Article

'Small Fires Causing Large Fires': An Analysis of Boko Haram Terrorism–Insurgency in Nigeria

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Abstract: Since July 2009, when the popular founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, was extrajudicially killed by the police, the group has become radicalised. Boko Haram started by terrorising the country, particularly the northeastern zone, which extends to Cameroon, Niger, and Lake Chad. Several works on the group, mostly by foreign commentators and scholars, have mainly attributed its rise to political and economic factors. Many of those works have not also recognised the metamorphosis from terrorism to insurgency, wherein the group is now replacing the secular status of Nigeria's configuration with a monolithic Islamic caliphal rule in the swathes of land that it has captured. Even though the Nigerian government has adopted the factors canvassed by those scholars and also denies the group an ideological anchorage, I argue that Boko Haram's ideological scaffolding is hinged on ultra-jihadi Salafism. Relying on qualitative sources, I employ a historical and interpretive framework in explicating the origin of Boko Haram and in content analysing President Muhammad Buhari's 2015 inaugural speech, which denies the group of any ideological leaning on Islam. I then contend that such a denial has made counter-insurgency measures of the government counter-productive, as efforts at meeting political and economic factors are difficult to achieve in the present circumstance. I, therefore, recommend counter-insurgency measures, which include, amongst others, Western education, Islamic de-radicalisation processes, and counter-insurgency narratives, as well as ideas to cut off the recruitment of youth into the group and military engagement, as both short- and long-term strategies.

Keywords: Boko Haram; terrorism; insurgency; ideology; Islam; security

1. Introduction

Politics and religion in Nigeria are Siamese twins. Ignoring their relationship, and how both are instrumentally used for real and self-serving purposes, is to create crisis, which has been continuously ignited in the country. Islam is a way of life and has significantly affected political development in Nigeria. Islam has a composite view of life; it does not separate religion from politics or culture. In fact, Islam holistically embeds and embodies all human endeavours and subsumes them under the will of God. This encompassing view of reality differs from the Christian posture of secularity, which is an attempt to separate the profane from the sacred, mundanity from divinity (Igboin 2021c, 2021d). The practical aspect of Islam is sharia, a set of divine laws that regulate the life of a Muslim in *ummah*—the Islamic community. Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist group in Nigeria, has continued to insist on the praxis of sharia law in a multi-ethnic and religious country; the group has been pursuing a sharia-based order through terrorism and now through insurgency. Boko Haram believes that secular institutions are structures of the infidels, which are crafted to undermine Islamic law and praxis. For the group, sharia law is the solution to the myriad of problems Nigeria is facing.

This article is provoked by the Nigerian President's inauguration speech delivered on 29 May 2015, which resonates both political and religious nuances that are worthy of some interrogation. President Muhammadu Buhari argued in that speech that Boko Haram

cannot, and should not, be linked with Islam, because Islam, as a religion of peace, does not align with Boko Haram's activities. The emphasis on Boko Haram's terrorism and insurgency, and the general insecurity that pervaded the country, was a follow-up to his campaign promise, namely, that he would quell the Boko Haram 'movement' immediately after being sworn in as president. His military background gave more vent to the belief that, if voted for, he would deal with the movement more effectively than his two predecessors who had no military background. In fact, as president-elect, Buhari in April 2015 re-emphasised his commitment to dealing with the Boko Haram group. Vaughan (2016, p. 229) quotes him thus:

> My administration would welcome the resumption of a military training agreement with the United States, which was halted during the previous administration. We must, of course, have better coordination with the military campaigns of our allies, like Chad and Niger. But, in the end, the answer to this threat must come from within Nigeria. We must start by deploying more troops to the front and away from civilian areas in central and southern Nigeria where for too long they have been used by successive governments to quell dissent. There are many reasons why vulnerable young people join militant groups, but among them are poverty and ignorance. Indeed Boko Haram preys on the perverted belief that the opportunities that education brings is sinful. If you are starving and young, and in search of answers as to why your life is so difficult, fundamentalism can be alluring. So we must be ready to offer the parts of our country affected by this group an alternative. Boosting education will be a direct counterbalance to Boko Haram's appeal. In particular we must educate more young girls, ensuring they will grow up to be empowered through learning to play their part as citizens of Nigeria and pull themselves up and out of poverty.

The averment above simplistically aligned with the popular but controversial diagnosis that the rise of Boko Haram could purely be hinged on political economy fault lines. Western governments and media were quick to regard Boko Haram as a fallout of socio-political and economic poverty that has pervaded the northern part of Nigeria for too long. Thus, many scholars and commentators continued to explore the socio-political and economic factors and how to counter the activities of the group by improving the situation (Ini 2013; Ayegba 2015).

Within this purvey, President Buhari's inauguration speech delivered on 29 May 2015 was exigently exciting for most citizens who expressed high hopes for his capacity to end the activities of the group within a short time. By 24 December 2015, Buhari, in a live nationwide television chat, announced that his government had "technically defeated" (BBC News 2015) the Boko Haram group. However, in May 2022, as the present author writes, Boko Haram still poses some form of high lethal threat to national security.[1] A close watch for the past seven years has shown that there is the need to interrogate government denial of Boko Haram's Islamic ideology and its counter-insurgency efforts in a bid to underscore the point that a proper, dispassionate definition and assessment of the group is critical to effective counter-insurgency. Recourse to this speech, therefore, becomes pertinent; firstly, because it has not been interpretively analysed; secondly, because the claim that Boko Haram cannot be linked with Islamic ideology is still being held by the government; and thirdly, because, contrary to the promise of wiping out the group within a short time, it appears that it is still waxing strongly.

2. Clarification of Terrorism and Insurgency

Attempts at defining and understanding terrorism and insurgency have ended up raising more questions than they set out to solve. Many studies (e.g., Hentz and Solomon 2017; Gebrewold 2009, amongst others) have used them interchangeably and thus have complicated their meanings. de Montclos' (2014) scintillating title: "Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism", for instance, neither explains the concepts nor demonstrates in clear terms how the transition from insurgency to terrorism took place.

The paper only chronicles the activities of the group and how both Western and Nigerian governments initially understood the group. Schmid (2011), from both empirical and theoretical engagements, demonstrates that terrorism has a definitional problematique, but the power of agency plays critical roles in both contextual and disciplinary understanding rather than defining terrorism. He concludes on a sober note that, even though there is the need to have an acceptable academic definition of terrorism, there seems to be none at the moment, which is a situation that portends dire consequences on human rights, freedom of expression, and of the media. Marsden and Schmid's (2011) study of typologies of terrorism further shows the complications that arise from the definitional problematique. However, they suggest structural, political, and ideological ideas as the most prominent ways of categorising terrorism, and the last is useful for our discussion in this paper. Rather than concentrating exclusively on elusive definitions, characteristics, typographies, methodologies, and strategies of terrorism, Schmid (2021) discusses how terrorism can be prevented by offering critically viable and useful suggestions. One of the ways he suggests includes preventing recruitment by countering ideas, narratives, and messages as well as formidably forming a resilient community against cognitive and violent radicalisation through non-violent means.

Regardless, Paul Wilkinson (2002, p. 16) defines terrorism as a "systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends". Rochdi Nazala (2019, p. 2) defines terrorism as a "rational act that employs violence or the threat of violence" geared towards achieving either religio-political purpose or other secular agenda. Nazala's conceptualisation of terrorism as a rational act is instructive for the single fact that terrorists are not mad men or women. They make rational and moral decisions to act as terrorists and therefore should not, and cannot, be undermined. Ruby (2002a, 2002b) also argues that it is unproductive in the course of prosecution of acts of terror to believe that terrorists are not rational humans given the amount of planning and clinical execution of their activities.

The history of terrorism is a long one, as acts of terror have been traced to premodern societies, such as the Zealots. Political terrorism, which has recently been more prominent, involves state-sponsored acts of terror against dissidents or other states in order to suppress opposition or consolidated regimes. Colonised people have also been involved in acts of terror to oust colonisers from their territories. For instance, Fanon (2004) argues that violence against colonisers can be justified on the grounds that the colonised need their independence. This is because colonialism is an act of terror against the colonised. It is absurd, he posits, for the colonised to think that the colonisers will give them freedom on a platter of gold. The violence of the colonisers should be reciprocated with more lethal violence. Arendt (1970, pp. 4–5), trying to envisage a time or situation when or where there is no violence, underscores the point that, for now, the international and many internal bodies have not been able to invent or suggest an alternative to violence, which is now amply being resonated in the Russia–Ukraine war. In relation to internal violence, which relates to Boko Haram, Arendt argues that the government can only subdue non-state actors if and only if its commands are obeyed by the armed forces. As I will emphasise later, the infiltration of Boko Haram members into the government and armed forces must have adversely affected the capacity of the government to deal with the group more effectively. She posits:

> In a context of violence against violence the superiority of government has always been absolute; but this superiority lasts only as long as the power structure of the government is intact—that is, as long as commands are obeyed and the army or police forces are prepared to use their weapons. When this is no longer the case, the situation changes abruptly. Not only is the rebellion not put down, but the arms themselves change hands. (Arendt 1970, p. 48)

In a different dimension, the New Leftist terrorism is centred on challenging Western hegemonic powers, whereas the current global wave of terrorism is religious terrorism "marked by Islamic radicalism" (Faluyi et al. 2019, p. 15). One of the main thrusts of Islamic radicalism is opposing "secular government" (Faluyi et al. 2019, p. 16), and it extends

beyond and across borders, as it maintains affiliate relationships with other terrorist groups with similar radical ideologies and goals.

Although the three former waves of terrorism have been described as traditional, conventional, or old terrorism, the fourth and current wave, religious terrorism, is referred to as new terrorism. New terrorism, as hinted above, to which Boko Haram fitly belongs, is ideologically grounded on religion, not secularism. The binary of God and the devil, good and evil, is ingrained and serves as motivation to dehumanise those whom they believe are infidels. The new terrorists justify their attacks on infidels as a worthy service to God. This divine duty, believed to be justified by scriptures and rewardable hereafter, has both religious and political dimensions. Although the intention and plan to convert or eliminate all infidels are primarily conceived as a religious duty, the establishment of the state to be ruled exclusively by religious laws signals a political interest (Igboin 2019, 2021a, 2021b). The latter leads to acts of insurgency, which I will shortly clarify below.

It is pertinent to say that many religious leaders and scholars have argued against linking terrorism with Islam, understandably because of stigmatisation and the protection of their religion. Although this is a legitimate fear, the fact also remains that the vast majority of Muslims are against the small minority involved in religious terrorism. The fear of stigmatisation does not obliterate the ideological leaning for acts of terror (Dawson 2015). According to Lorne Dawson (2015, pp. 142, 159), "insufficient attention is paid to the role of sincere religiosity in fomenting terrorism", as "the role of religion in terrorism and politics seems to be clear for most jihadist terrorists". The consequence of this insufficient attention is that counter-terrorism approaches and programmes miss the very essence for which they are set up.

At the outset, terrorism and insurgency, although they have been used interchangeably, are conceptually and practically not the same. For instance, Ernus Kurtulus (2011) tends to equate terrorism with insurgency, whereas Paul Wilkinson (2002, p. 1) argues to the contrary and insists that "it is grossly misleading to treat terrorism as a synonym for insurgency, guerrilla warfare or political violence in general". In addition, Alexander Spencer (2011, p. 461) refers to them as "inappropriate categories". According to the US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual, insurgency is understood as "an organized movement aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict" (Johnston 2018). Insurgents ultimately have the goal to degrade state actors and institutions while amassing popular support for their political objective. "The political objectives of insurgents therefore often include such outcomes as political independence, self-determination or secession" (Johnston 2018). This goal of insurgents, even though they may employ terrorist methods and tactics, makes insurgency potentially more dangerous to national security than terrorism. I align more with how Dennis Pluchinsky understands insurgents as a group who fights to carve and maintain a separate political entity or sovereignty for themselves by resorting to terrorism (see Tan 2019).

> The key factor determining whether a group is an insurgent group 'is whether or not it directly controls or has significant influence over a particular piece of territory' compared to terrorist groups, which do not control territory. Insurgent groups therefore aim to set up what is in effect a counter-government in territory they are able to wrest from the control of the central government. (Tan 2019, p. 231)

From the foregoing, I will, in the course of time classify Boko Haram as embodying both new terrorism, because of its ideological leaning on Islam and its unmitigated aversion for the secularity of the Nigerian state, on the one hand, and insurgency, because of its lethality against soft and hard spots for the purpose of its envisioned political goal of establishing a sovereign caliphate where sharia law is the sole, exclusive law to govern the emergent territory. This is important in order to properly understand the arguments that follow in subsequent paragraphs. Before moving forward, a brief history of Boko Haram is merited.

3. A Brief History of Boko Haram

The history of Boko Haram is controversial, particularly with regard to when it started. Although some suggest that the group started in 1995, preponderant opinion supports that it started in 2002. The group became popular under its late leader Mallam Mohammed Yusuf. Yusuf, a fiery Islamic preacher who radically challenged the basis of Western education and its influence in Nigeria, particularly in north-eastern Nigeria, where the group has been notorious (Sani 2011; Eveslage 2013). Yusuf's radical preaching was embraced by many Muslim youth because it frontally condemned the ills and vices perpetrated by government. In addition, Yusuf offered an Islamic alternative way of addressing the social, political, and economic quagmire in the country. He taught his followers that a sharia-based approach was the only effective solution to the mirage of national problems. In addition, because political leaders knew that sharia law would revolutionise society for better, they abandoned it, having haphazardly implemented it earlier in 1999 when the country returned to civil rule (Kassim 2018). Political leaders' flirtation with Western education and democratic principles was one of the reasons Yusuf gave for why political leaders abandoned sharia. His frequent reference to Western education being responsible for the ills in the Nigerian society led to the people nicknaming his group Boko Haram. *Boko*, in Hausa, means book, and *haram*, in Arabic, means forbidden; hence, Boko Haram means "Western education is forbidden". However, the real name of the group is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*, meaning "Association of Sunnis for the Propagation of Islam and for Holy War" or "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad" (Thurston 2018; Anugwom 2019; Igboin 2021a).

Yusuf established a state-like community, which he administered on the basis of sharia, described as a foretaste of his vision for the country. Being a wealthy and forceful preacher, he had in a short time succeeded in recruiting a huge number of followers who were indoctrinated and radicalised. Confrontation with state authorities, especially the police, was frequent and, in fact, led to the final attack in 2009, which led to the extra-judicial killing of Yusuf by the police. Yusuf was killed in July 2009. The group thus went underground to re-strategise. It resurfaced a year later, and it became more radical and violent than it ever was. Abubakar Shekau emerged as its new leader, succeeding Yusuf (Mohammed 2014). Shekau's blistering speeches and attacks on Christians further drew global attention to the group. However, the group split and began what Kassim (2018) refers to as a 'civil war' in 2016, when Shekau did not refrain from attacking Muslims, an action that the *Shuwa*, or the consultative forum that comprised key leaders of Boko Haram, considered to be against the teachings of Islam. It was this ideological difference that led to the breaking away of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) led by

> Mamman Nur and Abu Musab al-Barnawi, a son of Mohammed Yusuf, a number of senior leaders split off from Shekau's forces. Nur and al-Barnawi's faction, retaining the name ISWAP, gained recognition from ISIS and attracted a growing number of militants. ISWAP's leadership has changed in the intervening three years. In 2018 an internal dispute reportedly led it to execute Nur, and in March 2019, it announced that Abu Musab had been replaced by another (albeit unrelated) al-Barnawi, Abu Abdallah. (International Crisis Group 2019, p. 1)

For Shekau, any Muslim who did not cooperate or overtly support the group should be regarded as an infidel and should be treated as such. He thus attempted severally to justify the killing of Muslims, whom he believed were not supportive of the cause of Islamising the country. However, he was accused of strategically using such an interpretation to target and eliminate those he considered as threats to his leadership (Kassim 2018).

The International Crisis Group (2019) undertook a comparative analysis of the operations of Boko Haram and ISWAP and unraveled that the latter treats civilians and Muslims better than the former. According to the International Crisis Group (2019, p. i),

> The group treats local Muslim civilians better than its parent organisation did, better than its rival faction, Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS),

does now, and in some ways better than the Nigerian state and army have done since the insurgency began in 2009. It digs wells, polices cattle rustling, provides a modicum of health care and sometimes disciplines its own personnel whom it judges to have unacceptably abused civilians. In the communities it controls, its taxation is generally accepted by civilians, who credit it for creating an environment where they can do business and compare its governance favourably to that of the Nigerian state.

Strategically, this ostentatious 'humaneness' pays off because it resulted in attracting many recruits to its fold to the tune of about 5000 compared to Boko Haram's roughly 2000-man strength. The intermittent clashes between Boko Haram and ISWAP have been noted to have reduced their attacks on the country even though their lethality is not in doubt. On 19 May 2021, the two groups underwent a skirmish that led to the death of Shekau. Shekau, who had been declared dead at least four times earlier by the Nigerian military forces, died as a result of the long-standing civil war between Boko Haram and ISWAP. The leadership of the latter had insistently demanded the resignation of Shekau on ideological grounds, which he vehemently refused to accede. ISWAP invaded the Sambisa Forest, the fortress of Shekau's Boko Haram, with superior firearms, leading to the killing of many of the loyalists and fighters of Shekau. Shekau, possibly fearing the kind of treatment that would be meted on him if he surrendered to the authorities of ISWAP, denoted a bomb he secretly wore and killed himself (Abdullah and Adebajo 2021). However, what is immediately significant in this discourse is that both groups have the same root—Islam, although with different interpretations and operational strategies—as well as the same goal: to Islamise Nigeria and to rule it on the basis of sharia. It is upon this basis that the subsequent section interrogates the government's position that Boko Haram is far from Islam.

4. Analysis of President Buhari's Speech Bordering on Boko Haram

On 29 May 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari took over the reins of the government as a civilian president of Nigeria. Buhari had earlier ruled the country in 1984–1985 as a military dictator. Expectedly, he delivered an inauguration speech that borders on many challenges the country was facing at the moment. The security challenge posed by the Boko Haram Islamic group is one of the focal parts of the speech, which also draws my attention here. It is significant to posit that no study has attempted to analyse this part of the speech in connection with the group's ideological leaning, which I seek to undertake in this article. The section on Boko Haram in the speech has two broad perspectives: political and ideological, which I shall analyse shortly. However, it is necessary to quote it in extenso:

> Boko Haram is a typical example of small fires causing large fires. An eccentric and unorthodox preacher with a tiny following was given a posthumous fame and following by his extra judicial murder at the hands of the police. Since then through official bungling, negligence, complacency or collusion Boko Haram became a terrifying force taking tens of thousands of lives and capturing several towns and villages covering swathes of Nigerian sovereign territory.

> Boko Haram is a mindless, ungodly group who are as far away from Islam as one can think. At the end of the hostilities when the group is subdued the Government intends to commission a sociological study to determine its origins, remote and immediate causes of the movement, its sponsors, the international connexions to ensure that measures are taken to prevent a recurrence of this evil. For now the Armed Forces will be fully charged with prosecuting the fight against Boko Haram. (Buhari 2015)

Buhari's metaphor, "Boko Haram is a typical example of *small fires causing large fires*", calls for serious engagement in order to glean the government's position on the insurgents. What were the small fires causing the large fires? The incumbent government's argument was that the previous government inflamed the "small fires" by the extra-judicial killing of

Mohammed Yusuf, the former leader of the group. Buhari further indicted the previous government for official bungling, negligence, complacency, and collusion with the group, which eventually resulted in large fires charring the country. In other words, Buhari posited that, if the previous government had acted differently, the small fires of the group would have been successfully extinguished and would not have enlarged to what they were then. Buhari thus argued that the sole solution is full military engagement, which would lead to crushing the group within six months.

Many scholars and commentators pay more attention to the first part of the quotation because of the political undertone. The political agency theory of Boko Haram is more pervasive because it is an instrument of political manoeuvring. Many foreign commentators have accepted it as the only factor responsible for the rise of the group, perhaps until recently. They also viewed it within the global resurgence of religion and its violent methods. Western media had reported its activities in the light of previous religious attacks against Christians and thus denied it ideological discipline (de Montclos 2014). It is only a small group that believes that there is a strong religious–ideological motif that must be addressed (Roelofs 2014; Kassim 2015, 2018; MacEachern 2018; Thurston 2018). According to Hillary Clinton, for instance,

> the most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is a failure of governance at the federal, state and local levels . . . Lack of transparency and accountability has eroded the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state. (Roelofs 2014, p. 127)

The former President, late Musa Yar 'Adua, uncritically accepted that theory, thus undermining the ideological leitmotif that the group had canvassed, and therefore, he promised to deal with corruption as swiftly as he could. Roelofs (pp. 126–27) observes that "whilst the religious agency view puts local actors in a position of expertise—because they know the specifics of Boko Haram's teaching—structural views empower international commentators who are able to 'stand back' from the conflict and look to the wider, supposedly deeper, causes, whether socio-economic or religious". However, in the long run, it is clearly manifest that outsiders' views are not without some degree of interest.

President Buhari indicted his two immediate predecessors—Musa Yar 'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan—in their "official bungling, negligence, complacency or collusion" and for allowing the group to form an alternative government in the swathes of territories it had 'captured.' The town of Gwoza was announced by the group as its caliphate's headquarters, where it was operating its own kind of sharia law until security agencies were able to take back the town (Azama 2017, p. 83). Although Buhari may not want to state publicly that there was a caliphate within a sovereign country, the fact is that there was "an imaginary state within a state" (Thurston 2018, p. 80). As Shehu Sani (2011) revealed, the caliphate, which was an Islamic state, was administered in accordance with the Medina Order of Prophet Muhammad. This pristine vision was rebirthed and served as the forestate of what Boko Haram intended to convert the country to if it succeeded in its insurgency campaign. According to Zenn (2018), Gwoza was the 'capital' of Boko Haram's alternatively governed space, which it renamed "*Dar al-Hikma*", meaning the "House of Wisdom". In areas that Boko Haram 'captured' (captured is deliberately used by Buhari, being an army general, to underscore the force with which the group was operating and the military response that was needed or intended), it raised its flag while burning the Nigerian flag at a ceremony of change in authority over the spaces. In fact, about 130 towns and villages were under the control of Boko Haram where "it imposed its own interpretation of sharia law" (Human Rights Watch 2015, p. 401). Since alternatively governed spaces were highly contested by both forces—the state and Boko Haram—Buhari's government decided to securitise the group.

Buhari agreed to the argument of alternatively governed spaces, in that he posited that Boko Haram had captured "several towns and villages covering swathes of Nigerian sovereign territory". Boko Haram's governing of parts of Nigerian territory violated her

sovereignty. In fact, the modern state is more concerned about its territory, sovereignty, population, and legitimacy even though not all modern states can effectively assert control over them. Most modern states concentrate on legitimacy and sovereignty and strive to put the population and territory under check when the need arises, such as in Nigeria (Djugumanov and Pankovski 2013; Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2014). The two prominent characteristics that Buhari's government were contesting with Boko Haram were sovereignty and territory, though they had a strong political undertone, namely, the legitimacy of his government, because his electoral promise hinged on providing security for the country.

However, Buhari added: "At the end of the hostilies when the group is subdued the Government intends to commission a sociological study to determine its origins, remote and immediate causes of the movement, its sponsors, the international connexions to ensure that measures are taken to prevent a recurrence of this evil" (Buhari 2015). This part of the speech exposes the shallowness of the knowledge of the group, because, as Kukah (2013) argues, there should be a committed and holistic intellectual analysis of the group's ideological leaning rather than of the violence it perpetrates. Kukah further avers that there should be historical study on the group to establish whether it has a link with previous religious groups and movements that held and expressed similar ideological and violent traits. However, from the position of the government, it literally means that, to date, after seven years of Buhari's military engagement with the group, which is yet undefeated, the government has yet to know the origins and the factors responsible for its emergence. It suggests that the political economy factors that the government has upheld, which it intends to deal with, may not be the causes of the rise of the group. One may also think that counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations have not been addressing the real causes, and, hence, the group continues to appeal to new entrants, sympathisers, and foot soldiers, despite the intensity of military operations.

In addition, even though many researchers have not paid critical attention to instigators of collective violence and terrorism, one instigator or sponsor can employ thousands of perpetrators of collective violence (Igboin 2021b). According to David Mandel (2002, p. 102), "the function of instigators is not to carry out the acts of violence themselves but to tune and transmit the messages that will effectively motivate others to cause harm and to provide perpetrators with the requisite resources for accomplishing their tasks". Mandel (2002, p. 102) adds that "instigators shape the thinking and guide the behavior of perpetrators, but perpetrators have relatively little influence on the motives or plans of instigators". Why, therefore, should the sponsors of Boko Haram be left to continue to instigate the perpetrators of violence until the group is defeated? How does the government guarantee the defeat of the group if its sponsors and instigators are not determined and dealt with? How does this relate to the political economy factors that are popularly held to be responsible for the rise of the group? What are the hopes, goals, and gains of the sponsors of the group, and how can they be countered if they are not identified and dealt with? How does the government intend to block the recruitment of the alleged dregs who are easily lured by the group if it still has sponsors financing its operations? Interestingly, to date, the government is still overtly interested in dealing with perpetrators rather than the instigators of the group (Buhari 2015)

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in 2013 observed that Nigeria has allowed architects and instigators of communal and religious violence to live above the law for too long. As a result of the lack of appropriate judicial measures and, more importantly, the political will to deal with them to serve as a deterrence, more instigators have continued to exploit the weak and fragile system for their personal, political, and religious advantages. In addition, the monolithic approach to addressing the violence that has been perpetuated by Boko Haram has not helped to curtail or prevent recurrence. Accordingly, "the sole reliance on military force as a counterterrorist strategy to defeat Boko Haram was not effective" (Ogunfolu et al. 2018, p. 191).

There have been calls and pressure on the government to unravel the sponsors of Boko Haram. Some northern traditional and religious rulers have been suspected to aid and abet the group and also to shed it from exposure (El-Kurebe 2011). When former President Jonathan alerted the country that Boko Haram members must have infiltrated the government, it was argued that he spoke on an intelligence report. This thus sparked the demand to expose the sponsors in order to tackle the root of the insurgency. Until he left office in 2015, Jonathan did not expose the sponsors even though he hired mercenaries that fought the group and reclaimed several towns it had captured. The Buhari government announced in October 2021 that it had the names of 96 financiers and sponsors of the group.

For its part, the analysis of the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) in 2020–2021 revealed 96 financiers of terrorism in Nigeria, 424 associates/supporters of the financiers, and involvement with about 123 companies and 33 bureaux de change, in addition to identifying 26 suspected bandits/kidnappers and 7 co-conspirators. On terrorism financing, the NFIU has intelligence exchanges on Boko Haram, ISWAP, banditry, kidnapping, and others with 19 countries. During the same period, 2020–2021, the organisation returned fraudulently obtained funds totalling 103,722,102.83 USD; 3000 pound sterling; 7695 Singapore dollars; and 1091 euros to 11 countries of victims who came into the country (Ejekwonyilo 2022).

The irony, however, is that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has publicly announced and placed on the watchlist six Nigerian sponsors of Boko Haram, and the Nigerian government has yet to expose any sponsor of the group (Nwezeh and Olugbode 2021).

5. Analysis of the Second Part of the Speech

Now, if Buhari's government admits that parts of the sovereign space of Nigeria were governed by Boko Haram under sharia law, why does he deny it as an ideology? This leads me to the second part of the speech. However, before then, it is expedient to establish Buhari's position on sharia in political and religious trajectories in Nigeria. This requires some historical excursus into the pre-inauguration era. As Harnischfeger (2014, pp. 49–50) discovered from his fieldwork in Nigeria,

> The only person who enjoyed almost universal support among the Muslims I met in Borno and Yobe states was Muhammadu Buhari, a former general who had ruled Nigeria from January 1984 to August 1985 and who had tried to become head of state again as an opposition candidate in the elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011. He combined a tough anti-corruption stance with a strong commitment to Islam. If he were elected president 2015, militant Muslims might lay down their arms, trusting in his good intentions. But he would not have the means to radically transform the country. During the Shariah campaign, Buhari alienated Christians when he demanded the spread of Shariah to all parts of the country, and when he called on fellow Muslims not to vote for a Christian as president. In the 2011 presidential election, he won a majority in the 12 Shariah states of the Far North but was defeated in all others. Although he had kept the implementation of Shariah and other religious issues out of his election campaign, many adherents perceived his defeat in religious terms.

In addition, in August 2001, Buhari was quoted to have said that

> Sharia should be introduced in full across Nigeria. I will continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria. God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country. It is a legal responsibility which God has given us, within the context of one Nigeria, to continue to uphold the practice of sharia wholeheartedly and to educate non-Muslims that they have nothing to fear. What remains for Muslims in Nigeria is for them to redouble their efforts, educate Muslims on the need to promote the full implementation of Sharia law. (Oyewole 2014, p. 4)

The political conflict that expanded sharia caused in 2001 remains a watershed in the history of sharia controversies in Nigeria. Thousands of people were killed as a consequence of sharia law that was introduced by 12 state governments in northern Nigeria. It was in the heat of the tension that the above statement was made. When the President at the time, Olusegun Obasanjo, convened the National Council of State's meeting to advise him on how to mitigate the riots and conflict that were spreading across the country, Buhari argued that the president was interfering in the states' internal affairs. According to Buhari, the president has no constitutional powers to direct how states should be governed, especially as it applied to sharia (Vaughan 2016, pp. 207–8). In addition, in February 2015 before the elections, at the Chatham House in London, when Buhari was confronted with this quotation, his crisp answer was instructive: "Sharia is limited to inheritance, marriage, etc. but the constitution is superior. If anyone wants to change sharia, they have to change the constitution" (The City Reporters 2015).

Buhari's response was instructive as well as political. It is a clear affirmation of the superiority of sharia above the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In other words, except if one discerns its import, it can be waved away as insignificant or can be explained as him changing his views about sharia and about the fear that non-Muslims harboured that he would strive to Islamise the country. For instance, sharia that was implemented in the northern part of Nigeria in 1999 went beyond inheritance and marriage to the civil and criminal level. Sani Yerima, the governor of Zamfara state at the time and who started the sharia controversy, cited the Constitution as empowering him to implement sharia to touch upon every facet of life as taught by Islam. Yerima insisted that, just as Boko Haram also claims, sharia law is superior to the Nigerian Constitution (Igboin 2014a). At the time, Buhari apparently maintained that, since sharia is in the Constitution, it remains a law that should be implemented. Clearly, he was arguing that anyone who wants to change sharia must contend first with the provisions of the Constitution that harp on sharia. Since sharia is in the Constitution, for those states that wish to implement it, they are free to do so (Igboin 2014b).

Moreover, in 2013, Buhari and some other northern leaders strongly advocated amnesty for Boko Haram. According to Buhari, "it is good that they [Federal Government] set up a committee, although I have not seen the terms of reference. This is not the first time that amnesty is given to violent group. Whatever will bring us peace as a society, we should do it" (Ogundele 2013, p. 3). As soon as Buhari advocated amnesty for the group, many other people joined to pressure President Jonathan's government to intensify action in that direction. Ona Ekhomu, a security expert, concurs: "I support what the former Head of State said that we should do whatever that would bring peace. It shows he's a true statesman and that is true requisite for development. Every reasonable Nigerian supports amnesty and peace but the collaborators of the terror; those that brought them must be punished. I support amnesty too" (Ogundele 2013, p. 3). The former Kwara State governor, Abdulfatah Ahmed, also supported Buhari's call for amnesty for Boko Haram. According to him, "I wholeheartedly support the granting of amnesty to the Boko Haram members because it will provide a platform for the Boko Haram members to lay their grievances on the table and the Federal Government, indeed all Nigerians, the platforms to understand their grievances" (Ogundele 2013, p. 3).

But with the securitisation of the group, it became clearer that Buhari may have changed his mind or position, again, for obvious political reasons. If Buhari suggested amnesty to his predecessor, then, why was he securitising it? Was this not an inconsistency in thought? Why would he not grant amnesty rather than spend large sums of money to fight Boko Haram? These questions and many others cannot be fully addressed here. Perhaps, one can suggest that Buhari's change in mind results from the fact that he had to change his stance in order to disabuse the citizens' minds that he was sympathetic to the group, as it was controversially canvassed in 2012, when he was named, among others, as a trustworthy negotiator by the group, which is a role that he swiftly declined (Aziken et al. 2012).[2]

Let us now analyse the second part of the speech, which is concerned with the denial that Boko Haram is ideologically motivated by Islam. According to Buhari, "Boko Haram is a mindless, ungodly group who are as far away from Islam as one can think". Here, it is clear that Buhari denied any affiliation of Boko Haram with Islam. However, Buhari's reference to the group as a "movement" was instructive in carving an ideology for it. If Buhari believed that Boko Haram metamorphosed from a group to a movement, he could not deny it as an ideology. There are few movements without an extant ideology, and the Boko Haram "movement" was not an exception. Thus, an examination of the ideological leitmotif can elucidate the position better. Boko Haram aspires to create an Islamic state in Nigeria and is willing to kill Christians and Muslims whom it believes are not pious enough, i.e., who do not support it in order to achieve its goal (Guitta and Simcox 2014, p. 90). In response to Buhari's claim, Vaughan (2016, p. 223) argues: "While it is true that this radical group's brutal activities do not represent the myriad role of Muslim groups in Nigerian society, it would be shortsighted to dismiss Boko Haram as an aberration in Muslim Northern Nigeria".

Apart from the above, Buhari must have expressed this sentiment, which is commonplace amongst those who came to be disappointed in Boko Haram. The widespread support that Boko Haram enjoyed from the public, and particularly from the masses, began to wane when the group's ultra-jihadi Salafism[3] was turned against Muslims. One Muslim drives home this sentiment, as he avers:

> I am not sure that these people are really Muslims . . . . At the beginning one felt it was a religious thing but now nobody is sure again. How can they be bombing mosques, killing both Muslims and Christians? They are more like people who are not well, I mean they cannot be Muslims. This is not Islam at all. In fact, it is either they are ordinary blood thirsty people using religion as cover or they read the Qur'an upside down. This is not the behaviour of Muslims at all, we are not monsters, never. (Anugwom 2019, p. 132)

However, one can suggest another way to look at Buhari's claim of Boko Haram being far from Islam, and this is concerned with the ambivalent nature of religion. In other words, although religion can engender peace, it can also provoke war. Religion provides ideological motivation to resist oppression, but it also justifies it on some occasions. Religion can be an opium as well as amphetamine for the populace (Igboin 2014c, 2014d). Just as Muslims prosecute terror, so do they offer huge humanitarian services to victims and also become involved in ways to arrest the perpetration and perpetuation of terror (Svoboda et al. 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to balance the nature of religion when critical issues bordering on it are discussed.

6. Securitisation and Sociological Study after Military Operations

The Buhari government believes that the securitisation of Boko Haram would immediately end Boko Haram insurgency. According to Buhari, "For now the Armed Forces will be fully charged with prosecuting the fight against Boko Haram". Basia Spalek (2011, p. 192) posits that "securitisation might be thought of as the instigation of emergency politics: a particular social issue that becomes securitised is responded to above and beyond established rules and frameworks that exist within what might be termed 'normal politics.'" This underscores the fact that securitisation is not any kind of speech act or any type of social construction, but, rather, it is a special form of act that requires extraordinary measures beyond the commonly practised everyday politics (Williams 2003, p. 514). Measures are taken because survival is the cardinal thrust of security in the context of existential threats, as Boko Haram evidently portrays. Should Boko Haram be securitised, then? Within the context of an alternatively governed space, it is unreasonable not to securitise it. Since Buhari swore to defend the territorial integrity of Nigeria, he has the responsibility to engage the group and to restore the towns and villages it has captured back to the Nigerian sovereignty. In other words, Buhari's securitising of Boko Haram is borne out of the fact that Nigeria's territories were being governed by an alternative authority. The contest for

supremacy and sovereignty that characterises both sides' claims to the spaces forms the basis for securitisation.

Another critical issue that Buhari raises is that it is only when the group is completely defeated that a sociological study can be commissioned to determine "the origins, causes, local and international sponsors and how to forestall a recurrence". It seems that such consecutive actions are logically underwhelming; nicer tinsel would have been that at least both should be conducted simultaneously, even though a sociological study could have preceded military operations. Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa, a human rights lawyer, elucidates that the government appears not to grapple with the intellectual and intelligence trend in handling Boko Haram's terrorism. In other words, "even the Boko Haram insurgency, to which the President devoted most part of his speech, ended in a policy disaster, of cause after effect; in that the President will only know the cause, origin and perspectives of the criminal organization, only after he has succeeded in killing them all" (Onyekwere 2015, p. 4). Although he is a former military general, Buhari seems to believe that Boko Haram is a form of a regular non-state actor that the army can combat with much ease. He underestimated the capacity of the group to resist the army and to even command some offensive attacks on the country. This is why Alani Akinrinade, a former Chief of Defence Staff, disagrees with Buhari's position, arguing that there is no known military tactics that have defeated guerrilla forces as easily as that which Buhari proposes. He suggests that other non-military engagement must be pursued alongside military operations:

> But I am not aware of any military doctrine that has been put down that has addressed effectively guerrilla warfare, which is easier. But this kind of insurrection we are now having in our hands have (sic) never been addressed by military doctrine successfully. So, I am aware that military solution is not going to be the end of Boko Haram. So, the ball is in the court of politicians, economists and those that have human sympathy that could bring solution to this crisis. (Isenyo 2015)

Clearly, Akinrinade's informed position has been canvassed by a former Nigerian Senate President, Iyorchia Ayu. On the basis of sociological studies, Ayu (2014, p. 11) argues that "prominent businessmen and politicians in both Nigeria and Chad, in association with French companies, have invested heavily in the Chadian oil industry, and as a result, benefit from Boko Haram's destabilisation of the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. It is widely believed that it is they who are the principal financiers and arm suppliers to Boko Haram". Freedom Onuoha (2012, p. 5) also argues that "the financial support from politicians and other wealthy members, which helps to sustain the sect's operation in the areas of arms and weapons procurement, training, and compensation for those wounded in battle or relatives of suicide bombers" should be addressed if meaningful results are expected. What this portends is that, if the sponsors and financiers who are the beneficiaries are still active, the fight against Boko Haram will continue. It is on this basis that it is argued that a sociological study should be undertaken; therefore, the sponsors or instigators can be dealt with, and the group's sources can be effectively blocked (Igboin 2012).

When, in December 2015, Buhari announced that his government had "technically defeated" Boko Haram, there were several arguments regarding how best to interpret and situate the claim. It is an undeniable fact that, at that time, the military had potentially downgraded the group and recovered many of the territories it was holding. However, the triumphant claim of technical defeat also meant, in this context, that Boko Haram did not have the capacity to resurge for major attacks, as the military would only engage in cleaning up operations. One might add that technical defeat meant that the funding sources of the group or other military software and hardware were effectively cut off, leaving it incapacitated. In addition, it may just be that the government, for security reasons, used such a phrase to depict that the northern frontiers that extend to Libya were unassailably blocked and manned to prevent an influx of illegal arms. However, the government later claimed that the Boko Haram fighters were Libyans, not Nigerians (Saharareporters 2019). Perhaps, it is for these reasons that some argue that the declaration was premature, as the

group resurged with massive recruitment of women to carry out dastardly suicide missions (Iyi 2018).

Hakeem Onapajo (2017) disagrees with the Buhari government that Boko Haram had been technically defeated because the group has continued to show a capacity to remain a threat to not only Nigeria but also to the entire sub-region. Faluyi et al. (2019) argue that weighing the declaration of technical defeat with practical reality shows that there is lack of understanding of the ideological basis that ignited the violence in the first place and of the political economy factors that can be cannon fodder to fester the ideology. They assert that "engaging in military battle with the sect and defeating it militarily does not equate to defeating its terrorist ideology". What purpose does the claim of the government mean to serve? Does technical defeat imply that the ideological scaffolding of Boko Haram has been defeated? However, is that possible, given the government's claim that the ideological motivation of the group could not be determined until the final securitisation process? Has the government resolved the socio-political and economic factors that it claims to be responsible for the rise of the group? The fact, however, is that Boko Haram has not been defeated practically nor ideologically.

7. Towards Counter-Narrative Proposals

According to Mohamed Ali (n.d.), since "terrorism occurs when ideological motivation meets operational capability", multi-faceted approaches should be adopted to defeat ideological motivation as well as operational capability. Technically, two viable dimensions of a counter-narrative exist; they are: operational and strategic. The former focuses on targeting terrorist cells, whereas the latter involves a de-radicalisation process. I deal with the operational aspect first.

Since July 2009, after the extra-judicial murder of Mohammed Yusuf, the former leader of Boko Haram, the overarching narratives on the group have centred on political economy dimensions of its activities. Although that is germane, it is my position here, as I have tried to show above, that Boko Haram has a deep-rooted ideological gristmill steeped in Islam. David Tucker (2001) argues that the new terrorism ideology is hugely anchored in religion, and as such, it is lethal. One way, among others, to curtail recruitment is to ensure that the yet-to-be radicalised are given a counter-narrative 'pill'; otherwise, the future looks even bleaker.

Burniske et al. (2014) advocate strict, enforceable legislation that can ensure that those who are involved in terrorist activities are prevented or punished. They particularly argue that, because of the fluidity of information communications technology, new terrorism's sponsors often make their way through to their targets.[4] When surveillance is tightened, most of them continue to hide under the aegis of non-government organisations' operations to give aid to terrorists. They offer some assistance through donations and material assistance ostensibly to the victims, whereas the actual recipients are the terrorists. Thus, it becomes imperative for the government and institutions to establish measures to also counter their new innovations and measures.

There is the need to be more sensitive to foreigners' participation in counter-narrative processes because some of them may be supporters of the insurgents. Ayu's observation is important in this direction. It is amazing that countries that refused to give assistance to Nigeria some time ago suddenly became overly interested in fighting along with Nigeria (Ayu 2014). Guitta and Simcox (2014, p. 21) have also suggested the following: "The more foreign nations engage on the ground in Nigeria, the likelier it is that Boko Haram will internationalise its jihad. The group will likely emerge as an increasingly regional threat over the coming months". This is exactly what Boko Haram has achieved in the sub-region.

Now, I turn to the strategic aspect of the counter-narrative. There is the urgent need to begin judicial prosecution of Boko Haram's sponsors and instigators. By doing so, it is pertinent for the government to be very sensitive while taking into cognisance former President Jonathan's claim that Boko Haram's sympathisers have infiltrated the three arms of government—executive, legislature, and judiciary—as well as the military and other

security agencies that have been charged with the responsibility of fighting the group (Guitta and Simcox 2014; Igboin 2020).

A long-term study requires that substantive efforts are devoted to determine how and why counter-terrorism leads to further terrorism and insurgency. This is particularly important because northern Nigeria is notorious for recrudescence motivated by stringent interpretation of the Qu'ran. This implies that a de-radicalisation process should be emplaced. This should focus on ideology, indoctrination, and institutions that must have been identified as instigating religious violence. It should also include "rational, emotional and identitarian motivations" (Alonso et al. 2008, p. 19). A critical focus here is to produce an effective alternative to ideologically or theologically motivated terrorism and insurgency. First, it has been established that terrorists are not persuaded by political, social, or personal solutions such as amnesties and reforms. Second, military campaigns against terrorists have shown that they become more radicalised, thus validating the reasons for their movement and obtaining more recruits and sympathisers. Third, counter-ideological narratives prevent further radicalisation of communities. Fourth, it is crucial "to immunise especially Muslim youth from being indoctrinated into violence, hence preventing new generation of terrorists from being recruited" (Ali 2008, p. 2).

Through a resilient counter-narrative strategy, the government can detect, deny, prevent, and respond to terrorist threats (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada 2014). In this regard, textual-based counter-narratives are expedient for de-radicalisation and rehabilitation. With proper interpretation and contextualisation of the Qur'an, the misapplication of the concept of jihad and the hope of eschatological bliss for mass destruction can be contextualised (Allam n.d.). Shettima (2015, p. 10) has also rightly suggested that "it is hugely important for us to identify Islamic scholars with the intellectual depth to change the Boko Haram narrative so that we can save souls from listening to them. We must support these scholars and provide them with maximum security for not only them but their families as much as public office holders are adequately protected".

Above all, there is the urgent need to revisit the structure of the Nigerian state. The clamour for sharia has been a perennial issue dating back to the colonial era. Northern Muslim leaders have continued to argue that the British colonial authorities subsumed sharia law under the common law, which adversely impacted their development. The issue of sharia recurs intermittently in the political history and development of the country (Igboin 2021c). The regional government can deeply address the ideological basis for the continuous reverberation of sharia and the collective violence it generates. If the northern region decides to uphold sharia, this would satisfy all those who, for both political and religious reasons, cite it as the basis for terrorism and insurgency. Moreover, the educational disequilibrium in the north must be taken seriously because over 13 million *almajirai*[5] on the streets have been constantly (sometimes erroneously) accused of igniting violence. The fact is that they may be perpetrators, not instigators, of violence. They, as Matthew Kukah (2020), the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, argues, are deliberately impoverished by the northern elite who use them as electoral "barter". According to Kukah, "The new world of modernity was presented as a contaminant to the purity of Islamic knowledge. So, while the modern elite equipped themselves and their children with the armour of Western education, the mallam[6] and *almajiri* were left behind in the twilight zone of ignorance, fear, anxiety, disorientation and discomfiture, treating those outside with veiled contempt". This ingrained structural disadvantage of the *almajirai*, which is ossified by religion, requires political will to address if the reservoirs or arsenals of terrorism and insurgency are to get dried in the future.

8. Conclusions

Contrary to President Buhari's position that Boko Haram does not have an ideological leaning on Islam, I argue and maintain that it has such a leaning. Boko Haram itself has argued and demonstrated that it has an ideological leaning on Islam, which is Salafism. Recognising this fact is germane to its de-radicalisation. Although Boko Haram's resurgence

in 2010 appeared to be revenge for the defeat it suffered in 2009, it quickly turned into an insurgent group, using terrorism as a strategy to capture and consolidate its territorial goals. I argue that Boko Haram has a special characteristic that combines both terrorism and insurgency and that this falls within the ambit of new terrorism. New terrorism has a strong ideological anchorage in religion, which, in this case, is Islam. Boko Haram's terroristic activities are geared towards establishing a separatist caliphate, hence its insurgency. It is abundantly clear that the proper conceptualisation and classification of a 'movement' such as Boko Haram is critical to understanding and countering its narrative, which is fitly situated within the remit of establishing a sharia-ruled caliphate in north-eastern Nigeria. "Regardless of what might have informed the president's state of denial", Boko Haram is driven by Islamic ideology (Asiwe 2015). Denying Boko Haram as an ideologically driven movement demonstrates the fact that the government is either being political or underrating the insurgents. Proper conceptualisation leads to correct diagnosis and treatment. That is why the monolithic approach of securitisation has not yielded the desired goal of eliminating the insurgents. Clearly, Boko Haram has not been defeated at present, not even technically. Diligent efforts that are multi-dimensional and devoid of politics should be employed, rather than a monolithic approach. The avalanche of sociological research carried out by both local and foreign researchers, many of whom have deeply described and interrogated the historical, cultural, ideological, anthropological, and political economy factors relating to the group, should be ample bases for serious and sincere engagement. Those who have been alleged to have been the sponsors of Boko Haram should be put in the judicial process. This, of course, requires political will. Leaving this to chance has resulted in the democratisation of insecurity in the country.

Thus, although the government should intensify efforts towards addressing the political and economic factors it identified as causal to the emergence of Boko Haram, critical counter-narrative processes that involve both operational and strategic dimensions should also be pursued. Islamic scholars also have the onerous task of teaching and preaching counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency messages to the yet-radicalised youth. There should be a massive re-introduction of compulsory Western education for the youth in order to wrest most of the *almajirai* from stopping at Quranic school. These have the capability of not only wresting the spaces being alternatively governed by Boko Haram at present, but also, more importantly, of de-radicalising those already radicalised and preventing further radicalisation and recruitment. Therefore, the already-inflamed large fires will not engulf the whole country.

Notes

[1]   In a nation-wide broadcast, marking the 21st Democracy Day, on 12 June 2020, President Buhari referred to what he calls "sporadic incidents with loss of lives in Katsina and Borno States as a result of criminals taking advantage of COVID-19 restrictions. Security Agencies will pursue the perpetrators and bring them to swift justice". See *The Punch*, 12 June 2020. Daniel O. Iwere argues that COVID-19 cannot be blamed for the sect's attacks at this period. More critical reasons are strategy, absence of soldiers' welfare, and so on; see his "COVID-19 and Nigeria's Counterinsurgency Operations in the Northeast", Social Science Research Council (4 June 2020) https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2020/06/04/covid-19-and-nigerias-counterinsurgency-operations-in-the-northeast/ (accessed on 12 June 2020). Moreover, on 8 June 2020, over 80 persons and 6 soldiers were reported killed by Boko Haram/ISWAP in Borno. See *The Nation*, 9 June 2020; *The Defense Post*, 8 June 2020; The Associated Press, "Suspected Boko Haram Fighters kill 81 in Nigeria's Northeast", *The New York Times*, 10 June 2020. After assessing Buhari's regime for the past five years, Igiebor concludes that Boko Haram was more lethal in 2020 than it was in 2015. See Nosa Igiebor, "It's Mourning in Nigeria", *Tell Magazine*, 1 June 2020. In June 2022, heavy fighting still continues, as the Nigerian Army and Boko Haram/ISWAP are engaging each other. For more details, see, for instance, Ndahi Marama, "Boko Haram Massacre dozens of Farmers in Borno, as hunters kill

two Terrorists, injured scores", *Vanguard*, 24 May 2022; Kingsley Omonobi, "Army bombs Boko Haram Commander's Convoy, kill scores, destroy gun trucks", *Vanguard*, 15 May 2022 (accessed on 30 May 2022).

2   For details, see "Boko Haram wants talks . . . picks Buhari as Mediator, Saudi Arabia venue . . . demands ex-gov's arrests, compensation", *The Punch*, 2 November 2012. For his rejection of this offer, see Onyebuchi Ezigbo (2012), "Buhari rejects Boko Haram's Nomination as Mediator", *This Day*, 2 November 2012. Here, Buhari distinguishes three kinds of Boko Haram: the real one headed by the late Mohammed Yusuf, the criminal cell that attacks markets, etc., and the Federal Government, which he called the "biggest Boko Haram".

3   Salafism is a brand of Islam that teaches and tries to uphold the pristine form of Islam as practised in Medina by Prophet Muhammad. It preaches against religious innovations and insists on literal observance of Sunni orthodoxy, such as strict adherence to Islamic injunctions, the Sunna, and the caliphs who were under the direct tutelage of the Prophet. Ultra-Salafism is a form of Salafism whose theological descriptor tilts towards violent rebellion to bring people to conform to their variant of Islam.

4   The Buhari government has claimed that it has evidence to the effect that NGOs "solicit funds for selfish motives" and "fund the activities of insurgents", but it refuses to publicly name them. This claim led to the introduction of bills to regulate the activities of the NGOs in 2016 and 2020, both of which were stalled. In 2019, House Speaker Femi Gbajabiamila also alleged that "NGOs needed stricter regulation because some were aiding the Boko Haram insurgency". The failure of the bills to pass through the legislative process led to the controversial amendment of the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020, which empowers government to regulate the activities of NGOs and to remove their trustees if there are reasonable grounds to do so. For details, see Page (2021). Although Maza et al. (2020) mention some individuals' names in connection with the funding of Boko Haram, they argue that the state is one of its principal sponsors by paying huge ransoms to the insurgents with which they further arm themselves against the state.

5   *Almajirai* is the plural form of the Arabic word *almajiri*. *Almajirai* are young Muslims who are exclusively enrolled in Quranic schools under the tutelage of a mallam, a Quranic teacher. These young children are always away from their homes to live with the mallam. They are mostly taught how to read, write, and recite Quranic verses. The *almajirai* are mostly from poor homes. See Kukah (2020) and Hoechner (2014) for details.

6   A *Mallam* is person who is knowledgeable in the Quran and who teaches the *almajirai* free of charge. According to Kukah (2020), "the mallam was a privileged and treasured part of the spiritual web of his society". However, in contemporary Nigeria, the mallam and the *almajirai* have been looked down upon as dregs whose worth is only measured in political and violent recruitment. Eveslage (2013), however, argues that many radical *mallams* have deceived the *almajirai* into believing that violence is needed to change their situations and society at large, thus making the latter vulnerable to easy recruitment into Boko Haram.

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