The Intractable Malaise: Understanding the Patterns That Maintain the Terrorist Stronghold in Nigeria

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Abstract
The global manifestation of terrorism has been evident in Africa, with a significant allusion to Boko Haram jihadists in Nigeria. A critical corollary of this manifestation is a decade of humanitarian crisis that threatens human security in the country. Following Boko Haram’s re-emergence in Nigeria, the group has taken pre-eminence to present itself as the most intractable malaise ever known to ravage the peace and social fabric of the northern Nigerian state. The undue supremacy of the sect has not only earned it global notoriety but has also generated a continuum of controversial academic debates on the patterns that maintain the sect as a terrorist stronghold in Nigeria. However, rather than dwell on the questions of “who Boko Haram terrorists are” or “what the nature of their modus operandi and the number of casualties of their activities in Nigeria have been,” the study focuses on determining the influential factors that have fueled the burning flame of the insurgency in the affected region. It contends that submerging the problem in the traumatized region would have to do with resolving the causal efficacy of each of the foregoing triggering factors that are known to be fanning the flames of the insurgency. Accomplishing this aim, the study recommends provision and implementation of more effective research designs and policy recommendations to address the challenges and reposition the fight for better results.

Keywords
Boko Haram, insecurity, insurgency, intractable malaise, sustaining factors, terrorism, the Nigerian state

Introduction
Several assertions about terrorism have been contentious over time and space, because of not only its broad perspectives but also the innumerable instances of controversies that have been generated by various scholars’ attempts to define it (Anger, 2002; Geran, 2020; Yun & Kim, 2019). Tersoo and Terzungwe (2015) argue along the same lines, stating that “just as diverse as the techniques of terrorists are, so are the contending issues about terrorism, as well as the tactics of terrorism and the strategies of curtailing it from ravaging national security and world peace” (p. 28). Terrorism has been acknowledged as an enshrined phenomenon in human societies and has thrived for centuries as a dynamic instrument for those who believe in using it (Olofinbiyi & Steyn, 2018; Rapoport, 1984). However, in modern times the spate of terrorism is taking on new dimensions due to technological advancement, globalization, and its dominant popularity which was accentuated by the attack on the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon Building in the USA on September 11, 2001. (Tersoo & Terzungwe, 2015, p. 39)

Put differently, although terrorism has always been in continuous vogue, it was established to have evolved as a fundamental global problem dated back to the 1990s. Moreover, from the stand point of Wittkopf and Kegley (1999), the changing frequency of terrorism suggests a general trend of an increasing level of transnational terrorist activities since 1968, followed by a slight upsurge since 1987.

Terrorism is an incredibly difficult phenomenon to define. On one premise, the concept can be conceived of as a deliberate, calculated and extreme use of violence or threatened violence, perpetuated by malice, to cause serious harm or violence against individuals, governments and their assets with the sole intention to attain socio-economic, political, religious or ideological goals, through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear on civilian population. (Federal Republic of Nigeria Terrorism Prevention Act, 2011, p. 1; U.S. National Institute of Justice, 2011, p. 14)

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However, on the relevance of the concept to this article, the U.S. Department of Defense (2014) defines Terrorism, in accordance with “title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(d),” as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. According to the constitution of South Africa, “terrorism is an incident of violence or threat thereof, against a person, a group of persons or property not necessarily related to the aim of the incident, to coerce a government or civil population to act according to certain principles” (South African 1967 Terrorism Act, No. 83 of 1967; quoted in Held, 2019; Masuku, 2002).

Although these definitions are slightly differently expressed, the element linking these definitions is that of violence being utilized to influence or force the actions of individuals or groups. These definitions were adopted to conceptualize and define the main idea of this article. Nevertheless, in light of the complexity of defining terrorism, we may agree that there is no universally acceptable definition of terrorism, as “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (Ganor, 2002; Laqueur, 1987). For instance, Basques in Spain as well as Fatah and Hamas in Palestine, had at different times rationalized their attempts at terrorism as a means of seeking sovereign statehood or independence (Rapoopor, 1984, p. 52).

According to the Global Terrorism Index (2015), Terrorism remains highly concentrated in just five countries of the world, namely Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria. These countries accounted for 78 per cent of the lives lost in 2014. However, terrorism is spreading to more countries, with the number of countries experiencing more than 500 deaths escalating from 5 to 11—a 120 per cent increase from the previous year. The six new countries with over 500 deaths are Somalia, Ukraine, Yemen, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Cameroon. (p. 3)

Also remarkable is the unabated radicalization of the Nigeria’s Boko Haram jihadists over the last one decade. The country has experienced the largest upsurge in terrorist deaths ever recorded by any nation, with a geometric increase of about 300% to 7,512 fatalities (GTI, 2015). Findings by the Global Terrorism Index further revealed that the Nigeria’s jihadist terrorists overtook the Islamic State of Iraq and Libya (ISIL) to become the deadliest terrorist sect across the global continent. Evidence in support of the foregoing argument shows that the “net deaths attributed to Boko Haram increased by 317 per cent in 2015, thereby upgrading the jihadist death tolls to 6 644, as against ISIL’s death record in 2014, which accounted for about 6 073 terrorist deaths” (GTI, 2015).

Chukwurah et al. (2015) have described Boko Haram terrorism as the deliberate and systematic use of violence to destroy, kill, maim and intimidate innocent citizens in order to achieve a goal or to draw national or international attention to their demands, which may be impossible or difficult to achieve through normal political negotiation or on the battle field against the government’s army. (p. 13)

Terrorism, whether globalized or localized, can be said to be politically or socio-economically inclined, although it might reflect some other auxiliary undertones such as religious, socio-ethnic, or cultural motives. These rationales make up the philosophy for which these terrorists may seek sympathy at a national and global scale; and for which they are prepared to ravage Nigerian State. By the same token, a study conducted by Akpan et al. (2012) and Obioma (2009) conceives “Boko Haram as the most blood thirsty and destructive group and is notorious for its demonic brutality, mindless savagery and intense increase in the scope of its operations.”

A number of scholars have persistently argued that Boko Haram is an “indigenous Salafist group” which turned itself into a Salafist Jihadist movement in 2009. They contend further that the group was established by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the aim of establishing a Sharia government in the Borno State under former Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. The founder established a religious complex that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and neighboring countries enrolled their children (Eme & Ibieta, 2012, p. 34; Iyekekpolo, 2020, p. 756; Koko et al., 2017, p. 173; Pham, 2016, p. 23). At the inception of the crisis, the group’s ideology rejected Western education, institutions, and agencies that go with it, including government institutions. It prefers to have a sharia law applied all over the country, but if that is difficult to grant, they would rather have a separate Islamic state carved out of Nigeria, where they can practise their religious unhindered. And if this is not granted, Nigeria would be made ungovernable” (Eme & Ibieta, 2012, p. 34; Iyekekpolo, 2020, p. 754). The Nigerian government was of the opinion that their grievances appeared to be more of treasonable, illogical, and unallowable moves; and in a bid to curb the religious group of its excesses, there was an alleged incident of extra-judicial killing of their leader, Mohammed Yusuf, during the course of the struggle in 2009. This year marked the emergence of Boko Haram into a horrific terrorist group under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau. As far back as 2009, studies have shown that Boko Haram reinvented violence and commenced what could best be described as the bombardment of northern Nigeria with [a] frequency and intensity that are quite unprecedented in the history of violence in Nigeria, because those who escape death by day, sleep with one eye open by night. (Chukwurah et al., 2015, p. 12)

The jihadist sect has hitherto generated pervasive threats across the north-eastern socio-cultural communities, where it has, on daily routine, disrupted commercial enterprises and frightened investors to the degree that their activities have
propagated heavy concerns not only among average Nigerians but also with an extension to the neighboring countries (Olofinbiyi & Steyn, 2019a). This unplanned state of anarchy by the Nigerian jihadists has truncated the peace and scenery of life in the traumatized region of the nation. As the violence has defied all possible measures being put in place to come to its end, the study was designed to explore the various influential factors that could be responsible for the maintenance of the crisis in Nigeria.

**Method**

Data for the study were collected using face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews. This methodological approach was considered very effective as it enabled the participants to probe deeper into the subject of discussion on Boko Haram extremism. To make this technique more efficient in the investigation of the subject matter, participants chosen for the interviews were selected as “key informants.” This approach facilitated a more exhaustive gathering of rich data as the participants were probed beyond the capacity of what questionnaires could cover. Through the method, possible errors of interpretation were reduced, thus enhancing trustworthiness of the research, as high-quality data were collected until saturation point was reached. The study was conducted in Abuja, Nigeria, and the study population comprised two categories of stakeholder with age bracket (18 and above). The age criterion was based on the participants’ perceived maturity and their ability to articulate their experiences of the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria. The participants were selected across a wide range of stakeholders to give the study a more comparative research approach. This virtually helped enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings. See Table 1 for more illustration.

The responses to each question were summarized and important quotations were reported verbatim for the sake of authenticity and to validate the findings of the study. It is also paramount to note that the data analysis followed a set of five stages that were undertaken sequentially (starting from familiarization and identification of themes, coding and indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation) to ensure adequate and comprehensive analyses. Finally, the outcome of the study relies on participants’ in-depth data information, comparative analysis of findings with previous research inquiries in related studies. This enhanced the credibility and dependability of the research through a thick and rich description of participants’ understanding of the patterns that maintain the terrorist stronghold in Nigeria.

| Government officials | Sample selected | Civil society organizations | Sample selected |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| (a) Security Operatives comprising officers in the following arms: |                |                           |                |
| 1. The Police Force     | 1              | 4. Islamic religious leaders | 5              |
| 2. The Nigerian Army   | 1              | 5. Christian religious leaders | 5              |
| 3. State Security Services (DSS) | 1 | 6. Abuja Metro Police Community | 5              |
| 4. The Prison          | 1              |                           |                |
| 5. Customs and Border Protection | 1 |                           |                |
| (b) Political Office Holders | 5 |                           |                |
| Total                 | 10             | Total                     | 30             |
| Total number of selected samples 40 |
**Limitation in Terms of the Research Methods That Were Employed**

Despite the qualitative nature of the research methods that were adopted for the study, the research could be considered limited in the area of quantitative research data. It is believed that such data could have supplemented the findings of the qualitative research by covering a larger population to elicit data through the use of questionnaires. Consequently upon the nature of the research questions and methods chosen for the study, questionnaires were not administered, and thus the study could not involve the testing of hypotheses. However, the choice of an in-depth interview method elicited sufficient credible and dependable case study and incisively perceptive data, which a survey method might not have been able to accomplish. The study also had access to published and unpublished studies, journal and newspaper reports, as well as the electronic media, the print media, an audio recorder, oral and institutional data, and data collected directly from the field as complementary sources of information relevant to the study.

**Defining the Generalizability of the Findings**

Defining the generalizability of the findings was also enlisted as a limitation to this study. Actually, the fact that the study was relatively limited in scope in terms of the participants, age, locations, and techniques employed for data collection makes this impossible to define. Also, two crucial participant groups (survival victims and Boko Haram insurgents themselves) were excluded from the study. Obviously, these groups could not be included due to the sensitive and dangerous nature of the investigation, but this fact should perhaps be briefly mentioned as a limitation that affected a more complete and balanced picture of Boko Haram insurgency. There was also a recognition to the fact that the research was biased in the sense that most of the study participants were generally opposed to Boko Haram as a jihadist movement, and that the data in the quest to determine the root causes of Boko Haram insurgency might not have been skewed, if the views and perceptions of Boko Haram members were compared with the views of obviously biased participants. Irrespective of this array of limitations, this research could still be used as a baseline informative research for much broader future research inquiries on Boko Haram or related issues.

**Political Corruption and Boko Haram Terrorism**

Many studies that focus on Boko Haram activities in Nigeria have made clear-cut assertions that the rise and the maintenance of the sect occurred as a result of state neglect owing to corruption of the political leaders, chief government officials as well as relative deprivation of a large percentage of the citizens by the government (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015; Okoro, 2014). Central to this argument is that escalating poverty in Nigeria is accentuated by unabated trends in youth unemployment and political corruption. The resultant cost is what is deemed to have created the right conditions for the maintenance of radical Islamist terrorism as is experienced with Boko Haram in Nigeria (Onuoha, 2014; Thurston, 2016). Several research inquiries into terrorism in the global south have shown that the rising popularity of militant Islamist movements in northern Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of factors, including increased structural inequality, injustices, failed social services as well as exponential fraudulent increase in defense budgets, corrupt government officials, poverty figures in the North, Army accusation of deficit of armed weapons, inter alia (Anugwom, 2019; Iyekekpolo, 2019; Lukman, 2007; Pieri, 2019).

The findings in the current study add that a high incidence of pervasive elite and political corruption within the Nigerian democratic system is the leading factor fanning the flame of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. When the participants were asked to share their views on how the Boko Haram has been surviving in Nigeria despite the numerous official efforts being put in place to submerge the group, an officer in the Nigerian Army stated,

> Boko Haram terrorists survive in Nigeria because they have support from the community and international organizations. They have an adequate information system, more sophisticated and digitalized weapons to fight unlike us, as the Army is issued with old dilapidated and weak arms. So, there is no way we can defeat them. The Boko Haram are parts of our society . . . they are here and there.

Upon further interrogation, he stressed that

> We even hear that they are in the government and in politics. I must tell you, they have sponsorships and support from elite and political leaders. They are better trained and armed than the Nigerian Army and that is the truth of the whole matter. Our government would earmark some funds to train the army or to buy ammunition, but before you know the money is diverted by some political cabals to satisfy their own selfish interests. In fact, excessive corruption within the Nigerian system has made the fight against Boko Haram difficult. They have high-class people sponsoring their activities both in Nigeria and abroad. I pray that Allah will reveal those that are sponsoring the sect any moment from now.

Corroborating the points made by the Army Officer above, a detective from the Department of State Security stated,

> Corruption is a factor that helps the growth of BH terrorism. They keep winning the war against the military. It is not that our military force is weak, but even the Multinational Joint Task Force is still defeated. The reason is that the group has a good financial support—from where nobody knows. They use
sophisticated and digitalized weapons to fight. In 2014, despite Goodluck Jonathan’s determination to submerge the group through pumping of huge funds into the Army and other security agencies, those funds were siphoned by personalities like the former NSA and the Army chiefs [e.g. the late Chief of Defence Staff], so they say. The Army chiefs are even part of the corruption mess by collaborating with corrupt politicians to embezzle public funds meant for securing ammunition.

On being probed, he further stated,

The worst of it all is that they presented to the public that they have bought new arms and weapons to fight Boko Haram [and bring them] down. Sometimes, funds approved by the government to train officers by international security bodies were diverted into private accounts. They will show old pictures of previous training to prove to the public that the training has been conducted. At the end of the day, [they] deployed them to BH zones to fight with only one AK-47 rifles, where they met with BH using armoured tanks and bombs and various kinds of sophisticated weapons to fight. With this, now tell me . . . how do you want the military to win the war?

An interview with a community police officer revealed the following:

Corruption within the Nigerian government is a factor that makes it difficult to curb Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. We know that the Boko Haram’s leader in the forest there—Shekau, or what does he call himself?—is just a figurehead leader. The original leader is here, living with us in the community. They have representatives in all government sectors, giving financial strength and first-hand information to the sect. This is why it is difficult to submerge them. We have this information with us but because the police and even the community do not recognize us, we keep quiet and watch where things are going. This is what our military troops lack and the reason why they have failed in their pledge to rid BH out of Nigeria. I am sure the politicians who hide under their canopy are still there to frustrate the efforts of the government, and they are the ones financing Boko Haram activities and make them comfortable and surviving since 2010.

Comparing the responses of various stakeholders, the following were revealed by the excerpts:

A narrative from a businessman added that

Some powerful people in the government are rejoicing, making money and prospering in the unstable situation of the country and thereby financing Boko Haram members.

A 61-year-old Islamic scholar declared,

Democracy nursed a good platform for them to survive. Our politicians cannot be vouched for. Many people believed they knew about this Boko Haram issue to cover their corruption mess and so if you follow the trend of their operations, you would believe they have support of some important people and that gave them the power of surviving in the continent.

A postgraduate student at the University of Abuja had this to say:

They have some people who give them money . . . they sponsor all their activities . . . they have a more adequate information system than the military. Corruption in the government causes all the money earmarked to fight Boko Haram to be diverted.

A comparison of the responses affirmed the view that pervasive elitist and political corruption take the lead among the factors that create an enabling environment for the sustainability of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. Supporting the findings of Suleiman (2007), Onuoha (2012), Agbiboa (2013b), and Zenn (2013), the study found evidence to argue that excessive corruption within the Nigerian system has made the fight against Boko Haram difficult to win. The study unfolded that high levels of corruption persist within the Nigerian government and among prominent individuals and political saboteurs who benefit from the existence of the insurgency by inappropriately diverting and sharing public funds earmarked for procuring weapons and ammunition to fight Boko Haram terrorists and bring their reign to an end in Nigeria (Mbah et al., 2017). Based on the findings of this research, the corollary of these corrupt practices has given birth to security deficiencies and a weak security network within the military, specifically in terms of the availability of modern digitalized and sophisticated weapons to attack the Boko Haram war force. Moreover, there is a sad lack of electronic investigative devices to intercept and monitor the activities of the sect and its connectivity to sponsors and subversive elements in the broader society. Contrary to strengthening the armed forces against Boko Haram, the study found that corrupt individuals, both within the government and in the private sector, engaged in reinforcing the military-like force of Boko Haram terrorists through adequate funding, the provision of a powerful information network, and a technologically advanced infrastructure in the form of vehicles, clothes, food, shelter, and digitalized electronic devices (such as remote sensing satellite imagery, a border movement control system, information linkage devices, video cameras, CCTV, and cell phones). The insurgents were also said to be furnished with sophisticated weapons and arms with which the terrorists recorded infamous victories against the country’s ineffective armed forces over time. These findings resonate with Abubakah Shekau’s statement on March 7, 2015, that “even as the onslaught by the multinational armed forces against Boko Haram intensifies every day with the influx of new weapons and African Union support, the multinational force is much less equipped to combat Boko Haram’s war force” (Braun, 2015). This statement supports the finding that the victories of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria are sustained by an adequate security framework and fighting equipment that are obtained through the staunch support of corrupt individuals. Based on the conceptual narratives of participants, similar equipment is not made available to the multinational
armed forces, who are mandated by the government to win the war with outdated rifles and a lack of sophisticated support weaponry.

Community Support and Boko Haram’s Affiliation to International Organizations

A second leading factor that launches the boat of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria is community support and its affiliations with supportive international organizations. Based on the information received from the participants, it becomes crystal clear that the Boko Haram terrorists have strong support from covert members of the civil society through which they obtain adequate information and financial and economic resources which are pivotal to the sect’s continued insurgency activities (Agbiboa, 2013b; Okonkwo, 2019; Olofinbiyi & Steyn, 2019a). Regardless of publicized claims to the contrary, attempts by the government to repress the group and rid the Nigerian system of this scourge have, on different occasions, proved futile. It was also suggested that the sect has connections within local communities where they operate. In support of Adesoji’s (2011) findings, individuals who participated in this research argued that Boko Haram terrorists had very strong affiliations with international organizations, particularly with global jihadist movements from whom they received physical, motivational, and ideological support (Barkindo, 2014; Smith, 2015; Umar & Woodward, 2019; Zenn, 2017). The research inquiry also illuminated the complexities associated with the failure of the Nigerian system to subdue the sect and to sever it from its affiliations with world-class terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda, Ansaru, Al-Shabaab, the Taliban, and ISIS, all of which are believed to strengthen the war force of the organization in Nigeria (Adesoji, 2010; Agbiboa, 2013a; Iyekekpolo, 2018; Zenn, 2017). Empirical evidence in support of the above submission is captured in the statements of a political office holder and a detective who were interviewed:

The political office holder stated,

Yes, they have support from some saboteurs in the government and from some community leaders who do not know their relatives are among Boko Haram members. They keep siding their relatives anytime police want to get them arrested.

The detective expressed his views as follows:

Yes, they are affiliated to other terrorist organizations of the world. I know of their affiliation to Islamic States and Al-Qaeda, because their leader, Shekau, used to hold forth his loyalty to ISIS on the video tapes that they usually send to government.

To buttress the statement of the political office holder and that of the detective on the question of whether the Boko Haram terrorists have community support, a successful business woman stated,

Yes! They must have the support of some citizens because military caught some citizens who supplied food items and drugs to Boko Haram.

It was also suggested that Boko Haram’s affiliation to international communities was a prominent factor that aided the transnationalism of Boko Haram terrorism in neighboring countries. An excerpt in support of this finding is presented in the words of a community police member:

Yes! There is no doubt that they have support from some neighbouring countries because that is where they usually run to whenever the military attacks them heavily and they used to harbour them. Take note of this. They have support from those neighbouring countries they usually run to in order to avoid attacks from the Nigerian Army. This gives us more reasons why the Multinational Task Force also failed to resolve the problem.

A statement by a university academic was similar to that of an Islamic scholar, who said,

Allahakabar inna satani robihin! Some wicked communities are in support of Boko Haram but I know Allah would expose them one day. They also have the support of other neighbouring countries like Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic, not only Nigeria . . . that is why they can penetrate those countries so easily.

Considering the above conceptual arguments of the various participants, there is evidence that the Nigerian militia has adequate support from the community and the government—even their affiliations to other world-rated terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, Ansaru, Al-Shabaab, and Taliban, cannot be undermined as a liable factor that strengthens the war force of the Jihadist movement.

Powerful Information Network of Boko Haram Terrorists

There is relatively little or limited information in literature as regards the impact of information network on the sustainability of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the study identified that a powerful information network serves as the lifeline of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. Moreover, the adequate information system utilized by the sect was found to be an attendant consequence of their secret relationships with international organizations, secretive and probably affluent community members, and prominent figures in government and politics, to whom it has always promised its allegiance (Akwen et al., 2020). The findings thus suggest that Boko Haram terrorists owe their success and existence in Nigeria to an adequate information network through which they obtain vital information, intelligence plans to execute their objectives as regards when to strike, how to strike, and where to strike, and this phenomenon accounts for their frequent victories against the armed forces.
This statement was validated by a police officer and a 65-year-old Christian leader:

The police officer’s opinion was expressed as follows:

More so, they have support from government and the community as we know that some of them are even in the force . . . they are in politics . . . they are in government . . . they have representatives among students and lecturers. They have informants everywhere who provide them with an adequate information system. With corruption keep flourishing in the Nigerian system, it may be difficult to fight the war.

The Christian religious leader said,

Boko Haram has been surviving in Nigeria since 2010 because they have the support of powerful politicians and they live on powerful information sources which the military is seriously lacking.

Furthermore, on the question of community support and an information network as a factor sustaining the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, a Customs officer added,

I know they have community support. That is why they always have first-hand information about every step taken by the government to attack them. They are not spirits, they live on information from their supporters. That is why they are difficult to submerge in Nigeria.

The Unabated Growth of Boko Haram War Force

The unabated expansion of Boko Haram’s war force by the frequent recruitment of able-bodied youths, street children, and the poverty-stricken almajirai in northern Nigeria gives momentum to the insurgency in Nigeria (Hoechner, 2018; Omenma et al., 2020; Onuoha, 2014; Valasik & Phillips, 2017). This assertion is evident in the statement of Akpan et al. (2012), when they argued that Boko Haram war force escalated from harmless group of about 12 to more than 10,000 violent members in recent times. Because young people’s socio-economic needs remain unfulfilled as a result of the unequal social exchange between the political state and civil society (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961), a condition of anomie has been created in which they are compelled by frustration and aggression to violate the rules and norms of their land. In this context, they institute violence and conflict against the sovereign authority and are driven to join the Boko Haram sect as a means of compensating for their conditions of poverty, dehumanization, violation of fundamental human rights, unemployment, and societal neglect. The above argument finds support in the works of Freilich and LaFree (2016) and Valasik and Phillips (2017), who contend that Nigerian youths are living in frustration resulting from poor democratic governance and the long-lasting aftermath of years of corruption and mismanagement that characterized previous Nigerian regimes. Thus, frustration and anger seem to motivate a good number of the northern youth to fall prey to Boko Haram’s lure.

With reference to the arguments of Martin (2003), Kashima (2003), and Mamdani (2004), this study also found that Boko Haram’s persistent struggle for survival is a means of seeking freedom from the shackles of oppressions that are inflicted on them by the Nigerian political system. A theoretical reflection on this submission conceives “Boko Haram terrorists as ‘freedom fighters’, particularly from the historical perspective of their frequent prison breaks and the granting of freedom to inmates.” This view upholds the work of Wicker (1975), who observes that injustice, inequality, and dehumanization bred the crisis of Yusuffiya Boko Haram insurgency that Nigeria is facing today. In his analysis of the Attica prison revolt, Wicker (1975) points out that

the inmates of Attica prison revolted because the system evolved into one of the most massive violations of human rights. The revolters took hostages and compelled the authorities into four days of desperate negotiations, which Wicker describes as the grim sign of our dark times. (Bintube, 2015)

Taking a critical look at the previous findings as well as the narratives of participants in the present study, the disturbing trend of Boko Haram terrorism may be attributed to the youth’s irrational behavior that erupts from poor democratic practices, dehumanization, poverty and unemployment, socio-economic crises, frustration, aggression, disenfranchisement, political dissatisfaction, and human rights violations, which have prompted many youths to join the terrorist group, thereby inflating its numbers and strengthening the magnitude and the war force of the Boko Haram terrorists, who fight in large numbers and record continual triumphs against the official military force of Nigeria. The credibility of this statement is affirmed by a statement of a community police member:

This democratic government is even the life wire and wheels pushing the crisis forward in Nigeria. As I said before, it provides a breeding ground for all kinds of socio-economic problems in Nigeria. Corruption, joblessness, absolute poverty, frustration, material deprivations, violation of human rights, police brutality are all attendant consequences of the democratic era in Nigeria. This accounts for more reasons why the youth are joining the BH sect in the north to ease the conditions of unemployment. Some also see it as an avenue to retaliate for all the sufferings they have experienced because of the government.

He probed further,

There are so many factors associated with this. That is why it has been so difficult to stop them and because they are many in numbers and they receive support from some people in society, they have an adequate information system with which they operate. They also have funding and training connections with international terrorist organizations. Political corruption is another big factor to be considered.
The in-depth interview with a Customs officer revealed the following:

Boko Haram’s sustainability in Nigeria could be attributed to political influence in the north, religious brainwashing of the youth, corruption, community support and adequate information system available to the sect from people of the underground—that is, people whose identities and locations are not known. The weak security network of the military troops, a porous border security network, sponsorships by members of the government, parastatals and ex-political figures also aid the sustainability of the insurgency. We also know of their affiliation to other terrorist groups of the world such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, which are highly connected with the financial power of the sect. So many things are connected with their surviving trends in Nigeria.

Moreover, religious brainwashing, abuse of power by northern political leaders, state-actor terrorism, perceived societal neglect, unemployment, and pervasive poverty among the youth of the northern states cannot be left out of those variables that predispose them to Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria (Hoechner, 2018). The preceding statement is supported by the perspective of the rational choice theory of terrorism, which assumes that terrorist behavior usually emanates from a rational, calculated, and conscious decision to achieve socio-economic and political goals due to deprivation (Olofinibi & Singh, 2020). On the contrary, these youths’ behavior might reflect pathological or illogical behavior as a means to fulfill their personal needs. On this premise, the study shows a high sense of similarity with Akhain’s (2012) findings, contending that several scholars have attributed insecurity to the desire of man to satisfy his inordinate and immoral ambition and lust for materials, power, and authority; this accounts for the irrational use of violence by the Boko Haram terrorists against the northern states, private organizations, and the general public with the ultimate objective of achieving some particular selfish goals. With the war force of Boko Haram increasing on a daily basis, it has become difficult for the military to overwhelm such a large number of enemies. Hence the insurgency continues to evolve and re-evolve from year to year. But differently, based on the theoretical and conceptual argument of Blau’s global unequal power exchange, this study views Boko Haram terrorism as a collective social action or an emancipatory struggle against all kinds of oppression and dehumanization. Therefore, the group may find it difficult and irrational to stop the fight because their motive for going into rebellion with the sovereign authority has not been addressed or removed. This may well be another dimension to the sustainability of the insurgency in Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks

From all indications, terrorism will constantly move forward to survive in Nigeria and become part of the nation’s political structure, if appropriate extreme measures are not taken to change its course and impede its movement across a wide range of Nigerian communities. Terrorism is perceived as a perennial and ceaseless struggle that has long characterized the existence of man and his society (see Hoffman, 2002). Within this context, the research focused on Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria in a bid to elicit suggestions for a new approach to replace or improve the ineffectual armed struggle strategy that has been adopted in Nigeria to address and mitigate the sustainability of the Boko Haram insurgency in its affected communities. The study revealed that Boko Haram terrorism has existed for a decade in Nigeria and owes its survival to its ability to adapt and adjust to multinational challenges and countermeasures, as well as its capacity to continue to identify and exploit its opponent’s vulnerabilities. Moreover, an unjust “democratic” political dispensation in Nigeria has created sympathizers for the Boko Haram cause among local communities, who serve as its ears and eyes in many instances. To achieve any successes against Boko Haram terrorism, the article submits that efforts must be as tireless, innovative, and dynamic as that of terrorism itself. This barely suggests that the adopted armed struggle strategy by security forces in Nigeria is obsolete and will remain ineffective as long as the government’s declarations to the contrary remain unchanged.

The findings, furthermore, attribute Boko Haram’s infamous “successes” over 10 years of irrepressible and nefarious activities in Nigeria to a high incidence of pervasive elite and political corruption, community support, affiliations to international organizations, powerful information network, security deficiency in the country, poor democratic practices, and frequent recruitment of able-bodied and willing youths in northern Nigeria. The study unveils that the only way to impede the progress of and the sustainability patterns of the insurgency group is to address the causal efficacy of each of the foregoing triggering factors that have, for a long time, fanned the flame of terrorist insurgency in Nigeria. The study recommends that the Nigerian state must endeavor to respond to a new paradigm shift in counter-terrorism strategies to contain the Jihadist terrorists and rid the nation of the intractable menace. Accomplishing this end may require a combined effort of intelligence gathering, emancipatory struggle against all forms of corruption, collaborative efforts against terrorism and related crimes, peaceful negotiations (if need be), human socio-economic development, reorientation of political values, youth empowerment and educational reorientation, community sensitization, as well as partnerships with local communities.

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