Article

Radical Islam and Insurgency in Northern Nigeria: Tensions and Challenges

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Abstract: Located within a broad appraisal of Nigeria's nascent democracy, this paper examined the roots and triggers of radical Islam and religious extremism in Northern Nigeria. It also investigated its implication in the region through the lenses of religion and politics. Since 1804, a tradition of jihadist Islam in the north, introduced by Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio, has shaped not only the politics of the region but has festered into modern-day insurgency. This radicalism enthroned an intolerant, anti-Western and violent Islamic ideology used against minorities within and against other religions, ethno-regional groups, and political blocs in Nigeria. What exactly are the triggers of religious violence in today's Northern Nigeria? Furthermore, if any, what are the implications for this region? Drawing on archival materials and secondary sources, findings reveal deep-seated, anti-southern sentiments in the north, complicated by religious, cultural, and economic suspicions, whipped up at political intersections. Evidence also indicates significant leadership failures. This internal complexity holds back Northern Nigeria's overall economic and social modernisation pace. This paper recommends state-sponsored awareness campaigns that emphasise diversity, integration and unity. To overcome insurgency, politics must deliver dividends of democracy to all. Governance must become a means to economic ends and not an end in itself.

Keywords: violence; politics; religion; Northern Nigeria; African democracy

1. Introduction

Northern Nigeria is resource-rich but politically volatile and economically depressed (Hoffmann 2013). Extremist groups and militant insurgents have caused immense destruction of lives and properties across the region. In the northeast, Boko Haram—an Islamic fundamentalist group formed in 2009—has transmuted into the most devastating threat to national security in Nigeria. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2018), Boko Haram insurgency has claimed the lives of over a million people, displacing nearly 3.3 million inhabitants of the Lake Chad Basin, and dislocating over 2.5 million persons across north-eastern Nigeria. The connectedness of today's globalised world has allowed local extremists groups such as Boko Haram to graft themselves into universalised debates on Muslim resistance to Western hegemony (Crisis Group 2016). Sporadic violence in Kano, Kaduna and Zamfara states also indicates that the north is unpredictably dangerous and fundamentally underdeveloped. Conflict-induced food insecurity, limited access to basic amenities, a fragile economy and environmental challenges not only threaten the stability of the region and its people, but also challenge the integrity of the Nigerian state.

However, with a landmass approximately two-thirds of Nigeria and twice the size of Germany, yet rich in natural solid minerals with huge agricultural potential, states in northern Nigeria ought to be economically self-sufficient and politically stable. Additionally, a long established, precolonial economy, built around commerce and trade as far as North Africa (evidenced during Trans-Saharan trade) and developed on sound

pre-independence economic policies that prioritised agriculture, banking, trade, infrastructure and industrialisation should today make the north economically self-sustaining and competitive. Furthermore, Nigeria is Africa's largest economy by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Africa's largest single market and the continent's biggest democracy. In the last two decades, democratic consolidation and increased GDP derived from oil revenue provided the Nigerian government with robust resources to transform the economy of northern Nigeria, upgrade its infrastructure and close the development gap between the north and the more economically viable south (National Bureau of Economic Research 2007). More importantly, states in the north have benefitted significantly more from Nigeria's Federation Account than other states by reason of Nigeria's fiscal policy, adopted in 1988. Based on the north's population (over 90 million of Nigeria's estimated 200 million inhabitants), geography (60% of Nigeria's total landmass), higher number of states (19 out of 36) and more local governments (426 of 774), the current revenue allocation formula disproportionately allows more resources to flow northwards. Nevertheless, these historical, economic, and political advantages are yet to modernise the region or its people (National Bureau of Economic Research 2007). "Despite vast mineral resources, democratic consolidation and targeted state investment, northern Nigeria still faces its worst civil and economic situation since independence" (Moghalu 2019).

The volatility and complexity of challenges confronting the region make prescribing policy interventions extremely difficult. Yet, overcoming the north's considerable problems relating to politics, education, development, and security is crucial to the realisation of a shared and prosperous future for Nigeria. To address the development deficit between the north and the more prosperous south, as well as create an enabling environment in the north, a good starting point is to provide contextual understanding of religious intolerance in the north and argue that transformation from political and ideological structures that perpetuate poverty towards industrialisation and economic development demands recalibrating the politics of the region to tolerate others and emulate sound governance and economic best practices (Khan and Chen 2016).

2. Religion and Political Violence—A Theoretical Framework

Interest in the intersection of religion, politics, and violence, mostly treated separately until two decades ago, was brought into sharp focus after 11 September terrorist attacks on major financial and government institutions in the United States of America. That attack and many more that followed in Spain, France, the United Kingdom and other major European capitals are rooted in the re-emergence of politically active and extremist forms of religious groups that use religion as a rallying force to address, confront and challenge global developments and, in some cases, local socioeconomic trends. Since 9/11, the dimensions of political conflict and social upheavals with religious undertones have increased to alarming proportions globally in general and locally in Africa (U.S. Counterterrorism Centre 2013). In the River Chad area that integrates Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the Boko Haram insurgency group continues to wreak havoc across the region as it seeks to establish an Islamic state in West Africa. Across Somalia, Kenya and East Africa, the Al Shabab terror group is a constant threat to regional security as it attempts to destabilise and overthrow the government of Somalia as well as retaliate against regional neighbours (such as Kenya) for their military aid to Somalia. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is another insurgent group in Africa, operating around Northern Mali with a mission to create an Islamic kingdom in North Africa (U.S. Counterterrorism Centre 2013).

To explore the relationship between religion and political violence, Brubaker (2015) outlined two possible connections: one, a particularising view that religion is important, perhaps too important, in understanding and dealing with life. This view finds support in Ter Haar's (2005) argument that religion is a complex phenomenon and difficult to define precisely and that religious ideologies are deeply ingrained. These ideologies are drawn from sacred texts and teachings of inspirational leaders. Such teachings, overtime, become shared values and norms (predominant in Islam and Judaism), legitimised by

a transcendental source and are hardly subject to negotiation and compromise, given their accepted supernatural origin (Horowitz 2009). Brubaker further asserts that in many traditions of serious or demanding religiosity, personal, social, and political issues are viewed through the lenses of right or wrong and good or bad. As such, force or conflict, particularly in Islam, is seen as inevitable in upholding or restoring the "right" order of things on the one hand, while on the other hand, conflict is used to suppress or expel what they consider "wrong". Conflict in Islam "turns on the question of how we should live, not just questions of recognition, resources and opportunities for cultural reproduction that are central to politicized ethnicity" but also existential questions about life, living and the future (Isak and Harding 2011). The 1979 Iranian revolution is an example of how extreme Islamic views can impose radicalism on politics, education, and society. Another example is the rise in extreme conservative movements in the United States that seek to ban abortion, prohibit gay marriages, restore prayer to schools and restrict access to contraceptives in a liberal democracy with constitutionally guaranteed, protected human rights.

The other view is a generalising standpoint. It asserts that what appears to be religiously inspired violence or conflict is "best subsumed under political conflict or under the abstract rubric of politicised ethnicity. Through this view, religious claims may mask other, more important causal factors; religion is at best incidental to the logic or causal texture of the conflict or violence" (Brubaker 2015). This latter view suggests that religion is one among other causal factors, mostly used for mobilisation and legitimacy. Like ethnicity, language and race, religion is used as a means to an end and not an end in itself. More often than not, political mobilisers use existing religious sentiments or racial prejudice or ethnic differences as tools through which political (and not religious, racial or ethnic) ends are achieved. This is referred to as the politicisation or weaponisation of religion for non-religious purposes (Allan 1985). Many examples buttress the point above—conflicts over economic resources, political power, national self-determination, and cultural resistance employ religion for mobilisation (Basedau et al. 2011). In Northern Ireland, parties of the conflict are often identified as Catholics and Protestants, but both sides are ardent followers of the doctrines of Christ. Crisis in Belfast is not fundamentally about religious doctrines but about nationalism, social justice, and marginalisation. The same can be said of Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq and Alawits and Sunnis in Syria.

A third explanation that links religion to violence was propounded by Gregg (2014) who grouped together suicide bombers, Christian Apocalypse, millennialism, and jihadi warriors. "Religious adherents engage in apocalyptic war because they believe that it will hasten the apocalypse, a practice known as "catastrophic Messianism." Apocalyptic war occurs when adherents believe that current-day events are signs that the end is here, and that their participation in the Final Battle is necessary for both Good to triumph and for their own eternal salvation" (Gregg 2014).

Although not every form of religiosity is violent, studies show that some religious organisations have certain characteristics that give them the capacity to weaken the ideas of human commonality and, in some cases, destabilise civil society (Polson 2008). Across the world, religion and religious identity are intertwined in ethnic, political, economic, and social controversies, and can be misused by politicians, clerics, extreme religious leaders, or others to rouse their constituencies for gain.

3. Religion and Ethnicity in Nigeria—A Review of Literature

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation, with over 206 million inhabitants (United Nations Population Fund 2020). Demographically, the country is divided in two by geography, culture and religion. The North, comprising of 19 out of 36 states, is predominantly Muslim, integrated into Middle Eastern culture and Arabic civilisation, and peopled by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. The South, on the other hand, is cosmopolitan, Christian, and heavily influenced by Western culture (Akinyemi and Isiugo-Abanihe 2014). In precolonial times, both regions were autonomous and independent; however, in 1914, administrative efficiency necessitated the British colonial government to amalgamate both halves into a

single political entity—Nigeria. Although colonial Nigeria was governed as one, significant cultural and other differences persisted and manifested progressively as nationalist leaders from the north and south pushed for decolonisation and self-rule in the 1950s. By 1960, when political independence was achieved, both halves were unequal politically, educationally, socially, culturally, and economically (Ikime 1999). The south was at an advantage and as a consequence, relations in the newly emergent nation were strained by mutual suspicion and ethnic competition. In post-independence Nigeria, the concentration and influence of Christianity and Islam in the south and north, respectively, have had a significant impact on every aspect of Nigeria's political, economic, and social life—religion continues to shape identity, opportunities, and politics. This review looked specifically at the nexus of religion and politics in northern Nigeria.

More than any other region, the north of Nigeria has witnessed more religion-inspired conflicts than elsewhere in West Africa (U.S. Dept. of State 2016). Some major religion-inspired conflicts include: Boko Haram insurgency—an anti-West militant organisation that began in 2009 and continues to destabilise Nigeria's northeast geopolitical zone. The Miss World Competition Riot in 2002, during which violence erupted when most Muslims opposed the planned hosting of a beauty competition in Abuja, categorising it as immoral in the holy month of Ramadan. At least 100 people were killed while many Christian Churches were burnt (Human Rights Watch 2003). The Zaki-Biam conflict in 2001 between the Jukun and the Fulanis on the one hand, and the Tivs against Fulanis on the other, for which about 22 soldiers were ambushed and killed near the town of Vaase. The discovery of 19 bodies of soldiers in Zaki-Biam resulted in a brutal reprisal from the Federal Government, which left about 300 civilians dead while seven villages were completely destroyed (Obi-Ani 2008). Solidarity with Afghanistan in October 2001 led to days of violence and counter-violence in Northern Nigeria, as radical Muslims opposed US bombardment of Afghanistan following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. The Kaduna Sharia crisis of 2000 saw the unwarranted death of about 2000 people in the state after the introduction of Sharia Law. Violence between Tivs and Azeris in May 2001 in Nasarawa State left over 50,000 people homeless, and many dead. The Zango-Kataf crisis in 1992 left over 1000 Hausa-Fulani dead after a religious conflict escalated due to vandalism of a yam farm belonging to Christian farmers of the Kataf people. In 1990, at Bauchi, 10 secondary schools were attacked over allegations of water wastage, leading to the loss of five lives with about a hundred seriously wounded (Punch Editorial 2018).

Long-standing "anti-others" sentiment in the north runs deep. It began in 1804 when Usman Dan Fodio waged a holy war (Jihad) against un-Islamic and "corrupt" ruling elites. An immediate aftermath of that Jihad was the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate—an institutionalised and centralised Islamic state built on religious and political authority (Isak and Harding 2011). The 1804 Sokoto Jihad united, under a single religiopolitical structure and single language, most city states that occupy present-day northern Nigeria. The south, on the other hand, to a large extent is multi-faith, multi-ethnic and metropolitan (Nmah and Amanambu 2017). Colonial rule politics complicated relations between the two regions, particularly from 1914. Preference for and preservation of Islam in the north due to its structural alignment with the colonial enterprise encouraged the British to restrict the spread of Western education and Christian missions to the north. For the entire duration of the colonial project, an unofficial policy of religious segregation kept the regions apart. Within the north, non-Muslims were made to live in separate parts of town (Sabongari), away from Muslims. Towards and after independence, the north continued to project itself as a single, united, politico-religious region, in spite of the presence of non-Muslims in increasing numbers. This was evidenced in 1979 when attempts were made during the constitution drafting phase to make Sharia a national legal code. If colonial rulers had nipped segregation in the bud, conflict may have been less sporadic in modern-day Nigeria.

Colonialism and independence may have necessitated amalgamation and nationhood, but religious, educational, and ideological divergence remained in place to the extent

that post-independent political parties were structured along regional and religious lines. During Nigeria's Second Republic (1979–1984), the two main political parties—National Party of Nigeria (NPN—with roots in the North) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN—with roots in the South)—dominated the political scene. NPN fielded Muslim northerners as candidates and UPN presented Christian southerners. In the same vein, the aborted Third Republic (1993) had two parties—the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Both parties were a recast of the NPN/UPN structure of the previous republic.

Three decades ago, Osaghae (1988) argued that the state was unable to change the perceptions and attitudes of society because the state is itself guided by the same codes and, therefore, reaps the huge benefit of political privileges from them. Data analysis presented in this paper shows that these conditions persist and have been entrenched over time. Strong links between elites and their use of religion as a legitimising instrument have endured to the extent that they combine to shape politics and state policies in Nigeria. Elections in the north are not defined by policies or performance but by the religion of the contestants (Mayah et al. 2017). The character of the state—human rights, separation of power, rule of law, elections, party system, policies and reforms, decentralisation, public/private partnership, power relations—is shaped by the government in power and their ethnoreligious leaning.

More than any other region, the north's political environment is a defined elite political culture, grounded in politicisation of religion, leading to violent aggression towards minorities. (Bauhn 1989). These observations underscore elite political culture as a consistent phenomenon in the development and sustenance of organised political schema, in which violence serves as a means to an end. This point serves as a framework through which political culture fosters sustained resentment towards others (Seiyefa 2016). Religion has become an instrument of wresting for political power. Aspects of this contestation, especially the role of religious leaders and institutions in the democratic space, are by no means unique to Nigeria but the violence and conflict that surges prior to election, during voting and after election results are announced are significantly higher in the north than elsewhere across democracies in Africa.

Basedau et al. (2011) argued that certain religious structures such as parallel ethnic and religious identities or changing religious demographics are prone to mobilisation in politics; once politicised, violent conflict becomes likelier. The essence of Boko Haram and the philosophy that they preach is unique to the above theory. This is especially so in the context of religions' new political weaponisation. Religion may not only incite violence but also contribute to peace (Appleby 2000; Philpott 2007). Evidence suggests that the spate of violent crises that erupted in recent years in the north and along the Middle Belt region have religious, ethnic and sectarian colouring and have impacted negatively on both economic and human developments (Sunday Bobai Agang 2011; Loimeier 2012).

4. Materials and Methods

To investigate the triggers of religious conflict in northern Nigeria as well as its implications, if any, a qualitative methodological approach was used. This is especially appropriate for interpreting, describing, gaining in-depth insight, and contextualising the question of religion, politics and violence in the north. Further justification for a qualitative method, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is its ability to generate knowledge on "how" and "why" questions based on the experience, opinions, and account of participants.

In order to gain deeper insight into the research questions, existing data were used as the principal method of information collection. Data from peer-reviewed journal publications, books and newspaper articles proved most useful. Newspaper articles in national dailies in Nigeria such as *The Guardian* (15), *Punch* (15) and *THISDAY* (10) (listed in the Appendix A section) documented the daily occurrence of developments within the north and across Nigeria deemed relevant to the research questions. Articles that explored the "how", "what" and "why" questions were purposely selected for analysis. Books and

journal materials on their part provided historical analysis and thematic frameworks on the nexus between politics and religion and how they shaped violence and social relations in northern Nigeria. Justification for this method was informed by two important reasons: (1) Access to the north in general is limited due to restrictions imposed by the Federal Government based on COVID-19. (2) Volatility within the north due to sensitivity of religion (Islam) created safety concerns during the design phase of the research.

Qualitative content analysis used, followed by an existing yet strict methodological guide (Elo and Kyngas 2008). Familiarity with the gathered content was first established before coding sections of text into meaningful units. These were then discussed by the research team and developed into broader thematic categories. Subcategories were developed into how the subjects of "trigger" and "implications" were explored. What followed was a description of each category for context and meaning, particularly as they relate to research objectives. A main advantage of qualitative content analysis is its ability to simplify and reduce data into categories

Existing data produced results that can be generalised beyond the sample. They also provided a more in-depth understanding of the motivation, history, triggers and implication of violence in northern Nigeria. The risk of exposure to volatility, uncertainty and health concerns was mitigated with the use of secondary sources. Additionally, an extensive pool of existing literature was available, from which the study benefited immensely. A key obstacle that presented itself during data gathering was the abundance of data in newspapers. To alleviate this, only national newspapers were selected and only articles that probed into how and why were selectively analysed (Mason 1996).

5. Analysis

5.1. Interrogating the Roots of Intolerance and Violence in Nigeria

Multiple factors account for religious intolerance and violence in Nigeria. These include: weak co-operation among the constituting part of the federation; distrust along the lines of ethnicity, religion, class, and creed; the cycle of poverty; inconsistency of the federal government in handling ethnic-related issues; lack of education; and manipulative agenda of the powerful elite. These factors create a fertile soil in which conflict and violence have erupted and could break out at any point in time. Additionally, militant groups such as Boko Haram, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta militants, Oodua People's Congress (OPC), and the Egbesu Boys have become grim precursors of conflict and violence across the nation.

Since 1999, bottled-up political frustrations such as ethnic marginalisation, suppressed during the long and dark decades of military rule exploded from all parts of the federation—in the north, the introduction of Sharia law; in the southwest and the Niger-Delta, multiple ethnic groups and movements—some violent, others less-aggressive—all sought to address perceived and real oppression. In the Middle Belt, confrontations over landownership and power became a perennial problem (Obi-Ani 2008). These conflicts centred mainly on legitimation of power, how order prevails in society through force or dialogue, and definitions of social classes in the context of material interest. These observations by Weber three decades ago are still apt in describing roots of intolerance in Nigeria (Weber 1978). Conflict is thus created when groups attempt or succeed in carrying out their will by overcoming the resistance of other groups or infringing upon the rights of others.

From the lenses of political economy, violence in society is a product of irreconcilable differences between the dominant and oppressed classes (Lubeck 1985). Capital is unrepentantly consumed with the drive to reproduce itself while labour, on the other side, is fundamentally opposed to crude capital accumulation at the expense of workers' welfare. Within this premise, it is therefore the case that social conflict and violence will increasingly break out in societies with scarce economic resources in which capital and labour compete (Kukah 1993). In the Nigerian context, conflict is a manifestation of a power tussle, class struggle, ethnic difference and religious tension between the North and South.

Conflict and violence in Nigeria have resulted in unnecessary deaths, destruction and suffering. Worse still, conflict threatens national unity. Especially in the north, religious conflicts are usually a manifestation of deep-seated dissatisfaction with social and economic realities of poverty and deprivation (Khan and Chen 2016). Conflict there often takes on a religious colouration, even if the issue of contention is political or socioeconomic. Ethnic disputes also take on religious camouflage. For instance, the Maitatsine riots of 1980 to 1984 in Kano, Bulunkutu near Maiduguri (1982), Rigasa in Kaduna (1982) and Jiemta near Yola (1984) later assumed a measure of religious dimensions (Isichei 1987). Additionally, the 2000 riots over the implementation of the Sharia legal code in Kaduna assumed ethnic confrontation between the Hausa-Fulani and other ethnic groups, notably the Kajes, Katafs, Ibos, and Yorubas (Olurode 1989). This suggests a direct link between religion and conflict on the one hand while, on the other, it reveals a pattern of discernible regional suspicion that had existed prior to independence in 1960. The combination of religion, ethnicity and politics has constantly aggravated the mutual distrusts and the incessant ethnoreligious violence and conflict that threatens Nigeria's unity.

Independent Nigeria was founded on the principle of separation of church and state. However, as politics became entrenched in ethnic sentiments and regional biases, violence and conflict disrupted the gradual evolution of the political process. Contestation of political power and access to state resources by politicians from different ethnic groups led to the recruitment of religious leaders as means to an end— public support. Once recruited, religious leaders used their platforms and engaged their followers by emphasising differences, especially religious differences. In this way, these clerics became significant catalysts to violence, but not all violence is purely religious in nature (Adesoji 2011).

Religious leaders have used heated public rhetoric, such as the introduction of Sharia laws and the ban of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in secondary schools' curricula. These have led to an escalation of misunderstanding and a more divided, sectarian Nigeria. While religion at present is one dimension of the problem, continued misuse of religion as a tool to foster political, economic, or ethnic discord has increased sectarian hostility across the region. A section of Muslims in the north such as the Maitasine uprising in Kano in 1980 and Boko Haram are demanding that the Federal government implement Islamic laws. They believe Nigeria should be founded on Islamic law, devoted to the teaching of Islam. These religious sects constantly call on their fellow Muslims to rise up in rejecting the conformist dogma that Nigeria is a secular state (Kendhammer 2013).

These sects are funded from abroad by countries who share their Islamisation agenda. On their part, local clerics recruit from a bundle of unemployed youths to fight their cause Loimeier (2012). Politicians on their part use their platform to drum up support for extreme religious ideologies. These religious groups have grown dissatisfied with the Nigerian political system, which they believe is too corrupt and too slow in promoting their Islamisation agendas. The government's failure in providing a means to livelihood leaves the unsuspecting public with little option but to join and engage in suicide bombing and extreme violence to threaten and paralyze the system. Keddie (1998) and Hasenclever and De Juan (2007) argued that the politicisation of religion increases the risk of a violent escalation of a conflict, which is principally rooted in political or socioeconomic problems.

5.2. Political Complicity and Religious Violence in Northern Nigeria

The factors that perpetuate recurring religious violence in northern Nigeria can be grouped under three broad headings: historically embedded social divisions that mirror religious and geographical division, political corruption and elite manipulation; and the imposition of Sharia law in secular, constitutionally governed, democratic Nigeria. These groupings are not mutually exclusive but overlap in fundamental ways in the Nigerian context.

5.2.1. Religion, Ethnicity, and Geographical Divide

In Nigeria, religion plays a crucial role in determining the trajectory of elections and political relations. This is why the religion of a presidential candidate shapes the dynamics of an election significantly. Religious differences between the North and the South, particularly the juxtaposition of Muslim/Christian concentrations, has flared up tensions in Nigeria's political space. We argue that the ethnoreligious crisis that erupted shortly after 1999 is symptomatic of the character and politics of the Nigerian state. At the centre of most violence and conflict, we believe, is the problem of intolerant ethnic sentiments and toxic religious views that lay at the foundation of intermittent outbreak of violence within the north and along its boundaries with the Middle Belt.

At independence, nationalist leaders who emerged as state inheritors of power were faced with widening inequalities between the north and south. Ethnic suspicions and confrontations over resource control, revenue allocation and political leadership were not only unresolved but, in more ways than one, threatened the very existence of Nigeria. As Ochonu (2014) puts it, colonialism many not been the cause of inter-ethnic skirmishes, but it worsened it as ethnoreligious politics—introduced during decolonisation in the 1950s—festered and endured. For Osaghae (1988), the decision to force essentially incompatible groups together under an unworkable system not only laid the foundation of political suspicion and mistrust, but also proved costly after 1960. Independent Nigeria was therefore internally divided along regional and religious lines. These issues escalated into major political crises that prompted the first military coup in 1965, and subsequent coups in 1966, the infamous Nigerian/Biafra Civil War (1967–1970) and more coups thereafter.

Identity politics, corruption, scarcity of opportunities and socioeconomic challenges within the larger Nigerian system have inspired organised insurgency, especially in the north. Although violence is more prevalent in the northeast, it is a reflection of the political and social environment of the region. Especially in the north, there are complexities involved in the interpretation of the concept of Islam and its central role in politics, ethnic relations, and the resistance to foreign influence from the West. Religion is important in politics to the extent that religious leaders operate as part of or at par with the ruling elite. Clerics have vested interest in political power and are determined to collaborate with politicians in maintaining control of the system. This observation highlights the connection between politicians and religious leaders in the north as they mutually influence each other in the national and regional political arena.

Although successive governments since independence attempted to forge a Nigerian identity, each component part—East, West, Middle Belt and North—retained its unique identity with moderate allegiance to a united Nigerian identity. When civil rule was re-established in 1999, the ethnic and religious composition of each region did not change. More than elsewhere, the north remained ethnically homogenous, united under a single language, culture, religion, and spiritual head—The Sultan of Sokoto. Evidence indicates that prior to and since independence, power brokers in northern Nigeria have deliberately distanced themselves from Western influence through rhetoric, resistance to Western education and rejection of Anglo-American civilisation. Through these resistances and ensuing violence, elites in the north benefit from the promotion of ethnoreligious conflicts as they seek to profit, politically, ideologically and strategically from the associated arithmetic of numbers underpinning the conflicts, which may translate into increasing security votes, contracts, the creation of local governments and/or states as well as swelling representation in the National Assembly.

This study identified politicians as the main drivers of conflict and violence across the north. Although more than one factor fuels conflict in the north, politics of who receives what has become a catalyst that frequently fuels the growing sectarian violence and conflict to a frightening magnitude. It could be argued, and rightly so, that the spate of conflict and violence in northern Nigeria has its roots in the social and economic disposition, which have helped to escalate the crisis to its present terrifying point. Most states in the north straddle the country's ethnic and religious divide, stemming predominantly from competition over

political control, ethnic and religious grounds. Complicity works when vested interest in political positions get sucked into the rhetoric associated with victory-at-all-cost politics. This escalates to frightening proportions when personal financial gains mix with parochial ethnic and regional interest.

A case in point was in 1965 when thugs were used to deal with political rivals in order to perpetuate a certain group in power. All parties at the time played dirty politics—the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the north, the National Council of Nigeria, and the Cameroons (NCNC) in the east, the Action Group (AG) in the west. National elections that year were the most violent in Nigeria's political history, as elections were openly rigged and ballot boxes were stuffed with extra ballot papers, culminating into widespread rioting from October 1965 to January 1966. Political thugs from each party were all out to rob, loot, burn and kill (Ebimboere 2017).

Similar conflict occurred in 1979, 1983, 1993 and, more recently, in 2007 and 2011 when political parties engaged the use of thugs to disrupt orderly democratic processes. Certain religious sects across the north of Nigeria have become veritable obstacles to the emergence of a truly democratic culture. Islam in the north is more than religion but a radical ideology and a political identity. Those who do not identity with Islam and are of southern origin are pushed so far as to steer clear of any political intentions within the region. Non-Muslims have never occupied any significant political positions at any level of government in the north.

5.2.2. Political Corruption, Manipulation and Complicity

Data from this study indicate that politicians engage in manipulating the populace, using religion to create mistrust while seeking and perpetuating themselves in power. They use their broad platforms to spread inflammatory statements and religious sentiments, thus whipping up intolerance among their followers and agitating non-followers. This tactic is used to polarise the public and create a "we-against-them" divide. We argue that political elites will tender religious bids if religious legitimacy seems to be rational to secure their own survival. This assertion highlights the role of political leaders in the context of religious charging prior to, during and after elections. A case in point occurred in 2011 when supporters of Retired. General Mohammed Buhari who contested for and lost the presidential election poured into the streets across the north to demonstrate, destroy and terrorise non-supporters of their candidate, especially southerners living in the north. We found no evidence of Mohammed Buhari calling for restraint or appealing to his followers to exercise restraint.

De Juan (2009) argued that successful mobilisation, however, requires that politicians find allies in religious leaders who share similar interests. This mutually beneficial relationship requires politicians to promote and fund Islamic causes at the national and regional level, while religious leaders on their part convince their followers, using political interpretations that are likely to drum up support and win votes for certain politicians on the one hand, while on the other hand, demonise others. Northern Nigerian has been infected with religious chauvinism and exploitation by politicians and religious clerics who have become the ideological hand maidens of an unjust social order, contrary to the basic teachings of the Quran. Most clerics have downplayed their spiritual responsibilities towards their followers in the race to acquire material wealth.

This has ignited debate over whether state governments should help prevent religious violence by issuing licenses to preachers, thereby establishing norms that religious leaders, such as Mohammed Yusuf, would have to adhere to in order to lead a congregation. While this may seem to many Westerners like an infringement on free speech or an intrusion of the state into religious affairs, Paden (2008) notes that there is a history of such licenses in Nigeria, based on the argument that when a preacher "cries fire in a crowded (religious) theatre", their rights to "free speech" are no longer protected. Many northern governors who should set up mechanisms to monitor preaching in order to have a better idea of when conflicts are likely to occur are beneficiaries of the current system and may seek to preserve it.

The spate of violence and consequent bomb blasts in the north is a tragedy, not only because of the unnecessary loss of lives or wanton destruction of properties but because it exposes the flaws of politicians and their religious enablers that constantly put the safety and wellbeing of the region at risk in exchange for parochial, personal needs (Bintube 2015). While ethnic and regional diversion between the north and south hides the spiralling tragedies that occur across the three geopolitical zones in the north, it is reprehensible that political and religious leaders are failing to protect and advance the interest of their primary constituents.

It is equally interesting to note that in the north, the political class who are recipients of modern scientific and technical education from the West push fundamentalist and ideological philosophies that negate the uptake of Western education by the public. Rather than promote enlightenment, they use religion to hold back the public on the one hand, while on the other hand, they blame outsiders, particularly southerners and the West, as enemies of the north. Politicians in the region therefore use religion to distract from the critical task of state building and human development. It is no surprise that states in northern Nigeria have the worst development indices nationally. The challenges of poverty, food insecurity, mass illiteracy, youth unemployment and infrastructural development are well documented in the literature (Lubeck 1986; World Bank 2020); yet, politicians, whose families are Western-educated, call on a socio-economically backward, poorly educated, malnourished and mostly disenfranchised pool of discontent citizens to reject Western education and civilisation. They easily incite them to go on a rampage and resist change.

Evidence shows that some politicians induce an individual or group, by creating an enabling environment for tensions to flare and violence to occur. In such cases, politicians are straightforwardly causal modes of tensions and complications. Although, there are other modes of complicity that facilitate the commission of violence; for example, when the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram, turned the spotlight on the political elite and security agencies, revealing how their activities and failings have undermined national security because the same authority recruited them for their political gains; the leader of the group went further to implicate the sponsors. The complicity of politicians and religious leaders to incite violence and terror have wreaked significant havoc on the region.

> "The truth is that politicians are the root cause of this Boko Haram problem. For instance, in Borno State, the governor sponsors a group of armed youths known as ECOMOG. It is this ECOMOG that the governor formed and looks after, above the police, State Security Service and other security agencies. In Gombe State, the governor has the Kalari. I was once contacted by a governorship candidate to kill an opponent for a fee". Aliyu Tishau, the sect co-founder and coordinator in Gombe, Bauchi and Plateau states, 29 September 2011 Interview with Punch Newspaper.

Some politicians even placed a stamp of validation on sectional conflict and violence and intolerance with homicidal propensity in the name of religion. Politicians who have associated with such religious conflict through inflammatory pronouncement and inciting rhetoric have become the true sponsors of violent organisations such as Boko Haram. In some sense, Boko Haram is not really about a detestation of Western or other forms of education, but the expression of a malignant outcrop of fanaticism and intolerance.

Findings also demonstrate that at the extreme end of the spectrum, there is a section of the elite in the north who emphasise involuntary Islamisation by taking over state governance, including the take-over of state power by democratic or military means—a holistic or totalitarian idea that combines religious and political order. The alliance between religion and political authority has shifted to new dimensions by reason of incessant bomb blasts evidenced by the attacks of June 16th 2011 on the national headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force and the United Nation Building in Abuja of 26 August 2011, and violent kidnapping of students for ransom. These have resulted in significant changes in the north.

5.2.3. Sharia Law in Secular Nigeria

Since 1998, religion-related, intercommunal violence in the north has resulted in the death of thousands of people and many more thousands displaced, with numerous churches, mosques, businesses, vehicles, private homes and other facilities burnt and destroyed. The most severe incidents have occurred in the Middle Belt region including Jos, Plateau State (September 2001, November 2008, January 2010, March 2010, December 2010, and January–April 2011); Bauchi State (January 2011); Kaduna State (February and May 2000 and November 2002); Kano State and Yelwa, Plateau State (February–May 2004); and Northern and South-eastern Nigeria (February 2006). Additionally, clashes between herders and farming communities continued in the Middle Belt in Jos and Benue. Conflicts over the role of religion in politics and society have emerged in at least twelve Northern states including Zamfara, Sokoto, Kano, Niger, and Adamawa states.

In 1999–2000, the establishment or re-emergence of Sharia law (Islam's legal system derived from the Koran, the life of prophet Muhammad (SAW), and fatwas—the rulings of Islamic scholars) in secular, democratic Nigeria has its roots in the 1980s and 1990s when proposals were made to the National Assembly—Nigeria's highest law-making institution—to establish the Federal Sharia Court of Appeal. Though these attempts failed, the idea survived. With Sharia, most northern states continued to mix religion and politics without clear-cut delineation. Violence inspired by religion thereafter became an intractable crisis. Sharia became the weapon with which political and radical Muslim elites used to institutionalise suspicion, hatred, division, and antagonism against non-Muslims within the region. Sharia's imposition also emboldened fanatics and gave legitimacy to Islamic fundamentalism. We believe that Sharia laid the foundation for the radical, violent, anti-government campaign of Boko Haram that took off in August 2009 when the group attacked police stations near the town of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, setting off days of fighting, leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties.

What Sharia also symbolises is an ideology that legitimises a tradition of violence, war and Jihad against infidels—non-Muslims. Although Islam is proclaimed as peaceful, it endorses the use of force and aggression for its self-preservation and expansion. Violence thus becomes a form of acceptable practice in Islam. This suggests that the problem of Islam goes much deeper than a contradiction between theory (proclamations of peace) and practice (endorsed violence), but instead, a conflict between two important and fundamental aspects of the religious: one part treats peace as holy, while the other endorses violence as holy. There is a deep connection between authoritarian religion and authoritarian politics. It is rare for someone who promotes authoritarian politics to accept democracy in their religion or for someone who promotes authoritarian religion to fully accept democratic politics. Problems arise, however, when these same people assert claims to social and political power, which they would then employ to push the same choices on the rest of us, whether implicitly or explicitly.

Findings indicate that the real reason for politically motivated violence is not ethnic or religious differences but the scramble for land, scarce resources, and political clout. Poverty, joblessness, and corrupt politics drive extremists from both sides to commit horrendous atrocities. The emergence of Boko Haram (with ties to Al Qaeda) can also be understood from the deprivation and poverty framework. Boko Haram—which literally means "Western education is forbidden"—was mostly comprised of dissatisfied young people and unemployed university students and graduates (Khan and Chen 2016). Accordingly, this reflects the general frustration at the grassroots level, especially among semi-educated youth who feel frustrated and disenfranchised.

> The ideologists of Boko Haram reject the division of Nigeria into modern states. To them, the only boundaries that matter are between Islam (of which they believe they are the only authentic representatives that dictates the code for ruling the nation) Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Kaduna (2012).

In northern Nigeria, the form of modernisation being pushed on the public by the political and religious elite is significantly different from the realities of the "elites". While

the former is tied to radical Islam, the latter are beneficiaries of secular institutional privileges, state power and Western education. Nowhere else in modern Nigeria are the battle lines between modernity and religious tradition so starkly complicated in sharp contrast with much less confusion about the roles of the state, the rhetoric of the powerful elite and the experience of the masses. This suggests that in the north, religious radicalisation and confrontational violence and conflict are the exclusive preserve of the public, while modernity and liberalisation are the privileges of the upper class. Inevitably, violence and conflict across the northern states has denied liberal "Muslim" people the choice of being less extreme to explore different ways to be Muslim.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper highlighted the roots and drivers of radical Islam and insurgency in Northern Nigeria. It emphasised and linked three fundamental factors for recurring conflict—historically embedded social, economic, and geographical issues within the larger Nigerian context; political corruption and manipulation in the north; and the imposition of Sharia Law in selected states in northern Nigeria. Three other issues are subsumed within the broader factors—first, the presence of aggrieved, uneducated and dislocated masses who feel disenfranchised and economically disempowered; second, religious leaders and clerics—enablers of the political class and ideological defenders of Islam; and finally, multidimensional poverty, lack of opportunities and infrastructural decay.

At the national level, competition for political relevance is linked to regional and religious insulation from external influences in the north. Suspicions of others have been allowed to fester over the years and will continue to create new vistas for tension and possibly violence. The complicity of politicians will exacerbate tension in the violence-prone areas. The type of violence, conflict, and terrorism in northern Nigeria, by and large, does not discriminate in its choice of target. It attacks men and women of whatever political (or apolitical) views, social class, and walk of life—young and old, adults and children. No matter what their sources, political, religious, or economic, frequent conflict and violence in the north will continue to set the region and country back.

The Federal Government of Nigeria should create an education forum that would help people draw from the past without being enslaved to it. Public awareness campaigns should be geared towards promoting tolerance and a valuing of diversity, without which the region and country would continue its descent into chaos and conflict. To secure Nigeria's future and forestall violence, crisis and conflicts, the government must create space and opportunities for people to realise their full potential and aspiration. The rising spectre of youth unemployment is a stark reality that may continue to haunt Nigeria. The need to address these issues seriously and concertedly at all levels of governance with all the urgency it deserves must become the priority for current and future administrations.

Appendix A

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