

WHY VIOLENCE? WHY TERRORISM?
LESSONS FROM NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM

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ABSTRACT

Why do certain groups resort to violence in the form of terrorism? To answer this question, this analysis presents a hypothesis-generating case study of Boko Haram in Nigeria. It takes a deep dive into understanding the group's motives and justification for violence. After establishing the context of previous studies of terrorism to provide an analytical lens, it then presents Nigeria's relevant political, religious, social, economic, and educational context, and then focuses on Boko Haram and its motivations/actions, relying on a variety of qualitative evidence including the studies of interviews from alleged members. The study concludes by drawing out hypotheses about the role of Nigeria's history, its religious interpretations, the poor status of Nigeria's economy, and the corrupt Westernized political system in the region as factors in Boko Haram's motivations/actions, and the broad implications of these findings for studies of and policies toward terrorism.

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Introduction

An estimated 15,000 people have been killed by Boko Haram, a Nigerian Salafi-Jihadi group that seeks to create an Islamic Caliphate and remove all Western influences. These deaths have been caused by suicide bombings, mass murders, kidnappings, and rape, along with radicalizing children to become child soldiers. This terrorist organization is wreaking havoc in Nigeria and bordering countries in the northeast, and continues to do so.¹ Nigeria is the largest and most populous country in Africa, the largest oil producing country in Africa, and the most strategically important ally for Africa. According to William Saint in his research, “Higher Education in Nigeria,” a stable and peaceful Nigeria could contribute to Africa’s rise and integration into the global economy.² Unfortunately, Nigeria is an extremely conflict ridden nation and according to the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria is one of the top five countries with the highest impact of terrorism.³ For this reason, it sparks an interest into why and by what means has terrorism been able to create a stronghold and foundation in this country. This paper takes a deeper look into Boko Haram in order to formulate a hypothesis as to why organizations and insurgency groups resort to violence in the form of terrorism and what lessons can be learned from Boko Haram in Nigeria. This research is presented by first laying out the context of the already available scholarship about terrorism, its formation, and the use of violence by these terrorist groups. Second, this paper will present the context of Nigeria through the lens of its people, government, religion, economy, and their educational system. Third, this paper takes a

¹ Alex Thurston, “‘The Disease is Unbelief’: Boko Haram’s Religious and Political Worldview,” 1-33, *Center for Middle East Policy*, No. 22, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper-Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf

² William Saint, Teresa A. Hartnett, and Erich Strassner, “Higher Education in Nigeria: A Status Report,” 259-281, *The World Bank Higher Education Policy*, 2013.

³ “Global Terrorism Index: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism,” 1-111, *Institute for Economics & Peace*, 2015, <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>.

comprehensive review of Boko Haram and its motivations/actions. This paper is designed to develop hypotheses as to why a group like Boko Haram resorts to violence and to then take these hypotheses as potential tools that could be used to understand why other groups resort to violence as well. Lastly, it encourages further research into solutions for Nigeria and findings ways to address the issues of violence by Boko Haram and the research of other terrorist organizations.

Terrorism: What We Already Know

Definition and Structure

The definition of terrorism is rather fluid and to this day, the United States and the international community have yet to agree upon a concrete definition. Terrorism is one of the most contested concepts in international relations. Even the United Nations has addressed a need for a definition but has yet to create one with the consensus of Member States. As defined in Title 22 of the U.S. Code, Section 2656f (d) terrorism is “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence and audience.”⁴ According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism is “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”⁵ Both definitions draw upon the same conclusion that terrorism involves forms of ideologies that are based upon political, economic and/ or social issues. Although there are many arguments regarding the definition of terrorism and although it is challenging to establish an exact definition, according to Tore Bjorgo, many will accept the idea

⁴ “Research on Domestic Radicalization and Terrorism,” *National Institute of Justice*, 2017, <https://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/terrorism/Pages/welcome.aspx>

⁵ *Ibid*

that, “terrorism is a set of methods or strategies of combat than an identifiable ideology or movement, and that terrorism involves premeditated use of violence against (at least primarily) non-combatants in order to achieve a psychological effect of fear on others than the immediate targets.”⁶

Second, it is helpful to distinguish between crime and what is considered terrorism. Sandler raises an interesting point when stating that there is a difference between a crime and terrorism, the act of violence in terrorism must have a political or social objective. He explains that a kidnapping for ransom without a political or social agenda is not terrorism but is solely a crime. Furthermore, in order to be considered terrorism there must be a need for a large audience. Terrorists desire to create an atmosphere of fear and therefore engage in public displays of violence that typically result in civilian casualties. It must also be understood that terrorist actions are not random, but are strategically planned and executed campaigns to achieve their political or social agenda.⁷ This is crucial in understanding the separation of political violence and criminal violence.

Also, when studying and understanding terrorism, a great deal of research has been developed to better grasp the structure and formation of terrorist organizations. Many argue that present day terrorism has shifted and is more difficult to define than in the past. The idea that violence was perpetrated by an individual acting on behalf of some type of organization or movement made up of a hierarchical structure and chain of command is a traditional view. However, in recent years this idea of a hierarchy and identifiable chain of command has changed

⁶ T. Bjørgo, “Root Causes of Terrorism: Myth, Realities, and Ways Forward.” Edited by Toro Bjørgo. London, England. Routledge Press, 2005.

⁷ Todd Sandler, “New Frontiers of Terrorism Research: An Introduction,” 279-286, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2011, www.jpr.sagepub.com.

and many terrorist organizations now maintain a “leaderless network”.⁸ This makes it more challenging to combat such groups, because there are many different parts that make up the whole of the terrorist network.

Causes

There has been critical research that investigates the causes of terrorism and reasons for its formation. This paper breaks down those studies into five main causes or breeding grounds for terrorist activity, which include; social factors, political environment, economic situation, education, and religious interests.

First, the social environment of a country can in fact produce or incubate terrorist activities more effectively than others. As addressed by Crenshaw in her research, “The Causes of Terrorism,” one potential cause is due to grievances that affect a subgroup of the larger population. These grievances tend to be issues from ethnic minorities being discriminated against by a majority group, and these minorities take the issue into their own hands in order to gain equal rights or create separation from the state. These responses to such grievances then turn into terrorist actions when they take on extremist and violent actions. This has been shown to be a seed to terrorism, because, as a result of their grievances, such actions open the door for growth into a broader movement.⁹ It is important to note that not every group that has these grievances will act out in terrorism, which is why this is considered a seed to terrorism. For this reason, such a seed is planted and watered by adversities which in turn becomes the foundation for which other causes are built upon to encourage a group or organization to perform acts of terror.

Second, the political environment of a country could typically lead to civil unrest. Political grievances can also be a foundation for the cause of terrorism. Sometimes, the lack of

⁸ B. Hoffman, “Inside Terrorism,” New York, New York. Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁹ M. Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 379-399, *Comparative Politics*, Vo. 13, No. 4, 1981.

political expression or the suppression of people becomes oppressive. This can in turn stir up such grievances that help encourage violent acts of terror against the government.¹⁰ Also, political instability promotes a weak government, which can increase terrorist groups who find violence as the only means to have their voice heard and to have their political agendas accomplished. Involvement in such groups also at times offer better incentives than the government itself and for this reason, individuals are more prone to join terrorist groups, because of the better payoff.¹¹

The population growth rate can continue to increase political instability in some countries. Studies and data have shown that terrorism is propagated through the majority of young adult males. Developing nations have more young adult males than in developed nations. The greater the number of young males requires more jobs. The scarcity of employment fuels even more of a hatred for the West, because they associate the West's involvement in their country with the instability and lack of jobs. This hatred then creates even more political instability as unemployed young adult males seek avenues to stabilize their political structure, and typically make the West a scapegoat. Although this scapegoat attribution to the West has been justified at times, especially when Western countries in pursuit of their oil interests have supported corrupt and autocratic rulers.¹²

As mentioned by Sandler, political ideologies do in fact impact terrorism.¹³ Gassebner and Luechinger add that political struggles and social cleavages translate into increased levels of

¹⁰ M. Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," 379-399, *Comparative Politics*, Vo. 13, No. 4, 1981.

¹¹ Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks, "What Causes Terrorism?" 3-27. *Public Choice* 147, no. 1/2, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41483643>.

¹² Paul R. Ehrlich and Jianguo Liu, "Some Roots of Terrorism," 183-192, *Population and Environment*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2002, www.jstor.org/stable/27503829.

¹³ Todd Sandler, "The Analytical Study of Terrorism: Taking Stock," 1-15, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, www.jpr.sagepub.com.

terrorist violence when the struggles increase along with the social cleavages. Their studies also overlap with other researchers that make the claim that religious and ethnically diverse regions with religious and ethnic tensions do create a fertile ground for terrorism.¹⁴ These studies continue with more potential variables that may increase the level of terror in a nation. The key takeaways of these studies are that there are many different variables that go into the understanding of the root causes of terrorism. It is also crucial in understanding that each country's situation determines the roots of this terrorism.

Third, the economic situation of a country or region can be the result of political corruption and can create more grievances while standing side by side with the motives and recruitment tactics of terrorist groups. Scholars argue that economic grievances and deprivation can stir up or lead to terrorist attacks.¹⁵ The increase in population growth rate often can be the cause of economic stresses as it tends to widen the rich-poor gap in society and cause a greater distress in those left behind.¹⁶

On the issue of economic discrimination, after 9/11 there was a developing belief that economic instability or those in low income communities would more likely be the ones who would take part in terrorist attacks.¹⁷ However, Krueger and Maleckova make an interesting point in that their research suggests that low income was not associated with more terrorism and that the issue mainly derives from civil and political liberties within the state.¹⁸ Enders and

¹⁴ Martin Gassebner and Simon Luechinger, "Lock, Stock, and Barrel: A Comprehensive Assessment of the Determinants of Terror," 1-46. *CESifo Working Papers*, No. 3550, 2011, www.cesifo.org/wp.

¹⁵ Bird, G. Blomberg, S. B. & Hess, G. D. "International Terrorism: Causes, Consequences, and Cures," 255-274, *The World Economy*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2008.

¹⁶ Paul R. Ehrlich and Jianguo Liu, "Some Roots of Terrorism," 183-192, *Population and Environment*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2002, www.jstor.org/stable/27503829.

¹⁷ Todd Sandler, "The Analytical Study of Terrorism: Taking Stock," 1-15, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, www.jpr.sagepub.com.

¹⁸ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" 119-144, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003.

Hoover continued this suggestion with their research that points towards middle income communities being more conducive to acts of terrorism.¹⁹

Gassebner and Luechinger add to the discussion with their use of extreme bound analysis (EBA).²⁰ This analysis is a measure that allows for a connection of “robust” variables to terrorism and takes an extremely critical view of the causes of terrorism. According to this measure the majority of the variables do not survive their EBA measurement and according to this study they are not “robust” enough to fully explain or give cause that they provoke terrorism. Although their measurement is a bit extreme, they do not disregard these variables as factors that are conducive to terrorism.²¹ Much of this study indicates that economic discrimination, political ideologies, nationalist/separatist motives, and religious fundamentalism, and many of the variables listed by Sandler²² do in fact affect terrorism. Their studies indicate that terrorism is not in fact rooted in poverty and the lack of resources, rather those issues can be exacerbated by the lack of economic opportunities. Countries that tend to restrict economic freedom are more conducive or prone to terrorism. Economic inequality is also a factor that plays a role in causing terrorism. The more inequality and separation between economic classes the more likely a country is to be fostering a breeding ground for terrorism.²³

Fourth, when people typically think of terrorists, they consider a group of individuals who are poor, uneducated, and ignorant. This has been proven inaccurate and in fact, terrorists, especially their leaders, are typically young, well educated, middle class men. This new

¹⁹ Walter Enders and Gary A Hoover, “The Nonlinear Relationship between Terrorism and Poverty,” 267-272, *The American Economic Review*, vol. 102, no. 3, 2012, www.jstor.org/stable/23245540.

²⁰ Martin Gassebner and Simon Luechinger, “Lock, Stock, and Barrel: A Comprehensive Assessment of the Determinants of Terror,” 1-46. *CESifo Working Papers*, No. 3550, 2011, www.cesifo.org/wp.

²¹ Ibid

²² Todd Sandler, “The Analytical Study of Terrorism: Taking Stock,” 1-15, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, www.jpr.sagepub.com.

²³ Martin Gassebner and Simon Luechinger, “Lock, Stock, and Barrel: A Comprehensive Assessment of the Determinants of Terror,” 1-46. *CESifo Working Papers*, No. 3550, 2011, www.cesifo.org/wp.

understanding has sparked a great deal of interest and study on what role does education play on terrorist involvement. In moving forward and trying to draw more conclusions on what other factors and variables play a role in terrorism, Krueger and Maleckova study the effects that education levels may have on terrorist activities. They raise an interesting point, that according to polls and tests done on Israeli and Palestinian education levels and their connection to terrorism, they found that the more educated each group was the more likely they were to support violent terrorist measures. However, they made note that the deteriorating economic opportunities available for the highly educated is what sparked the violence that had ensued in December 1987.²⁴ This study adds to the question of the root causes of terrorism and if education can be considered one that may cause an effect either directly or indirectly.

Many studies on peace education have been done that address the fact that in order for there to be peace education, one criteria must be that all students attend public schools. It also requires the fostering of cultural differences and encouraging students to interact with others that have a background of different economic and regional situations.²⁵ These studies demonstrate the potential for education and through educational exposure to differences, tools for peace can be implemented in the educational system which would in turn impact peace in the region with a hope to stretch to the country as a whole. A study of peace education in Africa was conducted by Kenneth Omeje, where he states the impediments of this peace education and how because the West has primarily developed it, it is not realistic in African society and limits the change in society.²⁶ These studies of peace education raise the questions of what type of education is

²⁴ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" 119-144, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003.

²⁵ David W. Johnson and Roger T Johnson, "Essential Components of Peace Education," 280-292, *Theory into Practice*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2005.

²⁶ Kenneth Omeje, "Strengthening Peace Research and Peace Education in African Universities," 16-33, *African Sociological Review*, vol.19, no. 1, 2015.

necessary in engaging in peace and would they prevent terrorism or would they actually have the ability to cause terrorism. As mentioned by Krueger and Maleckova, it was in fact those with higher educational levels that began to erupt in violent terrorist acts in their own state, because economic instability triggered them.²⁷

Beza Tesfaye has studied Somalia to see whether education plays a role in the decrease of young people's involvement in violence. She compared 298 out-of-school young people ages 15-21 and 504 of the same age range of students who attended secondary school that had been funded by Mercy Corps' USAID-funded Somali Youths Learners Initiative Program. The results of their research shocked them. Their analysis showed that formal education reduced the likelihood of young people involved in violence by 16%. However, formal education increased the support of political violence by 11%. Young people who were more educated believed political causes served as a justification for violence. In order to understand this study, they dug deeper into understanding the context of Somalia. It seemed that the more educated a young person became the greater their frustration became as they realized the realities of their employment prospects and were seen to believe that their government was not doing enough to assist and work with them. These frustrations heightened the support for political violence. It is through these frustrations that extremist groups tend to play on in order to recruit those young frustrated individuals.²⁸ They also found that through programs such as the Mercy Corps' and the involvement of young people in community services, their support for political violence dropped by 13% and 20%. It also revealed that those young people were 15% more likely to believe that

²⁷ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" 119-144, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003.

²⁸ Beza Tesfaye, "Education Alone Doesn't Prevent Terrorism. Here's What Else You Need," *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/05/education-alone-doesnt-prevent-violent-extremism-heres-what-else-you-need/?utm_term=.1d6a067e40ed

they could have a positive impact on their communities.²⁹ It is through studies such as these that demonstrate how higher education can in fact heighten the support for political violence and acts of terrorism when groups feed young people's frustrations.

Fifth, many scholars argue that religious ideologies sometimes play a role in the reason for the formation of terrorist organizations. Viotti and Kauppi write: "With ideology, there is a belief in some idea, which in turn is the motivation for their behavior."³⁰ Some of the most recent terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, ISIS, and even Boko Haram have stressed their allegiance to Islamic ideologies using their own interpretation of the Quran as justification for their terrorist acts. In the Islamic faith, there are different religious terms that often times are combined together but should be distinguished. Through these different groups of the Islamic religion, it is possible to see which groups would be more prone to terrorist involvement than others.

Differences of Islam, Salafi, and Jihadi

While Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism tend to be used interchangeably, such terms are in fact distinct from each other and promote different actions and ideologies. The term Islamism is the broadest term to describe Islamist groups that believe in and hold fast to Islamic law and values, which play a vital role in public life. It is an act of political affirmation. This allows for Islamic sentiments and values to be displayed in "how politics should be conducted, how the law should be applied, and how other people- not just themselves- should conduct themselves morally," according to Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid.³¹ This broad definition captures both

²⁹ Beza Tesfaye, "Education Alone Doesn't Prevent Terrorism. Here's What Else You Need," *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/05/education-alone-doesnt-prevent-violent-extremism-heres-what-else-you-need/?utm_term=.1d6a067e40ed

³⁰ P. R. Viotti and M. V. Kauppi, "International Relations and World Politics," New York, New York. Pearson, 5th edition, 2013.

³¹ Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid, "Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer," *Brookings Institute*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

extremist groups and mainstream parties. Many mainstream parties seek to reunite pre-modern Islamic law with the modern state. This distinction between Islamists is crucial, because even though some are extremist, the majority of Islamists are not violent.³²

Dar and Hamid state that the term “Salafism is the idea that the most authentic and true Islam is found in the lived example of the early, righteous generations of Muslims, known as the Salaf, who were closest in both time and proximity to the Prophet Muhammad.”³³ What sets them apart from the mainstream ideologies is their belief in both the spirit and letter of the law. These groups are known for their attempt to imitate the habits of the first Muslims in all areas of their lives from how they dress to even on how they brush their teeth. Salafis are typically “quietists” in that they avoid interaction with the state and prefer to live their lives in this manner. A minority group of Salafis are Salafi-jihadists, which will be discussed after jihadism.³⁴

The term jihadism derives from the meaning of jihad, which states that religiously-sanctioned warfare is to be carried out and required by the individual Muslim rather than representatives of the Muslim community. In jihadism, they argue that every Muslim should take up this “mantle”. In jihadism, they are also freed from the scholarly ideology of how the Quran should be interpreted when discussing the times to use war, based on its context. Jihadism says that they are free from such contextual and classical rules of warfare.³⁵

The fourth term is Salafi-Jihadism. This is an approach that adheres to jihadism and is paired with Salafism. This tends to address and give a more divine imperative to their violent actions. They retain a view that holds Islam as the only authentic way, but, more in particular,

³² Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid, “Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer,” *Brookings Institute*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

that their way of following Salafi-jihadism is the only true and authentic way that all Muslims should follow. This ideology in turn justifies violent actions against other Muslims that disagree with them.³⁶ These terms demonstrate that, in the religious context, terrorist activity can in fact be stirred up throughout varying religious beliefs and clearly articulates how radical individuals can become.

Many scholars have studied all five of these causes and demonstrated that they do serve as the reason for terrorist organizations' formation and violence. Through this analytical framework of all five causes, the context of Nigeria will be laid out in the same manner, by analyzing its political, religious, social, economic, and educational factors. After taking this into consideration, a comprehensive overview of Boko Haram along with its motivations/actions will be addressed and analyzed while drawing connections to the five factors in Nigeria. Through the political lens, the government set-up in Nigeria will be revealed and then will present Boko Haram's frustration with the Westernized political structure in Nigeria as part of their motivations as well as their exploitative historical account of how the current politics came to fruition, which is intertwined in the religious context. Through the religious lens, the religious layout of Nigeria will be presented while delving into the massive religious motivations that are constituted as the main cause for Boko Harm's violence. These religious motivations also are completely intertwined with the other four factors. Through the social lens, the context of people demographics in Nigeria will be laid out while then discussing the social grievances and suppression/oppression that are interrelated with the political and religious context. Through the economic lens, the impoverished nature of Nigeria will be addressed and then discussion will occur on how Boko Haram uses the instability of the economy that is intertwined with the

³⁶ Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid, "Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer," *Brookings Institute*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

political and religious context to justify their violence. Through the educational lens, the Nigerian education system and its instability will be laid out while then addressing the highly-educated leaders of Boko Haram and how they exploit the uneducated masses in Nigeria, and intertwine their frustration with the current education system with the political and religious context.

This research will serve as stepping stones to then develop hypotheses as to which factors or combination of factors play a greater part in the use of violence by Boko Haram. The hypotheses will specifically address how each of the five factors do in fact play a role in Boko Haram's use of violence, but that the combination of certain factors is more likely to result in violence than others. This hypothesis-generating case study will gather data from 1980 to present day that addresses Nigeria's political, religious, social, economic, and educational context from sources such as; The World Bank, The United States Central Intelligence Agency, The National Bureau of Statistics, and The Embassy of Nigeria. The information presented on Boko Haram and its motivations/actions will be analyzed from 2000 to present day utilizing sources such as; The Global Terrorism Index, Combating Terrorism Center, Africa Research Institute, and Brookings Institute. All the information gathered will be addressed through the analytical framework that has been laid out. This hypothesis-generating case study of Boko Haram serves beneficial for the international community, because Nigeria stands as a key player in the success of many African countries and Africa as a whole, and currently Boko Haram plays a huge role in preventing development domestically and internationally. Therefore, this study is designed to better understand this group in particular, but is also aimed to promote further research into Boko Haram and using these studies to then delve into similarities with other terrorist organizations.

Nigeria

Located on the west coast of Africa, Nigeria shares borders with the Gulf of Guinea and Benin to the west, Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast, and Cameroon to the east. Nigeria is roughly six times the size of Georgia in the United States and slightly more than twice the size of California.³⁷

Figure 1: Nigeria in Africa



Figure 2: Cities in Nigeria



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Political and Religious Context

Nigeria is considered a Federal Presidential Republic that contains an elected President and a Bi-cameral Legislature. It is made up of 36 States and a Capital Territory, as shown in Figure 3, and a total of 744 local governments spread throughout the country. Similarly, to the United States of America, Nigeria's government is made up of three branches that use checks and balances; Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary. In the Executive branch resides the office of

³⁷ "The World Fact Book," *United States of America Central Intelligence Agency*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

³⁸ Ibid

the President, Vice-President, and members of the Federal Executive Council.³⁹ So that the government fully represents the people of Nigeria, they elect a President and Vice President from different regions and different religions. For instance, the current President of Nigeria who was elected in 2015, is a Northern Muslim and his running mate is a Southern Christian. Since Christianity and Islam are the two most prominent religions and split the population almost in half, the government is set up, to be able to support both groups of people.⁴⁰ This government set-up can create many tensions, because there are some religious sects that believe their religion is the right way and at times the only way and if it is not followed, this act of “neglecting the truth” is punishable by death. When certain countries attempt to embrace coexistence amongst different religions and religious sects, it can create a challenge and if they hold fast to those ideologies of only their way or death, the use of violence amongst both completely different religions and members of the same religion but those that follow a different sect are more apt to create a platform for terrorism.

The State level consists of the Governor, Deputy Governor, and members of the State Executive Council. Both the Federal and State levels contain their own Legislature. The Federal Legislature also known as the National Assembly, contains 109 members in the Senate and 360 members in the House of Representatives. The State Legislature is known as the House of Assembly.⁴¹ Each of these offices are elected for four years and a limit of eight years. The Judiciary serves as the interpreter of laws and settles conflicts between the Executive and

³⁹ “Nigeria: Past, Present and Future,” *Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Washington D.C*, 2017, <http://www.nigeriaembassyusa.org/index.php?page=nigeria-past-present-and-future>

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

Legislature. The Supreme Court is the highest court, followed by the Court of Appeal, the Federal High Court, Magistrate Court, Area Court, and Customary Court.⁴²

Figure 3: Division of States in Nigeria



Social Context

In 2016, Nigeria estimated to have a population size of over 186 million people, ranked the eighth largest populated country in the world, and ranked as Africa's most populous country. Nigeria also has over half of the population size of the United States of America, which in 2016 estimated a total population size of over 323 million people. The United Nations anticipates that by 2050 Nigeria will be the 3rd largest country in the world with 399 million people.⁴³ It is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups. The most politically influential groups are: 29%

⁴² "Nigeria: Past, Present and Future," *Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Washington D.C.*, 2017, <http://www.nigeriaembassyusa.org/index.php?page=nigeria-past-present-and-future>

⁴³ World Education Services Staff, "Education in Nigeria," *World Education News & Reviews*, March 7, 2017, <http://wenr.wes.org/2017/03/education-in-nigeria>

Hausa and Fulani, 21% Yoruba, 18% Igbo, 10% Ijaw, 4% Kanuri, 3.5% Ibibio, and 2.5% Tiv. English is the official language in Nigeria along with other dominant languages such as: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Fulani. Nigeria also contains over 500 additional indigenous languages. 50% of Nigerians are Muslim, 40% Christians, and 10% are of indigenous beliefs.⁴⁴ Nigeria has an increasing birth rate and the population contains a majority of people younger than 25. 42% are younger than 14, 19% are between the ages of 15 and 24, 30% are between 25 and 54, and 6% are over the age of 55. The average life expectancy in Nigeria is 53 years.⁴⁵ According to the World Bank, only 60% of the population is literate, which is below the world average of 86%.⁴⁶ The unemployment rate of youth ages 15-24 is 8%⁴⁷ and a total of 14% amongst all ages.⁴⁸

This growing population is creating many issues on its own. It has negative effects on the education system, the political environment, and even the economy. The fact that about 62% of the population is made up of people younger than 25 years of age is notable, because it is typically young males who become involved in terrorist organizations. Also, the fact that 44% of the population is younger than 15 years old, provides a greater number of potential coerced or voluntary children soldiers. The growing unemployment rate is of great concern to those citizens in Nigeria, and due to this knowledge of minimal employment opportunities, there is a greater chance for terrorist insurgency to rise up as a result of these grievances.

⁴⁴ "Nigeria: Past, Present and Future," *Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Washington D.C.*, 2017, <http://www.nigeriaembassyusa.org/index.php?page=nigeria-past-present-and-future>

⁴⁵ "The World Fact Book," *United States of America Central Intelligence Agency*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

⁴⁶ "Adult Literacy Rate, Population 15+ ears, Both Sexes (%)," *The World Bank*, 2017, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS>

⁴⁷ "The World Fact Book," *United States of America Central Intelligence Agency*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

⁴⁸ "Nigeria Unemployment Rate," *Trading Economics*, 2017, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/unemployment-rate>

Economic Context

The Nigerian economy remains unstable with its poor infrastructure. Conflict in the country and many regions slows down potential progress to develop a more stable economy. These threats exacerbate both poverty and unemployment and increase internally displaced persons (IDPs). Taking care of or providing refuge for these IDPs forces Nigeria to invest in their care instead of the economy of the country. Nigeria's economy is also negatively affected by its large dependency on oil. Nigeria's export earnings are 90% from oil. Nigeria has been unable to diversify their industries because all progress has been marginal. In 2014, Nigeria became Africa's largest economy and surpassed South Africa. Corruption occurs throughout the economy and smuggling warrants a dilemma. However, corruption is rarely investigated or prosecuted.⁴⁹ According to data from the World Bank, in 2015, Nigeria had a GDP of \$468.8 billion and a GDP growth at 2.7%, which is the lowest it has been since 1999. Nigeria's GDP demonstrates the huge instability in the country as it has fluctuated from .5% in 1999 to 33.7% in 2004. These grand fluctuations are detrimental to Nigeria, because it creates a huge rise in the economy, which then eventually has a tremendous fall as it did in 2005 from 33.7% in 2004 to 3.4% in 2005. The economy continues to fluctuate but has reached a low of 2.7% in 2016. Table 1 shows such fluctuations since 1999.⁵⁰ In 2016, Nigeria had a 15.7% inflation rate, which is ranked the 9th highest inflation rate in the world.⁵¹ Table 2 gives evidence not only of the growing population but also the growing relative poverty headcount ratio, which is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty lines. This data set ranges from

⁴⁹ "Nigeria: 2017 Index of Economic Freedom," *The Heritage Foundation*, 2017, <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/nigeria>

⁵⁰ "GDP by Country: Statistics from the World Bank, 1960-2015," *Nigeria Data Portal*, April 2017, <http://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/mhrzolg/gdp-by-country-statistics-from-the-world-bank-1960-2015?country=Nigeria>

⁵¹ "Nigeria: Country at a Glance," *The World Bank*, 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria>

the year 1980 to 2016 and shows that the poverty in Nigeria has risen by roughly 117 million and with the population increase that is roughly a 96.7% increase in poverty levels in Nigeria.⁵² An unstable economy can stir up grievances amongst members of society. It also effects unemployment rates and poverty. An increase in poverty can function as a breeding ground for terrorist organizations. An increase in unemployment rates can also serve as a perfect potential recruitment group of young people.

Table 1: Nigeria GDP growth (annual %), 1999-2015

Year	GDP growth (annual %)	Fluctuation Rate (%)
1999	0.5	--
2000	5.3	4.8
2001	4.4	-0.9
2002	3.8	-0.6
2003	10.4	6.6
2004	33.7	23.3
2005	3.4	-30.3
2006	8.2	4.8
2007	6.8	-1.4
2008	6.3	-0.5
2009	6.9	0.6
2010	7.8	0.9
2011	4.9	-2.9
2012	4.3	-0.6
2013	5.4	1.1
2014	6.3	0.9
2015	2.7	-3.6

Source: World Development Indicators (WDI)

⁵² "Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010," 1-31, *National Bureau of Statistics*, 2012, <http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/Nigeria%20Poverty%20Profile%202010.pdf>

Table 2: Nigeria Relative Poverty Headcount, 1980-2016

Year	Poverty Incidence (%)	Estimated Population (Million)	Population in Poverty (Million)
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.47
2016	72.0	186	134.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics. HNLSS 2010 & Fitch Reports

Educational Context

Nigeria's education system is controlled by Federal, State, and local governments.⁵³ The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for overall policy formation and quality control; however, it is mainly involved in tertiary education. The State is largely responsible for secondary education and local governments are responsible for elementary education. Due to the country's more than 250 ethnic groups and their languages, students are taught in either Yoruba, Ibo, or Hausa until grade 4 when the language of instruction changes to English.⁵⁴

Basic Education (elementary education) covers nine years of formal schooling; 6 years in elementary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. Post-basic education consists of 3 years in senior secondary education. Tertiary education offers opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and vocational and technical education. In basic education, the first six years of

⁵³ World Education Services Staff, "Education in Nigeria," *World Education News & Reviews*, March 7, 2017, <http://wenr.wes.org/2017/03/education-in-nigeria>

⁵⁴ Ibid

elementary curriculum includes: Mathematics, English, basic science and technology, Nigerian language, cultural and creative arts, and religion and national values.⁵⁵

Progression to the last 3 years of basic education or the junior secondary education are obligatory. These three years continue with the same subjects from the elementary education but then adds business studies. Nigeria's education system, and especially in their basic education, the dramatic population growth overburdens them. Of Nigeria's population, 44% are below the age of 15 and because of this, the government is left unable to provide enough schoolhouses or even teachers for all the young people. Also, they suffer to integrate this large youth population into society. According to the United Nations, in 2010, 8.73 million elementary aged students didn't participate in education at all. Based on this statistic, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world.⁵⁶ According to data produced by the World Bank, in 2010, 63.8% of Nigerian students were enrolled at the elementary level compared to the global average of 88.8%.⁵⁷ In 2015, Nigeria had the youth literacy rate at 72.8% and the adult literacy rate at 59.6% compared to the global average of 90.6% for youth in 2010 and 85.3% for adults in 2010.⁵⁸ Even when looking at just the developing nations, Nigeria fell short of meeting the average rate. In a report from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), from 2005 to 2013, Nigeria's adult and youth literacy rate was at 51% whereas average literacy rate for Sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries was at 60%.⁵⁹ Although based on this data, Nigeria is only 9% below the average of developing countries, it

⁵⁵ World Education Services Staff, "Education in Nigeria," *World Education News & Reviews*, March 7, 2017, <http://wenr.wes.org/2017/03/education-in-nigeria>

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ "Education is Vital to Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (Youth and Adult Literacy Rates)," *UNICEF Data*, April 2016, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/overview/>

still demonstrates the fact that Nigeria is under-educated as it has not even reached the average for countries in similar situations. Education participation rates vary based on region, for example, comparing the oil-rich South to the impoverished North, where in some places the participation rates dropped below 25% in 2010.⁶⁰ The issue then becomes that due to the structure of Nigeria's education system, if a student does not attend basic education they are unable to enroll in senior secondary education, which results in great numbers of uneducated and most likely unemployed or poorly employed young people. Although Nigeria has established a compulsory free Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act which was passed in 2004 and has been re-structured in 2012 and re-implemented in 2015, the government is unable to keep up with the growing population rate, which makes this Act more difficult to fulfill in providing a primary education to all children of Nigeria.⁶¹

Another issue that arises is that primary schools are taught by local governments and with 744 of them and each having different religious, tribal, cultural, and even moral views, demonstrates why it becomes difficult to take control of the educational system and why it is possible for many children to be taught extremist views that promote violence in a classroom, depending on the local government they are under. This is a critical analysis that must be put into play, when evaluating the propensity of highly educated students who are more apt to become terrorists than the uneducated. With a growing uneducated base in Nigeria and the lack of a nationalized or centralized curriculum, more children can be taught in their mandatory grades' ideologies that could lean on extremism. This opens the door for this growing and marginalized group to be further influenced outside of the educational system.

⁶⁰ World Education Services Staff, "Education in Nigeria," *World Education News & Reviews*, March 7, 2017, <http://wenr.wes.org/2017/03/education-in-nigeria>

⁶¹ Ibid

Boko Haram

Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in a mosque called Markaz as the movement's headquarters. Yusuf utilized an existing mosque where he taught his followers, because he was expelled from mosques in Maiduguri, due to the fact that Muslim clerics were against his radical views of Islam.⁶² The group began to emerge in 2003 when many radical Islamists fled to Kanamma in the northeast area of Nigeria, where it attempted to fulfill its own radical views but met much resistance with authorities. This group was led by Mohammed Yusuf and his strict, fundamentalist interpretation and approach to the Quran and believed that the creation of Nigeria by the British had imposed Western and un-Islamic ideologies and way of life for Muslims. Throughout 2003 and 2004, this group called Boko Haram began to incur violent attacks on police stations while avoiding civilian casualties. Then in July 2009, Boko Haram launched an uprising that brought about a huge military crack-down killing more than 800, the majority being Boko Haram members along with Mohammed Yusuf. Boko Haram went underground for an entire year and re-emerged in September 2010 when a group of Boko Haram gunmen freed over 700 inmates, with many being sect members, from a prison in Bauchi. Along with this prison raid came assassinations and deaths. These killings did not and have not stopped since 2010.⁶³ Since 2010, Boko Haram has increased in its number of recruits and in size. It has also increased in its complexity and has become a true terrorist network. Lastly, its violent actions only continue to escalate in scale. Since 2011, Boko Haram has planted bombs almost

⁶² "Nigeria: Timeline of Boko Haram Attacks and Related Violence," *Security News and Resources Blog*, 2014, <http://www.i-sentry.net/nigeria-timeline-of-boko-haram-attacks-and-related-violence/>

⁶³ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

weekly in public spaces or in churches in the northeast region of Nigeria.⁶⁴ Some say the death of Yusuf created a shift in motives and plans, and caused an even more radical group to fester over a year's time, now running rampant.

The insurgency became even more complex when a splinter faction of Boko Haram, called Ansaru, emerged, and, alongside Boko Haram, began kidnapping foreigners for ransom to gain attention and news. There is little information about who leads Boko Haram now after a report in 2016 confirmed Shekau, Yusuf's deputy, was dead. This report remains in question, but the considered leaderless group is still inflicting havoc on the region. This adds to the complexity of the group's structure and formation, because many accounts say there is another leader, but as of now, Boko Haram has so many sects that it can still grow and thrive without the need of one central figure or leader. Boko Haram is best described as an umbrella-like structure. The very true organism of Boko Haram is at the top but there are a vast number of cells that carry out attacks, recruit foot soldiers, and exploit financial avenues for their own reasons. Due to this, it is almost impossible to determine how many followers of Boko Haram there are.⁶⁵

Motivations/Actions in the Political Context

Boko Haram presents many frustrations with the political structure in Nigeria, especially as it adheres to democracy, a Westernized form of government. Not only does the structure infuriate the insurgency, but also the fact that the President's Vice President is Christian goes against the very principles and foundations of its Salafi-Jihadist beliefs. Also, the corruption within the government along with the fact that the government is unable to provide stability in

⁶⁴ Andrew Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" 1-16, *United States Institute of Peace*, 2012, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR308.pdf>

⁶⁵ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

the region and so many people, in particular Muslims, are suffering, Boko Haram blames the government and the countries' involvement with Western society.

The reason for such frustration of the West is because Boko Haram takes advantage of its historical legacy and religious views in order to spread its beliefs across Nigeria and especially to justify its violent actions. In order to understand Boko Haram, it is crucial to understand Nigeria's history and, in particular, its interpretation of the historical events. In the mid-11th century, in the northeast region of Lake Chad in Kanem, the Kanem-Bornu Empire was ruled by kings of the Muslim Sayfawa dynasty. This empire flourished under the Sayfawa dynasty and was the greatest power in the region. The identity of the empire was distinctively Islamic.⁶⁶ The Kanem-Bornu Empire was able to flourish and expand through its military conquests and its diplomatic trade relations with other Muslim states. By the 17th century, the empire controlled the trans-Saharan trade routes and signed treaties with rulers in North Africa. In 1814, Muhammad al-Kanemi ended the influence and authority of the Sayfawa dynasty in the Kanem-Bornu Empire. In 1852, Britain became involved through the British monarch Queen Victoria's treaty with the Sovereign Kingdom of Bornoo that would ensure hindrance free trade. In May 1893, the invasion of Rabeh Fadlallah, a Muslim warrior and slave trader from today's Sudan launched the collapse of the dynasty. The collapse began when France opposed the invasion because they wanted to control the installation of a ruler in the empire.⁶⁷ The British were afraid of losing their trade relations to the French and therefore supported the invasion by Rabeh. The French forces killed Rabeh in 1901 and his death left the empire without a leader. The territory then became divided between France, Britain, and Germany.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Fr. Atta Barkindo, "How Boko Haram Exploits History and Memory," *Africa Research Institute*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/boko-haram-exploits-history-memory/>

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

The glorious depiction of the Islamic empires in the regions are a great contrast to the Nigerian state today. Yusuf praised the Sayfawa rulers and their promotion of Islam but also condemned al-Kanemi for collaborating with Western “infidels”.⁶⁹ It was through this collaboration that brought the great Islamic empires to their knees. Boko Haram’s version of history is selective in nature, because in fact the Kanem-Bornu empire was more volatile and at times far less glorious than claimed by Boko Haram. Nonetheless, the exploitation of such a history has been the driving factor for the hatred of Western “infidels”. Boko Haram’s leaders and followers view their own idealized facts from their selective historical accounts. They see that the involvement with the West was the reason for the collapse of the Islamic empires. The Western control over the territories deteriorated Nigeria’s economy, political, and value systems. Boko Haram blames the West for why the northeast region is so impoverished, because the effects of the West’s control of the region are long lasting. Boko Haram also builds its hatred towards the West on the fact that during their control of the region, they imposed their religious beliefs and values on the people, which went against Allah and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.⁷⁰ These historical accounts and Yusuf’s original design of the story fuels the fire for Boko Haram and, for many, this account is the reason for their recruitment to this violent group.

Many have mistaken the meaning of Boko Haram to be a translation saying Western Education is forbidden. This may be the implied contextual meaning but it is not the direct translation.⁷¹ The word ‘Haram’ is a borrowed Arabic word that refers to those things that are forbidden in Islam. The word ‘Boko’ is often mistaken for meaning in the Hausa language

⁶⁹ Fr. Atta Barkindo, “How Boko Haram Exploits History and Memory,” *Africa Research Institute*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/boko-haram-exploits-history-memory/>

⁷⁰ Dan Murphy, “‘Boko Haram’ Doesn’t Really Mean ‘Western Education is a Sin,’” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/Backchannels/2014/0506/Boko-Haram-doesn-t-really-mean-Western-education-is-a-sin>

⁷¹ Ibid

‘book’. Paul Newman, one of the leading authorities in the Hausa language, states that this translation is inaccurate.⁷² The term came from a time when old British colonial education policy became a force in Nigeria and the Hausa speakers believed Britain was trying to colonize their minds. In the figurative, the word ‘boko’ means Western Education but its literal translation means ‘fraud’ or ‘inauthentic’. Newman describes how this Hausa word has many meanings but focused around “things or actions having to do with fraudulence, shame, or inauthenticity”⁷³ or even deception. During British colonization, the colonists aggressively pushed for modern secular education that Muslims resisted.⁷⁴ When replacing Nigeria’s traditional Islamic educational system with their own, the people would call out ‘Boko’, referring to “fraudulent deception being imposed on the Hausa by a conquering European force.”⁷⁵ Rather than sending their children to British ruled schools, the Hausa elite made their servants teach their children, because they believed that if they did attend these schools their Islamic cultures and values would be undermined and their children would become ‘yan boko’, meaning ‘(would-be) westerners’.⁷⁶ Therefore, the name Boko Haram figuratively and contextually implies Western Education is forbidden, because of the historical context of western ideologies that were imposed and forced upon Muslims in this region. It is for this reason that the history of Nigeria is extremely important in Boko Haram’s evangelical approaches. It also demonstrates why Boko Haram views western education as forbidden, because it attempted to undermine its very own

⁷² Dan Murphy, “‘Boko Haram’ Doesn’t Really Mean ‘Western Education is a Sin,’” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/Backchannels/2014/0506/Boko-Haram-doesn-t-really-mean-Western-education-is-a-sin>

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

belief system and it is sinful because it goes against the teachings of Allah and the Prophet Muhammed.

These views and interpretations of their past, correspond with social issues of feelings and sentiments of oppression for many years as well as their religious views that find those who are not “true followers” of Allah, those typically being the Western World, should be put to death.

Motivations/Actions in the Religious Context

Boko Haram’s frustration and anger towards the imposition of Western values on the northeast region of Nigeria have only intensified, because of its contrasting religious values, views, and ideals. Boko Haram is considered Salafi-jihadists, which as was earlier discussed, promotes a view that holds Islam as the only authentic way, but, in particular, that its way of following Salafi-jihadism is the only true and authentic way that all Muslims should follow, which justifies violent actions against other Muslims that disagree with them.⁷⁷ Its radical interpretation of the Quran without considering the context of the text, is a reason for its violent acts. Shekau has claimed to be imitating the work of the Prophet by massacring those “unbelievers” and “infidels”.⁷⁸ The group uses texts from the Quran about how unbelievers are considered infidels and that the head of the infidel should be cut off. These interpretations of its holy book and the teachings of its Prophet are the source for its attacks, because it believes that its way is the truth and so all others, even different sects of Muslims are considered infidels and must die. The fact that the Judeo-Christian faith promotes Jesus as God, infuriates Salafi-Jihadists, like Boko Haram, because that is blasphemy against Allah. Boko Haram also frowns

⁷⁷ Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid, “Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer,” *Brookings Institute*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

⁷⁸ Ibid

upon the actions of Western ideals and how the educational system encourages such values amongst young people, it believes, discriminates against its faith.⁷⁹ Both the tragic historical account of the fall of a once great Islamic empire and the imposition of religious values that push against Allah and the Prophet are fuel to the fire of Boko Haram's violent insurgency.

Boko Haram's politics and theology incorporate more than just a hatred for Western influence. Its worldview in fact fuses together two key ideas. The first is religious exclusivism, which states that all other religious and value systems are not accepted in the eyes of Boko Haram and that even rival interpretations of Islam are opposed. According to Boko Haram, there is only one interpretation of Islam, which it possesses. The exclusivism requires all Muslims to choose between Islam and anti-Islamic practices, which are Western ideals.⁸⁰ These Western ideals contain three pillars that Boko Haram's leaders identify and consider to be the reason for their downfall as a once great Islamic state. The three pillars are Judeo-Christian tradition, democracy, and education.⁸¹ The second adheres to the social context, which is its "politics of victimhood", which Boko Haram claims that its violence and actions are in direct response to the decades of persecution against Muslims in Nigeria.⁸²

Its demands have varied but typically have two focuses: release of Boko Haram prisoners and the creation of an Islamic state.⁸³ Boko Haram as an Islamic sect believes that northern

⁷⁹ Alex Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief: Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview," 1-33, *Center for Middle East Policy*, No. 22, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Fr. Atta Barkindo, "How Boko Haram Exploits History and Memory," *Africa Research Institute*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/boko-haram-exploits-history-memory/>

⁸² Alex Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief: Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview," 1-33, *Center for Middle East Policy*, No. 22, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf

⁸³ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

Nigeria has been seized by false and corrupt Muslims and desires to wage war against such “infidels” who defy Allah and the nature of Islam. It also believes in the need for war against the Federal Republic of Nigeria in order to create and establish a pure Islamic state that is ruled by Sharia law.⁸⁴ Boko Haram continues to spread the teachings of its faith and purpose as true followers of the Prophet Mohammed with YouTube clips and on the ground approaches, such as; foot men who travel from village to village, and trucks with speakers proclaiming the “truth” throughout the city streets.⁸⁵

Boko Haram’s religiously justified violent actions involve suicide bombings and mass murders. The promotion of suicide bombings can be found in the Salafi-jihadist beliefs, that death or martyrdom will be rewarded by Allah with a life after death filled with riches, glory, and many virgins. These suicide bombers are considered martyrs because they are dying for what they believe is the right cause in following the teachings of the Prophet. Even though many current Islamic scholars have detested this proclamation of suicide bombers as martyrs, Boko Haram indoctrinates its followers with such teachings and proclaims any other teachings that contradict as sinful and un-Islamic. The mass murders, as mentioned earlier, are justified by Boko Haram because according to their interpretation of the Quran, “infidels”, those who go against the true and only authentic way of Islam, are to be put to death.⁸⁶

Boko Haram has been notorious for targeting school children. In 2013 Boko Haram killed dozens of school boys in the northeast, and in 2014 they kidnapped 276 school girls

⁸⁴ Andrew Walker, “What Is Boko Haram?” 1-16, *United States Institute of Peace*, 2012, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR308.pdf>

⁸⁵ Fr. Atta Barkindo, “An Introduction to Boko Haram’s Ideologues: From Yusuf to Shekau,” *Africa Research Institute*, February 2, 2017. <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/blog/introduction-boko-harams-ideologues-yusuf-shekau/>

⁸⁶ Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid, “Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer,” *Brookings Institute*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

between 16 and 18 years old and threatened to rape them, marry them, or even sell them.⁸⁷ It is also known for the recruitment of child soldiers. Both the kidnapping of young girls and creation of child soldiers are considered justifiable in the eyes of Boko Haram. The indoctrination of young children is the best way to spread its faith, because children are more receptive and easily molded at a younger age. There is also discussion as to why the group would kidnap so many girls from a schoolhouse. Some argue that because Boko Haram has threatened to sell them that it is a way of producing finances for the purpose of furthering its degree of influence in the area. Others have questioned the role of women within Boko Haram, stating that women play a vital role and that the girls could become the wives of these men in order to serve in the camps by cooking, cleaning, bearing children, and taking care of the young boys.⁸⁸ Regardless, both are justifiable in the eyes of Boko Haram as it follows its interpretations of the teachings of the Prophet. It believes that according to the Quran, it must spread its faith by any means necessary. Its violent actions towards all citizens are done with purpose and to make a statement or to promote support for its insurgency.

Social Motivations/Actions

Yusuf took advantage of the definition of Boko Haram along with Nigeria's history and promoted the increasing support of this organization by capitalizing on the public grievances, frustrations, and resentments that came from the social uncertainty that continued with the agonizing poverty felt by its people. With the ever-growing population in Nigeria and lack of employment, citizens anticipated their impoverished situations and became frustrated that the

⁸⁷ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

⁸⁸ Fr. Atta Barkindo and Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram: The Importance of Listening," *Africa Research Institute*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/event/boko-haram-the-importance-of-listening/>

government seemed to not assist its own people. Yusuf lured his followers through such a timely message and took hold of people's minds and the social vulnerabilities of religiously-inclined young people.⁸⁹ He played on the aspect that they as "true believers" were being oppressed by Western civilization that was running their country to the ground.

Boko Haram began its campaigns with many locals preaching and footmen who walk from village to village proclaiming the truth that Yusuf and Boko Haram stood for. It also uses trucks with speakers on the top that play the teaching and preaching's of Yusuf all throughout the streets of northeastern Nigeria. Its evangelical approaches were non-violent and effective due to the lack of education in the area, it was easier to indoctrinate and persuade young followers.⁹⁰

When the Nigerian military became involved and formed an opposition to its followers and forms of preaching, the group began to change some of its approaches.⁹¹ The Nigerian government made poor decisions in how to handle Boko Haram. The military responded to Boko Haram's attacks and actions with heavy-handed raids which have resulted in accusations of human rights abuse.⁹² These measures were counterproductive and brutal, which only fanned the flame and gave it fuel to expand.⁹³ The government that desired to stop or cripple the insurgent group has inversely encouraged it and made it stronger with frustration and anger for the rise of "infidels". And these "infidels" were trying to rise up against Boko Haram and this became another form of suppression/oppression that it felt was being inflicted upon its beliefs.

⁸⁹ Abee Olufemi Salaam, "The Psychological Make-Up of Mohammed Yusuf," *E-International Relations*, November 4, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/04/the-psychological-make-up-of-mohammed-yusuf/>

⁹⁰ Fr. Atta Barkindo, "An Introduction to Boko Haram's Ideologues: From Yusuf to Shekau," *Africa Research Institute*, February 2, 2017. <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/blog/introduction-boko-harams-ideologues-yusuf-shekau/>

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

⁹³ Andrew Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" 1-16, *United States Institute of Peace*, 2012, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR308.pdf>

However, it is interesting to note the fact that Boko Haram did not employ violence against civilians before 2009. The organization directed its actions mainly towards police and government officials. But, its actions against these groups were not peaceful by any means. Yusuf became increasingly more radical throughout his years leading Boko Haram, as he was preaching radicalism and ever-increasing support for violence. Boko Haram has been violent since its founding in 2002, but it was not until after the death of Yusuf in 2009 and the shift of power to Shekau that the insurgency group became even more radical and began wreaking havoc on all non-Muslims and different sects of Muslims who disagreed. This shift in power sparked a transition of violence. Yusuf, from the beginning taught the need for challenging the engagement between the Western and Muslim worlds. The death of Yusuf seemed to be the final act of oppression that Boko Haram would put up with and is what is believed to have caused such a great shift in its strategies.⁹⁴

Economic Motivations/Actions

There is great disparity between Nigeria's north, which is majority Muslim and its south, which is mainly Christian. The north suffers greater and "badly trails the south in terms of education and wealth".⁹⁵ It is crucial to understand Boko Haram in the context of Nigeria's structure, because many of its justifications for violence stem from the economic grievances in the country. Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation, largest economy, and largest oil producer, but astonishing levels of corruption have suffered it to be without basic development and

⁹⁴ Fr. Atta Barkindo, "An Introduction to Boko Haram's Ideologies: From Yusuf to Shekau," *Africa Research Institute*, February 2, 2017. <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/blog/introduction-boko-harams-ideologies-yusuf-shekau/>

⁹⁵ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

infrastructure.⁹⁶ However, although there is a great deal of poverty in the northeast region, poverty alone cannot explain why violent organizations and movements flourish in some regions rather than others.⁹⁷ Boko Haram does in fact use the structure of the region to encourage support for its efforts. Boko Haram ties this economic instability back to the political and historical context of the country and how the Western world brought great devastation to its people, and their constant involvement in Nigeria continues to negatively affect the economy and its stability. Even though the northeastern region is extremely impoverished, Boko Haram finds ways to obtain funding in order to continue its strategic acts of violence. Boko Haram is financed mainly through ransom kidnappings, bank robberies, and other illegal activities. It is believed that it also raids military arms depots and traffic illegal arms into West Africa.⁹⁸

Educational Motivations/Actions

As previously mentioned, the founder of Boko Haram was Mohammed Yusuf, a native from the Yobe State. He reportedly dropped out of secondary school but enrolled for a Quranic education in the Chad and Niger Republic. This area is known to have a zeal for religious education, which is common for Northern Nigerian Muslims. It was through this religious education that Yusuf developed his radical ideology. He joined the Islamic Movement of Nigeria in the 1990s, but when he perceived the movement to be led by Shia Muslims, he broke away and then went to the Borno State of Nigeria where he joined *Jamaatul Tajdid Islam (JTI)*.⁹⁹ He

⁹⁶ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

⁹⁷ Alex Thurston, "'The Disease is Unbelief': Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview," 1-33, *Center for Middle East Policy*, No. 22, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf

⁹⁸ Mike Smith, "FACTSHEET: Explaining Nigeria's Boko Haram and its Violent Insurgency," *Africa Check: Sorting Fact from Fiction*, 2014, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-explaining-nigerias-boko-haram-and-its-violent-insurgency/>

⁹⁹ Abeeb Olufemi Salaam, "The Psychological Make-Up of Mohammed Yusuf," *E-International Relations*, November 4, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/04/the-psychological-make-up-of-mohammed-yusuf/>

still found himself dissatisfied with the doctrine and joined a group called Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra or Shabaab. He then emerged as the leader of the organization and displaced the elderly sect members.¹⁰⁰ Shortly after taking over the organization he began to change the doctrine and devised tenets that strongly condemned Western education and civilization as “taquut”, meaning evil, and should be forbidden by every Muslim. Through this doctrinal perspective, Yusuf formed the group that is today known as Boko Haram with its original name Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra changed to Jama'atu Ahlus- Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, meaning People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad.¹⁰¹

Before the death of Yusuf in 2009, Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's deputy and Mamman Nur were third-in-command. They met each other as theology students in Borno, even though they both had semi-different views, Yusuf admired the Taliban and Shekau preached a 'takfiri', meaning 'excommunication', ideology; however, both focused on Nigeria.¹⁰² Boko Haram's exploitation of the uneducated population is rather fascinating, because it utilizes the lack of education as a tool to promote its own radicalized religious education in order to indoctrinate young people. It is through such a set-up that Boko Haram is able to thrive, because it begins recruitment and teachings at a younger age, the younger children are easier to mold and shape to conform to its beliefs. Boko Haram can and has also targeted the well-educated, because as the literature presented, those who were more educated realized their social and economic realities

¹⁰⁰ Abee Olufemi Salaam, “The Psychological Make-Up of Mohammed Yusuf,” *E-International Relations*, November 4, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/04/the-psychological-make-up-of-mohammed-yusuf/>

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Jacob Zenn, “Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, February 24, 2014, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/leadership-analysis-of-boko-haram-and-ansaru-in-nigeria>

and therefore, Boko Haram has been able to harness such social and economic frustrations in order to add to its numbers.¹⁰³

Hypothesis and Lessons Learned

Based on the research presented about Nigeria and Boko Haram, I tie together all the information on the relevant political, religious, social, economic, and educational context of Nigeria along with the comprehensive overview of Boko Haram and its motivations/actions in order to make hypotheses about how Boko Haram resorts to violence as a result of all five factors, but recognizing that there are certain combinations of factors that seems to be utilized and exploited more by Boko Haram as a justification for its violent actions.

In relation to the political factors, the case supports two hypotheses for further research. The first is that the more political instability there is in a country, the more likely terrorism will form. The second is the more political frustration there is in a country, the more likely terrorism will form. The political instability of Nigeria has created a great deal of grievances especially amongst young adult males who lack employment. The structure of the government also infuriates Boko Haram, because it does not believe the country should collaborate with Westernized ideologies, especially with a Christian in the office of Vice President.

These political factors also tie into the religious factors that cause violent extremism. In relation to the religious factors, the case supports the hypothesis for further research that the more religious tension and radicalization there is amongst a group, the more likely they are to resort to violence in the form of terrorism. Religion has played a huge role in terrorist's violence, because in some radicalized religions, war and violence is promoted and considered an act

¹⁰³ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" 119-144, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003.

divinely directed by the god of that religion. In contemporary radical Islamism, many radicalized groups and especially Salafi-Jihadists, like Boko Haram, view the war against “infidels”, people who don’t agree with them whether a different sect of Muslim, different religion, or those who adhere to or promote Westernized ideologies, as divinely directed, and instructed by Allah and therefore, this is one of the greatest causes of terrorism for such radicalized Islamic believers and Boko Haram. Also, its frustration with religious ideologies that promote Jesus as God and discredit their Islamic values, helps fuel this violent extremism, because it goes against everything Allah and the Prophet preach, and therefore are infidels, which according to Boko Haram and other Salafi-Jihadists, they must be put to death.

To view through the lens of social factors, the case suggests two hypotheses for further research. The first is that the greater the population growth, the more likely terrorism will form. The dramatic growing population in Nigeria has effected the political stability in the region and a lack of employment, which makes people concerned for their livelihood. The second is that the more a group is suppressed, oppressed, or made to feel inferior; the more likely they are to form terrorist sects. Boko Haram felt it was being discriminated against and that its cultural values were being suppressed by Western institutions that had been imposed in Nigeria. But this has not been the only reason, because many other groups that are oppressed do not act out in violence. This grievance added with other factors has encouraged the use of violence, but it is not the sole purpose.

The economic factors have been a breeding ground for Boko Haram in Nigeria. In relation to the economic factors the case suggests the hypothesis that the more frustrated individuals become with corruption, poverty, and their situation; the more likely they are to resort to violence. The political corruption and political factors have sparked and add to the

economic instability in Nigeria. The fact that a great deal of the northeast, where Boko Haram flourishes, does trail behind the south and is extremely impoverished, makes it a great place for them to recruit followers and other soldiers. The poverty that Nigeria is experiencing allowed for Mohammad Yusuf to use such a context to shape his message towards the grievances of the impoverished individuals. The studies show that many individuals who are a part of terrorist organizations are from the middle class, but this does not neglect the fact that those in poverty are more susceptible, as demonstrated in Nigeria with Boko Haram members, to terrorist recruitment, because of such economic grievances.

Educational factors play a huge role, and through this lens, the case suggests two hypotheses for further research. The first hypothesis is that the more educated an individual becomes, the more likely they are to become frustrated with their situation and justify the use of violence. The second hypothesis is that the more uneducated an individual is, the more likely they are to be preyed on by terrorist groups to become easily indoctrinated and made soldiers for such insurgencies. This is because, as stated previously, those that are well educated are more prone to violence; however, terrorists prey on the uneducated in order to indoctrinate them, and with the growing population of uneducated young people, it makes them more susceptible to these terrorist groups. Therefore, impoverished and uneducated individuals are more easily brought into and indoctrinated in terrorist ideologies. It is a misconceived notion that even those who had dropped out of primary or secondary school are ignorant or not able to critically think for themselves, which this will always remain a debate; however, based on interviews of alleged members of Boko Haram in Nigeria by Fr. Atta Barkindo, he mentions that these members were able to critically think and were very well informed about their situation and life in general. They may not have had a formal education by the State, but these terrorist factions seem to have their

own type of radicalized education that not only indoctrinates their soldiers but also gives them the ability to think critically and remove a certain amount of ignorance from their current situation. Although, this education may be extremely biased, it is still a form of education that helps demonstrate why terrorist groups prey on uneducated individuals for recruitment.¹⁰⁴

There is another factor that has tied into the political factors of Nigeria that Boko Haram seems to uniquely use in order to justify its violent actions and also that encourages violence, which is its interpretation of Nigeria's history. The case suggests the hypothesis that the more a group uses sad or angering interpretations of history and historical figures or events that seem to shape the poor circumstances of their now, the more likely they are to turn to terroristic tendencies. The fact that Yusuf tailored his message around his interpretation of a once great Islamic empire who was brought down by the un-Islamic world and infidels, known as the West. This historical interpretation brought about a greater hatred for Western ideologies that are very prominent in Nigeria, which can be seen in their politics and educational system. This hatred is due to the fact that Yusuf and Boko Haram members saw and still see the growing instability of Nigeria and trace it back to this downfall brought on by the West. This interpretation fuels Boko Haram's violent terrorist acts as it seeks to restore the once great Islamic empire.

Based on these findings, the case presents two hypotheses for which combination of factors are more likely to result in terrorism. The first hypothesis is that the combination of radicalized religion and historical interpretations account for the greatest cause of violence in extremism based on information analyzed through the lens of Boko Haram. The second hypothesis is that based on Nigeria's context, the more political and economic instability there is in a country, the greater chance there is to be an uprising, but this alone does not cause all violent

¹⁰⁴ Fr. Atta Barkindo, "How Boko Haram Exploits History and Memory," *Africa Research Institute*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/boko-haram-exploits-history-memory/>

extremism, but when combined with a group's radicalized religion and interpretation of history, violence is more likely to occur in the form of terrorism.

These hypotheses should be evaluated further and studied in the context of Boko Haram, but also taken to study and understand other violent terrorist organizations.

Questions for Future Study

Boko Haram has fascinating components to its structure that deserves further study and research. This group is becoming an increasingly dangerous group and is flourishing in ways that have yet to be fully understood. Not only does Boko Haram present a threat, but other terrorist organizations around the world that use violence in similar ways are greatly impacting economies, governments, and the livelihood of their citizens. It is important to continue to study groups like Boko Haram in order to fully understand not just its implication, but the modalities that create such violent extremism so solutions can be developed to curtail and eventually stop such violence. A few questions that prompt further research are as follows: Do Western ideologies and involvement create seeds for the growth of terrorism when watered with political and economic issues? Should counterterrorism efforts be tailored to the group itself? Are we listening and paying attention to the true causes of violence or just assuming it is because of irrational thought? How do we develop a model to understand why groups form and act in the way they do? What are the similarities in other violent radicalized groups? Can these lessons from Boko Haram be applied to other groups?

Conclusion

Comprehensive research has gone forth to understand radicalization, terrorism and these insurgents' use of violence. Based on what can be seen from Boko Haram, it is understood that a country like Nigeria that is struggling with an imbalance and corruption in its economy,

government, education, religion, and population size all have served as a breeding ground for the formulation of terrorist groups who use violence. It can also be seen that groups like Boko Haram exploit and warp history and religion to justify its violent acts. It is upon these two factors along with this country's political and economic situation that creates the greatest likelihood of extremist groups resorting to violence.

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