's security agencies, addressing a longstanding challenge of fragmented operations. Historically, the lack of seamless communication between military, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement has hindered the effective sharing of information. AI's ability to integrate data from multiple sources into a unified platform has significantly streamlined this communication process, enabling agencies to share critical intelligence in real time (Suleiman & Omojuwa, 2025). This enhanced inter-agency coordination is crucial for counter-terrorism, as timely and accurate information can make the difference between success and failure in high-stakes operations.

Despite these advancements, challenges persist, particularly regarding Nigeria's technological infrastructure and the need for specialized personnel to fully leverage AI tools. The integration of AI into Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy has thus far demonstrated substantial benefits, with improvements in intelligence analysis, operational efficiency, and inter-agency collaboration.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence presents a transformative opportunity to reconfigure Nigeria's counter-terrorism architecture by enhancing intelligence gathering, predictive analytics, and operational responsiveness. Yet, its integration remains constrained by infrastructural deficits, fragmented institutional coordination, and ethical vulnerabilities. While AI offers strategic advantages, its long-term utility depends on the capacity of the Nigerian state to address these systemic challenges and embed AI deployment within a coherent, accountable, and future-oriented security framework.

Recommendations

- i. The government must invest in AI-specific infrastructure and cultivate technical expertise within security institutions, enabling the sustainable use of AI in intelligence analysis and threat prediction.
- ii. Develop a centralized counter-terrorism command structure that fosters inter-agency collaboration, ensuring AI tools are deployed in a harmonized manner to avoid redundancy and enhance operational coherence.
- iii. Establish an independent oversight mechanism to regulate the ethical application of AI in surveillance and intelligence, safeguarding civil liberties while maintaining public trust and ensuring compliance with international human rights standards.

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