International Journal of Information Resource Management (IJIRM)
Volume 3, Number 4 (October, 2026)
E- ISSN: 1118-7786

IMPACT OF TERRORISM AND ARMED INSECURITY ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: AN INTEGRATIVE NARRATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

Violent insecurity has disrupted education and public services across Northern Nigeria, but its implications for library and information systems (LIS) have seldom been examined together. This article brings Nigerian library studies, research on educational disruption and institutional reports into an integrative narrative review. It considers damage to buildings and collections, interruption of information services, pressures on library personnel and the adequacy of disaster preparedness. Direct research from the North-East documents losses to library assets, while studies of university and public libraries reveal uneven access to disaster-control measures. Research involving internally displaced persons points to persistent information needs and the importance of outreach beyond conventional library buildings. Nevertheless, direct evidence on the scale of service interruption and library staff displacement remains limited; claims that library programmes independently reduce insurgency have not been established. Drawing on human security and institutional-resilience perspectives, the article explains how armed insecurity can deepen information exclusion and delay institutional recovery. It recommends conflict-sensitive continuity plans, secure preservation and backup systems, staff safety and professional development, and partnerships for displaced-community information services. Multi-site field studies are needed to assess these effects more precisely and inform locally appropriate recovery policies.

Keywords: Armed insecurity; Terrorism; Libraries; Information Services; Northern Nigeria; Displacement; Institutional Resilience

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Introduction

Violent insecurity in Northern Nigeria has consequences beyond casualties, destroyed property and displaced households. It affects the institutions through which people learn, obtain public information and preserve community records. The nature of insecurity also varies across the region. Boko Haram and associated insurgent activities have been especially prominent in the North-East; banditry and kidnapping have affected communities in the North-West; and communal conflict, farmer–herder violence and other armed threats have shaped insecurity in parts of the North-Central zone. These differences matter because terrorism, insurgency and armed criminal violence should not be treated as identical phenomena, even where their effects on public institutions overlap (Bilyaminu et al., 2017; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2025a, 2025b).

Libraries depend on the safety of their buildings, the mobility of users, the availability of trained staff and the continuity of their parent institutions. A library may lose its capacity to serve a community without being directly attacked: schools may close, roads may become unsafe, budgets may contract and equipment may remain idle. Conversely, displaced people may need more reliable information just as nearby services become less accessible. These practical difficulties suggest that the consequences of insecurity for LIS development should be assessed in terms of both physical losses and reduced access to information.

Much of the published discussion has examined either the damage caused by insurgency to educational institutions or library preparedness for emergencies. Far fewer studies measure the duration of library closures, the relocation of library personnel or the effectiveness of services provided to displaced users. This article therefore revisits the

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existing evidence with four questions in view: What is known about damage to library resources? How does insecurity affect service continuity? What can be said about professional capacity? And how prepared are libraries to respond and recover? The review also considers whether libraries can support educational recovery and informed civic participation without being assigned the functions of security agencies.

Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives

Armed Insecurity and Library Development

Terrorism involves violence intended to intimidate or coerce audiences beyond its immediate victims, whereas the broader category of armed insecurity includes insurgency, organised criminal attacks and communal violence. These categories are not interchangeable in legal or political terms. They are considered together here because each may expose libraries and their users to disrupted movement, damage, institutional closure and loss of public services. Regional displacement assessments illustrate the differences: IOM (2025b) recorded 2,333,190 internally displaced persons in its October 2025 North-East assessment, while its North-Central/North-West assessment identified 1,378,124 people displaced across ten states (IOM, 2025a). These are population figures, not counts of affected libraries.

The developmental importance of libraries extends beyond the number of premises or books held. Library services support reading, research, access to official information, digital participation and the preservation of local records. Abubakar (2013) examined ways public libraries could contribute to poverty alleviation in Nigeria, and Mngutyo et al. (2020) discussed the relationship between public library provision and national development. Such functions require continuity. The loss of a collection is visible, but the

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educational cost of a library that cannot open, update its materials or reach its users may accumulate less visibly over time.

Human Security and Information Access

Human security provides a useful standpoint because it asks how threats affect people's daily capabilities rather than considering security only as the protection of territory. The United Nations Development Programme (1994) identified interconnected dimensions of human security that include personal, community and economic well-being. For a learner who has left home because of violence, the availability of textbooks, reliable public information and a safe learning space may become part of the practical conditions for resuming education.

In this review, information deprivation refers to an interruption in people's reasonable ability to obtain and use information required for learning, public participation or recovery. The concept connects physical disruption to its social consequences but should not be treated as a separately measured outcome in the studies considered here. The extent of deprivation is likely to differ among urban and rural communities, library types and groups of users. A useful LIS response must therefore consider who loses access, what information is needed and which alternative channels remain available.

Library Infrastructure and Documentary Loss

The clearest library-specific evidence concerns damage to premises and documentary resources. Abdullahi et al. (2025), drawing on information from 28 librarians in conflict-affected parts of North-East Nigeria, reported destruction affecting library buildings, collections and related facilities. The study is valuable because its unit of observation is the library itself rather than educational infrastructure in general. Its small and purposive

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context, however, cannot establish the prevalence of damage across every state or type of library in Northern Nigeria.

Preparedness research also describes the vulnerability of public libraries in the North-West. Esse et al. (2022) examined disaster-management readiness in that setting and identified weaknesses that could make recovery difficult. The studies are complementary but answer different questions: one investigates conflict-related physical damage, while the other assesses institutions' readiness for destructive events. Neither should be used to infer a precise regional total of destroyed libraries. The practical implication is that restoration must address collections, equipment, catalogues, records and the ability to reopen services, not buildings alone.

Information Services for Displaced Communities

Displacement makes conventional building-based library provision less reliable. Lawal (2016) argued, on the basis of a study of Nigerian public library services to displaced persons, for clearer policy and stronger partnerships with community stakeholders. Ifijeh et al. (2019) proposed educational and information services for displaced people in the North-East and highlighted the role public libraries might play when appropriately supported. These contributions are concerned primarily with service needs and proposals; they do not quantify the aggregate number of library service days lost to conflict.

Eneasato and Jidere (2024) assessed the needs of internally displaced persons and advocated a coordinated outreach approach. Their work included 230 displaced persons and placed education among the priorities identified by participants. Taken together, these studies support a shift from asking only whether a library building is open to asking

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whether usable information reaches those who need it. Mobile collections, shared learning locations, printed guidance and low-bandwidth digital services may all have a role, provided that safety, accessibility and local preferences guide delivery.

Professional Capacity and Service Continuity

Library services depend on cataloguers, reference librarians, information-technology personnel and other workers who maintain collections and interpret users' needs. Institutional closure can interrupt their work even when they remain employed. Abubakar (2022), in a conceptual analysis of ICT adoption during insecurity, identified educational closures and weak technology adoption as connected difficulties in parts of the North-West and North-Central zones. The article is useful for understanding conditions that may impede remote services, but it did not measure how many librarians were displaced.

The available literature therefore permits a cautious claim: armed insecurity creates plausible pressures on library staffing and service delivery, but the size of these effects has not been established by representative library-workforce data. Treating broad civilian displacement as a direct count of displaced librarians would overstate what is known. Future studies should record staff transfers, vacancies, periods of closure, changes in opening hours and the extent to which alternative services continued during particular episodes of violence.

Disaster Preparedness and Institutional Resilience

Disaster management is often discussed as an emergency reaction, yet preparedness also concerns whether essential functions can continue under restricted conditions. Nwokedi et al. (2017) investigated fire-disaster preparedness at the University of Jos Library, while Esse et al. (2022) examined public-library disaster readiness in the North-

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West. Because the Jos study concerned fire safety, its findings should not be recast as direct measurements of preparedness for terrorist attacks. It nevertheless offers relevant evidence about the organisation of emergency planning and staff responses.

A more recent survey of 428 library personnel in federal universities in the North-East found that some disaster-control measures were available, but their accessibility was relatively low (Makinde & Maimako, 2026). The hazards considered were broader than armed conflict, making it inappropriate to interpret the study as a terrorism-impact estimate. Comparative work from Ghana similarly reported weaknesses in library disaster planning (Ayoung et al., 2016). Garnett (2021) argues for resilience approaches that integrate anticipation, adaptation and recovery into ordinary library management. For northern Nigerian libraries, the resulting priority is not simply increased physical security; it is a plan for protecting staff and preserving usable services when routine operations are interrupted.

Libraries, Information Literacy, and Community Recovery

Nigerian LIS authors have considered the contribution of libraries to public awareness and national security. Ossai-Ugbah (2013) discussed their role in civic information, while Ogugua and Ikeagwuani (2024) identified information access, outreach and institutional support as relevant to responses to terrorism. Nsirim et al. (2024) likewise reviewed the possibilities for libraries to encourage informed citizenship and community resilience. These publications provide useful professional arguments, but they do not establish that particular library programmes caused a reduction in insurgent incidents.

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The strongest case for involvement is educational and humanitarian. Libraries can help users assess misinformation, locate trustworthy public guidance, maintain learning and document community experience. Their contribution is likely to depend on user trust; consequently, the protection of confidentiality, intellectual freedom and equitable access should remain central. Assigning surveillance duties to libraries would risk undermining the very relationships on which effective information provision depends.

These discussions suggest an integrated pathway: conflict can damage or close institutions, thereby restricting information access, while existing continuity arrangements and partnerships may reduce the duration of that restriction. Figure 1 summarises this relationship as a conceptual interpretation of the literature. It is not a tested causal model and does not assume the same effects in every location.

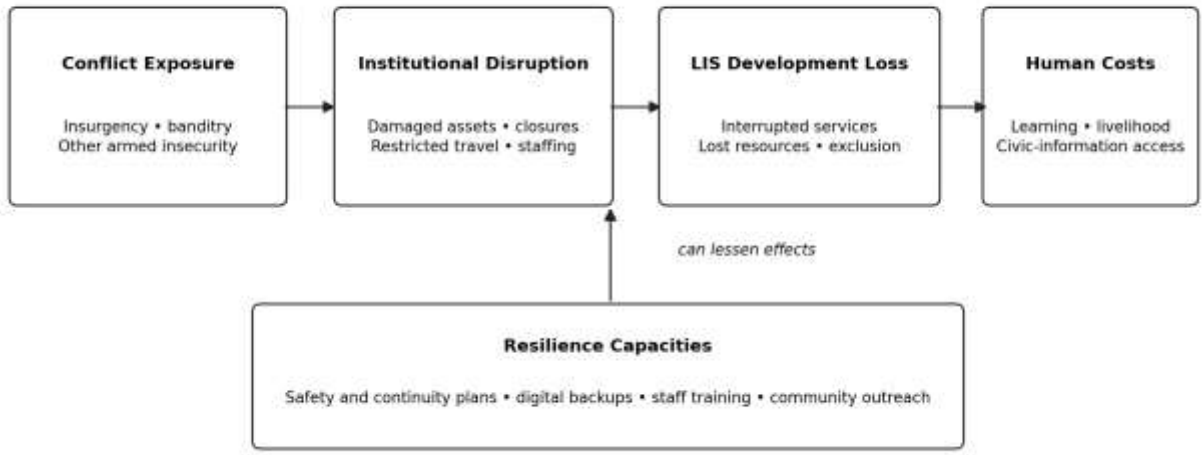


Figure 1. Conflict exposure, information-system disruption and resilience: an interpretive framework based on the literature reviewed.

Methodology

An integrative narrative review was used because the relevant research includes surveys of library personnel, studies of displaced populations, conceptual articles and

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reports on regional displacement. These sources differ in purpose, design and measurement, making statistical aggregation unsuitable. The manuscript draws on Nigerian LIS scholarship and selected comparative disaster-preparedness literature already assembled for the study, with particular attention to studies directly concerned with libraries in the northern geopolitical zones. Authoritative displacement reports are used only to establish the wider context of insecurity.

The analysis was organised around four concerns: infrastructure and collections; services and access; professional capacity; and preparedness and recovery. Sources were considered in relation to the population studied, location, study design and the claims their evidence could support. Direct observations about library buildings or personnel were distinguished from inferences made from studies of education or general displacement. Comparisons with libraries outside Northern Nigeria were used to illuminate preparedness practices, not as proof of conflict effects within the region.

This is not presented as a systematic review. The source material does not provide a complete prospective record of every database search, screening decision or excluded item, so a PRISMA-style numerical flow chart would be misleading. No original survey was conducted for this article, and the tables summarise published findings and reasoned policy implications rather than newly collected respondent data. The review's principal limitation is uneven direct LIS evidence across the North-East, North-West and North-Central zones. The interpretation below respects that limitation.

Table 1. Selected studies and the limits of the claims they support.

Study	Evidence considered	Relevance to this review	Main limitation

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Study	Evidence considered	Relevance to this review	Main limitation
Abdullahi et al. (2025)	Report from 28 librarians in conflict-affected North-East settings	Destruction of library buildings, collections and equipment	Limited coverage; not a regional prevalence estimate
Esse et al. (2022)	Public libraries in North-West Nigeria	Disaster-readiness concerns under insecurity	Readiness is not a direct count of conflict damage
Makinde & Maimako (2026)	Survey of 428 federal university library personnel, North-East	Uneven access to disaster-control measures	Hazards investigated extend beyond armed conflict
Lawal (2016); Eneasato & Jidere (2024)	Studies addressing IDP information needs	Case for deliberate public-library outreach and partnerships	Cannot quantify conflict-related library closure
Abubakar (2022)	Conceptual analysis of ICT adoption during insecurity	Potential barriers to remote information services	Not a survey of displaced library personnel
Nsirim et al. (2024)	Literature-based discussion of libraries and security	Possible information-literacy and civic-information roles	No causal measurement of counter-insurgency outcomes

Thematic Synthesis and Discussion

The literature supports a differentiated account of LIS vulnerability. Physical losses have been reported in conflict-affected libraries in the North-East, while surveys in the North-East and North-West document weaknesses in disaster-management capacity. These findings justify practical attention to prevention and recovery, but they cannot establish a common rate of damage across the northern region (Abdullahi et al., 2025; Esse et al., 2022; Makinde & Maimako, 2026).

The evidence for service interruption is more indirect. Displacement studies show that communities need educational, health, livelihood and civic information, while library authors have proposed outreach arrangements that could address aspects of that need

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(Lawal, 2016; Eneasato & Jidere, 2024). Yet a household's displacement does not by itself demonstrate that a particular library has closed. The missing evidence is operational: opening hours, service records, circulation changes, access to digital resources and documented periods when libraries could not function.

Regional variation further complicates a single account of insecurity. The humanitarian reports identify a large displacement burden in the North-East and in parts of the North-Central and North-West, but the causes are not uniform. In the North-Central/North-West assessment, banditry, kidnapping and farmer–herder clashes were important displacement drivers (IOM, 2025a). Treating all such events as terrorism would obscure the conditions to which libraries must respond. Table 2 therefore distinguishes the regional context from what is directly known about libraries.

Table 2. Regional patterns of insecurity and the available LIS evidence.

Zone	Security context	Library-focused evidence	Evidence still required
North-East	Prolonged insurgency and displacement	Documented damage to library assets; university disaster-control survey	Multi-site figures on closures, losses, recovery costs and staff movement
North-West	Banditry, kidnapping and community-level insecurity	Public-library disaster-readiness study; discussion of ICT constraints	Direct measurement of disruption and alternative services
North-Central	Communal conflict, farmer–herder violence and related insecurity	University of Jos emergency-preparedness study; adjacent education/ICT literature	Conflict-specific library data across institutions and states

A second pattern is the gap between the importance of continuity and the evidence available to assess it. Preparedness studies evaluate policies, equipment or staff awareness; they rarely follow a library through a specific security incident and document its return to service. A stronger research design would combine incident histories with

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library administrative records, interviews with staff and users, and observations of the services actually available during displacement. Such evidence could distinguish the effects of insecurity from long-standing problems of finance, electricity supply and technology adoption.

The human-security perspective clarifies why continuity deserves attention. Loss of access to learning material, trusted public guidance and digital information can intensify difficulties already facing displaced or isolated populations. This does not mean that every educational setback is attributable to the absence of a library. Rather, library access is one institutional resource within a wider recovery environment. The relevant policy question is how information institutions can maintain a dependable minimum service during disruption and rebuild provision as conditions permit.

Table 3 sets out the level of support that the reviewed literature provides for the article's central claims. These assessments are qualitative judgements about the fit between evidence and claim, not statistical confidence intervals or formal risk-of-bias scores. They help avoid presenting a persuasive policy proposal as an already demonstrated effect.

Table 3. Evidence-to-claim appraisal of the main findings.

Claim	Available support	Appropriate interpretation
Library infrastructure can be damaged by conflict.	Direct evidence from selected North-East libraries.	Supported for documented settings; extent across the region is unknown.
Library disaster preparedness is uneven.	Direct library surveys in the North-East and North-West; institutional case evidence.	Well supported within studied organisations; varies by institution and hazard.
Displaced people face unmet information needs.	Studies of IDPs and policy proposals for library outreach.	Reasonable basis for improved services; closure rates remain unmeasured.

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Claim	Available support	Appropriate interpretation
Insecurity leads to library staff displacement.	Limited library-specific data; related education-sector disruption.	Important question, but the size and direction of the effect need direct study.
Libraries can reduce extremism or insurgency.	Conceptual and literature-based security discussions.	Potential contribution through education; no demonstrated causal effect.

The distinctive contribution of this review is not a claim to have discovered new incidents or collected fresh field data. It is the distinction between three forms of institutional harm that are often combined: physical loss, service inaccessibility and weakened recovery capacity. This distinction matters for planning. A damaged library requires restoration of assets; a safe but closed library may require alternative service arrangements; and an institution with staff or continuity deficits may need organisational support even after buildings have been repaired. Response strategies should begin with the type of failure actually observed.

A related contribution is to regard information-service continuity as an element of recovery rather than an optional activity after reconstruction. In practice, a modest service that remains available may be more useful to displaced users than a restored building they cannot safely reach. The effectiveness of mobile provision, offline collections and partnerships remains a question for assessment, but the literature offers sufficient justification for piloting and evaluating such arrangements.

Recommendations

First, library governing authorities and parent institutions in conflict-exposed areas should adopt written, locally tailored continuity plans. Each plan should identify emergency contacts, decision-making responsibilities, evacuation procedures, priorities for saving collections and the minimum services to be maintained during temporary

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closure. Practical exercises and periodic review should be required, rather than leaving the plan unused in a file.

Second, LIS institutions should protect essential records and collections through routine backups, off-site copies of critical data and low-bandwidth or offline methods of access. Digital investment should respond to local electricity and connectivity constraints and be supported by tested restoration procedures. The priority is to preserve access to materials, not merely to purchase more equipment.

Third, employers, professional associations and LIS schools should provide staff safety guidance, crisis communication training and continuity-management skills. Training should address user privacy, the protection of rare materials, remote reference services and communication with displaced communities. Institutions should also document staffing interruptions so that future decisions can rest on evidence instead of assumption.

Fourth, public libraries, the National Library of Nigeria, local authorities and humanitarian organisations should establish partnerships to deliver appropriate information services to displaced persons and host communities. Service design should begin with local needs assessment and include accessible learning resources and dependable information about education, health, rights and available support. Pilot services should record reach, use and barriers to access.

Fifth, state-level education recovery plans should recognise libraries as supporting institutions. School reopening, community learning provision and library recovery should be coordinated where feasible, while maintaining the independence and trust needed for credible information services. Information-literacy activities should promote critical assessment of sources without turning libraries into surveillance facilities.

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Sixth, researchers and LIS professional bodies should commission comparative field studies across the three northern geopolitical zones. Studies should collect directly attributable measures of library damage, closure duration, lost resources, staff mobility, service demand and recovery. Clear reporting of search strategies, samples and limitations will enable later reviews to test patterns currently supported only by small or non-comparable studies.

Conclusion

Terrorism and other forms of armed insecurity pose a serious challenge to library and information systems development in Northern Nigeria, but the available evidence is not equally strong for every form of harm. Studies of selected libraries document physical losses and shortfalls in disaster preparedness. Research on displaced persons demonstrates the need for accessible information provision, while direct data on library-specific staff displacement, closure duration and the effects of recovery interventions remain limited.

The most defensible response is therefore twofold: protect the institutions that preserve and distribute knowledge, and sustain information access for people whose daily lives are disrupted by violence. Effective continuity planning, secure preservation, professional preparation and locally grounded outreach are practical starting points. Future research should determine which interventions work, for whom and under what security conditions.

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