

## TERRORISM IN NIGERIA AND THE QUESTION OF RELIGION

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### **Abstract**

*Throughout history, power has more often than not been wielded through terror that is, by inciting fear. All despotic societies have been founded on fear, as have so-called totalitarian regimes in the modern era. The precursors of terrorism are many and they include political, economic, social, ethnic, racial and religious factors. However, this paper focuses on the religious factor. This is because of its highly volatile nature in Nigeria. Religion plays a serious role in fostering terrorist tendencies because of its conception against people identified as "infidels". It is quite disheartening that Islam; a religion that translates to peace is in the forefront of terrorism (various violent militant groups like Boko Haram and Al Sunna Wal Jamma) in Nigeria. The major reason for this could be because the history of Islam was very violent as indicated by the "JIHAD" fought by the founder of the religion and other later adherents to proselytize the society. This killing of "unbelievers" at that time has transmuted into terroristic activities today. The "blame Islam" argument would suggest that there is something inherent to "Islam" as a unitary phenomenon, which inspires and motivates Muslims to kill and die in the name of Islam. Arguably, religious extremism is a major derivative of terrorism in the contemporary world and in Nigeria today, the major factor that have led to the upsurge of terrorism is religion.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Islam, Jihad, Religion, Extremism, Terrorism, Fear,

### **Introduction**

In the past, terrorism was practiced by a collection of individuals belonging to an identifiable organization that had a clear command and control apparatus and a defined set of political, social, or economic objectives. Radical leftist i.e., Marxist-Leninist/Maoist/ Stalinist movements organizations such as the Japanese Red Army, the Red Army Faction in Germany, and the Red Brigades in Italy, as well as ethno-nationalist terrorist movements such as the Abu Nidal Organization, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the Basque separatist group, ETA, reflected this stereotype of the traditional terrorist group. "They generally issued communiqués taking credit for and explaining in great detail their actions" (Lesser 1999, pp.8). However disagreeable or distasteful their aims and motivations may have been, their ideology and intentions were at least comprehensible albeit politically radical and personally fanatical. Significantly, however, these more familiar terrorist groups engaged in highly selective and mostly discriminate acts of violence. They targeted for bombing various symbolic targets representing the source of their animus (i.e., embassies, banks, national airline carriers, etc.) or kidnapped and assassinated specific persons whom they blamed for economic

exploitation or political repression in order to attract attention to themselves and their causes. Even when these groups operated at the express behest of, or were directly controlled by, a foreign government, the connection was always palpable, if not necessarily proven beyond the shadow of legal doubt. According to Magnus, following the 1986 retaliatory U.S. air strike on Libya, Colonel Qaddafi commissioned the Japanese Red Army to carry out revenge attacks against American targets. In hopes of obscuring this connection, the Japanese group claimed its Libyan-sponsored operations in the name of a fictitious organization, that of the “Anti-Imperialist International Brigades” (2010, pp.62-63). Similarly on the other hand, Iranian-backed terrorist operations carried out by Hezbollah in Lebanon during the 1980s were perpetrated under the guise of the so-called “Islamic Jihad.” (1993, pp.63).

Edmund Burke was among the first to use the term, which he invoked to describe Robespierre's “Reign of Terror,” a strategy aimed at stifling opponents and controlling the masses after the French Revolution. Robespierre was the radical Jacobin leader of the new French government. Thus,

He used terrifying means tens of thousands were executed at the guillotine, and hundreds of thousands of others were shot or left to die in prisons in the name of virtuous democratic ideals, as an instrument of social control by the state to restore order in a climate of anarchy. This somewhat positive connotation of terrorism remained largely until the 1930s, when the term became used to connote repression of the masses by totalitarian states, including Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Stalinist Russia.' (Burke 1993, pp.90).

The modern usage of the term, developed in the mid-twentieth century, “regards terrorism as a tool of ethnic and religious fanatics to serve political ends, such as liberation from an alien occupying group, or simply to exact righteous vengeance against a group labeled as a threat or enemy.” (Hoffman 2006, pp.40).

Today, the more traditional and familiar types of ethnic/nationalists and separatist as well as ideological group according to King “have been joined by a variety of organizations with less-comprehensible nationalist or ideological motivations. These new terrorist organizations embrace far more amorphous religious and millenarian aims and wrap themselves in less cohesive organizational entities, with a more-diffuse structure and membership.” Unlike the specific, intelligible demands of past familiar, predominantly secular, terrorist groups who generally claimed credit for and explained their violent acts, no credible claim for the embassy attacks has yet been issued. Indeed, the only specific information that has come to light has been a vague message taking responsibility for the bombings in defense of the Muslim holy places in Mecca and Medina and promising to “pursue U.S. forces and strike at U.S. interests everywhere.” (Weiner 1998, pp.6)

The fact that the most notorious instances of contemporary terrorism have a religious dimension, notwithstanding their political aims, should serve to remind us that this has also been true historically of most forms of terrorism, such as that of the Jewish Zealots of the first century C.E., for example, or of the Ismailia sect of Assassins from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Indeed, the religious point of reference was long

central to most societies, and this phenomenon has not yet exhausted itself. Nowadays, terrorism beats out guerrilla warfare as the preferred and practically exclusive weapon of the weak against the strong. In other words:

Its primary target is the mind. In that sense, terrorism is the most violent form of psychological warfare, and its psychological impact is commonly understood to be far greater than its physical effects. Stooping to often pathetic means, terrorism is a way of creating power in the hope of seizing from below that which the state wields from on high (Chaliand and Blin 2007, pp.9).

### **Typologies**

Given the virtually infinite variety of circumstances surrounding terrorist events, every group or act that fits any conventional definition of terrorism is unique, usually in several respects. Still, there are a few generic dimensions that distinguish some terrorists, terrorist groups, and terrorist acts from most others. According to Forst, he argues that:

Particular terrorist groups and individual acts of terrorism fall into any of a variety of categories, based on the following dimensions: Whether or not politically motivated, Whether or not operating under state authority, Degree of association with larger terrorist organizations or networks, Extent of organization and planning, whether justified in religious or ethnic terms, whether aimed primarily at people or at symbolic targets and the types of people targeted (Forst 2008, pp.8).

Each case can usually be characterized conveniently and usefully in terms of the particular combination of these and possibly other dimensions that fit. The variation of behaviors among these various categories may in most instances be greater than the variation of behaviors within a particular category.

### **Politically and Nonpolitically Motivated Terrorism**

Acts of terrorism are generally carried out with a political agenda: to induce the state or citizens in a state to act in ways that those who carry out the acts perceive are unattainable through legitimate means. Typically, a terrorist act achieves its aim by instilling fear in a target group and thereby pressuring the state to act in accordance with the wishes of the terrorists. It may aim to destabilize the political, economic, or social order. It may attack symbolic targets, such as government buildings, a venerable statue, or a sacred shrine a mosque, temple, or church rather than people. In some cases, however, the acts of terror are committed out of sheer hatred, strictly with the goal of exterminating a group of people perceived as undesirable referred to euphemistically as “ethnic cleansing” by the perpetrators and as “genocide” by objective observers or inducing the targeted group to flee the territory. Gus Martin refers to these acts as cases of “communal terrorism” (Martin , pp.171). Such acts are not generally characterized as politically motivated, although principled political motives may be claimed to provide an element of legitimacy to a terrorist because that is rooted, in fact, primarily in hatred.

### **Terrorism by the State**

We have noted that the term “terrorism” was coined in the nineteenth century to describe acts conducted by the French Republic. More than a century later, some of the most devastating episodes of terrorism continue to be committed by or sponsored under the authority of sovereign nations. Among the most brutal examples are the following: These various forms of support may have anyone or a combination of several aims: to destabilize a state to gain greater influence in the region, to create international visibility for a persistent problem, such as that of Palestine, to retaliate against a target state in the region perceived as an enemy and to undermine the influence of a larger power operating in the region. Although acts of state-sponsored terrorism are well known both those involving direct initiation and control and those involving patronage and indirect support few sovereign nations officially acknowledge involvement in or support of these activities. Today, terrorism is widely thought to originate with groups like al Qaeda, operating outside the official auspices of the state. Constitutional democracies have taken particularly strong stands against terrorist attacks on noncombatants, especially in the post-Cold War era. Leaders of nondemocratic nations generally express opposition to terrorist activities as well, especially when the targets of those activities are people who are friends of the state or when the activities are aimed directly against the state and its resources. Terrorist groups and individuals are, at one extreme, operative of larger terrorist networks, much like business franchises. Some are only loosely affiliated al Qaeda is the best known of such loosely associated networks.

### **Terrorism by Militant Religious Extremists**

The fact that the most notorious instances of contemporary terrorism have a religious dimension, notwithstanding their political aims, should serve to remind us that this has also been true historically of most forms of terrorism, such as that of the Jewish Zealots of the first century C.E., for example, or of the Ismaʿili sect of Assassins from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Indeed, the religious point of reference was long central to most societies, and this phenomenon has not yet exhausted itself. Much terrorism is conducted in the name of a religious mission. With the 9/11 attack, Islamic jihadism<sup>1</sup> became the most prominent example of terrorism motivated by religious extremists, but by no means the only example of terrorist acts done in the name of religion. Millions of innocent people were slaughtered as infidels by Muslim crusaders for some 200 years beginning in 1099, as were countless others by militant extremist factions of all the major religions over the years.

### **Ethnic Terrorism**

Ethnicity is typically associated with unique combinations of genetics, culture, language, religion, and common heritage, and ethnic terrorism is terrorism an ethnic group. It occurs typically following long-standing ethnic or tribal rivalries and is accompanied by slogans, such as the following: you are not one of us, you interfere with our well-being and thus threaten us, and we must defend ourselves against you and your kind. Ethnic terrorism usually follows acts of persecution, with the persecutor and persecuted often switching roles in episodes of mutual retaliation.

Daniel Byman observes that ethnic terrorism is often the product of government

interventions against ethnic minorities. “He identifies several common characteristics of such interventions. When a government acts with force to stifle the dissent of an ethnic minority against government rule, the actions tend to polarize the opposition and induce a stronger-than-anticipated reaction” (Byman 1998, pp.149). Such acts of force often induce other countries and institutions that are unfriendly to the government to provide support to the ethnic minority.

The Nature of terrorism the American colonialists did to the British military in the late eighteenth century. In the end, overly aggressive government action tends to escalate ethnic terrorism. Every continent has its history of ethnic rivalries that simmer and then boil over into acts of terrorism, some not involving government intervention. Although each of these histories has its own unique elements, they tend to share many attributes: small differences become greatly magnified while large commonalities and shared values are ignored; intermarriage between individuals of opposing clans or tribes become taboo, and the identities of the children of such marriages become confused; extremists on both sides put moderates under pressure to choose sides and give up conciliatory or neutral positions; and government interventions tend to be alternately inept and needlessly brutal, with both sorts of reactions having the eventual effect of energizing the opposition.

### **Suicide terrorism**

Arguing in line with JF Forest in his work titled *Centering Terrorism*, Sheikh Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, Spiritual Leader of Hezbollah's avers that “What martyrdom is greater than making yourself a human bomb detonating it among the enemy? What spiritualism is greater than this spiritualism in which a person loses all feeling of his body and life for the sake of his cause and mission?” (Ganor 2001, pp.10). Ganor defined suicide terrorism as “. . . an operational method in which the very act of the attack is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator”) often characterize it as violence carried out by Islamists or Islamic fundamentalists, that is, martyrs and self-sacrificers, against a range of targets. (Ganor 2001, pp.135).

Pedazor Ami posited that “Recent efforts to trace the history or pre-history of suicide terrorism also stress its religious origins” (Pedazor 2004, pp.108). The histories of the phenomenon usually run from the Assassins and Sicarii through the eighteen-century suicide attacks of Muslim warriors against Western colonial rule in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines through Japan's Second World War Kamikazes to the Iranian children, the Basij, used by Revolutionary Guards to clear out minefields during the Iran/Iraq war (Basij 1980, pp.8). “The causes for which those involved sacrificed themselves and, usually, as many others as possible, were religious or some mix of religious and nationalist/patriotic objectives” (Reuter, pp.110).

### **Terrorism and Religion**

“To fight in defense of religion and belief is a collective duty; there is no other duty after belief than fighting the enemy who is corrupting our life and our religion”. (Ibn Tamiyya, c.1300). At the end of the 20th century the world faced a revival of religious fundamentalism, quite puzzling to many people who had assumed that the process of secularization was, although perhaps erratic, an irreversible one. The long-standing liberal assumption that the rise of modern society and the decay of religion were two sides

of the same coin was suddenly thrown into doubt; and the shock effect of this was soon registered in writing on terrorism, where religion had confidently been consigned to the margins of terrorist motivation. In the 1980s terror was still the business of a handful of radical revolutionaries and some all-too-familiar nationalists. The next ten years, however, saw a remarkable shift. One of the leading surveys 96 in the late 1990s asserted that 'the religious imperative for terrorism is the most important defining characteristic of terrorism today', while the author of an American college textbook on terrorism put 'religious fanaticism' top of her list of terrorist motives. Official assessments reflect this too; for instance, the *Canadian Security Intelligence Service 2000 Public Report* states that 'one of the prime motivators of contemporary terrorism is Islamic religious extremism'. And while the US State Department remains unshakably regional-political in orientation, and still does not isolate religion as a category in its statistical breakdown.

Bruce Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism*, an authoritative recent study by the head of the Rand Corporation's terrorism research unit, is devoted to religion. Hoffman notes that the first 'modern' religious terrorist groups did not appear until around 1980. "By 1994, however, fully a third (16 out of 49) of known terrorist groups 'could be classified as religious in character and/or motivation and this proportion leapt again the following year to almost half (26 out of 56)." (41)

Huffman further argued that "those involved in religious terrorism see violence as an act of sacrament or divine duty carried out in direct response to some theological requests or expectations" (43).

### **Religion and Terrorism in Nigeria**

There is a continued threat from extremist groups operating in Nigeria. The al Qaeda-linked terrorist group Jamaat al Ansar al Muslimeen fi Bilad al Sudan, better known as Ansaru, has previously carried out attacks and kidnappings, including that of westerners, across northern Nigeria. Nigeria faces growing threat of Boko Haram. Boko Haram's international connections to al-Qaeda and its affiliates is obvious. According to Doris Dokua, Nigeria has one of the highest terrorism threat levels in the world" (Dokua , pp.10). Despite a general decrease in terror-related deaths, the country recently recorded the second highest number of people who died in terrorist attacks worldwide, after Afghanistan. Several militant groups are active in Nigeria, leading to attacks on both civilian and military targets. Boko Haram is by far the deadliest, mostly active in the north of the country. Certain deaths have also been attributed to Fulani extremists, while further violent outcomes have been characterizing conflicts among other herdsmen, farmers and ethnic groups.

Most attacks take place in northern and north east Nigeria; there has been an increase in insurgent attacks in Borno State. However, there have been a significant number of attacks elsewhere. Public places where crowds gather have been targeted, including places of worship, markets, shopping malls, hotels, bars, restaurants, football viewing centers, displacement camps, transport terminals, government buildings, security and educational institutions schools, further education colleges and universities are all regular targets, and international organisations. Attacks have taken place around religious and public holidays in public or crowded places, including places of worship as well as during election periods.

According to Omomia, the current spate of religious terrorism in Nigeria is concealed by the perpetrators as a desire to “fight for God”. It is often argued by the insurgents that they are fighting for God”. The present level of terrorism in Nigeria, occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency, is commonly adjudged to be the most devastating in her religious and political history (Omomia 2021, pp.107). He also argued that Boko Haram sect which holds the philosophy that the “Western form of education is forbidden” is said to have captured some towns which include “Damboa, Gwoza, Bama, and some of Nigeria's towns bordering the Cameroons, Borno State and Mubi, Madgaki and Michika in Adamawa State” (Omomia 2021, pp.66) He further avers that the Boko Haram sect believes that Western Education is sin, and Boko Haram is bent on introducing sharia law across Nigeria. The implication of this, according to them, is to govern the nation according to the teachings of Islam. It is their opinion that they can enthrone spiritual sanctity which Allah demands. The implication of this, according to them, is to govern the nation according to the teachings of Islam. It is their opinion that they can enthrone spiritual sanctity which Allah demands (2021, pp.113).

Methods of attack have included coordinated armed assaults, rocket attacks, assassinations, kidnapping, use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), bombings (including by child and female bombers), car bombings and arson. Use of military uniforms and vehicles have been used as a tactic to get close to the intended target.

Since 2019, there has been an increasing trend of terrorist groups constructing illegal vehicle checkpoints on major supply and commercial routes in Northern Nigeria and attacking vehicles travelling on major roads into Maiduguri, Borno State, including the Maiduguri-Damaturu Road. These attacks have directly targeted civilians, security forces and aid workers. There have been a number of actual and attempted attacks against IDP (Internally Displaced Persons), camps, markets, places of worship, security force installations, government and educational facilities in Borno and Adamawa. There has also been an increase in suicide attacks in central Maiduguri, Borno State.

The Premium times of 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 reported that Governor Nasir El-Rufai has raised concerns about the emergence of Boko Haram elements, terrorists' enclave and the activities of ANSARU insurgents in Birnin Gwari and Chukun local governments of Kaduna state. The governor disclosed that the debriefing of the first Abuja-Kaduna train kidnap victim to be released indicated that the terrorists were making comments like “the forests in Kaduna are even better than that of Sambisa and so they should all relocate here” (2007, pp.1). According to El-Rufai, “the problem of insecurity now has moved from the North East to the North West.” He argued that the security situation in the state indicates "a movement from banditry to terrorism with expertise in making explosive devices. And again, this is because Boko Haram and ANSARU elements have moved into the state." (2007, pp.1)

### **Timeline of Terrorism in Nigeria, 2022**

In Niger State, the Punch reported on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January that Governor Sani Bello said that at least 220 people were killed by the terrorists within the first two weeks of 2022.

The Punch also reported that: the most affected local government area in the state, with 34 persons killed on January 12, another 18 persons killed on January 29 and 20 persons killed on February 3.

On February 5, no less than 44 persons were killed while 31 persons were abducted, and on February 21, about 14 persons were murdered by the criminals in Galape, a community in the local government.

The biggest carnage was in Dilalai community, Giwa Local Government Area where at least 50 people were killed on March 20.

In Zamfara State, no fewer than 200 people in Anka and Bukkyum communities were killed on January 5, the biggest single attack so far this year.

Despite the rising insecurity, however, security experts have warned against the declaration of state of emergency in the North-West.

In separate interviews, the experts, Patrick Agbambu, Timothy Avelle and a former Director of the Department of State Services, Mike Ejiofor, said a state of emergency did not achieve the desired result the last time it was declared.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-monthly-protection-report-unhcr-sub-office-maiduguri-february-2022> that:

Suspected ISWAP members attacked an ambulance which was conveying drugs for an INGO in Gujba town on 4/1/2022.

Similar attacks by NSAG were also reported on Muktum, Goniri and Kasatchiya communities on 16th, 25th and 29th January 2022. During one of the attacks in the nearby Nigerian Army Institute of Peace in Buratai, vehicular movements on the referenced road linking to Adamawa State was disrupted for a day.

Also, on 25th January 2022, suspected ISWAP members on the Damaturu-Biu road abducted at least 04 civilians.

Again, reports still have it in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022\\_Zamfara\\_massac...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Zamfara_massacre) that from 4 to 6 January 2022, over 200 people were killed by bandits in Zamfara State, Nigeria. This was the deadliest *terrorist attack* in Nigeria.

According to premium news online, *on the 23 Jan 2022* — At least 486 people were killed in the first three weeks of 2022 by non-state actors across Nigeria, an average of 22 people a day, ...

28 March— At least eight people were killed and many others missing when gunmen detonated a bomb on the tracks and opened fire on the train ...

Thus, following the track of events vanguard online *on 6 Apr 2022* <https://www.vanguardngr.com> reports that “The first *attack* on Tabanni took place on March 15, 2022, where two people were abducted and one was killed on Dogon Dawa-Zaria Road.

There has been an increasing number of attacks on Humanitarian workers in North East Nigeria. Areas of particular concern include northern and north eastern borders with Niger and Chad as well as more widely across Borno, Yobe, Gombe and Adamawa states in north east Nigeria, and some northern and middle belt states including Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, and Niger. Ansaru, Boko Haram and ISWA have carried out a number of kidnaps in Nigeria. Kidnappings could occur anywhere in areas where terrorist groups have a presence.

### **Terrorist groups operating in Nigeria**

Boko Haram or JASDJ is an Islamist terrorist group operating in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The group aspire to establish a Sharia State in Nigeria and West Africa,



de-stabilise the Nigerian government and remove western influence from the country. The group was formerly linked to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The group split into 2 factions: Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) and JASDJ or Boko Haram.

ISWA is affiliated with ISIS core in Iraq and Syria and has expressed an intention to target Nigerian government, Christian and western interests. ISWA have launched a series of successful attacks against Nigerian military locations, increased their freedom of movement across Borno and Yobe states. Ansaru is another Islamist terrorist organisation based in northern Nigeria, and is proscribed by the UK. It emerged in 2012 and is motivated by an anti-Nigerian Government and anti-Western agenda. Ansaru is broadly aligned with Al Qaeda.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of terrorism has become a major threat to the civil liberties that form an essential basis for constitutional government. While human beings tend quickly to forget the ravages caused by epidemics or the death toll from natural disasters, even when they occur on a vast scale, memories of the carnage caused by war, terrorism or other forms of political violence rarely fade. This is in part because the purposeful nature of such violence demonstrates what human beings are capable of doing to each other. Because of the increased lethality of the contemporary wave of terrorism, a government cannot wait until a terrorist attack occurs to act. Counterterrorism must be largely preventive. But the traditional law enforcement mind-set is to wait for an incident to occur in order to begin an investigation. Even today, law enforcement systems are designed to act efficiently after the event—to investigate, collect evidence, arrest, charge, and prosecute. Unless there is a lead, the average police officer will not expend time, energy, and resources. A sea change in law enforcement culture is essential to combat terrorism. Instead of building cases by gathering evidence to prosecute, law enforcement authorities must invest their assets in collecting intelligence to detect and disrupt terrorist attacks. This involves effective use of confidential informants, undercover officers, and other covert assets, a mind- and a resource intensive process. Winning hearts and minds is key. To prevent terrorists from influencing the public, governments must co-opt ethnic and religious leaders from communities affected by terrorism. In as much as it is communities that eventually defeat terrorism, governments must ensure that Muslims are not demonized. Since no terrorist group can sustain itself without public support, it is critical to win over public support. Like a company, a terrorist group needs to grow in order to survive, and recruitment and flow of support intelligence, funds, weapons, sanctuary remain key. To disrupt the public appeal of terrorist groups, it is essential to legally criminalize and then target the terrorist support networks. Comprehensive legislation targeting terrorist propaganda, including through the World Wide Web, and fund-raising by extremist groups, should be criminalized. Likewise, religious leaders who spread hatred in schools and elsewhere must be prosecuted. Developing a zero-tolerance policy toward terrorism in Nigeria is essential. Terrorists are like sharks they rapidly move in search of new opportunities.

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