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Research article

MICHAEL ENEYO'S FEAROLOGICAL APPROACH TO BANDITRY, BOKO HARAM AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Michael Eneyo^{1*}

¹ Department of Philosophy and Leadership Studies

*Corresponding author: michealeneyoo@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Banditry, Boko Haram insurgency and other forms of terrorism remain major threats to peace, security, environmental sustainability and national development in Nigeria. Conventional responses have largely emphasized military operations, intelligence gathering, arrests, prosecutions and deradicalization programmes. Despite these efforts, insecurity persists in many parts of the country, suggesting the need for complementary approaches that address the psychological, relational and social dimensions of violent extremism. This paper applies Michael Eneyo's Fearological framework to Nigeria's banditry and Boko Haram crises. While conventional security studies often frame insurgency as ideological, economic or criminal, Fearological Ethics reframes violence as a response to misunderstood and manipulated existential fear. The paper argues that Boko Haram and bandit recruitment are sustained by fear of cultural extinction, fear of state abandonment and fear of the Other. It further shows that fearology can shift security practice from eliminating fear to understanding fear, from individual fear to relational fear, and from force-centred responses to systemic fear reduction. These shifts can improve Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration outcomes, intelligence sharing, community trust and civil-military relations. The article proposes a fear-reduction pillar to complement Nigeria's kinetic strategy and offers policy recommendations for security institutions. The paper contributes to decolonizing security studies by centering an African philosophical approach to conflict resolution and environmental security.

KEYWORDS

Fearology;
Fearological Ethics;
Boko Haram;
banditry;
Nigeria;
counter-terrorism;
fear reduction;
environmental security;

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Introduction

Nigeria has experienced multiple forms of violent conflict over the past two decades, including Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, armed banditry in the Northwest, kidnapping and communal violence in different parts of the country. These conflicts have resulted in loss of life, displacement, destruction of infrastructure, economic decline and environmental degradation. Studies consistently show that terrorism and armed conflict remain among the greatest obstacles to national development and sustainable peace in Nigeria (Ike et al., 2022; Aamo et al., 2021). Conventional counterterrorism strategies have focused primarily on military operations, intelligence gathering and law enforcement. Although these approaches remain necessary for the protection of lives and property, scholars increasingly argue that sustainable peace also requires attention to the social, psychological and structural conditions that sustain violent extremism (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997). Central among these conditions is fear. Fear functions simultaneously as a motivator, a mechanism of control and a tool of political violence. Terrorist organizations do not merely seek physical destruction; they also seek psychological domination through fear.

Fear shapes the behaviour of individuals, communities and institutions. Communities abandon farms, businesses close, schools are deserted and citizens may become reluctant to cooperate with security agencies because they fear reprisals. In this sense, understanding fear is essential for understanding the persistence of insurgency and banditry. Michael Eneyo's Fearological Ethics offers an emerging African philosophical framework for examining the role of fear in human behaviour and social conflict. According to Eneyo (2023, 2024), fear is neither inherently negative nor inherently positive; its consequences depend on how it is understood, interpreted and managed. Fearological Ethics seeks to transform destructive forms of fear into constructive forces that promote survival, responsibility, cooperation and development. This article examines how fearology can contribute to addressing Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in Nigeria while also acknowledging the environmental impacts of violent conflict. It argues that any serious counter-terrorism strategy must move beyond treating fear as an emotion to be suppressed and instead treat fear as existential intelligence that reveals what communities value, what they perceive as threats and what must be addressed for peace to become sustainable.

Literature review

Fear, conflict and peacebuilding: theoretical foundations

Fear has long occupied an important position in political philosophy, psychology and peace studies. Nussbaum (2018) describes fear as one of the most powerful political emotions because it shapes perceptions of threat and influences collective behaviour. Subba (2014), one of the leading fearologists/fearists, sees fear as a controller of human actions. Fear can encourage defensive action, social exclusion and support for violence when individuals perceive existential threats to identity, culture or survival.

Lederach (1997) argues that sustainable peace requires the transformation of relationships and the addressing of underlying perceptions that perpetuate conflict. Galtung (1996) similarly distinguishes between direct violence and structural violence, emphasizing that unresolved social grievances can produce recurring cycles of conflict. Fearological Ethics builds upon these insights by proposing that fear itself is not the primary problem. Conflict emerges when fear is misunderstood, manipulated or expressed through violence. From this perspective, insurgency and banditry represent manifestations of unresolved existential fears rather than merely criminal or ideological behaviour.

Environmental consequences of Boko Haram and banditry

Although terrorism is usually analysed through security and political lenses, its environmental consequences are equally significant. Boko Haram insurgency has contributed to environmental degradation across northeastern Nigeria through the destruction of forests, farmlands, water resources, wildlife habitats and public infrastructure. The displacement of populations has also increased pressure on natural resources around internally displaced persons camps, resulting in deforestation, soil degradation and unsustainable resource extraction.

Studies further show that both insurgent activities and counterinsurgency operations have contributed to environmental destruction through habitat loss, landmine contamination, destruction of agricultural lands and pollution of water resources. Banditry has similarly disrupted agricultural production across northern Nigeria. Fear of attacks has forced many farmers to abandon cultivable lands, thereby threatening food security and increasing pressure on remaining ecological resources. Armed attacks on energy infrastructure have generated substantial environmental and economic costs while undermining Nigeria's sustainability objectives.

From a sustainability perspective, insecurity creates a cycle in which environmental degradation fuels poverty, while poverty and resource scarcity create conditions conducive to further recruitment into violent groups. This relationship highlights the need for integrated security and environmental approaches. A security policy that ignores ecological damage and livelihood collapse may reduce immediate threats but fail to address the deeper pressures that sustain conflict.

Methodology

This article adopts a conceptual and analytical design. It applies Michael Eneyo's Fearological Ethics to the interpretation of banditry, Boko Haram insurgency and their environmental impacts in Nigeria. The analysis draws on fearological concepts, peacebuilding theory, counter-terrorism discourse and environmental-security literature. The paper is organized around the central assumption that violent conflict is sustained not only by weapons, ideology and economic grievance but also by unresolved existential fear.

The method is interpretive and policy-oriented. First, the paper identifies the fear dimension of terrorism and banditry. Second, it explains the Acquaintance Method and Love-Fear Method as practical components of Fearological Ethics. Third, it examines the fear of the Other and postcolonial fear of state abandonment as relational and structural dimensions of insecurity. Finally, it proposes fear-reduction strategies that can complement military operations, deradicalization programmes and community peacebuilding efforts.

Fearological framework and the fear dimension of terrorism

Traditional security responses to banditry and Boko Haram often focus on force, including military operations, arrests and weapons recovery. These approaches treat violence as the primary problem. Michael Eneyo's Fearology asks a deeper question: what fear is driving the violence? If fear is part of the root of violence, then solutions must work with fear rather than only suppress its symptoms.

Terrorist organizations depend heavily on fear for their survival. Recruitment often occurs in environments characterized by poverty, insecurity, social exclusion and fear of the future. Members may join extremist groups because they fear unemployment, political marginalization, hunger or violent reprisals. Communities under terrorist control frequently comply with extremist demands because they fear death or punishment. Banditry operates through a similar mechanism. Farmers abandon their lands because they fear attacks; communities pay ransom because they fear losing loved ones; and businesses close because investors fear insecurity.

Fearological Ethics identifies this situation as negative fear. Negative fear restricts human freedom, limits development and encourages harmful actions. Consequently, any sustainable response to terrorism must address not only physical violence but also the fear that sustains it.

The Acquaintance Method and counterterrorism

One of Eneyo's major contributions to fearological studies is the Acquaintance Method. This method maintains that familiar realities generate less fear than unfamiliar ones. Fear can therefore be reduced through understanding, interaction, exposure, dialogue and knowledge acquisition (Eneyo, 2023). Applied to the Nigerian context, the Acquaintance Method suggests several practical strategies.

First, government institutions must strengthen community engagement. Many rural communities affected by insurgency and banditry distrust security agencies. Suspicion creates distance, and distance creates fear. Frequent interaction between security personnel and local populations can improve trust and encourage intelligence sharing. Second, educational institutions should incorporate peace education, conflict resolution and civic responsibility into their curricula. Young people who understand diverse cultures and religious traditions are less likely to be manipulated by extremist ideologies.

Third, interfaith dialogue should be strengthened. Faith-based organizations can play a significant role in counter-radicalization efforts in Nigeria. Religious leaders who engage one another constructively reduce suspicion and weaken extremist narratives that thrive on ignorance and division. Fourth, rehabilitation programmes should emphasize community reintegration rather than mere detention. Without community trust, former extremists may struggle to reintegrate and could become vulnerable to re-radicalization.

The Love-Fear Method and human-centred security

The second major contribution of Fearological Ethics is the Love-Fear Method. According to Eneyo (2024), fear should be managed from a background of love, care and concern for humanity. Actions motivated by ethical concern are more likely to produce positive outcomes than those driven by hatred, vengeance or domination. The Love-Fear Method seeks to replace destructive fear with protective concern for human wellbeing.

Application of this method to the Nigerian security situation requires a shift from mere punishment to human-centred security. Communities affected by terrorism need visible evidence that the state values their lives. Access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities and social welfare programmes communicates concern and reduces the grievances that extremist groups exploit. Youth empowerment is equally important because many recruits into violent groups are young people facing unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Victims of terrorism also require psychological support. Fearological Ethics recognizes that prolonged exposure to violence creates enduring fear. Counselling services, trauma recovery programmes and community healing initiatives should therefore form part of national security policy. Religious institutions also have a responsibility to promote human dignity, peaceful coexistence and social responsibility. Extremist ideologies often flourish where fear-based interpretations of religion dominate public discourse.

Fearological ethics and government policy

Fearological Ethics does not reject military operations. Citizens have a legitimate expectation that the state will protect lives and property. However, military action should be integrated with psychological, educational, social and ethical strategies. A fearological policy framework would include strengthening trust between citizens and security agencies, expanding educational opportunities in vulnerable regions, promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue, supporting deradicalization and reintegration programmes that enjoy community confidence, addressing poverty and unemployment, providing trauma healing for victims, discouraging fear-based political and religious rhetoric, and encouraging responsible media reporting.

This integrated approach recognizes that terrorism is sustained not only through weapons but also through fear, mistrust, ignorance and social fragmentation. The current kinetic operations may reduce Boko Haram and bandit capacity in the short term, but they may not sufficiently reduce recruitment where fear remains unresolved. Fearology therefore offers Nigeria a fourth pillar for security strategy: fear reduction. This pillar can complement existing military and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration work by lowering recruitment, improving intelligence and rebuilding state legitimacy.

Results and discussion

The core problem: fighting symptoms rather than sources

The core argument of this article is that Nigeria's response to terrorism and banditry often fights symptoms rather than sources. Those who are recruited into Boko Haram may cite fear of Western education erasing Islam, fear of state corruption, fear of cultural extinction or fear of death by security forces. Bandit recruits may cite fear of cattle rustling without justice, farmer-herder attacks, starvation and state abandonment. Citizens may cite fear of army crossfire, bandit attacks and perceived government inaction. When these fears are not properly addressed, communities may refuse to share intelligence, making security operations more difficult.

Kinetic operations can create short-term safety but may also deepen long-term fear when communities experience the state mainly through raids, arrests or temporary military presence. Citizens may feel secure during military operations but later fear reprisals when security forces leave. In some cases, fear of reprisals may push youths and adults toward armed groups as a survival strategy. This is why a force-only approach can unintentionally create tomorrow's fighters if it fails to reduce the fear that sustains violence.

Eneyo's Fearology Approach: three shifts for security strategy

Table 1. Eneyo's Fearology Approach: three shifts for security strategy.

Current approach	Fearological shift from Eneyo	Security impact
Eliminate fear by telling citizens not to be afraid and framing insurgents as irrational.	Understand fear. Treat fear as existential intelligence by asking what people fear and how such fear can be reduced non-violently.	Turns fear from paralysis into data, helps communities map real threats and enables security actors to target root drivers rather than only fighters.
Target the Other by framing conflict as Fulani versus farmers or Muslims versus Christians.	Repair relations by beginning dialogue with shared fears such as fear of children dying, poverty, suffering and insecurity.	Creates entry points for peace even where political demands appear non-negotiable and supports exit programmes.
Show force through super camps, airstrikes, mass arrests and firefights.	Reduce systemic fear by pairing security operations with schools, clinics, justice and visible state protection.	Encourages citizens to choose the state over violent groups, increases intelligence sharing and reduces fear of abandonment.

Source: Author's synthesis from Fearological Ethics framework, 2026.

Treating fear as relational, not individual

When Boko Haram is framed only as a Muslims-versus-Christians or state-versus-Islam crisis, and banditry is framed only as a Fulani-versus-farmers problem, the deeper fear structure is obscured. Such framing turns complex conflicts into identity wars. Identity-based interpretation hardens fear of the Other, fuels hatred and can indirectly support further recruitment. Fearological Ethics stresses that postcolonial fear is relational. Fear grows in the gaps between groups that do not understand one another's existential threats.

Application to banditry and Boko Haram requires mapping the fear landscape. Bandits in northwestern Nigeria may cite fear of state neglect, farmer-herder conflict, cattle rustling and poverty. Boko Haram recruits may cite fear of Western education corrupting Islam, fear of state corruption and fear of cultural extinction. A fearological ethical response does not justify violence. Rather, it separates legitimate fear from illegitimate violence. Genuine fears can be recognized and addressed, while violent methods are rejected and held accountable.

For citizens, the state should stop merely telling communities not to be afraid. Fear is not an enemy when it is understood; it can become a tool for mutual living, conflict resolution and problem-solving. Communities should be helped to read fear accurately. They can be guided to ask whether fear is related to random death, specific actors, specific routes or particular times. This turns fear from paralysis into intelligent action.

Inter-group dialogue, deradicalization and fear testing

Current Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes and community dialogues often ask conflicting parties what they want. Bandits may ask for money, and Boko Haram members may make ideological demands. However, such demands may express desire rather than the deeper fear that sustains violence. Fearology provides an alternative line of inquiry by asking what people fear if they lay down arms, what farmers fear when herders pass through their farms, and what communities fear when security personnel arrive. Such questions are more likely to reveal fear of starvation, revenge, death, domination or extinction. These overlapping fears provide entry points for peace.

Deradicalization also requires fear testing. A closed worldview is often sustained by fear-based simplification. If Boko Haram members fear that Western education will destroy Islam, that fear should be examined through evidence, safe exposure and the presentation of successful Muslims who have used Western education for development. Such practical and evidence-based exposure can weaken fear-based narratives. Fearology gives this process a philosophical and problem-solving foundation by focusing attention on the fear that makes extremist ideology attractive.

Postcolonial fear of state abandonment

Postcolonial fear of state abandonment refers to the persistent anxiety among citizens that the state is either unwilling or unable to provide protection, justice, welfare and opportunities necessary for human survival and development. This fear emerges from historical experiences of colonial governance, where political institutions primarily served extractive and coercive purposes rather than the welfare of indigenous populations. Although many African states gained political independence in the twentieth century, weak institutions, uneven development and limited state presence continue to shape citizens' perceptions of government authority.

In many postcolonial societies, the state is often viewed not as a reliable protector but as a distant or selective actor that appears mainly during taxation, elections or security operations. Communities experiencing poverty, poor infrastructure, inadequate healthcare, limited educational opportunities and insecurity may develop a deep fear that they have been abandoned by those entrusted with their protection. This fear is particularly evident in regions affected by insurgency, banditry and communal violence, where citizens may rely on self-help mechanisms, ethnic militias, vigilante groups or non-state actors for survival.

From a fearological perspective, postcolonial fear of state abandonment is an existential fear rooted in concerns about safety, dignity, identity and the future. When citizens believe that the state cannot protect them from violence, hunger, unemployment or social exclusion, they may become vulnerable to alternative sources of authority, including extremist groups. The consequences of this fear extend beyond security challenges. It weakens public trust, reduces cooperation with government institutions, discourages intelligence sharing, undermines democratic participation and fuels social fragmentation.

Addressing postcolonial fear of state abandonment requires more than military intervention. Governments must demonstrate their commitment to citizens through visible and consistent provision of public services, equitable development, access to justice, quality education, healthcare and responsive governance. When citizens experience the state as present, caring and reliable, existential fears are reduced and trust in public institutions is strengthened.

Policy recommendations

First, security agencies should add fear mapping to military operations. Before major operations in affected communities, security institutions should conduct community fear-mapping sessions that identify where, when and from whom civilians fear death or harm most. Such information can help plan operations in ways that reduce civilian fear and increase trust.

Second, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes should be redesigned around fear rather than grievance alone. Instead of asking only why individuals joined violent groups or what they want, programmes should ask what they feared before joining and what they fear if they exit. Such questions can inform reintegration modules that test fears safely and reduce recidivism.

Third, every kinetic operation should be paired with at least one visible fear-reduction project. No security action should stand alone without evidence that the state is also addressing human needs. Clinics, schools, fast-track justice for cattle rustling or land disputes, and livelihood support can help reduce postcolonial fear of state abandonment.

Fourth, commanders and security personnel should be trained in Fearological Ethics. A short module can help officers read fear in communities, understand how operations increase or decrease fear, and communicate in ways that build trust. Such training can be developed in partnership with relevant academic departments and scholars of fearology.

Fifth, security performance should not be measured only by body count or arrests. A fear index should be added to security key performance indicators. Communities can be surveyed on whether they fear the state less than bandits or insurgents. If fear of the state becomes greater than fear of violent groups, then the security strategy is failing even when tactical successes are recorded.

Expected outcomes and implications

When existential fear is reduced, recruitment into violent groups can decline even where ideology remains. Fearology gives Nigeria an African philosophical language for peacebuilding without merely copying Western hearts-and-minds models. The cost of integrating fearology is relatively low because many actions can use existing budgets, personnel and institutions. The risk is also limited because fearology does not negotiate with terrorism; it separates legitimate fear from violent methods.

The major implication is that Nigeria's long-term security must be built around both protection and trust. Communities must experience the state not only as an armed presence but also as a source of justice, welfare and dignity. A fear-reduction approach can improve intelligence sharing, reduce recruitment, support reintegration and strengthen civil-military relations.

Conclusion

Banditry, Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism continue to threaten Nigeria's stability and development. Traditional security measures remain necessary, but they are insufficient when employed in isolation. Michael Eneyo's Fearological Ethics provides an additional philosophical framework for understanding and addressing these challenges. The Acquaintance Method emphasizes knowledge, dialogue, familiarity and trust as tools for reducing fear and preventing radicalization. The Love-Fear Method advocates actions motivated by concern for human welfare rather than hatred or revenge.

Together, these methods offer a pathway toward a society where fear no longer serves as a weapon of manipulation but becomes a constructive force that encourages vigilance, responsibility and peaceful coexistence. Nigeria's long-term security depends not only on defeating terrorists militarily but also on dismantling the culture of fear that sustains violence. Fearological Ethics contributes to this task by combining philosophical reflection with practical strategies for peacebuilding and human development. One cannot kill an idea merely by force, but one can address the fear that makes the idea attractive. Eneyo's Fearology gives Nigeria a tool for that task. Integrated into policy, clear, hold and build can become clear, reduce fear, hold and build.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not applicable. This is a conceptual and policy-oriented article based on existing literature and philosophical analysis.

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