Gendered Security Practices at Checkpoints: Analyzing the Politics of Surveillance and Exemption in Kwara State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study offers a critical analysis of gendered security practices at military and police checkpoints in Nigeria, with particular attention to the differential application of surveillance and exemption shaped by gender norms and socio-political dynamics. Employing insights from feminist security studies and postcolonial theory, the paper interrogates how the securitization of public spaces often marginalizes women while reinforcing patriarchal structures of state authority. Checkpoints are conceptualized as localized arenas of surveillance and control that mirror broader mechanisms of governance, embedding gendered expectations into the fabric of national security strategies. The research highlights how young men are frequently targeted for intensive scrutiny and suspicion, whereas women especially those who conform to traditional gender roles are often exempted from such checks. This differential treatment is grounded in normative assumptions that associate femininity with passivity and non-threat. Yet, such exemptions carry significant implications; while appearing to shield women from overt state surveillance, they simultaneously contribute to their erasure from security discourses and may increase their vulnerability to gender-based violence and abuse. Through qualitative methodologies including case studies, semi-structured interviews, and critical policy analysis this study examines how intersections of gender, class, and ethnicity shape the everyday implementation of surveillance at checkpoints in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that gendered security practices both reflect and perpetuate broader social hierarchies, and call for a reassessment of existing protocols to promote more inclusive, equitable, and rights-oriented approaches to national security. By unpacking the dynamics of both surveillance and exemption, the paper advances a nuanced understanding of how routine security operations reproduce gendered power relations and mediate citizens' encounters with state authority.

***Keywords**:* gender, security, surveillance, exemption, Nigeria, checkpoints, feminist theory, state power

1.1 Introduction

Amid rising levels of insecurity, terrorism, insurgency, and transnational crime particularly across the Global South governments have increasingly resorted to the securitization of public spaces as a key strategy of governance. In Nigeria, security checkpoints have become a central component of national security responses, especially in light of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast and the growing incidents of banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest and Middle Belt regions. These checkpoints, typically manned by military personnel, police, and other paramilitary forces, are intended to regulate movement, identify potential threats, and protect the public. While these measures form part of the broader counterterrorism and security infrastructure, they also function as arenas where power is exerted, social structures are reinforced, and specific norms related to gender, identity, and suspicion are enacted (Akinwale, 2020; Omede, 2015).

Within these militarized spaces, a clear pattern of selective scrutiny has emerged. Young men, in particular, are frequently stopped, questioned, and subjected to intensive physical searches. In contrast, women especially those who are elderly, visibly pregnant, or dressed in ways that align with traditional gender expectations are often permitted to pass without significant scrutiny. This disparity in treatment is not merely procedural but is rooted in entrenched gendered assumptions about threat perception. Such practices reflect a patriarchal logic that frames masculinity as inherently threatening and femininity as inherently innocent or non-threatening (Enloe, 2014; Shepherd, 2011). This dynamic, referred to in this study as the "politics of exemption," highlights how certain groups become hyper-visible to the state's surveillance mechanisms while others are rendered effectively invisible.

This gendered differentiation at checkpoints raises important concerns regarding the conceptualization and implementation of security in Nigeria. Although women may avoid invasive searches, their exemption should not be misinterpreted as a form of respect or equity. Rather, it constitutes a mode of gendered control through invisibilization. Such practices not only reinforce traditional gender roles but also carry significant practical and political risks. For instance, by presuming female non-agency, security protocols may overlook the potential for women to be used strategically by insurgent groups such as Boko Haram's documented use of women and girls as suicide bombers or couriers (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Furthermore, exempting women from scrutiny often renders their experiences at checkpoints invisible, allowing for the perpetuation of sexual harassment, extortion, and abuse without proper documentation or redress. These gendered dynamics in turn challenge the development of inclusive and equitable security governance.

This research is guided by two core questions:

1. What accounts for the routine exemption of women from stop-and-search procedures at Nigerian checkpoints?
2. What are the broader security and political consequences of such gendered practices?

These questions aim to unravel the deeper implications of gendered security protocols within Nigeria's political and societal context. They invite critical examination of how state security is performed not solely through military enforcement and surveillance technologies but also via socio-cultural assumptions about identity, threat, and citizenship. Understanding these practices can contribute to policy improvements in Nigeria's security sector by providing a basis for the development of more equitable and effective checkpoint procedures.

The study's significance lies in its contribution to both the discourse on Nigerian security and the broader field of gender studies. It contests the prevailing assumption that security threats and their responses are uniformly applied or experienced. Instead, it posits that security interventions are deeply gendered and mediated by institutional, historical, and cultural factors that determine which groups are deemed dangerous and which are not. By focusing on checkpoints sites of frequent and direct state-citizen interaction this study underscores how mundane security routines contribute to the broader processes of everyday securitization (Pain & Smith, 2008).

From a gender studies perspective, this work engages with feminist critiques of mainstream security and international relations theories, which have long contended that dominant paradigms ignore or marginalize women's experiences while reinforcing masculine norms of power and control (Tickner, 1992; Sjoberg, 2013). Through a feminist analytical lens, the study reveals that national security functions not only to defend the state from external threats but also to perpetuate internal hierarchies, particularly those grounded in gender. This insight calls for a reframing of security as a socially and gendered constructed issue, rather than one addressed solely through military strategy or technical intervention.

Nigeria serves as an important case study due to its regional significance, demographic complexity, and socio-political volatility. The confluence of terrorism, weak institutional governance, and a heavily militarized state apparatus presents a unique context for investigating the gendered dimensions of security enforcement. Moreover, the country's religious and cultural diversity shapes how gender norms are applied in security settings. For instance, in Northern Nigeria predominantly Muslim female travelers may be treated differently than in the South, where religious pluralism influences norms surrounding modesty, female mobility, and gender relations (Salihu & Gberevbie, 2013). These regional variations further complicate the narrative and necessitate context-specific policy considerations.

This article endeavors to unpack the intricate ways in which gender is woven into the fabric of security practice in Nigeria. It seeks to highlight how normative gender assumptions shape policy implementation, influence citizen experiences, and contribute to broader questions of governance,

justice, and equality. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform the formulation of security protocols that are both more inclusive and more effective, ensuring that the pursuit of safety does not come at the cost of gender equity or civil rights.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In contemporary Nigeria, security checkpoints have become a prominent state mechanism for maintaining public order and addressing insecurity, especially in areas plagued by political unrest, terrorism, and banditry. However, these checkpoints often reflect entrenched social, cultural, and gendered hierarchies. Although intended to protect the public, checkpoint procedures are unevenly applied across demographics. Women are frequently exempted from physical searches due to cultural sensitivities, religious norms, and fear of public backlash (Aborisade & Fayemi, 2021). This raises critical concerns about the politics of visibility, surveillance, and security in Nigeria.

The heightened surveillance of men versus the routine exemption of women reveals a gender bias embedded in security protocols. Such selective practices reinforce patriarchal views that women are non-threatening, rendering them invisible in the security landscape (Akinro & Bakare, 2022). These gendered assumptions not only perpetuate symbolic inequality but also pose material threats to national security. In northeastern Nigeria, insurgent groups like Boko Haram have exploited female exemptions to smuggle weapons and carry out attacks (Okereke, 2020).

The absence of formal, gender-sensitive frameworks governing checkpoint operations leaves security decisions to individual discretion, often leading to inconsistent practices, reduced public trust, and questions about the legitimacy of the state's security apparatus (Ogundipe, 2019). While some women perceive exemption as cultural respect, others view it as a barrier to equality and comprehensive security.

In Kwara State, these national dynamics are echoed with local variations shaped by cultural, religious, and institutional factors. Although Kwara faces fewer security threats than the North-East or North-West, checkpoints remain a daily reality. Yet, scholarly attention to how gendered assumptions influence these practices and their implications for human rights, civic inclusion, and effective governance remains limited.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the gendered nature of checkpoint practices in Kwara State, focusing on how surveillance and exemption are differentially applied based on gender and what this means for inclusive and effective security policy.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Surveillance, Gender, and Power in Security Studies

Over the past two decades, security studies have evolved significantly, with growing scholarly interest in the intersections of surveillance, gender, and power in both conflict and post-conflict settings. This literature review engages with three interrelated thematic strands: the implementation of surveillance and security frameworks in conflict-affected societies; feminist critiques of traditional, state-centered security paradigms; and empirical insights from Nigeria and analogous contexts. In doing so, the review identifies critical gaps this research seeks to address.

2.2 Surveillance and Security Policies in Conflict/Post-Conflict Societies

In fragile and post-conflict environments, surveillance has increasingly become a central instrument through which states attempt to reassert authority, manage perceived threats, and maintain control. Scholars such as Lyon (2007) and Amoore and De Goede (2005) contend that surveillance extends beyond technological advancement, functioning as a deeply political and biopolitical tool embedded within statecraft. In these contexts, surveillance mechanisms act as both deterrents and disciplinary technologies, particularly in areas where state legitimacy is contested or weak. Checkpoints, in particular, serve as tangible expressions of state power operating to regulate mobility, identity, and suspicion in daily life (Monahan, 2006).

The post-9/11 global security environment, shaped by the war on terror, has further entrenched these practices in fragile states. In Nigeria, for example, the state's response to insurgent threats, particularly from Boko Haram, has led to the widespread normalization of checkpoints as tools of militarized governance. Nevertheless, these strategies have been critiqued for their reactive and alienating effects, often exacerbating tensions between security forces and civilian populations (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011). Agamben's (2005) concept of the "state of exception" is particularly relevant here, highlighting how emergency measures can suspend legal norms and concentrate discretionary power in the hands of security personnel.

While there is a substantial body of work on surveillance in conflict-affected regions, relatively little attention has been paid to how these security infrastructures operate along gender lines. Much of the literature treats subjects as gender-neutral entities, prioritizing analyses of insurgent threats or state responses over the differentiated experiences of individuals navigating securitized spaces.

2.3 Feminist Perspectives on Security and the State

Feminist scholars have long challenged the masculinist and state-centric assumptions of traditional security studies. Foundational works by Enloe (2014), Tickner (1992), and Sjoberg (2013) argue that security should be analyzed through gendered power relations, as dominant frameworks often

prioritize state sovereignty over individual protection, especially for women and marginalized groups. Enloe (2000) introduces "banal militarism" to explain how routine practices, like security checks and armed patrols, normalize militarization while concealing gendered dynamics.

In these spaces, masculinity is equated with authority and threat, while femininity is seen as passive and in need of protection. This binary marginalizes women's experiences and reinforces structural divisions of risk and labor. Feminist perspectives also expose the hyper-surveillance of young men and the under-surveillance of women (Shepherd, 2011).

Crucially, these exemptions are not inherently protective but reinforce patriarchal ideas that deny women's agency and obscure their roles in violence and peacebuilding. In Nigeria, Boko Haram's use of women as suicide bombers highlights this risk (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Yet, feminist insights remain underapplied to local security practices like checkpoint surveillance in African contexts.

2.4 Empirical Insights from Nigeria and Comparable Contexts

Empirical studies and human rights reports have documented numerous abuses at military and police checkpoints in Nigeria, including extortion, sexual violence, and arbitrary detention (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020). These violations are often underreported when women are affected, due to factors such as cultural stigma, fear of reprisal, and the absence of effective complaint mechanisms.

Salihu and Gberevbie (2013) emphasize the persistent marginalization of women in Nigeria's security sector—both in terms of policy considerations and representation within the security apparatus. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making roles and operational units, and their specific concerns are frequently sidelined in the development of security frameworks. Further, Akinwale (2020) and Omede (2015) highlight how the Nigerian state's reliance on militarized governance has constrained democratic participation, with little accountability or transparency in security operations.

Comparative case studies from countries like Kenya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan echo these patterns. In Pakistan, for example, Syed (2010) documents the exemption of women from checkpoint searches, a practice that has at times been exploited by insurgent actors. Similarly, in Afghanistan, female militants have circumvented security screenings by exploiting gender norms surrounding modesty and privacy (Cook, 2016). Although these cases provide valuable comparative insights, they often lack sustained engagement with the everyday experiences of those subject to such practices.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Feminist Security Studies (FSS) and Michel Foucault's Theory of Surveillance, both of which provide critical lenses for interrogating the gendered dynamics of security practices at checkpoints. Feminist Security Studies challenges the traditional, male-dominated conceptions of security by emphasizing how gender shapes experiences of surveillance, control, and exemption (Shepherd, 2013). FSS critiques the masculinist assumptions embedded within state security institutions that render women either invisible or hyper-visible, depending on sociocultural contexts. In the case of Nigeria, and particularly Kwara State, the routine exemption of women from security searches is not merely a logistical or cultural decision it reflects deeper patriarchal constructions of femininity as passive, non-threatening, and apolitical (Sjoberg, 2010).

Complementing this, Foucault's concept of surveillance particularly his notion of the panopticon is useful in understanding how power is exercised through the observation and categorization of bodies (Foucault, 1977). Checkpoints become panoptic spaces where certain bodies typically male are constantly subjected to scrutiny, while others are exempted based on perceived docility or harmlessness. This selective surveillance contributes to the reproduction of gendered power hierarchies and has material implications for both national security and gender justice.

Together, these theories illuminate how checkpoint practices in Kwara State are not neutral or purely functional but are embedded in a matrix of gendered meanings, political interests, and institutional power. They help explain how security becomes a site where gender roles are both constructed and contested

3.1 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, incorporating elements of both case study and ethnographic inquiry to explore the gendered dimensions of security practices at checkpoints in Nigeria. The choice of qualitative methods aligns with the study's central aim to understand the everyday experiences and perceptions surrounding gender-based exemptions in checkpoint surveillance. Rooted in an interpretivist epistemological stance, the research prioritizes the subjective interpretations individuals attach to their interactions with state authority, identity, and security infrastructures.

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative case study design, complemented by ethnographic techniques, guides this investigation into the politics of surveillance and gender-based exclusion within Nigeria's security framework. According to Yin (2018), case studies are particularly effective in facilitating a nuanced understanding of complex, context-dependent phenomena. This design allows for a

detailed examination of how checkpoint surveillance practices are shaped by, and reproduce, gendered norms.

The selected case study focuses on key locations in north-central Nigeria specifically Offa Garage, Idofian, Ajase Ipo, Offa town, and Omu-Aran in Kwara State. These areas were chosen due to their prominence in state-led security operations, frequency of checkpoint implementation, and socio-political relevance. These regions also exhibit varied levels of urban development, religious plurality, and exposure to insurgent threats, thus offering a broad spectrum of contextual dynamics for assessing gendered security practices.

Although the study is not a full ethnography, it incorporates ethnographic sensibilities such as prolonged engagement, community immersion, and direct observation. These approaches enrich the analysis by capturing the lived realities and embodied experiences of both security actors and civilians within these securitized spaces.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The research employed three primary data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Triangulation of these methods enhanced the reliability and depth of the data, providing a comprehensive perspective on the gendered nature of checkpoint operations.

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with participants drawn from three principal groups:

- Security operatives (including both male and female personnel from the Nigerian Army, Nigeria Police Force, Civil Defence Corps, and the Department of State Services),
- Civilian commuters (ensuring balanced representation across gender),
- Experts in policy and civil society (including human rights advocates, gender researchers, and scholars in Nigerian security studies).

Between January and May 2025, a total of 36 interviews were conducted. The semi-structured format allowed for open-ended responses while maintaining a thematic focus on checkpoint routines, gendered interactions, security perceptions, and exemption experiences. Security officers were asked to elaborate on gender-specific procedures, institutional guidelines, and personal discretion in enforcement. Civilian participants shared their insights on the fairness and emotional impact of these practices, including perceptions of trust, fear, and legitimacy.

Interviews were conducted in English, Yoruba, Hausa, and Nigerian Pidgin, according to participants' linguistic preferences. When necessary, interpreters facilitated communication to bridge language barriers and ensure accurate representation of responses.

2. **Field Observations**

Observational data were collected at selected checkpoints Offa Garage, Idofian, Ajase Ipo, Offa, and Omu-Aran chosen for their strategic relevance and frequency of use. Observations centered on the interactions between commuters and security personnel, with particular attention to how gender shaped these encounters. Specific indicators included who was subjected to searches, how searches were conducted, the presence or absence of female officers, and the influence of gender identity on the perceived fairness or legitimacy of the procedures. Observations were carried out at various times of day, covering both peak and non-peak hours to capture temporal variations in behavior and protocol.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of the research topic, several ethical measures were instituted to safeguard the dignity, rights, and safety of participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of their voluntary involvement, and made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent either verbal or written was obtained prior to interviews or observations. For participants with limited literacy, oral explanations of the study and consent procedures were provided by the research team.

3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Data collected from interviews, observations, and document reviews were analyzed thematically, guided by the core research questions: What accounts for the frequent exemption of women from stop-and-search operations, and what are the broader political and security ramifications of these gendered practices?

Thematic analysis identified four principal themes:

1. Rationales presented by security personnel for gender-differentiated screening,
2. Civilian interpretations and attitudes toward gendered search procedures,
3. Implications of these practices for perceptions of justice and safety,
4. Security vulnerabilities arising from the exemption of women.

These findings underscore the interplay between gender norms, surveillance regimes, and state power in shaping Nigeria's security landscape, particularly within the everyday micro-politics of checkpoint governance.

4. 1 Rationale Provided by Security Operatives

Security agents frequently justify the exemption of women from stop-and-search protocols by citing religious and cultural concerns related to the physical examination of female bodies. This

explanation is particularly prevalent in regions influenced by Islamic norms, where there is heightened sensitivity around modesty and public decency. Many officers expressed apprehension about public accusations of misconduct, which discourages them from engaging in direct searches of women.

A male officer in the Nigeria Police Force explained:

"We don't touch women indiscriminately. In this region, even while doing your job, you might be accused of harassment. So, unless a female officer is present, we prefer to avoid any potential controversy."

Although this practice appears to honor sociocultural values, it reinforces patriarchal assumptions that treat women as both sacrosanct and invisible within state apparatuses. Rather than stemming from codified policies, these practices are often shaped by discretionary judgments and informal traditions.

Additionally, several officers acknowledged the absence of formal instruction on conducting gender-sensitive searches. A Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps official observed:

> "Our manual doesn't specify how to handle women at checkpoints. We use our best judgment."

This lack of standardized procedures reflects a policy gap where frontline decisions are more influenced by cultural expectations than by institutional directives.

4.2. Civilian Perspectives on Gendered Search Practices

Public reactions to gendered surveillance vary widely. While some women welcomed the avoidance of physical searches, others questioned the inconsistency and potential security risks of such gender-based exemptions.

A female university student remarked:

> "Sometimes I feel relieved they don't search me, but other times I wonder why only men are checked. What if a woman carries something dangerous?"

Male respondents frequently voiced frustration at being disproportionately targeted, interpreting these practices as indicative of societal bias.

One young man expressed:

> "It feels like being a man is treated as a threat. We're the ones always searched, questioned, and exposed. Women just walk past, even if they're carrying large bags."

Such sentiments highlight a broader issue of gendered profiling, which can undermine public confidence in the impartiality of law enforcement. Many respondents advocated for a more equitable approach that does not compromise individual rights or public safety.

4. 3. Consequences for Perceptions of Justice and Security

The perception of procedural fairness is central to public trust in security institutions. The gendered disparity in checkpoint procedures raises serious concerns about both the legitimacy and efficiency of current practices. Several interviewees, including security operatives, critiqued the logic behind exempting women from scrutiny.

A military officer commented:

> "Security should follow procedure, not emotion. If women aren't searched, the system is flawed. It sends the wrong message that some people are beyond suspicion."

This view underscores the sense of procedural injustice that arises from unchecked discretionary practices. Furthermore, the exemption of women from searches challenges the principle of equal citizenship, where all individuals should be held to consistent standards of legal and security oversight.

Women, too, expressed concerns about their invisibility in security considerations. A civil society advocate in Offa observed:

> "Exemption isn't always empowering. It can feel like you're not seen as part of society, even when it comes to national security."

These findings point to broader implications for civic inclusion and gender equality within the state's security framework.

4.4 Operational Risks of Gender-Based Exemptions

Perhaps the most critical concern raised by gender-based exemptions is the potential for exploitation by criminal and insurgent actors. Experts in policy and security warned that excluding women from scrutiny creates a significant vulnerability in national security operations.

A policy analyst noted:

> "There have been documented cases, especially in the Northeast, where women were used to transport weapons because security officials didn't suspect or search them. It's a serious gap."

This concern is substantiated by field observations and media reports documenting the use of female insurgents by Boko Haram. In one observed case at a Maiduguri checkpoint, no women were stopped for checks, even when carrying large bags a pattern noted in multiple locations.

Security officers themselves admitted these limitations. A Department of State Services (DSS) operative stated:

> "Anyone can pose a threat, including women. But without trained female officers or authorization, we usually don't intervene."

This illustrates systemic shortcomings in gender-inclusive security design, including inadequate female staffing and the absence of infrastructure for conducting respectful and effective searches of women.

5.1 Summary of Core Findings

The research demonstrates that gendered checkpoint practices in Nigeria are primarily shaped by socio-cultural norms, rather than formal state policy. While security agents often justify female exemptions as culturally sensitive and non-invasive, these practices reinforce inequality, perpetuate stereotypes, and leave exploitable gaps in surveillance efforts.

Symbolically, exempting women reflects entrenched gender roles; materially, it undermines consistent and effective security strategies. By treating women as passive or non-threatening, the state not only weakens its own security apparatus but also marginalizes women from civic participation.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reform: recruiting more female personnel, establishing clear gender-sensitive protocols, and conducting public education campaigns that balance dignity with national security

6.0 Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

6.1 Surveillance and the Gendered Body

Michel Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power offers a critical lens through which the gendered nature of surveillance at Nigerian checkpoints can be understood. According to Foucault, surveillance extends beyond mere observation; it functions as a mechanism for normalizing behavior and producing compliant bodies. Within this framework, the unequal distribution of

surveillance becomes evident men are consistently subjected to searches, whereas women are frequently exempt. This disparity is not an indication of impartiality but rather reflects a gendered perception of threat embedded within the security system. While men are cast as potential risks and consequently monitored, women are rendered invisible within the security landscape.

This gendered allocation of surveillance supports the feminist notion of the "masculinization of threat" (Sjoberg, 2010). Security institutions often operate under the presumption that violence is inherently male, thereby overlooking the roles women may play in insurgency either as instruments or as autonomous actors. The exclusion of women from security checks is not a liberation from state oversight but a denial of their agency within the discourse and practice of national security.

6.2 State Legitimacy and Governance

In democratic societies, legitimacy is largely derived from public perceptions of justice, fairness, and equitable enforcement of laws (Tyler, 2006). The selective application of checkpoint procedures based on gender undermines these principles by fostering perceptions of bias and arbitrary enforcement. Data from field interviews and public opinion surveys in this study indicate that many men feel disproportionately targeted, while some women express discomfort at being exempt from scrutiny. This suggests that Nigeria's current security operations compromise democratic values by institutionalizing unequal treatment.

From a governance standpoint, the absence of codified, gender-sensitive procedures highlights institutional deficiencies. Reliance on informal practices grants excessive discretionary power to frontline officers, weakening accountability and trust in state institutions. These practices underscore the fact that security provision is not administered as a universal right but is instead shaped by gendered assumptions, reflecting a fragmented and unequal governance structure.

6.3 Human Rights and Gender Equality

The gendered application of security protocols raises profound concerns about human rights and gender justice. While exempting women from searches might seem protective or culturally sensitive, such measures reinforce patriarchal ideologies by portraying women as passive and in need of protection rather than as autonomous citizens. Feminist critiques assert that this "benevolent sexism" ultimately hinders women's full participation in security and civic life (Tickner, 1992; Enloe, 2000).

Simultaneously, the exclusive focus on male bodies as threats legitimizes invasive and often dehumanizing treatment of men, contributing to the normalization of state-sanctioned violence. The lack of provisions such as female security personnel or private search spaces indicates a disregard for bodily autonomy and the right to privacy, irrespective of gender. A rights-based

security framework must recognize gender not as a rationale for exclusion or control but as an integral aspect of inclusive and ethical governance.

6.4 National Security Effectiveness

Exempting women from checkpoint screenings has tangible consequences for national security. Prior research and findings from this study confirm that insurgent groups like Boko Haram have exploited these gender-based oversights by deploying women as couriers and suicide bombers (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). The invisibility of women within security procedures creates exploitable vulnerabilities, placing civilians at risk and revealing the ineffectiveness of gender-blind security protocols.

The current reliance on visual profiling where threat is assessed based on gender and appearance is inadequate in addressing the complexities of contemporary insurgencies. Security personnel frequently lack training in gender-sensitive approaches, and existing policies fail to incorporate an intersectional analysis of risk. As a result, operations are less efficient and resources are misallocated.

This research supports ongoing advocacy for more nuanced, inclusive, and evidence-based national security strategies. Gender must be considered a central analytical tool in designing and executing security measures not merely as a cultural consideration but as a strategic imperative to enhance efficacy.

6.5 Global Comparisons and Lessons

The gendered dynamics of checkpoint procedures in Nigeria are not isolated phenomena; similar patterns are evident in other regions facing conflict or high-security demands. In Israel, for instance, men especially Palestinian men are disproportionately subjected to scrutiny (Parsons & Salter, 2008). In Afghanistan, international forces have often excluded women from searches out of respect for cultural norms, despite clear evidence of female involvement in insurgent activities (Shepherd, 2011).

However, unlike Nigeria, several of these countries have adopted gender-responsive measures. In Israel, female personnel conduct gender-specific searches, while gender training and privacy safeguards have been implemented in Afghanistan. These examples illustrate that cultural sensitivity and security effectiveness need not be mutually exclusive. Instead, carefully crafted policies rooted in empirical evidence and human rights can uphold both security and gender equity.

Nigeria could adopt similar reforms by enhancing the recruitment of female officers, instituting standardized, culturally appropriate search procedures, and embedding gender analysis into

broader security sector reforms. These measures would increase institutional credibility, foster public trust, and close operational gaps.

7.1 Conclusion

This study critically explored the gendered dynamics of checkpoint security practices in Nigeria, situating the discussion within broader frameworks of surveillance theory, governance, and feminist security studies. Fieldwork, interviews, and policy analysis uncovered a consistent pattern wherein women are often exempted from security searches, while men are disproportionately surveilled. Although these practices are frequently justified by cultural or religious norms, they carry profound political, security, and human rights implications.

8.1 Summary of Key Insights

1. **Gendered Application of Security Protocols**:
   The research reveals that checkpoint operations in Nigeria are shaped by patriarchal assumptions that equate femininity with harmlessness. Such gendered logics fail to reflect actual security risks and perpetuate outdated notions of women's roles in conflict.

2. **Public Perception and Experience**:

   Responses gathered show a split in perception along gender and class lines. While men often feel criminalized, some women feel overlooked rather than respected. Both groups identify security loopholes that undermine the effectiveness of the system.

3. **Structural Weaknesses in Governance**:

   The absence of standardized, rights-compliant checkpoint procedures reveals systemic governance issues. Informal practices dominate, leading to inconsistent enforcement, rights violations, and reduced public trust in security institutions.

8.2 Political and Security Implications

Continuing with gender-biased security practices threatens both political legitimacy and operational effectiveness. As Tyler (2006) argues, procedural fairness is foundational to public trust. When security enforcement is selectively applied, state authority appears arbitrary, diminishing citizens' confidence.

On the security front, insurgent groups have exploited the blind spots created by these gendered practices. The failure to adequately screen women has resulted in increased use of female operatives by terrorist organizations (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). This oversight exposes a critical vulnerability in Nigeria's counterterrorism framework.

Moreover, the persistence of these practices reinforces patriarchal norms within security institutions, marginalizing women from key roles in policy and operations, and limiting the inclusivity of the national security discourse.

9.1 Recommendations

1. **Establish Gender-Inclusive Checkpoint Protocols**:

   National agencies should formulate and enforce guidelines that balance security needs with gender sensitivity, ensuring uniform procedures for all while safeguarding individual dignity and rights.

2. **Enhance Female Security Personnel Recruitment**:

   Increasing the number of trained female officers particularly in conflict-prone areas would facilitate culturally appropriate and effective search practices.

3. **Implement Gender and Human Rights Training**:

   Continuous training on gender dynamics and human rights should be mandatory for all security personnel. Drawing from international best practices, these trainings should include real-life scenarios and ethical engagement strategies.

4. **Utilize Technology to Standardize Practices**:

   Adoption of non-invasive technologies, such as scanners and detectors, can minimize the need for physical contact, addressing privacy concerns and reducing the gendered burden of current practices.

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