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Ghana's resilience to terrorism: Costly signalling of terrorist groups or strength of counter terrorism strategy?

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Abstract

West African countries show some degree of readiness to combat terrorism; however, not all countries in the subregion have encountered direct terrorist attacks. This raises the question of what experiences inform counter terrorism strategies of terrorism resilient countries and why such countries seem to avoid terrorism despite sharing borders and histories as well as combating terrorist groups alongside countries devastated by terrorism. This paper explores Ghana's resilience to terrorism and seeks to understand whether such exceptionalism is due to costly signalling of terrorist groups or strength of the state-led counter terrorism strategy. The paper demonstrates how Ghana's resilience is linked more directly with the socio-political set-up of the nation-state. The construction of the nation-state provides prohibitions against identity-based extremism, a dynamic that increases the cost of home-grown terrorism, unlike the state-led counter terrorism strategy which sometimes seems to be vulnerable to terrorism. The paper concludes with insights for sustainable management of terrorism resilience.

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Introduction

Terrorist groups have proliferated in West Africa. This has included homegrown groups and foreign fighters. The Al-Qaida group in the Maghreb, for example, claims affiliation to the global Al-Qaeda network with origins to the Arabian Peninsula. The Islamic State of West Africa has similarly been a franchise of the Islamic State of Syria and Levant. The Boko Haram group in Nigeria has been the most notorious homegrown group operating in the sub-region of West Africa.

The Sahelian countries, comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger and northward regions of Nigeria have been the epicentres of the atrocious activities of these groups (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015; Cline, 2021). Indeed, littoral countries, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin have seen various attacks, however, they have also remained resilient against terrorist groups taking territories inside their national borders (Bala & Tar, 2021; Ero & Mutiga, 2021; Maiangwa, 2014). The increasing spread of terrorism has resulted in almost all countries in the region typically showing some degree of readiness to combat terrorism and violent extremism (Courtright, 2023; Okpaleke, Nwosu, Okoli, & Olumba, 2023).

This readiness raises the question of what experiences inform counter terrorism strategies of terrorism resilient countries and why such countries seem to avoid terror attacks despite sharing borders and histories as well as combating terrorist groups alongside countries devastated by terrorism. This paper turns to the issue of resilience to terrorism in West Africa, focusing exclusively on Ghana. Ghana is one of the few countries that have been resilient to the proliferation of homegrown terrorist groups and cross-border and solidarity attacks.

Ghana still has some of the dynamics that drive terrorism in other countries. Ghana is a major actor in West Africa counter terrorism operations. It tends to offer political leadership to the region's security architecture, and directly contributes militarily to multi-state operational efforts against terrorist groups (Addo, 2008; Iddris, 2020). Ghana also hosts a quasi-US military base (Africanews.Com., 2018; Iddris, 2020) and relates effectively with foreign countries, including France that has been instrumental in counter terrorism operations in the Sahel region (Baldaro & Diall, 2020; Cline, 2021).

The capital city, Accra, has also continued to host high-level anti-terrorism summits (Iddris, 2020). These dynamics have, however, not occasioned any diffused violence, unlike countries such as Kenya and Uganda in East Africa, that have suffered Al-Shabab diffused attacks for their involvement in counter terrorism operations in Somalia, Al-Shabab's home-country (Ero & Mutiga, 2021). This paper particularly explores whether Ghana's exceptionalism to terrorism is linked to costly signalling of terrorist groups (i.e., rational decisions of terrorists to forego targeting Ghana) or strength of the state-led counter terrorism strategy (i.e., governance and law enforcement systems).

The rest of the paper is structured such that in the next section, we review the existing literature to conceptualise and explain costly signalling decisions of terrorists and counter terrorism strategy of states. We follow this up with a discussion regarding the context of Ghana's resilience within the West African sub-region. This section identifies opportunity structures likely to attract and/or prohibit terrorism in the country. It highlights the social, political, ethnic, religious, economic and regional dynamics likely to inform costly signalling decisions of terrorists. In the next section, we present Ghana's resilience from the perspective of the historical construction of the nation, highlighting how the return of the country from a quasi-federal state to a unitary one immediately after independence has been helpful against violent mobilisations with identity overtures.

This is followed by the counter terrorism strategy of the state, focusing on political and security governance in the contemporary state. This section critically reviews and evaluates terrorism legal provisions from the national constitution, legislative enactments and judicial rulings as well as securitised speech-acts of state actors, such as ministers and presidents. In the concluding section, we reflect on the major findings and establish where Ghana's resilience to terrorism specifically lies – whether in the hearts and minds of the population and/or embedded in the coercive powers of state to deter proliferation of terrorist groups.

Conceptual and literature review

Drivers of terrorism and terrorism resilience in West Africa

Why terrorism occurs, that is, violent acts committed with intention to coerce, intimidate and/or kill others to attain political, economic, religious, ideological and/or social goals (Kis-Katos, Liebert, & Schulze, 2011) in West Africa, has been extensively studied (Bala & Tar, 2021; Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021; Ero & Mutiga, 2021). Three important explanations have also been apparent in emergent literature. First, the onset of terrorism has often been linked to bad governance and poor political leadership (Adelaju, Labo, & Penar, 2018; Maiangwa, 2014). West African states are often associated with poor state monopoly over use of coercion and as such tend to fail to police entire populations and national borders (Ero & Mutiga, 2021; Bala & Tar, 2021). This weakness creates security vacuums, which are then filled by community-based self-defence brigades. The discourse in this perspective shows West Africa's non-state groups typically promote sectional agenda, including protecting ethnic and/or religious community perceived to have been neglected by central state governments (Elden, 2014; Maiangwa, 2014). This condition is deemed to create situations whereby different sectional groups compete for supremacy and control of interests, which in the process antagonise one group against the other. The inter-brigade and intercommunity clashes also court the attention of state security actors to intervene (Baldaro & Diall, 2020; Raineri & Strazzari, 2015).

State interventions in these clashes often include repressions which end up pushing even non-violent groups to resort to extremist tactics, in the hope to evade police brutalities (Bappah, 2016; Elden, 2014). This dynamic means the problem of terrorism in West African is linked to lapses in security and political leadership and therefore makes accountable political leadership and effective capacity of state, including strengthening national defence forces, immigration services and police agencies to be the optimal measures to counter terrorism. For example, defence and immigration forces can help to deter and prevent cross-border infiltration of foreign fighters while effective police systems can pre-empt incidents of violent community clashes that may give rise to homegrown terrorism (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021; Iddris, 2020).

The second causal dynamic of terrorism in West Africa is attributed to socio-economic factors. West Africa is showcased as having poor social welfare policies which in addition to higher youth unemployment and poverty drive young people to take up arms in effort to better their living conditions (Agbiboa, 2015; Iyekekpolo, 2016; Onapajo & Ozden, 2020). This problem creates widespread mastery of violence and insecurity within society (Agbiboa, 2015; Bappah, 2016). Thus, improving the socio-economic conditions of countries devastated by terrorism emerges as the optimal counter terrorism measure. It also means ensuring no group feels excluded from the distribution of national resources and promoting reciprocal respect for diversities across society can offer efficient deterrence against terrorism. These measures should improve state legitimacy in the minds and hearts of the population and prevent individualised and/or group-based attempts to violently attack state representatives and infrastructures.

The third causal explanation, however, suggests terrorist groups often have supreme values which can be independent of political and economic dynamics of countries (Elden, 2014; Okpaleke, Nwosu, Okoli, & Olumba, 2023). This perspective rekindles winder debates that groups motivated by ideological fundamentalism are less likely to be swayed by improvements in their politico-security and socio-economic conditions (Freytag, Krüger, Meierrieks, & Schneider, 2011). Ideologically inclined groups, such as Boko Haram, seek to displace the Nigerian state and install a version suitable to their ideals of government and as such remain unwilling to accept compromises from state authorities (Elden, 2014; Lyekekpolo, 2016). This point largely makes defeating active terror groups militarily, while criminally prosecuting their sympathisers an important counterterrorism. It also means finding the supreme value, i.e., ideology and countering such a value with superior values could help hold communities back from sympathising and/or offering safe havens for terrorist actors.

The foregoing explanations are not just largely universal in nature, but they have also been derived generally from studies of actual incidents of terrorism. This means present debates of why terrorism is endemic in West Africa are significantly poor with insights derived from how terrorism has been resisted not just by some countries but also in some parts of countries devastated by terrorism. The extent to which they are universally applicable to all cases of terrorist incidents can moreover be debated. For example, the dynamics that gave rise to Boko Haram in northern Nigeria have been different from those of Islamic State and Al-Qaeda affiliates in Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger.

The foundation of Boko Haram has been linked to intensive Islamic activism that took place in the north long before Nigeria was put together as a nation-state (Adelaju, Labo,

& Penar, 2018; Iyekekpolo, 2016). These activisms, however, peaked due to differential developments of the nation-state, including the adoption of Sharia (Islamic law) in some parts of the country, such as Zamfara, which subsequently encouraged other states, such as Yobe and Borno, where Boko Haram originated from, to want to practice Sharia (Eden, 2014). Boko Haram therefore emerged as jihadi nationalists, as their violent interpretations and applications of Islamic laws were confined within Nigeria.

Boko Haram has indeed transformed with increased cross-border attacks in Cameroun and Niger, Nigeria's neighbouring countries. However, its foundation still differs significantly from the jihadi internationalists of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as these groups are internationally oriented in their violent interpretations and applications of Sharia. The affiliates of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Sahel moreover owe their foundation to the collapse of the Libyan state following the 2010-2011 Arab Spring (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021; Okpaleke, Nwosu, Okoli, & Olumba, 2023; Raileigh, Nsaibia, & Dowd, 2020).

This collapse facilitated criminal trade of weapons stolen from the liquidated Libyan army. The Tuareg ethnic group which had been agitating for independence in northern Mali subsequently exploited the availability of lethal weapons in effort to expedite their course for independence with military force (Baldaro & Diall, 2020; Raineri & Strazzari, 2015). This called for state intervention, but the Malian army came in poorly prepared, resulting in a defeat that also triggered junior military officers to overthrow the government (Cline, 2021; Raileigh, Nsaibia, & Dowd, 2020).

These developments set Mali up with social divisions and led to the collapse of the central state in some parts of the country and allowed for communities to form self-defence identity-based vigilante groups (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021; Cline, 2021). The security vacuums created opportunities for the emergence of extremist groups who later pledged loyalty to global networks of Islamic State and Al-Qaeda (Baldaro & Diall, 2020; Cline, 2021).

Analytical framework

The foregoing insights imply that the foundation of terrorist groups typically differs across countries. Thus, conditions conducive to the emergence and effectiveness of terrorism are country specific, although once terrorism emerges, terrorist groups tend to mobilise multiple grievances to maintain momentum (Freytag, Krüger, Meierrieks, & Schneider, 2011; Kis-Katos, Liebert, & Schulze, 2011; Okpaleke, Nwosu, Okoli, & Olumba, 2023). In other words, terrorism is partly a costly signalling activity, in that it relates with rational decisions of terrorists to include or exclude a country in their objectives. However, the rational decisions of terrorism are informed variously by both internal and external behaviours of countries. Countries with high levels of internal group-based grievances and sense of state neglect could offer low prohibitions (i.e., low cost) against terrorism. This scenario could be more conducive to the emergence and proliferation of homegroup terrorism compared with countries with low internal identity-based grievance and widespread high sense of state legitimacy (i.e., low-cost signalling).

Similarly, countries with hostile foreign behaviours, especially towards terrorist groups operating in near-by countries could attract cross-border diffused attacks from such groups (i.e., weak counterterrorism strategy). In a similar vein, effective state policing of communities and widespread reciprocal respect for group-based differences could downplay emergence of terrorism, making the emergence and instrumentalism of terrorism highly prohibitive (i.e., strong counterterrorism strategy). This paper argues that terrorists decide rationally on whether to include or forgo a target. Cost signalling decisions of terrorists are informed not only by societal factors at sub-state level but can also explain the types of home-grown terrorisms likely to emerge and what types of violent methods such group are likely prioritise. For example, Freytag and colleagues (2011, p. 6) argued that levels of "sympathy, acceptance or support for terrorist activities" within a country can be an "important factor that helps terrorism to develop". In other words, countries with low support for extremism are costly for terrorism, while countries with high support for extremism offer low cost to doing terrorism. Freytage and colleagues (2011, p. 6) thus further intimated that low-cost dynamics enable "terrorists to find retreats or gain financial aid". The more support 'terrorists obtain from the[ir] environment, the lower are the opportunity costs for individuals to become terrorists' (Freytag, Krüger, Meierrieks, & Schneider, 2011, p. 7).

This paper, hence, frames factors that inform rational decisions of terrorists (i.e., costly signalling) around societal level factors, including histories and relationships of religious, ethnic and political interactions across communities. We further associate strength of counter terrorism strategy, on the other hand, with how the state of Ghana approaches issues of terrorism, including laws, regulations, policies and speeches aimed at protecting, preventing, pre-empting and responding to terrorist threats in West Africa and emergence inside the national territories.

Ghana's exceptionalism in West Africa's terrorist threat

Ghana has been resilient to terrorism. The dynamics involved in terrorist activities around the sub-region are, however, observable in the country. Ghana has some of the political, religious, ethnic, economic and regional dynamics that have driven extremism elsewhere in the region. For example, interethnic conflicts have been pervasive in the country, especially in the northward regions (Paalo & Issifu, 2021). These areas share borders with Burkina Faso, which has been devastated by terrorism (Africa Defence Forces, 2022a; Courtright, 2023). Bawku, which shares borders with Burkina Faso, has ethnically based chieftaincy conflict which dates to colonial times. This conflict frequently flares up and creates anxieties in Ghanaian security circles. It is worried Bawku could easily become a safe haven for terrorist groups in their activities in the Sahel region, such as illustrated in this media report:

> *10 months of retaliatory violence that … saw at least 90 people killed and split Bawku along ethnic lines … caught the attention of many Western security analysts watching the conflict in neighbouring Burkina Faso, where a collection of armed groups linked to al Qaeda and the Islamic State group have grabbed territory and displaced 1.7 million people internally with alarming speed in recent years, often by exploiting hyperlocal conflicts. ... Analysts warned that the chieftaincy dispute in Bawku, just a few miles from the border with Burkina Faso, was fertile ground for jihadist infiltration — and would mark a worrying spill-over of the Sahel's terrorist groups into Ghana* (Courtright, 2023).

Thus, the volatile context of Bawku potentially offers strong opportunities for terrorist recruitment and financing activities. There is moreover a separatist problem in the eastward region which dates to the immediate years of independence in 1956 (Bening, 1983; Ullo, 2020; Wiafe, 2021). The Western Togoland separatist group has been agitating for independence from mainland Ghana (Bulgarelli, 2018). Their separatism agenda has indeed lacked substantive support and sympathy from the local population (Bulgarelli, 2018; Wiafe, 2021). The eastward region, however, shares borders with Burkina Faso to the north and Togo to the East, both countries have variously seen terrorism (Baldaro & Diall, 2020; Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021). Neither the ethnic violence in the northward communities nor separatism problem in the eastward region has indeed created security vacuums significant enough to drive extremism in Ghana, as the cases of Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso have been.

Few Ghanaian nationals have, however, participated in global terrorism. Nazir Alema Nortei who had studied geography at a university in Ghana joined Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and was killed in August 2015 (BBC.Com., 2015). His farewell text message to his parents provoked national concerns (Sahara Reporters, 2015) and yet barely 6 years later, another Ghanaian, Abu Dujana, detonated a suicide car bomb at a French Reconnaissance camp in Mali in June 2021 (Ghanaweb.Com., 2021). Media disourse often suggested they had been pushed out by indignities of poverty to join these deadly groups (Sahara Reporters, 2015; Ghanaweb.Com., 2021). Abu Dujana's pre-recorded video message, however, echoed pan-Fulani identity revival (Ghanaweb.Com., 2021), linked to increased participation of Fulanis in West Africa terrorism more broadly (Bala & Tar, 2021; Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021). The Fulani ethnic group may constitute barely 0.02% of the over thirty million Ghanaian population (Cline, 2021; Republic of Ghana, 2021). However, Dujana self-identified not only as Fulani but he also claimed a local attachment to Karaga, a community in northern Ghana where herder-farmer and ethnic conflicts have gained significant notoriety (Paalo & Issifu, 2021).

The Fulanis in Ghana, just like those in other parts of the West African region (Bukari & Schareika, 2015; Cline, 2021), are generally nomads. They take their cattle around in search of pasture, a lifestyle that frequently leads them into clashes with subsistence crop-farmers (Bukari & Schareika, 2015). It further renders the younger generation landless (Setrana, 2021). This vulnerability occurs in a country where local attachment is required before one could be recognised as a national and accorded a citizen status (Yaa, 2020; Republic of Ghana, 2021). This sense of non-belonging and dispossession appears to have motivated Dujana to migrate to join violent extremist groups. His pre-recorded farewell note to his parents, for example, called on the youth, especially 'his Fulani ethnic group to take up arms against Ghana' (Ghanaweb.Com., 2021). This call suggests there is an apparent weak sense of national recognition among border town communities. It is buttressed by frequent agitation of border communities to be included in national policies such as the voter registration, census and national identification cards because they have their ancestry straddled across the other side of the border (Bukari & Schareika, 2015; Setrana, 2021; Yaa, 2020).

Besides the case of Nazir Alema and Abu Dujana, an incident occurred on 28th December 2021 at the country's Kotoka international airport in Accra, which the anti-bomb squad of the Ghana Armed Forces was called to investigate a suspicious, unattended bag. The official statement of the airport confirmed the incident but failed to mention its contents.[1] This created public anxiety, including media reports which shared videos of panicked travelers alleging that they had been "detained after they had been told of a bomb attack, but the supposed bomb went off after a while" (Dailyguidenetwork.Com, 2021). Examining these insights with near-terrorism real-life cases cited the foregoing section, it could be plausibly reiterated that chances of homegrown groups to emerge and be effective in Ghana, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria remain significantly low (i.e., high costly signalling). However, the likelihood of cross-border attacks seems significantly high (i.e., state-led counter terrorism fragmentation). The exceptional case of Ghana to West Africa's terrorist threat therefore seems to lie more in the prohibitive dynamics of the set-up of nation-state, compared to state-directed counter terrorism strategy.

Understanding Ghana's resilience to terrorism

Costly signalling dynamics

Ghana is a plural country with over thirty million population identify with different ethnic, regional and religious groups and subscribe to different political and economic ideologies (Republic of Ghana, 2021). They, however, co-exist with all the differences entailed within and across their respective group lines. This distinctive feature links with the construction of the country into a modern nation-state. Ghana is a former British colony and was hence subjected to the policy oof indirect rule that characterised British colonialism. The policy amplified existing local cleavages for the benefit of the colonial authority (Allman, 1990; Schwelb, 1960). This, including the formation of the country, which was divided into four autonomous regions, including the Colony of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Trans-Volta Togoland and Northern Protectorate. The Colony comprised coastline communities while Ashanti comprised the middle, forestland belt area and Northern Protectorate consisted of the savanna-land laid up above the Ashanti enclave

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[1] Ghana Airport Company press release 'Incident at Arrival Hall, Kotoka International Airport' 29th December 2021

(Allman, 1990; Bening, 1983). The Trans-Volta Togoland represented the eastward communities which presently share border with the Republic of Togo and where there a separatist agenda has persisted since 1956 (Bulgarelli, 2018).

These divisions created a quasi-federal state, whereby chiefs, community elders and educated elites were empowered to rule the designated areas on behalf of the colonial authority. The northern communities particularly acted as labour reserve for the cocoa plantation and mining works in the Ashanti enclave and trading posts along the coast. This trend led to emergence of settler communities, popularly known as zongos in contemporary southern Ghana communities (Abdul-Hamid, 2011). These communities mostly identify as migrants but with strong leanings towards Islam (Abdul-Hamid, 2011). The quasi-federate state amplified local divisions, such that the autonomous regions emerged at the independence struggle with their respective identity-based political parties. The Northern Territories had Northern People's Party, while the Muslim People's Party canvassed support from Muslim-dominated communities. The National Liberation Movement (NLM) canvassed political sentiment in the Ashanti while the Togoland Congress held Trans-Volta Togoland political sentiments. Allman (1990, p. 263), citing Hailey (I951), illustrated the political situation in the Ashanti more particularly as such: "[a]t one period Ashanti national sentiment undoubtedly looked forward to the evolution of the country into a separate political unit".

The Ashanti separatism agenda was quashed with the "the political integration of Ashanti with the Gold Coast Colony" in 1946 (Hailey, 1951, cited in Allman, 1990, p. 263); however, it had sown a discord which would resurface in the lead to independence in 1957. For example, Nkrumah-led nationalist Convention People's Party (CPP) indeed campaigned on nation-wide nationalism, enabling it to eventually win the independent elections. The nascent CPP government however, met fierce resistance from the Ashanti-led NLM as the NLM opposed unitary state and "asserted Asante's right to self-determination in the face of Kwame Nkrumah's blueprint for a unitary government in an independent Ghana" (Allman, 1990, p. 264). The NLM leaders at some point indeed "alternated demands for Asante autonomy within a federated Gold Coast with calls for Asante's complete secession" (Allman, 1990, p. 264). Their agitations had however, created conditions for politically motivated ethnic-based violence to plague major cities of the Ashanti region to the extent that colonial officials could only watch while "their model colony teeter on the brink of civil war" (Allman, 1990, p. 264). Thus,

> *For nearly three years most Asante supporters of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) lived in exile in Accra. Indeed, Nkrumah, out of fear for his safety, did not cross the Pra River, the boundary between Asante and the Colony, until well after independence in 1957. In short, the NLM not only posed a serious threat to the stability of Nkrumah's pre-independence government, but it destroyed the illusion, present since I951 … that the Gold Coast's transition to full self-rule would proceed with rapidity and order (Allman, 1990, p. 264).*

The danger these divisions posed to national peace and unity of the new nation-state prompted the Nkrumah-led nationalist government to immediately recentralise the state and collapsed any form of local political mobilisation. It led to the one-party state system that Ghana practiced up until the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966. It was assumed centralised state promotes national unity and needed to engineer reciprocal respect for differences at the societal level. This statecraft also involved the banning of political formation along sectional lines and encouraged nation building formulae that kept ethnic, religious and regional cleavages below the national-state level. This effectively liquidated the 'quasi-federal' state and retained the unitary state across successive governments that came after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966.

The prohibitive powers of national constitutions are especially observed in the present 1992 Constitution and the 1960 Constitution, which liquidated the federal state and its sectional political formations. Article 55 of the 1992 Constitution, for example, fully prohibits identity-based political formations. It requires items of registered political parties such as colour, motto, emblem, flag and name to have no regional, ethnic, religious or any sectional connotations. It further mandates all registered political parties to have branches in each of the country's sixteen regions and "be organized in at least two-thirds of all districts in each of these regions" (Brierley & Ofosu, 2014, p. 1). These constitutional arrangements offer political parties incentives to promote religious, ethnic and regional balance in candidate selection, which in the process, is hoped to foster a popular sense of ethnic, regional and religious inclusion in both partisan and national politics (Brierley & Ofosu, 2014). This strategically keeps dynamics of the plural context from surfacing actively in state governance.

Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution further ensures the unitary state is decentralised. This provision has since 1993 been operationalised with the Local Government Act (462), as amended in 2016, as Act 936 and 2017 as Act 940. These legal frameworks have ensured the central state transfers some of its functions and powers to formally established sub-national assemblies to perform and deliver public goods and services to local residents (Ahwoi, 2020; Awortwi, 2010). These institutional level measures promote grassroot participation and ownership of the socio-economic development and prosperity of the country. They afford local residents the power to elect local elites, who in turn are assembled in each district assembly office to deliberate and address matters of concern to the communities they represent (Awortwi, 2010; Ahwoi, 2020).

These multiple layers of governance ensure inclusion in state governance and help moderate perceptions of exclusion that could have driven certain regions and groups to treat the state as unrepresentative of their concerns and engage in rebellion, drawing the state to reciprocate with repression. The decentralised local governance system has a deterrent effect to moderate grievances of 'ungoverned spaces' which typically motivate proliferation of extremist groups. This way of managing diversity in Ghana does not however, necessarily mean people take no identity items into account in their personal choices. Choices related to marriage, worship, collegial groupings and cultural celebrations (Abdul-Hamid, 2011) as well as civic exercises, such as voting often show linkages with ethnic, regional and religion affiliations (Basedau, Erdmann, J., & Stroh, 2011). What it means, however, is that the deliberate policies of the state seem to have helped moderate the mobilising effect of identity differences at the state level, which in turn contributes to weakening their salience and potency to be mobilised to foment intolerance and extremism at societal level (Abdul-Hamid, 2011). The replacement of a quasi—federate state with a strong unitary state and how the unitary state is structured offer prohibitions in general terms against the proliferation of homegrown extremist groups.

Strength of state counter terrorism strategy

The state-led response to terrorism is undergirded by the national constitution of 1992 and the various legislative acts, instruments and executive instruments as well as administrative regulations. Foremost among these include the Anti- Money Laundering Act, 2008 (Act 749), Anti-Terrorism Act, 2008 (Act 762) and Economic and Organised Crime Office Act, 2010 (Act 804). Also included are the Anti-Money Laundering Regulations, 2011 (L.I. 1987), Anti-Terrorism Regulations, 2012 (L.I. 2181) and Economic and Organised Crime Office (Operations) Regulations, 2012 (L.I. 2183). There is also the Security and Intelligence Agency Act, 2020 (Act 1030). These security related legal arrangements are read in context of the country's Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 61). The legal tools give the state the power to determine what is a terrorist act and how to deal with it. The foundation of the counter terrorism strategy is, however, especially undergirded by the Anti-Terrorism Act itself, 2008 (Act 762). It was amended in 2012 (Act 842) and again in 2014 (Act 875) but still frames terrorism as act performed in furtherance of a political, ideological, religious, racial or ethnic cause. This legal definition is oddly generic and hence Adarkwah (2020) described it as evasive because it makes every violent act potentially a terror act. This means it can be exploited by repressive governments to stifle civil dissent and prosecute political opponents as terrorists. Norman and colleagues (2014, p. 204) raised similar concerns as such: a thief of Caucasian extraction fleeing from a bank robbery and exchanging gunshots with the police in a predominantly Black nation like Ghana would be considered a terrorist. The words 'political', 'ideological', 'religious' or 'racial' as qualifiers … appear to render the definition of terrorism nebulous or pedestrian…. the Act poses immense threat to human rights, the abuse of Due Process and … Civil Rights.

The vague framework of this law may, however, be explained by the multidirectional activities of terrorist groups. For example, while terrorist groups often emerge with specific motives, they tend to mobilise other grievances once they have gained momentum (Okpaleke, Nwosu, Okoli, & Olumba, 2023). This means a tightly concise and settled approach could pose challenges, including provoking specific religious, ethnic, political and cultural groups to think that their issues have been specifically targeted. The wideranging discretion of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2008 (Act 762) nonetheless seems to be more reflective of the years sanctioned for convicted persons. While the minimum jail term is seven years, the maximum is twenty-five, which means one judge could commit a convicted suspect into seven-year jail term while another goes for the maximum of twenty-five. The Act, however, seems to relate more distinctively with several United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, including resolution 2178 (2014), 2396 (2017) but more especially resolution 2462 (2019) which states that "any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever, wherever and by whomsoever committed." This frame relays terrorism as a criminal act and hence gives the state a primary jurisdiction over its control and prosecution. The terrorism law in Ghana yet lacks specific provisions for dead and returned foreign fighters, although such persons could be assigned and treated in terms of 'persons of interests' as detailed in section 49 of the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2020 (Act 1030).

The legal context underpins counter terrorism policies of the state. The Executive Instrument II, issued in 2012, especially led to the establishment of an Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Inter-Ministerial Committee. The committee was tasked to implement several United Nations Security Council Resolutions, including resolution 1267 (1999), 1373 (2001), 1718 (2006), 1737 (2006). Its composition consists of the Minister responsible for Finance and Economic Planning, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Attorney-General and Justice, National Security as well Deputy Chief of Staff of the President, and Governor of the central Bank of Ghana. Interestingly, however, it is chaired by Finance and Economic Planning Minister even though the membership includes Interior Minister who has the stated responsibility over internal security. The Committee's functions include maintaining a Domestic Terrorist Group List. The procedure to use to name a group as an extremist, however, is taken from foreign countries. It states that the minister in charge of foreign affairs should invoke the powers of regulation 5(1) of the Anti-Terrorism Regulations 2012 (L.I. 2181) to 'forward to the Finance Minister the listing or de-listing of any individual, entity or organisation by the United Nations Security Council.' This means Ghana depends largely on foreign countries such as the USA, UK and EU, as the dominant voices in the UN System to determine and designate domestic extremism agenda as terrorism in nature. This gives little consideration to its own unique national soft power resource bases, such as offices of chiefs, local elites and religious leaders who are typically first points of contact for community level matters.

The Ministry of National Security was, however, established in 2017, which was followed by enactment of the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2020 (Act 1030). This law homogenises security and intelligence activities, including enabling the government to develop a national security plan that specifies the security strategy of the state between 2020 and 2024. This is indeed the first comprehensive national security plan to have been devised for the country (Nyabor, 2021). The Ministry coordinates institutional activities related to terrorism and counter terrorism. The strategic approach seems to have been largely underpinned by principles of Pre-emptive, Preventive and Protection as well as Responsive (i.e., 3Ps + R) formulae. The pre-emptive pillar focuses on early warming in which grievances likely to spark extremism and drive terrorist group proliferation are mitigated at the political level. Both preventive and protection pillars ensure no terrorist event ever takes place in Ghana and hence involves building state and societal resilience against extremism. The responsive pillar offers measures by which direct attacks are to be dealt with. This way of framing the pillars largely suggests the state-led counter terrorism strategy is pro-state more than pro-people.

Concerns therefore abound that Ghana needs to include its soft-power resources as obtain in offices of traditional authorities and decentralised local governance system to promote local ownership in efforts to build local resilience against terrorism (Africa Defence Forces, 2022a). These concerns somewhat encouraged the state to devise the hashtag, 'see something, say something', which aims at mobilising, engaging and encouraging popular participation in the pre-emptive, preventive and protection counter terrorism efforts (Africa Defence Forces, 2022a). This slogan yet appears to be a direct 'copy' and 'paste' of the USA's 'If You See Something, Say Something', that was used to mobilise US citizens to align their hearts and minds with the government in its response to the 2001 September 11 attacks.[2] In other words, the slogan of see something, say something, developed from a context of direct terrorist attack, unlike Ghana, which has thus far remained relatively free from such attacks.

Ghana's version of see something, say something, nonetheless, seems to associate positively with how the US campaigned with the slogan. Ghana deploys the slogan to urge the 'citizens to report suspicious or potentially terrorist-related acts to security forces' (Africa Defence Forces, 2022a). The US did the same to heighten 'public awareness regarding acts and indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime' and 'the importance of reporting suspicious activity to state and local law enforcement.[3] This, however, means there was active local level preparation in the context of the USA, which has been weak in the context of Ghana. The Ghanaian government has since been slow in involving traditional authorities (Ghanaweb.Com., 2021; Africa Defence Forces, 2022b), unlike the USA that involved actors in 'hometown security' arenas, enabling it to foster security partnerships with 'local, tribal, and territorial governments' as well as private sector actors and their communities.[4] These partnerships helped the US to reach its diverse populace across diverse settings with messages that align with everyday concerns and fears of citizens.[5] In the case of Ghana, local residents rather often see 'security officials working' at border posts largely in terms of outsiders and unwelcome intruders (Africa Defence Forces, 2022a).

Many security policy analysts in Ghana, including Professor Kwesi Aning at the Accra-based Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) felt the

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[2] https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/SeeSay-Overview508_1.pdf. [Accessed 12.06.2023]

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/SeeSay-Overview508_1.pdf. [Accessed 12.06.2023]

Ghanaian state has remained relatively slow in equipping state security actors in border town communities (Africa Defence Forces, 2022a). Africa Defence Forces (2022a) further reported that Aning toured border posts closer to terrorist devastated countries, such as Burkina Faso and Togo. In this, Aning observed individual security officers who could sacrificially 'go undercover to develop intelligence about potential terrorist acts' while most border posts were staffed with capable customs and immigration officers. Yet, most border posts lacked basic security equipment and infrastructures, including scanners to help detect contraband items arriving at these posts. Ghanaian security agencies indeed, rarely show signs of weakness to suggest the state is vulnerable to extremism (Adarkwah, 2020; Iddris, 2020; Norman, Awiah, Aikins, & Binka, 2014). These observations, however, implicitly suggest Ghana resilience to terrorism may significantly lie elsewhere in the socio-political set-up of the nation-state, compared to the counter terrorism strategy of the government. They indicate how state-led strategies seem to be weak in dealing with issues attractive to cross-border infiltration. This could create chances of contagious cross-border and solidarity attacks to spill-over to Ghanaian communities

Discussion and conclusion

While West African countries variously combat terrorism, not all these countries have had direct experience with terrorist attacks. This context raises several questions, including the type of experiences informing counter terrorism strategies of terrorism resilient countries and how to explain the resilience of such countries. This paper addressed such a gap, by exploring how Ghana has been resilient to terrorism and identifying plausible explanations. It examined whether Ghana's uniqueness is linked to decisions of terrorist groups to forgo targeting it or embedded in the strength of the state-led counter terrorism strategy. The major finding thus demonstrated how the post-colonial construction of the nation-state, especially the defederalization of the state immediately upon independence contributed to foster reciprocal respect and tolerance for group differences within the state set-up itself, inuring to the benefit of sub-state level cohesion. This dynamic generally prohibits proliferation of extremism which is typically conducive to home-grown terrorism. The dynamic increases the cost of doing terrorism by lowering Ghana's attractiveness for terrorist targeting. This does not mean Ghana does not have some form of the dynamics driving terrorism in other parts of the sub-region. What this rather means is that Ghana's exceptional case lies in the way the unitary state, which replaced the quasi-federate state, was constructed to manage group-based grievances over the years.

The state-led counter terrorism strategy, on the other hand, while seemingly legally well-structured, seems to have been informed largely by global frameworks, especially UNSC approaches to counter terrorism. These frameworks reinforce the monopolising powers of the state over the use of force within its territorial borders, including proscribing terrorism as criminal acts prosecutable solely by the state. The implementation of terrorism related policies, in most cases, however, seems to offer avenues for possible cross-border intrusion and attacks. The state is indeed visibly present in border town communities; however, border posts appear to be ill-equipped to detect and pre-empty terrorist items from crossing borders. Also, state activities, such as collection of census data, voter registration and citizenship registration sometimes antagonise and marginalise border town communities and individuals who have their ancestries straddled across the border to the other side. These gaps have potentials to provoke contagious cross-border attacks. This also means the insights could be useful for unaffected countries that seek to maintain their resilience. This insight especially implores terrorism-resilient countries to deepen their resilience by rolling out population-centred programmes to help deepen mutual understanding and reciprocal respect for differences to increase the cost of doing terrorism.

The insights as well offer lessons for efforts to improve sense of national recognition and attachment in border town communities in Ghana. The evidence showed people in border towns typically treat border post guards as outsiders, which means they could easily refrain from volunteering information useful for detecting terrorist affiliates and items. Such tendencies can provide fertile grounds for terrorist recruiters, financiers and sympathisers to restock and reduce border town communities into safe havens for terrorism. Benjaminsen and Ba (2021) observed across the Sahel, for example, how weak sense of national recognition drives individuals of nomadic groups, such as some Fulanis into Sahelian terrorism. Ghana could pre-empt this threat by sufficiently leveraging on the influences its national soft power bases of community, cultural and religious leaders have on their followers. In this way, state counter terrorism augments its prohibitive potency with good soft power bases. It could also fine-tune global norms by firming up the current Anti-Terrorism law which seems unapplicable to dead and returned fighters.

The application of the concept of costly signalling has been also innovative. The insights obtained from Ghana especially offer pathways to enhance terrorism reliance in West Africa. The evidence showed post-colonial constructions of the Ghanaian nation state explains much of its resilience to terrorism. This calls for further studies to expand the insights to examine cases of other countries and enable the field to build robust debates on how statecraft and nation-building in plurally diverse contexts support and/or prohibit proliferation of terrorist groups. This paper has shown that terrorism is context-dependent, requiring opportunity structures to raise motivation and capacities for extremism. This means effective counter terrorism strategy is one that allows for combination of military and non-military measures seeking to prevent, pre-empt, protect and respond to threats and incidents related to terrorism. This may include killing active shooters, prosecution of supporters, freezing of funding and improvement in people's sense of nationality and nation-state attachment. It also entails countering sectarian ideologies and supreme values of extremist groups with superior narratives and addressing grievance related to socio-economic inequalities.

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