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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS OF RISKY FRAMING AND CERTAINTY EFFECTS ON COUNTERTERRORISM TACTICS ADOPTION: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA

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#### ABSTRACT

In an effort to psychologically oriented solution to the menace of terrorism in the Nigerian state, we employed a 2x2 factorial design to examine risky framing and certainty effects on counterterrorism tactics adoption. Eighty students of psychology, (mean age = 24.35 years, SD =2.85 years) were involved in the study. Framing was varied into positive and negative framing levels, while certainty was varied into certainty and uncertainty levels. A 2-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) result revealed significant main effects of framing and certainty on counterterrorism decision. The results were discussed in consideration of the prevailing security challenges in Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

What looked like a sectarian religious violence in the North-east region of Nigeria in 1999, escalated into terrorist activities with international linkages and affiliations in 2009 (Gilbert, 2014). Since then, Nigeria has been battling with the challenges of terrorism orchestrated by the activities of the dreaded religious extremist group known as Boko Haram, resulting in immeasurable loss of lives and properties especially in the Northeast region where the group had once dislodged residents of about 18 local council areas, and hoisted the irflag thereof, claiming ownership of the territory. Conservatively, over 2.3 million Nigerians have been displaced by the sect - about 250,000 have left Nigeria and fled into Cameroon, Chad or Niger, more than 17,000 persons has been killed (European Centre for Research Training and Development, ECRTD, 2013). The group has carried out mass abductions of school children and students (Bilyaminu, Iya and Purokayo, 2017). Other studies have documented the devastating effects of terrorism on the Nigerian economy (Mukolu and Ogodor, 2018; Onime, 2018; Omoyibo and Akpomera, 2013), education sector (Medugu, 2017), and loss of lives and properties (Achumba and Ighomereho, 2013). Terrorist groupssuch as Boko Haram, usually take advantage of remote areas, where they build momentum and gain local support in order to operate effectively.

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They tend to use guerrilla tactics such as bombing, ambushing, kidnapping, killings, and assassination in order to create fear or gain recognition (Adebayo, 2014). The Boko Haram terrorist organization has its roots in northeastern Nigeria, is linked to insurgency stemming from north Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic. Boko Haram is a Hausa name which translates roughly as Western education is forbidden, was on 22 May, 2014, officially declared a terrorist group affiliated to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb by the United Nations Security Council (Medugu, 2017; Liolio, 2013; Olojo, 2013; and Adesoji, 2010). Thus, efforts had been, and is being made by government at all level to curb Boko Haram-related terrorist activities in the Nigerian state and bring lasting peace and security to its citizens. Immediate and long-term measures of countering terrorism and Boko Haram have been adopted by the government. In most cases, technological devices are procured and employed in a bid to mop up illegal arms and weapons in the possession of the terrorists both in their operational bases and in the communities by security personnel. This has to a great extent controlled the proliferation of illegal arms and weapons in the Nigerian society (Olaniyan, 2015; Amnesty International, AI, 2014; United Nations Security Council, UNSC, 2012). However, the continued attack of soft targets and innocent citizens mainly women and children suggest that the supply route of the terrorists are yet to be completely cutoff. According to experts (Jepma and Lopez-Sola, 2014; Mintz, Redd and Vedlitz, 2006), adopting any counterterrorism tactics was never an easy

task, and is largely influenced by psychological, social and situational factors. Notable of these variables is the way the information is presented to the decision maker, generally termed framing. Framing is classified into three categories a) goal framing-which deals with different information on the various goals an individual aims to achieve in a given time and situation, b) attribute framing-which deals with information concerning the distinctive features of choice options available to the decision maker, and c) risk framing- which concerns the consequences of making the right or wrong decision (Levin, et.al, 1998). This study evaluates the risk framing typology. Kahnemann and Tversky (1979) referred to the phenomenon that people's decisions are biased by the way in which information is presented as risky framing effect or risky choice framing effect. Xu, Broster, Wu, van Dan, Jiang, Fan and Luo (2013) assert that risky framing effect occurs when two messages that are logically equivalent but differently phrased have divergent effects on people's responses. Risky framing effect was employed in a classical study by Tversky and Kahneman (1981) to describe the finding that simple changes in the wording of decision problems can lead to different preferences. They found in their seminal paper (in which they introduced the Asian disease problem that despite all options being logically equivalent with only the degree of risk inherent in the option differing) that participants displayed a risk-aversion bias in the positive frame (72% choosing the certain option over the risky option). However, in the negative frame there was evidence of a risk-seeking bias (78% choosing the risky option over the certain option).

Drawing on prospect theory Kahneman and Tversky (1982) argued that the wording of information makes people code the outcomes of identical options either as gains or as losses and their responses will reflect such coding. Unfortunately, despite the reported huge influence of framing in decision scenarios including social security claiming (Brown, Kapteyn and Mitchell, 2011), public property and personal money (Wang, 1996), and attitude formation (Shimizu and Udagawa, 2011), studies seem not interested in exploring how risky framing effect could influence counterterrorism tactics adopted by the security agencies. Another factor that could have noticeable influence on the adoption of any counterterrorism tactics is certainty or level of confidence of the decision maker on the likely outcome and what he/she expects from a situation. This level of confidence has been termed certainty effect (Panasiak and Perry, 2013; Evren, 2014). It is a psychological phenomenon wherein a decision maker pays more attention or picks deals that he or she is certain to benefit rather than taking deals where the profit margin is not sure. Certainty effect connotes that decision makers will adopt a given strategy or not depending on their conviction that their expectation will be met. Agranov and Ortoleva (2014) reported that when decision makers are certain and confident about the possible realization of their targets, they tend to be risk-averse, that is, they stay away from highly risky options. However, when they are not certain of the outcome, they would rather remain risk-seeking, that is, they keep taking more options that could be risky. Accordingly, the certainty effect happens when people overweight outcomes that are considered certain relative to outcomes that are merely possible. Studies in the domain of gambling behavior, insurance policies, healthcare, disease prevention, business investments, and voting decisions (Camevale, Inbar and Lerner, 2011; Johnson and Gleason, 2009; Weber and Chapman, 2005) demonstrate that when decision makers are sure of achieving their set target (though

little), they tend to go for it rather than rather than waiting for probable options. In Nigeria, for instance, typically, certainty effect is observed in a situation where a marketer comes up with two promo options: a) buy two items and get one free, and b) scratch the coupon on the item and you may be a lucky winner of one. Research, (Evren 2014), shows that 80% above of buyers will go for the first option, because it has higher certainty of profit/gain outcome. The certainty effect reflects a practical demonstration of the underlying principles that influence human decision making on daily basis, and could be influential in decisions to adopt any tactics to counter terrorism in the Nigerian society, as it shows decision makers as always aiming to reduce loss and maximize success. To successfully combat terrorism, the Nigerian government and the security agencies need to understand not just the science and art of combat operation, but also, the cognitive and emotional dynamics that come into play during critical decision making.

The knowledge that psychological factors such as deliberately altering a piece of information given to the decision maker could lead to the adoption of a wrong and costly tactics both to the security agencies, the citizens lives and properties, the economy and the education sector. Till date most if not all studies on terrorism in Nigeria focus on the economic, education and mental health of victims of terrorism in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps. The persistence of Boko Haram terrorist activities for about a decade now, despite the huge chunk of Nigeria's annual budget being allocated to security since 2009, calls for the review of other factors outside the terrorists that could be hampering the success of countering terrorism in Nigeria. To this effect, Mintz *et al* (2006) called for studies on the effect of risky framing and certainty in the domain of counterterrorism strategies by states battling with terrorism in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, USA. Unfortunately, literature, still show dearth of studies in response to this call despite frequent changing of security chiefs in Nigeria for the suggestion, recommendation and adoption of wrong or poor counterterrorism tactics. Researchers in Nigeria seem not interested in exploring how risky framing and certainty could impact the adoption of any counterterrorism tactics by the Nigerian government. The present study aims to fill this gap in knowledge. It was predicted that both risky framing and certainty will affect the decision to adopt the use of technological devices in tackling counterterrorism in Nigeria.

## METHODS

**Participants:** Eighty participants (40 male, 40 female) were randomly selected from psychology undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) (Mean age = 24.35, SD = 2.85). Participants were randomly allocated into four groups of 20 participants, and each group participated in one of four framing and certainty conditions. The UNN Research Ethics Committee approved the conduct of the study and all participants consented to be involved in the study prior to taking part in it. Participants were not offered any monetary reward for being part of the study.

## MATERIALS

**Tackling insecurity in Nigeria:** Tackling insecurity in Nigeria stimulus material used to measure framing and certainty effects. It is a hypothetical plan of the Nigerian Government to procure and deploy technological devices to

detect and control the movement of illegal weapons by terrorist groups in Nigeria (see procedure).

**Counterterrorism Tactics Inventory:** Counterterrorism Tactics Inventory (CTTI) was developed by the researchers and deployed to measure counterterrorism tactics adoption by the participants. It has 7 items rated on 1-5 scales “Strongly disagree” (scored 1) “Strongly agree” (scored 5). It is progressively scored. Possible total score ranged from 7-35 (higher scores imply higher level of adoption of the use of the devices, vice versa). Items 1, 4, and 5 of the CTTI are directly scored, while items 2, 3, 6, and 7 are reverse scored with “Strongly agree” attracting 1 point, whereas, “Strongly disagree” is scored 5 points. Five experts (2 clinical and 3 experimental psychologists) were requested to determine the appropriateness of the inventory in measuring counterterrorism tactics. Their approval rating of the items on a scale of 20%-100% ranged from 70%-90% (mean %= 80%). An internal consistency alpha of .60, and a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) construct validity coefficient of .75 were reported for the present study among a sample of Nigerian university students. This indicates that the materials were both reliable and valid measure of the constructs.

**Procedure:** The 80 (40 male, 40 female) students that took part in the study were randomly selected, and assigned to the different experimental groups through a simple random selection. Each group was made up of 20 male and female participants. Group 1: positive framing and certainty, Group 2: positive framing and uncertainty, group 3: negative framing and certainty, Group 4: negative framing and uncertainty. Risky framing and certainty were manipulated by giving varying information to the different groups concerning a hypothetical counterterrorism tactics proposed by the Nigerian government.

**Group 1 (positive framing and certainty) were informed as follows:**

*At the present time, because of the war on terrorism in Nigeria, there is approximately 90% chance that the National Assembly will approve funds for the procurement of counterterrorism devices as proposed by the Executive Arm of government. The National Assembly is fully committed to doing all that is required to protect every Nigerian from the activities terrorists despite the dwindling oil prices and bad economy being witnessed by Nigeria. Currently, there is high level of confidence that these devices will be successful in detecting illegal weapons in the possession of terrorists. Many researchers and scientists are highly encouraged by the progress made so far and are convinced that these equipment will work effectively as they have been successfully used in other countries.*

**Group 2 (positive framing and uncertainty) were informed as follows:**

*At the present time, because of the war on terrorism in Nigeria, there is approximately 90% chance that the National Assembly will approve funds for the procurement of counterterrorism devices as proposed by the Executive Arm of government. The National Assembly is fully committed to doing all that is required to protect every Nigerian from the activities terrorists despite the dwindling oil prices and bad*

*economy being witnessed by Nigeria. However, there is low level of confidence that these devices will be successful in detecting illegal weapons in the possession of terrorists. Many researchers and scientists are lowly encouraged by the progress made so far and are unconvinced that these equipment will work effectively as there have been reports of failure in some countries.*

**Group 3 (Negative framing and certainty) were informed as follows:**

*At the present time, because of the war on terrorism in Nigeria, there is approximately 10% chance that the National Assembly will not approve funds for the procurement of counterterrorism devices as proposed by the Executive Arm of government. The National Assembly is fully committed to doing all that is required to protect every Nigerian from the activities terrorists despite the dwindling oil prices and bad economy being witnessed by Nigeria. Currently, there is high level of confidence that these devices will be successful in detecting illegal weapons in the possession of terrorists. Many researchers and scientists are highly encouraged by the progress made so far and are convinced that these equipment will work effectively as they have been successfully used in other countries.*

**Group 4 (Negative framing and Uncertainty) were informed as follows:**

*At the present time, because of the war on terrorism in Nigeria, there is approximately 10% chance that the National Assembly will not approve funds for the procurement of counterterrorism devices as proposed by the Executive Arm of government. The National Assembly is fully committed to doing all that is required to protect every Nigerian from the activities terrorists despite the dwindling oil prices and bad economy being witnessed by Nigeria. However, there is low level of confidence that these devices will be successful in detecting illegal weapons in the possession of terrorists. Many researchers and scientists are lowly encouraged by the progress made so far and are unconvinced that these equipment will work effectively as there have been reports of failure in some countries.*

After the experiment, the participants were asked to wait for the next phase of the study which comes up in 3 minutes time. Within this period, they were told to recall and write names of at least 10 of their favourite Nigerian musicians cutting across all genres of music. Ezeh and Mefoh (2015) reported that this strategy allows presented study stimuli to slither into participants' unconscious. At the expiration of the 3 minutes, the CTTI was administered on all groups to assess their level of approval of the procurement of technological devices (counterterrorism tactics adoption). (Higher scores on the CTTI indicate adoption of the tactics, vice versa). The participants were fully debriefed at the end of the study.

**Design/Statistics:** A 2 (positive framing vs negative framing) x2 (certainty vs uncertainty) between group factorial design was adopted in this study. Two-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistic was used to analyze the obtained data.

## RESULTS

The descriptive statistic table shows that participants in the positive framing group had higher counterterrorism tactics

mean score ( $M = 28.17$ ;  $SD = 4.57$ ) than those in the negative framing group ( $M = 22.25$ ,  $SD = 5.60$ ).

(both military and civilians) in Nigeria since the terrorism war began about a decade ago.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics table showing mean and standard deviation of counterterrorism tactics scores based on risk framing and certainty**

Variable	Levels	N	Mean	SD
Framing	Positive framing	60	28.17	4.57
	Negative framing	60	22.25	5.60
Certainty	Certainty	60	29.25	4.31
	Uncertainty	60	21.32	4.56

**Table 2. Table of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results for framing and certainty effects on counterterrorism tactics**

Source of Variance	Type III of sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	Eta2	N
Framing	1032.53	1	1032.53	97.80	.000***	.466	120
Certainty	1794.13	1	1794.13	169.95	.000***	.603	120
Framing x Certainty	2430	1	24.30	2.30	.132	.020	120
Error	1182.40	112	10.56				

Note: \*\*\* =  $P < .001$ .

It was also observed in the table that participants in the certainty group had a higher counterterrorism tactics mean and standard deviation score ( $M = 29.05$ ;  $SD = 4.31$ ) than those in the uncertainty group ( $M = 21.32$ ,  $SD = 4.56$ ). The ANOVA table showed that framing had a significant effect on the adoption of counterterrorism tactics,  $F(1, 112) = 97.80$ ,  $P < .001$ . The effect size (.466) indicated that 47% of the variance in counterterrorism tactics was explained by framing. Also, the table revealed that certainty had significant effect on counterterrorism tactics,  $F(1, 112) = 169.95$ ,  $P < .001$ . Sixty percent (60%) of the variance in counterterrorism tactics explained by certainty.

## DISCUSSION

Risky framing and certainty effects on adoption of counterterrorism tactics were examined in this study. It was observed that both risky framing and certainty had significant effects on adoption of counterterrorism tactics among the respondents. This shows that the way an information on tactics of combating terrorism is presented to policy makers determines the decision to adopt such tactics or not. This result lends support to previous findings in different domains of human decisions, such as career choice (Khan, 2014), health and social welfare (Pinon and Gambaro, 2005), life and death imagination (Shimizu and Udagawa, 2011), and disease control (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). It is here noted that presenting same information either in positive or negative terms (framing) influences people's adoption of any tactic to tackle and/or curb security challenges in Nigeria, as demonstrated among American population in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack of the World Trade Center (WTC) (Mintz et al., 2006). It shows that security operatives' choices of counterterrorism tactics are largely influenced by information at their disposal regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of each and available tactics. This implies that, decisions to adopt any tactics to counter terrorism by security advisers, policy makers and security agencies such as the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Police should be based on both the advantages and disadvantages of the available tactics options. The tactics of combating terrorism by confronting their operational bases such as Sambisa forest and other bases in the North-East should be reviewed. This tactics has (although yielded some level of success that is by far below the general expectation of the citizenry) led to the depletion of both human and natural resources, high level of casualties

The finding of this research has demonstrated that the adoption of this tactics was based on the decision makers' trust in such approach as convinced by the security advisers and experts. The result also shows that certainty had a significant effect on counterterrorism tactics, indicating that level of confidence of security policy makers in the tactics adopted to curb insecurity in the society determines counterterrorism tactics decisions. Other studies (e.g. Chui, et al., 2012; Hadiwidjojo, et al., 2014; Lizarraga, et al., 2007; Byrne and Worthy, 2015; Mintz, et al., 2006) have found similar effect. Security is a matter of life and death and people will do anything possible to ensure its presence, but their actions are dependent upon how sure they are (certainty) that their action(s) will lead to the reduction of insecurity.

This result hold that if the people have confidence and are certain that the security agencies have the capacity and capability to protect them, they would feel free and confident to provide security tips such as reporting unsuspected moves by individuals and groups in their community, as the security agencies has often appealed.

**Limitations of the Study:** The limitation of this study is the choice of undergraduates as they study respondents even when it is known that they may not be experienced in security matters and decision. This may tend to limit the generalization of the research finding to the student population as they present a peculiar characteristic that may not obtain in the general population of Nigerians especially the security agents such as Army, police, Navy, Air force, and the National Security and Civil Defense Corps.

**Suggestions for Further Studies:** Further studies should involve actual security operatives such as the army, police or naval personnel as participants. This will in effect show empirical evidence of risky framing and certainty effects on adoption of counterterrorism tactics, thereby allowing for near-total generalization of such finding.

## Summary and Conclusion

This study employed a 2x2 factorial group design to examine risky framing and certainty effects on counterterrorism tactics among a randomly selected Nigerian sample. Result of the study revealed that both framing and certainty had main effects on the adoption of counterterrorism tactics. These findings were discussed theoretical and empirical literature.

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