

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.25.2024.285			
Received:	16 Nov. 2023	Accepted:	2 February 2024
Revised:	09 January 2024	Published:	15 June 2024
Volume:	25 (June)	Pages:	59-69
To cite:			
Mariya Shaikh. 2024. The unholy war of Boko Haram: A comprehensive analysis. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 25 (June.): 59-69.			

The Unholy War of Boko Haram: A Comprehensive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Boko Haram is widely considered one of the deadliest and most destructive terrorist organisations. It started in Nigeria and has been responsible for numerous attacks, including bombings, kidnappings, and massacres. The group was founded in 2002 to establish Islamic law in Nigeria. Since then, it has extended its operations to neighbouring nations such as Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. International attention was drawn to Boko Haram, especially after more than 200 schoolgirls were abducted in Chibok, Nigeria, in 2014. Numerous people have been displaced from their homes and thousands of people have died as a result of the group's actions in the affected regions. This paper delves into the extremist group Boko Haram's origins and goals in the context of Nigeria's socioeconomic landscape. The paper aims to uncover the group's terrorism by drawing on the teachings of Al-Quran and Hadith. It meticulously examines how Boko Haram attempts to justify its actions through distorted interpretations of Islamic scriptures, particularly claiming Jihad. The central idea asserts that Boko Haram's invocation of Islamic teachings is fundamentally unsubstantiated. This paper aims to ascribe the group's narrative by examining their ideological foundations and highlighting the differences between their behaviour and Islamic values.

Keywords: Africa, Boko Haram, Islam, Nigeria, terrorism.

In 2014, the world witnessed severe brutality in Africa. On the 11th of April 2014, more than two hundred and thirty young schoolgirls aged between 16 and 18 years were abducted at the local school of Chibok in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram. The kidnapping captured the world's attention, and a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls went viral to support the Chibok girls. From London and Washington to Johannesburg and Abuja, marches, and rapid action to reunite these schoolgirls with their parents took place immediately after their abduction. The incident of the abducted Chibok girls clearly exemplifies the threats of terrorist menace and the challenges of confronting terrorism in Africa.

Boko Haram: The Most Destructive and Lethal Group

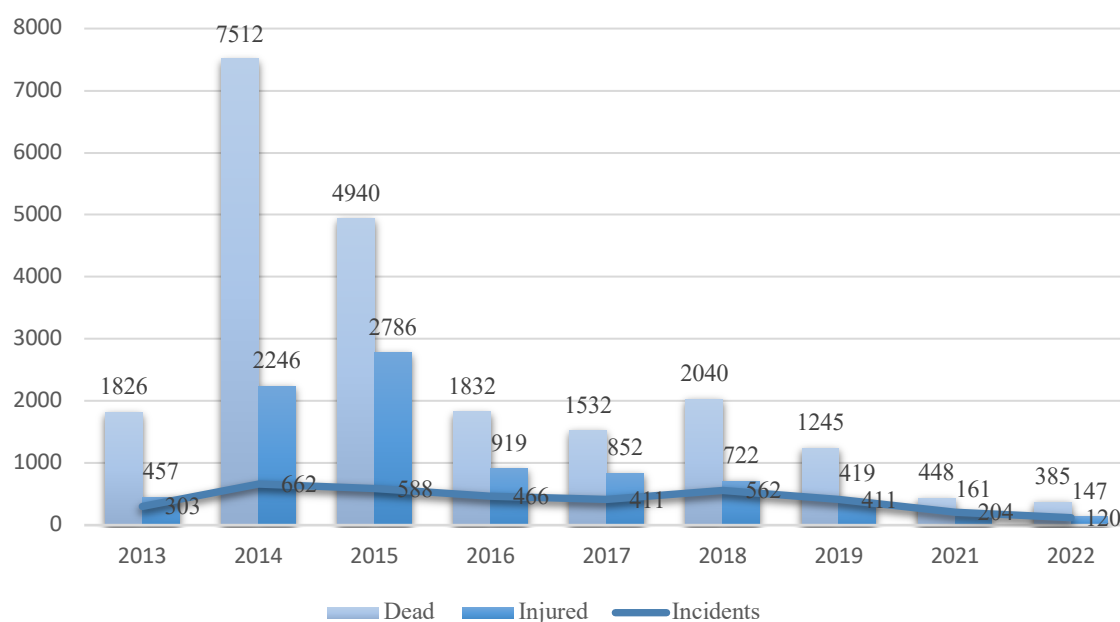
Nigeria is Africa's top oil producer. It has the continent's largest Muslim population. In 1960, Nigeria achieved independence, and the tensions between northern and southern Nigerians escalated on account of religious, ethnic, and social differences. Northerners, who are mainly Muslims, felt they were inadequately represented in government and politics. Top official positions were given to southern Nigerian Christians, mostly Igbos. Nigeria hosts the deadliest

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terrorist group in Africa, the Boko-Haram, which is based in northern Nigeria (Global Terrorism Index 2015: 33; Virginia 2015: 17-20).

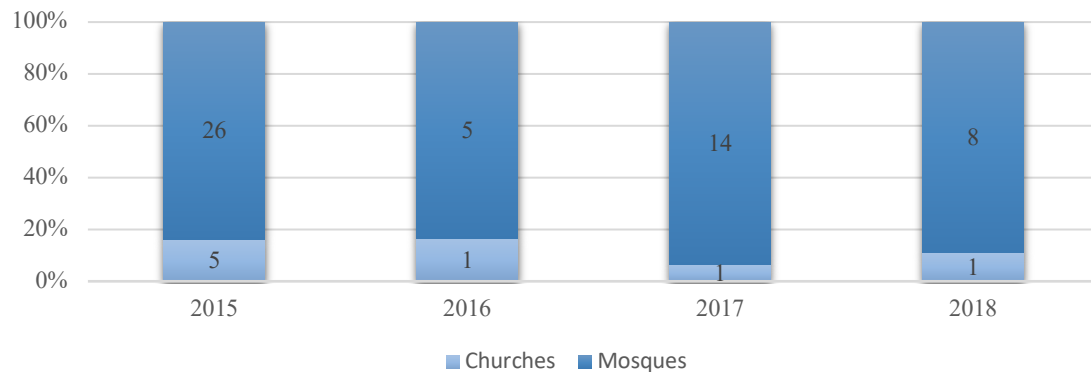
As shown in the Figure 1, Nigeria experienced the most considerable upsurge in terrorist deaths ever recorded by any country from 2013 to 2014. Also, this group is accountable for the 7,512 deaths in 2014. The terrorist threat in Nigeria has significantly increased during the years, and it peaked in 2014. The number of terrorist deaths in the country increased by more than 300 per cent, reaching 7,512, the highest number ever recorded by any country in 2014. Nigeria accounted for only 5 per cent of terrorist occurrences globally, yet it had the second greatest number of fatalities. Terrorist strikes in Nigeria are far more deadly than in any other country. In Nigeria, each attack resulted in an average of 11 deaths. Nigeria went from having the fifth-largest number of fatalities in 2013 to having the second-highest in 2014. The cause for this was partly due to Boko Haram's increasing cruelty.

Figure 1: Number of Dead, Injuries and Incidents in Nigeria from 2013 to 2022
Source: Researcher's compilation from Global Terrorism Index (GTI) (2014-2023)



Following a spike in Boko Haram's violence in 2014 and 2015, the number of people killed by the organisation has dropped significantly. With the help of Benin, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, the Nigerian military has driven Boko Haram out of various territories in northeastern Nigeria. The group, on either hand, retains control over many villages and pockets of territory in northern Nigeria and carries out deadly suicide attacks. During the first half of 2018, it has increasingly targeted mosques, with suicide bombers accounting for about one-third of all fatalities. Boko Haram split in two in 2016. One part, commanded by the group's founder's son, remained faithful to the Islamic State's central leadership and became known as the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP). In February 2018, ISWAP kidnapped over a hundred pupils. A little over a month later, they were released (Council on Foreign Relations 2021; Hansen 2021). As per figure 1, in 2019, 1,245 people died in Nigeria due to terrorism, down 39 per cent from the previous year. Terrorism-related incidents dropped by 27 per cent, putting Nigeria's terrorist violence at its lowest point since 2013. In Nigeria, a major reduction in violence contributed to the decrease in terrorism deaths and events.

Figure 2: Attacks on Mosques by Boko -Haram from 2015 to 2018
Source: Campbell & Harwood (2021)



According to figure 2, Boko Haram has attacked 53 mosques in four years. In 2015, the group attacked 26 mosques in total. It is unclear why mosques became a major target, although power disputes among several Boko Haram factions could be a factor. The irony is that, although claiming to follow real Islam, the organisation has targeted mosques more than churches from 2015 to 2018. Boko-Haram has been linked to Islam by the international media, yet they have focused their attacks on mosques.

What is Boko Haram?

Boko Haram refers to 'Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad', means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". In the Hausa language of northern Nigeria, Boko Haram means "Western education is Forbidden". Boko Haram's stronghold is in the northern part of Nigeria, especially Kano, Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, and Kaduna. Boko Haram is also titled the 'Nigerian Taliban' because they resemble the Taliban (CNN 2018). Boko Haram relies on domestic social and economic hardships, collaborates with worldwide terrorist organisations. It is crucial to highlight that there are parallels and contrasts between these local and global groupings. Boko Haram and the Islamic State (IS) have gained a reputation for being the two most destructive and violent extremist groups with political ambitions (Campbell 2015). Both organisations have been labelled as terrorist organisations with no regard for dissent, diversity, or human life and dignity. Although their motivations and control methods appear to be pretty similar at first glance, there are distinctions in their orientations, financing levels, leadership, resources, and involvement in the broader goals of other regional and external powers (International Crisis Group 2016).

The impact of the Taliban takeover on the Sahel's ISIS chapter, which fights the Taliban in Afghanistan and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) in portions of the central Sahel, is even more unpredictable. Since its start, the IS has been extremely clear about its mission. The group was created by certain Al-Qaeda dissidents and numerous groups fighting against Bashar al-administration Assad's in Syria to establish a Sunni Islamic Caliphate in the region. The Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS) expanded its territorial authority in the late 2010s and has shown little interest in discussion since then. In 2020, it was subjected to a series of military losses at the hands of JNIM and fatal French airstrikes (Shah 2018)

Origin of Boko Haram

From 2002 to 2003, an international non-governmental organisation that ranks and investigates countries based on their global corruption levels ranked Nigeria as the second most corrupt country. The activities of Boko Haram started in the year 2002. Mohammed Yusuf, the founder of this organisation, along with his admirers, protested against the corruption in Nigeria. Boko Haram was able to attract various unemployed youths at the beginning of activities, who were

frustrated by corruption, mainly bribery. Boko Haram's transition to radical violence and extremist took place in 2009. Nigeria's government launched a counter-offensive against Boko Haram. In 2009 approximately 1000 members of the group were killed by authorities. Under the leadership of Abubaker Shekau, Mohammed Yusuf's successor, Boko Haram's extremism grew more assertive and more driven. Boko Haram was more sustainable and effective under the supervision of Abubaker Shekau. Boko Haram's violence grew in scope at the end of 2012 and in 2013. It expanded in 2013 to include a transnational component from Benin, Chad, and Cameroon (Banka 2019).

Objectives of Boko Haram

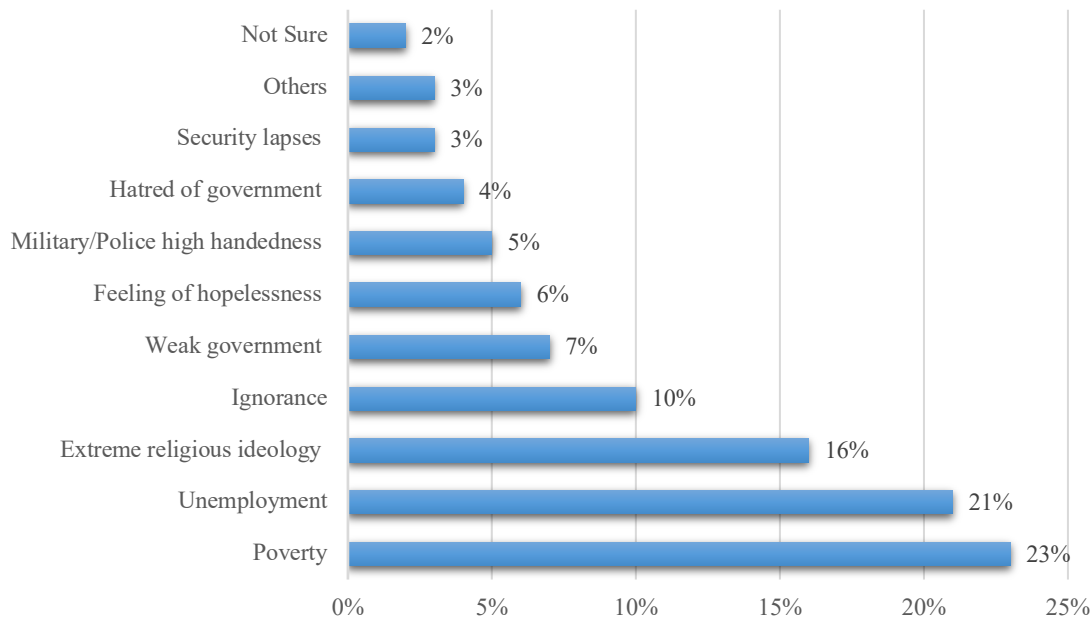
Boko Haram is a unique terrorist organization because of its regional focus. Boko Haram was created with an ideology of disdain for western principles and culture. The founder initiated a group with the objectives to execute the Sharia law in Northern Nigeria, to prohibit Western culture and principles; and to get eliminate bad governance, moral deprivation, and corruption (Felter 2018).

The Socio-Economic Conditions in Nigeria

One of the primary purposes of this paper is to look at the socio-economic conditions in order to know what causes terrorism. The socio-economic conditions of unemployment, poverty, regional economic, education-related problems, developmental, and differences in resource between ethnic northern and southern Nigeria created a disparity in living conditions. In order to emphasis the issue mentioned above, three challenges need to be highlighted: poor access to education, poverty, unemployment, and inequality; and the North/South ethnic discrepancy

There is mounting evidence that terrorism is driven primarily by political and socio-economic factors. There has been a lot of research done on the primary causes of terrorism and the main one is lack of access to public goods and faith in one's government. Adelaja et al. (2018) research the individual-level causes of terrorism. They have surveyed individual respondents to understand why people get involved in terrorism in Nigeria. Respondents were given the option of choosing one of three alternative statements in the poll. Hence, the percentages in figure 3 represent an ordering of the primary causes of terrorism at the individual level. It was frequently emphasised that security official's harshness and hatred of inadequate governance are primary factors of Boko Haram. From the perspective of an individual, as seen in the Figure 3 the leading causes are unemployment, poverty, ignorance, weak governance and extreme religious ideology. However, failures of government, pessimism, military hegemony, and hatred of the government were also listed as causes facilitating terrorism. These responses can help policy about the root causes of terrorism and the required prevention strategies from the people's perspective.

Figure 3: Why Some People Engage in Terrorism in Nigeria.
Source: Adelaja et al. (2018)



By 2030, Nigeria wants to bring 100 million people out of poverty. Lifting Nigerians out of poverty is serious for 'moving the needle' and eradicating global poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the world's poorest areas. Many are unable to educate their children or feed their family members. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Measure (MPM) (The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) produced (2010) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative measures poverty by considering various deprivations experienced by people in their daily lives, including poor health, insufficient education and a low standard of living (<https://ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/>)). 47.3 per cent of Nigerians—roughly 98 million people—are multidimensionally poor. Around a quarter of Nigeria's population is classified as vulnerable, with levels of spending ranging from one to 1.5 times the official poverty line, and social protection is minimal. Nigeria is the biggest contributor to Sub-Saharan Africa's multidimensional poverty, the zone with the highest levels of multifaceted deprivation (Lain & Vishwanath 2021). Because monetary and multidimensional poverty are spatially unequally distributed in Nigeria, poverty reduction efforts must be targeted appropriately.

Some researchers have been identified unemployment and poverty as primary reasons for terrorism. While other researchers feel that there is no link between unemployment, poverty, and terrorism. The intelligence and security community generally believe that economically deprived people are probably choosing violence to express grievances; therefore, unemployment and poverty generate terrorism. As per the relative deprivation theory, people become discontent when they feel deprived and use violence to show their complaints. Furthermore, it is asserted that impoverished economic situations such as unemployment and poverty create the conditions for people to associate with terrorism. According to Kavanagh, poor but well-educated persons are more prone to engage in terrorism (Ayegba 2015: 95-98; Kavanagh 2011: 123-125). According to the study of Bhatia and Ghanem (2017: 9-13). due to a scarcity of employment prospects in Nigeria, researchers studying the association between unemployment, education, and extremism discovered that unemployed educated persons are more prone to be radicalised by terrorism.

A respected Nigerian civil society activist from Abuja, Clement Nwankwo, argues that poverty and lawlessness are a root cause for recruitment into Boko Haram. However, Boko Haram has been using religion for the recruitment of people. If there is no money, people would generally live in impoverishment and uncertainty. On the contrary, upon joining Boko Haram, they are fed well, their day-to-day expenses are met, and they are given a sense of direction and community (Smith 2015).

Extremism of the Nigerian Taliban

In 2009, Boko Haram started an insurgency against the Nigerian government with the aim of establishing the *Caliphate* in West Africa. The insurgency mostly occurred in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Boko Haram promised loyalty to the Islamic State group (IS) in March 2015, which was led by Abubakar Shekau at that time. Later, IS divided into several groups after it was announced that Abubakar Shekau had been replaced in August 2016 (Wilson 2018).

Boko Haram set hundreds of prisoners free from a prison in Bauchi in 2010. In December, 80 people were killed in a blast by Boko Haram in Jos in the same year. They also orchestrated an attack in Abuja on New Year's Eve for the first time in 2010. From 2010 onwards, the group moved to Mubi, and then on to Maiduguru battlefields. In May 2011, Boko Haram bombed many places in the North when Goodluck Jonathan (a Christian from the Ijaw minority) was reelected as President in August 2011. They also targeted the Police Headquarters and the UN Mission in Abuja. In Borno and Yobe states, the group attacked beauty parlours, bars, markets, churches, Igbo-owned enterprises, and conference halls in November 2011. Murders and kidnappings of Westerners and suicide bombs at churches were reported in the spring of 2012. In October, pistols and machetes were used to murder 41 university students in Mubi. In 2012, Boko Haram killed approximately 1200 people, and by May 2013, the number of people killed by Boko Haram increased from 2009. Unfortunately, in July 2013, the group burnt 29 students alive in a school in Yobe. Killings had exceeded 4000 by the end of 2013 (Chotia 2016).

After the violent crackdowns of 2009, the group became extremely destructive and lethal. It displaced millions and killed thousands of people in Northeast Nigeria. The group uses cruel strategies such as car hijacking, roadside shooting, suicide bombings, assassinations, bomb explosions, and kidnapping. Boko Haram has also destroyed police and civilian property, public institutions, and government property. According to Amnesty International, Boko Haram fighters have bombed and killed citizens, burned villages, and assaulted and kidnapped children and teachers. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria has seen a huge increase in terrorism from 2013 to 2014. It made Boko Haram the deadliest terrorist group (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016; Amnesty International 2015). It's important to note that Boko Haram targets have shifted from security forces to unarmed civilians (soft targets).

The attacks by Boko Haram have harmed the country's economic development efforts. The attacks have also triggered the worst humanitarian crisis ever, and millions of people have been displaced from homes, communities, and jobs in the Northeast. For example, Borno State was the worst affected, and approximately 1.3 million people were displaced and needed humanitarian assistance. In 2014, Boko Haram's kidnapping of Chibok schoolgirls caused international outrage. In 2018, they repeated the abduction of schoolgirls from Dapchi (Aljazeera 2018; Henry 2017: 182).

As per Figure 4, between 2011 and 2023, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria experienced a terrifying chapter in their security histories as Boko Haram masterminded a wave of violence that claimed thousands of lives. Most of these terrorist attacks occurred in Nigeria, especially in its northeastern states, with Borno serving as the epicentre and accounting for over 38,000 fatalities. Notably, the 2014 kidnapping of 276 female students from a secondary school in Borno brought Boko Haram's actions to the attention of the world community, highlighting their global implications. More than 100 girls were still unaccounted for as of April 2021, despite intensive efforts, underscoring the long-lasting effects and difficulties in dealing with the fallout from such horrible deeds. This sobering fact highlights the pressing necessity of regional and global cooperation to combat the ubiquitous threat that Boko Haram poses and deal with the long-lasting consequences of their deeds.

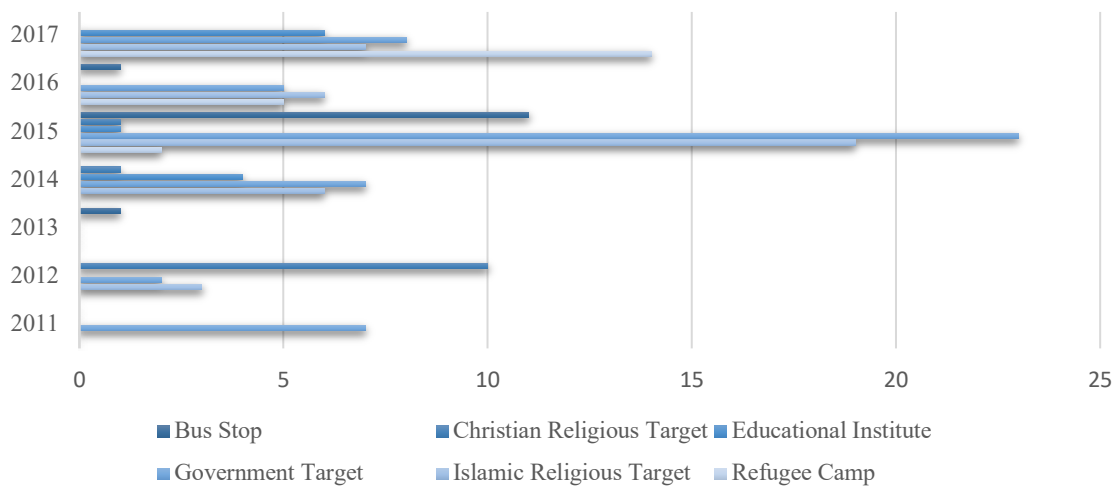
Figure 4: States Most Affected by Boko Haram's Deadly Attacks in Nigeria from 2011 to 2023



Boko Haram's activities were countered with military force by the Nigerian government, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, where the groups attacks were the most severe. In 2015 and 2016, military forces were victorious in retaking Maiduguri from Boko Haram. After that, the group create shelter in the Sambisa Forest and continues to instigate attacks in different parts of Northeast Nigeria (BBC 2018; BBC 2016).

Figure 5 can provide some critical insights into the group's perspective on suicide bombers. First, it is worth noting that Boko Haram began using suicide bombers in 2011 and 2012. The group concentrated its efforts on government and Christian targets, two of the most critical ideological goals, and educational institutions it opposed. Surprisingly, except for one occasion in 2014, Boko Haram suicide bombers did not strike churches after 2012. Furthermore, the year 2014 is significant because it was the first year that Boko Haram targeted educational facilities and began the trend of suicide attacks on civilian targets, particularly markets. The sheer number of attacks in 2015 was noteworthy. In 2015, the organisation also attacked refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, a pattern that has continued.

Figure 5: Suicide Bombers from Boko Haram by Target and Year



(April 2011-June 2017)

Source: Researcher's Compilation from Global Terrorism Index (GTI) (2011-2018)

Boko Haram currently has a large recruitment base in northern Nigeria and can increase the lethality of its suicide bombings and develop further operational skills. It is critical to comprehend Boko Haram's operational and demographic progress to better combat its tactical development.

Any attempt to change Boko Haram's attack strategies and prevent further escalation should look at how the group has learned from its errors and incorporated new ideas it deploys now. In terms of warfare tactics, Boko Haram mainly employs guerilla attacks and suicide bombers against military and civilian targets. However, Boko Haram claims to have advanced weapons and several armoured vehicles seized mainly from the Nigerian Army. The Islamic State prefers direct warfare and concentrates on taking territory to realise its broader objectives. Another significant distinction between the various groups is that Boko Haram has drawn many Islamic extremist youngsters and cadres from within its control region. In contrast, the IS has a global appeal to attract Islamist extremists (Shah 2018). Boko Haram and the Islamic State are distinct entities, in terms of their operations and tactics. Boko Haram has yet to grow out of its geographical confines, whereas the IS has already emerged as a global menace.

Boko Haram caused substantial casualties during the first week of June 2023, killing about 132 people in the northern Nigerian states of Sokoto, Zamfara, Benue, and Katsina. In particular, these group actions between June 3 and 4 resulted in the terrible loss of at least 36 lives in six villages located in the states of Zamfara and Sokoto. On July 24, banditry in the Dan Gulbi district of the Maru Local Government Area in Zamfara State claimed 34 more lives, including seven soldiers. Around 80,000 people have been displaced in Plateau State since May as a result of the growing violence between farming and herding communities. Increased violence occurred in May and June, killing about 200 people in fights between Berom farming communities, which are primarily Christian, and Fulani Muslim herding communities, which are Muslim, in the Plateau State regions of Riyom, Barkin Ladi, and Mangu. Notably, at least 20 villages in Mangu were attacked on May 15 by attackers allegedly identified as Fulani herdsmen, who killed at least 100 people, many of them women and children. The severity of the situation was further highlighted on June 22 when two separate attacks in the Riyom and Mangu areas resulted in the loss of at least 16 lives (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2023). The series of occurrences highlights the intricate interactions among various elements that lead to the extensive and diverse security issues that northern Nigeria is confronting.

It is necessary to identify the origin and evolution of the group's operational portfolios to evaluate present and future potential for active counterterrorism and counterinsurgency tactics. One of the key reasons the insurgency is a lack of trust in the military and the administration. There is a prevailing climate of distrust in the state and its institutions, all over Nigeria, so the group is easily able to continue their activities. The central government is unresponsive and, more importantly, entirely clueless about Nigerian peoples' genuine needs and grievances.

Discussion: Cruelty in the name of Islam and Sharia

It is clear that Boko Haram's extremism goes against the teaching of Islam and *sharia*, and that there is no scriptural basis for their actions. Some reasons why Boko Haram is un-Islamic are, they: (i) target educational institutions; (ii) wage a war against Christians; (iii) forcibly convert people; (iv) force girls into marriages, and; (v) claim to conduct Jihad.

People generalize Islam, which is followed by more than a billion people in the world. Islam's billion followers consist of different sects and all of them interpret the scriptural texts in different ways. However, Boko Haram's slaughters, abductions, and chaos are totally against the teachings of Islam. Boko Haram conducts itself in a manner that is alien to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. As per Iyad Madani, the secretary-general of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Boko Haram's abductions and murders are 'barbaric', 'inhumane' and "not only disavow their Islam, but their humanity" (Batrawy 2014). The Boko Haram claims to bring *sharia* to the world which in fact does not exist as per the Hadith and al-Quran. Al-Quran, Al-Ma'idah 5: 32: states:

"If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land – It would be as if he killed all humankind, and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of all humankind".

Marriage in Islam is consensual; the prohibition of forced marriages is prohibited throughout Al-Quran and Sharia. In a video, Abubakr Shekau states that the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls should be married off. Marriage in Islam is constructed on mutual love, peace, and compassion, and not solely for satisfying human sexual desire. Islam does not allow any female or male to be married without consent. According to a Hadith, a girl was married off against her will, and she came to Prophet Muhammad and said she had not agreed to the marriage. Prophet Muhammad quickly proclaimed the marriage null and void (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Hadith No. 2469). Al Quran al-Nisa 4: 19 states: "O believers! It is not permissible for you to inherit women against their will or mistreat them to make them return some of the dowry as a ransom for divorce".

Islam affirms consent in marriage, and this consent falls within a broader framework of Islamic law to protect women. It gives women the right to choose in matters affecting their life. Boko Haram's aggression towards students and teachers is in direct violation of Islam's precepts. Islam, a religion whose first revelation from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was "*Iqra*" (Read), repeatedly commands all Muslims to read, and pursue education regardless of gender. Nigeria's government, weakened by corrupt patronage networks and unable to admit its own weaknesses, is increasingly being challenged by the youth to become more accountable and improve people's livelihoods. Boko Haram, however, has rejected government assertions that it has been defeated and continues to operate throughout Nigeria.

Based on the research, Boko Haram considers themselves puritan Muslims. However, their actions go against the teaching of Islam. One needs to address them as the criminal group rather than an Islamic terrorist group. Their heinous acts show that Boko Haram is not linked with most Muslims worldwide and that they have no respect for the Islam they profess to be fighting for. Non-state terrorist organisations use comparable strategies to resist and challenge such policies, behaviour, and practices, just as states do to enhance their economic and political dominance. Non-state terrorism can be dealt with if we hold governments directly or indirectly accountable for state terrorism and address its root causes. Due to poor governance and rampant corruption, these causes the governance system has reached a breaking point. The unaccountable behaviour of northern elites and the politics of natural resources and its inequitable sharing, in the face of widespread poverty has stoked widespread discontent. Terrorism impacts civilians whether states or non-state actors perpetrate it and therefore is a crime against humanity.

To conclude, this paper provides a comprehensive exploration of Boko Haram's origins and objectives within the socio-economic context of Nigeria. By scrutinising the group's actions in light of Islamic teachings, particularly Al-Quran and Hadith, the study exposes the distortion of these scriptures to justify heinous acts such as the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' abduction. The paper highlights how Boko Haram's claims of waging *jihād* are inadequate and how their invocation of Islamic principles is baseless. This work adds to a nuanced understanding of Boko Haram by analysis of their ideological foundations and a comparison with Islamic values. It emphasises the glaring discrepancy between their actions and Islamic teachings.

Acknowledgment

This research is funded by the University of Religions and Denominations, Ministry of Science Research and Technology, Qom, Iran.

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