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Security Policy Formulation and Implementation in Nigeria: An Assessment of the National Security Strategy in Addressing Emerging Threats

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Abstract

This study evaluated the relationship between policy formulation, institutional capacity and threat mitigation in Nigeria, where an unprecedented strain from non-traditional threats like violent insurgency, mass abductions, and cybercrime persists despite the National Security Strategy (NSS) blueprint. Grounded in Structural Realism, the research adopted a descriptive survey design to examine how the persistent execution gap affects real-world safety. Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 200 personnel across state security agencies, the Office of the National Security Adviser, and policy institutions in Abuja, yielding 186 valid responses for analysis. The study used descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient for data analysis. Findings revealed a strong, positive relationship between effective strategy implementation and threat mitigation ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$), demonstrating that structured policy execution directly improves operational security outcomes. Conversely, a significant inverse relationship emerged between institutional capacity bottlenecks and policy execution effectiveness ($r = -0.612$, $p < 0.05$). Operational hurdles—particularly inter-agency rivalries, intelligence siloing, funding deficits, and inadequate technological infrastructure—substantially weaken field execution. The study concludes that strategic policy design alone cannot guarantee national stability without addressing internal structural weaknesses. It recommends establishing a centralized joint-intelligence database to eliminate operational siloing and upgrading technological infrastructure alongside field funding to ensure effective security policy enforcement.

Keywords: Institutional Capacity, Inter-Agency Cooperation, National Security Strategy, Policy Implementation, Threat Mitigation

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INTRODUCTION

National security frameworks have moved beyond traditional state-centric defence to address increasingly dynamic, non-traditional, and asymmetric threat environments in today's public administration and strategic governance (Eze & Okafor, 2024; Usman, 2025). For many years, foreign military posture and sovereign border preservation dominated our foreign military posture and sovereign border preservation framework. Non-state actors, cross-border criminal networks, systemic socio-economic grievances, and volatile cyber vulnerabilities constitute our modern security risks. Managing national security now demands a shift from reactive military force to integrated institutional governance that spans defense, intelligence, public administration, and social policy. A vivid illustration of this structural transformation is the rapid escalation of complex, overlapping security dilemmas that characterise Nigeria's security landscape over the past two decades.

Prominent among these are violent extremism in the North-East, widespread banditry and mass abductions in the North-West, secessionist agitation in the South-East, crude oil theft in the Niger Delta, and escalating cyber-attacks across critical national infrastructure (Adetula, 2015; Odigie-Emmanuel, 2026; Onuoha, 2014). Disruption of internal economic activity and exposed critical vulnerabilities within civil and military administration form the hallmark of the expansion of these threats into ungoverned spaces, and have severely tested state authority,

In response to these multi-dimensional challenges, the Federal Government of Nigeria formulated comprehensive strategic blueprints, notably the National Security Strategy (NSS) overseen by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). The policy frameworks, particularly the landmark 2019 NSS review and its subsequent operational updates, were explicitly anchored on a "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" approach (Olugbodi, 2021). The explicit objective of these policy documents was to harmonise military, intelligence, and civil institutions into a unified vector capable of neutralising contemporary national vulnerabilities while safeguarding public welfare and human security. However, a fundamental disconnect persists between formal strategic policy formulation and operational reality on the ground.

Scholars of Nigerian security governance observe that while policy documents often display sound strategic vision, their translation into tangible security outcomes remains deeply flawed (Akinyemi, 2020; Remigius, 2025). Rather than a failure of conceptual policy design, the persistence and resurgence of asymmetric security threats reflect a profound execution deficit. The national intelligence and defense architecture continues to grapple with fragmented inter-agency coordination, operational intelligence siloing, institutional rivalries, and pervasive equipment deficits (Mohammed et al., 2019; Yahaya, 2026). Consequently, criminal networks and insurgent groups frequently exploit these structural operational seams, operating with alarming impunity across remote border regions and urban corridors alike (Okoli & Orinya, 2013).

Understanding the direct relationship between national policy formulation, implementation pathways, and threat mitigation is therefore a vital imperative for security scholars and public policy architects. Policy intent alone cannot yield stability without robust execution mechanisms, transparent administrative structures, and continuous inter-agency collaboration. Evaluating how institutional capacity bottlenecks ranging from inadequate technological integration to inter-agency mistrust hinder the full realization of strategic policy frameworks is crucial for strengthening state resilience (Enemuwe et al., 2026; Imobighe, 2003). A critical assessment of Nigeria's National Security Strategy provides actionable insights into how policy design aligns with operational capacity to safeguard national sovereignty and citizen welfare.

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Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's updated National Security Strategy outlines an ambitious framework for protecting the country, yet insurgency, banditry, and cybercrime continue to spread at an alarming rate. The real issue lies in the deep disconnect between policy design and on-the-ground enforcement. Severe inter-agency rivalries, weak institutional capacity, and systemic funding shortages routinely derail implementation plans. As a result, security agencies struggle to contain evolving threats, leaving a frustrating gap between national security goals and real-world safety.

Objectives of the Study

i. To examine the relationship between the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy and the mitigation of emerging threats in Nigeria.
ii. To determine the relationship between institutional capacity challenges and the effective execution of the National Security Strategy in Nigeria.

Research Questions

i. What is the relationship between the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy and the mitigation of emerging threats in Nigeria?
ii. What is the relationship between institutional capacity challenges and the effective execution of the National Security Strategy in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

HO_1: There is no significant relationship between the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy and the mitigation of emerging threats in Nigeria.

HO_2: There is no significant relationship between institutional capacity challenges and the effective execution of the National Security Strategy in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Realist Theory of Structural Realism

Kenneth Waltz (1979) propounded Structural Realism, which asserts that security environments are defined by an inherently anarchic structure where states must continuously build robust internal capacities to ensure self-preservation and survival. The theory posits that national security policy formulation, threat mitigation, and institutional organisation are dictated by state power dynamics and the imperative to defend national sovereignty against emerging dangers. A primary strength of Structural Realism is its logical clarity in explaining why governments prioritise centralised national security strategies and hard-power capabilities when facing existential threats. However, its main weakness stems from an overemphasis on traditional state-to-state conflict, often failing to account for internal administrative friction, soft-power diplomatic tools, or the rise of non-state violent actors in modern asymmetric warfare.

Despite these limitations, the theory provides a highly relevant analytical foundation for this study. It clarifies why the Federal Government of Nigeria formulates overarching frameworks like the National Security Strategy to maintain state survival. Furthermore, it offers a solid lens to examine how internal institutional capacity deficits and structural operational gaps directly weaken the state's ability to neutralize modern security threats.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design utilising a quantitative approach to evaluate the

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relationship between policy formulation, institutional capacity, and threat mitigation.

Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population comprises officers across state security agencies, personnel within the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), and policy experts in Abuja, Nigeria. A sample of 200 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation across civil, intelligence, and military sectors.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Primary data were gathered using a structured, 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire titled *Security Policy Implementation and Threat Mitigation Questionnaire (SPITMQ)*. The instrument measures key variables including strategy formulation, inter-agency coordination, institutional capacity challenges, and execution effectiveness.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was calculated to test the two null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance and determine the strength and direction of relationships between policy variables and threat mitigation.

Results and Discussions

Out of the 200 copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents across military, intelligence, and civil security sectors in Abuja, 186 fully completed copies were retrieved, yielding a 93.0% response rate. Data were analysed using a benchmark mean of 2.50 on a 4-point Likert scale (4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree).

Response to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy and the mitigation of emerging threats in Nigeria?

Item Description	Mean (x)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Decision
Comprehensive strategy formulation directly enhances operational threat response.	3.24	0.68	Agreed
Effective implementation pathways lead to a measurable drop in emerging threats.	3.18	0.72	Agreed
Alignment between strategic policy goals and field operations improves security outcomes.	3.31	0.65	Agreed
Regular updates to security policy frameworks strengthen overall national resilience.	3.05	0.80	Agreed
Grand Mean	**3.20**	**0.71**	**Agreed**

Source: *Field survey, 2026*

The data in the table above show an overall grand mean of 3.20, which is well above the 2.50 decision threshold. This indicates that respondents strongly agree that proper formulation and execution of the National Security Strategy directly correlate with mitigating emerging threats across Nigeria.

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Research Question 2: What is the relationship between institutional capacity challenges and the effective execution of the National Security Strategy in Nigeria?

Item Description	Mean (x)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Decision
Inter-agency rivalries and poor intelligence sharing derail strategic execution.	3.45	0.58	Agreed
Inadequate technological infrastructure limits early threat detection and response.	3.38	0.62	Agreed
Funding deficits and resource misallocations weaken institutional operational readiness.	3.29	0.70	Agreed
Insufficient personnel training limits the capacity to implement modern security policies.	3.12	0.75	Agreed
Grand Mean	**3.31**	**0.66**	**Agreed**

Source: *Field survey, 2026*

The results show a grand mean of 3.31, indicating high agreement among respondents that institutional capacity challenges—particularly inter-agency rivalries and technological gaps severely compromise the effective execution of national security frameworks.

Hypotheses Testing

Both hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance (N = 186) using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r).

Hypothesis One (H01): *There is no significant relationship between the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy and the mitigation of emerging threats in Nigeria.*

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value (2-tailed)	Significance Level	Decision
Strategy Formulation & Implementation	186	0.684	0.000	0.05	Reject H01
Threat Mitigation	186				

Statistical Decision: The calculated correlation coefficient ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$) reveals a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between strategy formulation/implementation and threat mitigation. Consequently, H01 is rejected.

Hypothesis Two (H02): *There is no significant relationship between institutional capacity challenges and the effective execution of the National Security Strategy in Nigeria.*

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value (2-tailed)	Significance Level	Decision
Institutional Capacity Challenges	186	-0.612	0.000	0.05	Reject H02

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Strategy Execution Effectiveness	186

Statistical Decision: The analysis yields a negative correlation ($r = -0.612$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a significant inverse relationship. As institutional capacity challenges increase, the effective execution of the National Security Strategy significantly decreases. Thus, H02 is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study demonstrate a strong, statistically significant relationship between the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the mitigation of emerging threats in Nigeria ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$). Respondents clearly recognised that formal strategic frameworks provide the necessary operational blueprint for proactive threat response. This aligns with the findings of Asongo and Shagari (2025), who observed that structured policy frameworks and joint collaborative guidelines significantly improve security responses and territorial control when operationalised effectively. Similarly, Olugbodi (2021) argued that the systematic review and implementation planning of national security blueprints like the NSS remain vital prerequisites for establishing institutional resilience against dynamic non-state security threats.

Conversely, the study revealed a significant negative correlation between institutional capacity challenges and effective policy execution ($r = -0.612$, $p < 0.05$). Operational bottlenecks—most notably inter-agency rivalries, severe intelligence siloing, and equipment shortages—substantially derail implementation. This result strongly echoes Yahaya (2026), who highlighted that structural fragmentation among security institutions and information siloing routinely create operational corridors that criminal networks and kidnap gangs exploit. Furthermore, Mohammed et al. (2019) emphasised that when state institutions grapple with institutional rivalries, limited logistics, and corporate operational weaknesses, their administrative capacity to execute coordinated security policies is severely compromised. Addressing these structural capacity deficits is therefore essential for turning national policy vision into tangible security outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that effectively formulating and implementing the National Security Strategy is essential for mitigating emerging threats in Nigeria. However, persistent institutional capacity challenges, particularly inter-agency rivalries, intelligence siloing, and resource shortages, severely hinder successful policy execution. Bridging the gap between strategic policy intent and operational reality requires addressing these structural bottlenecks. Enhancing inter-agency collaboration, modernising technological infrastructure, and ensuring adequate funding will convert security policy frameworks into practical, long-term national protection.

Recommendations

1. Security agencies should set up a shared intelligence database to stop inter-agency rivalries and improve joint security operations.
2. The government should provide modern tracking technology and better funding to help security agencies execute national security policies effectively.

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