Religious Extremism and the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria

Enweremadu, David U. and Njoku, Emeka T.
Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

The last decade has witnessed significance rise in terrorism related violence in Northern Nigeria. Much of the violence has been driven by the activities of the Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad, popularly Known as Boko Haram, an Islamic sect that was established earlier in 1995. Since then, a large amount of scholarly works have been published to explain the emergence of the group. The dominant explanations in these studies have centered on widespread poverty, ignorance, political marginalization and power struggle among Nigerian political elites. Based on an extensive survey of existing literature, this article seeks to disprove those notions. The central argument of this paper is that, the upsurge and persistence of violence by the Boko Haram Islamic sect can largely be attributed to religious extremism. The spread of religious extremism in Nigerian is it-self traced to unfettered spread offoreign ideologies, writings and teachings of Islamic scholars such as Sayyid Qutb, and the Pakistani Islamist, Abdul A'la Mawdudi, which were the ideological foundation behind the Iranian revolution that had a spillover effects in parts of Northern. To ensure sustainable peace, the article suggests that it may be necessary for the Nigerian government to closely monitor the activities of external religious actors and the international spread of fundamentalist religious ideologies and practices in the country before they transform to incubators of violence.

Keywords: Religious extremism, violence, terrorism, Boko Haram

Introduction

Violence carried out in the name of religion has now become one of the most serious security challenges in our contemporary world. The Nigerian state has not been spared this hydra headed global security challenge. From the early 1980s, several Islamic groups, such as the Matatsine, Yan'daba, and Muslim brotherhood, have caused unmatched violence within the polity. After being suppressed by heavy-handed military forces, these violent religious groups have reemerged, with even greater vigour. In early 2000, a violent religious militant group, the Al-Sunna Wal Jamma, that is, “followers of the Prophet”, more widely known as “the Nigerian Taliban” wreaked havoc in several cities across the northern part of the country. Before the violence could die down, another group, “Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad”, popularly Known as Boko Haram, which was established earlier in 1995 by one Lawan Abubakar, but later led by Mohammed Yusuf (Adesoji, 2010), emerged, to perpetrate even worst forms of terrorist violence.

Since its emergence, this latter group which claims to be fighting for the imposition of Sharia all over Nigeria has been involved in dastardly acts of terrorism against the state and innocent civilians. Over time, its operations have moved from random shootings to suicide bombings targeted at police stations, military barracks and places of worship, raising fears of a bloody sectarian war or even the disintegration of the country. Immediately after the April 2011 elections, the group stepped up its violent rhetoric against the Nigerian state and Christians leaving in the northern part of Nigeria, causing the death of about 500 people in 2011 alone. One of its

1 This figure was surpassed by the over 800 people, including Boko Haram followers, killed in July 2009,
deadliest attacks occurred on August 26, 2011, when a suicide bomber blew up the UN's Nigeria headquarters in Nigeria, situated in Abuja killing 24 people. Another attack on a Catholic church, just few miles outside the capital, on Christmas day, killed 36 worshipers (Reuters, December 26, 2011). The largest single attack however occurred in the northern city of Kano on January 20, when a well-coordinated attack on several government institutions (police, immigrations, state security service etc) claimed over 140 lives (Reuters, January 1, 2012). The increasing sophistication of its attacks, including suicide attacks, has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Nigerians and the flight of thousands more from the affected areas, raising fear of a sectarian war.

Detailed studies measuring the socio-economic impact of the Boko Haram violence and the political uncertainty it has engendered are yet to be done. However, some economists have calculated and predicted significant consequences of the violence on Nigeria's growth rate (Rice, 2012). A number of foreign investors and local businesses are said to have abandoned investment plans for northern Nigeria because of the Boko Haram insurgency (Anaro, 2012), even as there is talk that some wealthy Nigerians are considering selling real estate assets in Abuja because of the Islamist attack there in 2011 (Rice, 2012). Although some analysts have argued that 'today's Nigeria is strong enough to avoid protracted crisis' (Moyo, 2012), many prominent Nigerians, including Wole Soyinka, the Nobel prize-winning Nigeria author, have however warned of the possibility of the crisis degenerating into a civil war if unchecked (Reuters, January 16, 2012). Nigeria's immediate past leader described the situation as worse as or more complex than the Nigerian Civil War which occurred between 1966 and 1970. More importantly, there are also growing signs that Nigerian violence and instability may be spreading across the border, hereby affecting her neighbouring nations.

Growing evidence of the involvement of foreign terrorist organisations in the Boko Haram violence, both as foot soldiers and financiers/trainers has become visible (Mechan & Speier, 2011; Krech, 2011: 133). The dominant explanations for the upsurge of violent acts by non-state actors such as the Boko Haram in Nigeria have until now centered on widespread poverty, ignorance, political marginalization and power struggle among Nigerian political elites. But as this study will show, although these positions are useful to some extent in explaining the rise of violence and violent groups, such as the Boko Haram, they are not sufficient, to the extent that they do not account for all the internal and external variables that we observe in practice. For instance, what are the role of external actors and the international spread of fundamentalist religious ideologies and practices in the violence occurring in the Northern part of Nigeria? This study, which employs secondary data sources, seeks to address this important gap observed in the existing literature, as well as contribute to the ongoing debate on the nature and solutions to the various internal conflicts plaguing Nigeria. The central argument of this paper is that, the upsurge and persistence of violence by the Boko Haram terrorist group can largely be attributed to religious extremism—a deep sense of ideological fervor supplemented by sets of activities aimed at protecting ones religious cleavage. This dimension of religious extremism in Nigerian can further be traced to foreign ideologies, writings and teachings of Islamic scholars such as the Pakistani Islamist, Abdul A’la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb from Egypt, which was the ideological foundation behind the Iranian revolution that had a spillover effect in all parts of the world including most parts of Northern Nigeria in the late 1970s and 1980s.

**From Religious Intolerance to Terrorism: A Review of Literature**

Extant literatures on the reason for the upsurge of religious violence or terrorism fall into various clusters. One school of thought stresses the view that the rise of terrorism in our contemporary world is a manifestation of the United States (US) foreign policy particularly in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East (Chomsky, 1986; Lewis, 2002; Mamdani, 2004; Heskey cited in...
Lengmang, 2011). Chomsky posit that the rise of terrorism by diverse groups in Central America and the Middle East is attributed to the US foreign policy during and after the Reagan’s administration which was primary aimed at countering what was called the “evil scourge of terrorism”, which they believed was wide spread in these regions hence, the need to eradicate them.

According to him, the campaign to stop the scourge of terrorism quickly led to popular mobilization that was unprecedented in character (Chomsky, 1986). For Mamdani also, the rise of terrorism could be traced to the US foreign policy during the cold war. Specifically, its proxy wars in the Middle East aimed at obstructing the growing influence of Soviet Union in the region. The US government provided various levels of support to the Mujahedeen in order to fend off Soviet Union expansionist objectives. Furthermore, Lewis and Hesky reiterated that the actions by the US in the Middle East such as the US-Iraqi war, her position on the Palestinian question and its effects on the Middle East, its support for Israel, the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan helped to fuel resentments among Muslims in different parts of the world including Nigeria. According to Lewis (2002):

On October 13, 2001, days after the commencement of the US Military campaign in Afghanistan, several hundred demonstrators gathered in Kano, the largest city in Nigeria’s predominantly Muslim Northern region to protest the American action. The protesters carried banners criticizing the US, and many re-displayed images of Osama bin Laden. The Peaceful demonstration was immediately followed by rioting and street battles between Christians and Muslims, in which more than 100 people died. The international media reported these events as the most militant Anti-American protest around the world since the beginning of hostilities in Afghanistan.

Another school of thought advances that among the many causes of terrorism or violence is poverty. This is irrespective of contrary views that the poverty thesis does not hold much ground in explaining the rise of terrorism due to challenges of establishing a causal link between poverty and terrorism in practice and in theory. However, some scholars still consider the poverty theory as salient in understanding the upsurge of terrorism. For Thakur (2006), “poverty can be an incubator of terrorism,” although most terrorist leaders emanate from the upper middle class however, they source their members from among the very poor in the society. It is reasoned that “alienation, despair, discontent provides fertile grounds to would-be terrorists.” Manyin et al. are of the view that, one of the underlying factors that have engendered religiously motivated terrorism in Southeast Asia including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines is the problem of socio-economic inequalities, which was perpetuated by repressive secularist’s governments leading to frustrations of diverse sections in the society. This further brought about the emergence of radical Islamic movements particularly in the 1990s and gave Al Qaeda terrorist network the opportunity to infiltrate the region and help established the Jemaah Islamiyah, a regional terrorist network in South East Asia. This group carried out the Bali bombing in Indonesia in October 12, 2002 which killed about 200 people (Manyin et al., 2003). In the same vein, Al-min, cited in Boukharis (2006), stress that some parts of the Middle East, socioeconomic disparities originating from policies of authoritarian governments, have been regarded as the remote factors that gave rise to Islamic fanaticism and terrorism. For instance, in Jordan, as a result of the policies of the Jordanian government, which were not people oriented, and has led to diverse forms of social inequality, deprivation and poverty, economic adversity has driven most young men disillusioned by the society to involve in all manner of social vices. This has often landed them in detention where they are recruited into terrorist groups.

The failure of most African states to provide and protect their citizens, led to the emergence of diverse violent militant groups. In Defunct Sudan, years of social economic inequality, repressive policies of the government and proliferation of conflicts, provided an environment for terrorists groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Egyptian Islamic Group, Abu Nidal organization, Hamas
Religious Extremism and the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria

and Hizballah to come in, organize and train (Dagne, 2002). In Nigeria, where basic necessities of life are lacking, high employment rate, poor per capita income of less than a dollar per day, absence of adequate infrastructure, high levels of corruption in government, marginalization of a large number of her populace from benefitting from large revenue accrued from crude oil, the main source of her revenue, have resulted in high levels of poverty among her citizens; a condition that leaves them vulnerable to all forms of exploitations, including perpetuating all forms of violence for a token. This is believed to explain the rising incidences of terrorist violence in the Northern part of the country. Danjibo (2009) further reiterated this fact when he stated that, in the North, the Almajeris, a “large army of unemployed youths roaming the streets paying their dues of discipleship by begging and scavenging”, are ready to engage in any violent conflict for a fee when the need arises. Wealthy terrorist have exploited their social state and have solicited for their support in committing violent acts attributing their plights to westernization and a promise of a better life in the world beyond the event of their death in the process (Lewis, 2002; Obi, 2005; Makinda, 2005; Danjibo, 2009; Ogundiya, 2009; Bolaji, 2010; Lenmang, 2011; Gwamna & Dayil, 2011).

Yet another school of thought that includes Beit Hallami, Mark Juergenmeyer, Hent De Vries, Bruce Hoffman, Daniel Pipes, Ben-Dor & Pedahzur, samuel Huntington, Augustine Martin, intellectualize that, the increase of terrorism acts in our modern world can be blamed largely on religion, particularly the abrahamic faiths. The history of religion has been the history of violence. From one historical epoch to another, various religious groups asserted their dominance and relevance through force (Beit Hallami, 2004). For Hent de Vries (cited in Hashimi, 2009), religion has always had as part of its features, violence. This was further corroborated by Juergenmeyer (2001) who stress that religion and violence are intertwined. According to him, religious followers involved in violence do not see themselves as terrorist rather they are part of a cosmic struggle against the forces of evil and are divinely mandated to destroy the evil forces. Thus, they view their actions as legitimate because it was sanctioned by God. Samuel Huntington in his seminal book, “The Clash of Civilization”, identified Christianity and Islam as two major religions that have a history of antagonism. He posited that “the twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon when compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relations between Islam and Christianity” (Huntington, 1996). Martins (2011) historicizes that, from the Christian religion which commenced the “crusades”, a campaign that saw the destruction of lives and properties of the Muslims, Jews and what the crusaders term Heretical Christians; the Islamic extremist groups called the Harshish group or the “assassins” under the tutelage of Hassan isn Al sabbah, who assassinated Christian leaders; the Jewish “Sicarris” who assassinated the Roman rulers and other Jews who were their collaborators; and Hinduism, through its thugee cult which strangled passersby in sacrifice to the hindu god, most religions have been guilty of terrorism and violence.

However, some scholars are united in the view that although religion has played major role in the rise of Jewish, Christian, Hindu terrorism for many years, Islam has change the trend of terrorism (Hoffman, 1995; Juergenmeyer, 2001). “The willingness to sacrifice for one’s faith may be a requirement in most religions but it is only in Islam that there is such an explicit doctrine of fighting for the faith and a doctrine too that is so deeply ingrained in the popular mind” (Ben-Dor & Pedahzur, 2004). Furthermore, Pipes (cited in Hashimi, 2009) posited that Islamic religion in inherently more violent than any other religion. He stated that extreme Islamic ideology is contradictory to the norms and practices of a secular society and thus discordant. All these explanations have illuminated the discuss on violence and terrorism, yet they fail to explain an important aspect of contemporary political and religious life, namely that the activities of external actors and the international spread of fundamentalist religious ideologies and practices cannot be divorced from the violence occurring in the Northern part of Nigeria.

It is in the light of the above, that this paper aims to examine the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group from the perspective of religious extremism as against officious
explanations such as poverty, unemployment, political marginalization or social economic inequalities, power struggle among elites within the country. In other words, we are more concerned with the manner in which international extremist religious ideologies have permeated and have been ingrained among diverse extremist groups within the Islamic community in Northern Nigeria, from the Maitatsine to the most recent, Boko Haram. We argue that these extremist dogma can indeed be traced to foreign ideologies, writings and teachings of Islamic scholars such as Sayyid Qutb from Egypt, and the Pakistani Islamist, Abdul A'la Mawdudi, which was the ideological foundation behind the Iranian revolution that had a spillover effect in all parts of the world, including most parts of the Northern Nigeria beginning from the late 1970s.

Historicizing Religious Extremism and its Manifestations in Nigeria

At this point, it is important to conceptualize religious extremism for better appreciation of its historiography. Like religion, religious extremism is not a new concept; it is a century old problem, a culture that was in existence prior to the first phase of globalization (Hashmi, 2009). Indeed, religious extremism is an activity which most if not all religious cultures has undertaken in a particular historical epoch. The term extremism is used to denote activities that are considered abnormal or irrational. That is, those acts that goes beyond what is generally accepted in the society, whether political or religious. Our emphasis however, is on the concept of religious extremism. Prus (2005: 47) defined religious extremism as an “intense sense of ideological fervor accompanied by highly focused and sustained sets of activities that expresses the devotion of one or more persons to their particular belief systems”. The further identified certain features of religious extremism which includes “monastic seclusion of members, the extended proselytizing of non-members, the vilification of outsiders as well as sinners within, the criminalization of non-compliant persons, and the eradication of designated enemies.” Prus however posits that religious extremism reflects the norms and ritual activities of diverse religions, which are supported, sanctioned and certified by members and therefore relatively do not have direct linkage to terrorism or are not perceived by members as extremism but a normal activity sanctioned by a superior being. Thus, the members believe their actions are not extreme but moderate. For Liebman (2001: 76-86) religious extremism is the “desire to expand the scope, detail and strictness of religious law; social isolation, and the rejection of the surrounding culture”. Religious extremism can either be “a process or an institution”, that is a process of expanding religious laws to the extent that it is incorporated not just in the private realm but in the public realm. In other words, extremist strive to enforce their laws on the society hence creating political conflict or isolate themselves and wait for a divine interpolation for their ideals to become reality. Moreover, their laws are elaborated and are strictly observed to the extent that leniency in the interpretation of sacred text is negated. Secondly, Liebman advance that another dimension is isolation from society that find their norms of these religious sects repugnant to natural justice equity and good conscience. Consequently, extremist laws and societal laws are disparate. Conclusively, Liebman submitted that religious extremism is detrimental to collective formation and “all historical religions recognized the destructive capacity of extremism and sought strategies to contain it. Beit- Hallahmi (2001) posited that religious extremism tends to antagonize the forces of secularization and other religious groups that are opposed to it through the instrumentalisation of violence. In various parts of the world, this violence against secularization and other religions has been seen. The Hindus in India have attacked Muslims and destroyed their mosques; in the United States, religious extremist groups have demanded for polices and laws that ensures prayers in public schools and have destroyed hospital and killed doctors who engage in abortion. The Jewish religious extremists in Israel have also demanded for a theocratic state and have attacked and killed Palestinians.

The trajectory of the Nigerian state has been marred with violence incidence which was largely inspired by religious extremism among other factors. This socio-political violence which is rooted in religious extremism existed during colonialism (Amucheazi, 1986; Suberu & Osaghae, 2006 and Falola, 2009). However,
Religious Extremism and the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria
during the colonial rule violence influenced by religious extremism were either managed or completely repressed by the colonialist through military might (Anderson, 1959; Haynes, 1996; Adama, 2003). Nevertheless, post-independence era saw the re-emergence of religiously motivated violence in Nigerian state (Lubeck, 1985; Kukah, 1993; Rasmussen, 1993; Falola, 1998). Specifically, the 1980s saw the emergence of the Maitatsine and the Muslim Brotherhood. These groups portray themselves as the true Muslims that are advocating for saving Islam from corrupt Sufism and the significance of the establishment of the Islamic Umma. They equally advocated for the destruction of the colonial state which they believed was structured with Christian ideologies. In furtherance to achieving their goal, these groups carried out various acts of violence. Most of this violence was targeted at state institutions and Christians (Olupona and Falola, 1991; Ibrahim, 1991; Kukah, 1993; Mangwvat, 2011; Walker, 2012). In response to the violent activities by these Islamic groups, evangelical Christians established vigilante system in which they deployed to counter the attacks and thus frustrate the objectives of the Islamic extremist groups seeking for the islamization of Nigeria. These violent confrontations were demonstrated in 1987 and 1992 where various Christian groups fought against the destructions and killing of the lives and properties of Christian in places such as Kafachan, Zaria, Wusasa, Funtua, Kastina (William, 1987), and in Zango-Kataf in Kaduna state where Christian Kajes resisted vigorously Hausa-Fulani Muslim domination of their land (Haynes, 1996; Falola, 1998; Maier, 2001).

In contemporary times, violence influenced by religious extremist views has not abated but have degenerated into dangerous strain of political violence, specifically terrorism. This extremist religious ideologies saw the emergence of groups such as the Al-Sunna Wal Jamma or “Followers of the Prophet”, widely known as “the Nigerian Taliban”, the Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad, also known as Boko Haram and its splinter group, Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimeena Fi Biladis- Sudan, popularly called (Ansaru or JAMBS). These new groups have carried out acts of terrorism as a way of asserting themselves in the state. Explicitly, these groups focused their violent tactics on soft targets, these include the wanton destruction of markets, motors parks, places of worship especially mosques that are believed to be teaching moderate Islam and the killing of both Christians and moderate Muslims (Danjibo, 2009; Adesoji, 2010; Onuoha, 2012; Walker, 2012). Furthermore, in retaliation of the activities of Boko haram and other terrorist groups, a Christian extremist group known as the Akhwat Akwap emerged in 2011. The group stated that their goal is to counter the killings of Christians by the Boko Haram terrorist groups. This group is however limited to the Northern part of the country, especially in states such as Bauchi, Adamawa, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Benue, Taraba, Yobe, Borno and Kaduna (Mamah, 2011).

Therefore, we argue that these intermittent acts of violence in the political trajectory of the Nigerian state have been largely attributed to religious extremism. This is because the Islamic extremist seeks for the establishment of an Islamic Umma or theocratic state that is governed by sharia, hence they advocate for the destruction of the state as it is currently constituted. They based their arguments on the believe that the state is largely structured after Christianity and their laws, which is principally the British Common law is rooted in Christian principles introduced by the colonialist. Therefore, extremist Islamic groups advocate the reclaiming of the state through jihad. They believe that for them to achieve their goal of the creation of the Islamic community preaching alone cannot be adequate, thus the need to apply force in achieving these goals is now justified. In another vein, Christian extremism in contemporary Nigeria is largely reactionary. Although certain parts of the Bible admonishes Christians that the faith is threatened by violence and for the faith to survive it has to respond through violence. However, scholars argue that a major factor behind Christian extremism is the perceived islamization goal of other Islamic extremist group in Nigeria. The Christian groups aim is to stem the tide of the Islamization programmes believing that the Islamization of the country will put her in similar status with Iran, which became an archetype of true Islamic Umma and consequently, relegating them (Christians) to the background of political obscurity (Kukah, 1993; Hayness, 1996; Falola, 1998; Adesoji, 2010).
The influence of religious extremism in spurning violence in Nigeria helps in setting the tone for a rigorous examination of the emergence and entrenchment of these violent religious ideologies in Nigeria. In the next section of this article, we analyse the trajectory of these ideologies; how they have permeated the Nigerian political space, and how they have influenced the emergence and the radicalization of extant religious groups in the state, with the Boko Haram as a case study.

**International Religious networks, Religious Extremism and the Boko Haram Phenomenon**

In this section we argue that another explanation that has been glossed over by scholars, for the emergence of Boko Haram terrorist groups in Nigeria is traced to the transnational extremist religious ideologies. Specifically, the dissemination and entrenchment of these radical religious ideologies propounded by Abul A'la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb from Northern Africa and the Middle East into the Nigerian polity. We further contend that various radical groups that imbibed the extremist stand of Mawdudi and Qutb have influenced the emergence of various groups in different political contexts who draw inspirations from them.

Mawdudi and Qutb religious ideology is rooted in Salafism. The central theme of Salafism is the importance of adhering to “pure” Islam or the literal interpretation of the sacred text and the significance of violent Jihad, which is regarded as a sacred duty that true Muslims must engage in (Jones, 2014). Mawdudi and Qutb have been regarded as the founders of Muslim extremist ideologies (Laquer, 1999; Mamdani, 2004: 53). According to Black (2011: 307-310), Abu’-A’la- Mawdudi was the first Muslim intelligentsia who advanced the integration of religion and the state and refuted the modernist method of adopting Sharia. He argued for the literalist interpretation of the sacred texts. Therefore, A’la-Mawdudi is regarded as the father of Islamic extremism. Similarly, Sayyid Qutb is reputed as one of the most influential Islamists who advocated the subjective interpretation of the sacred texts. For Qutb, the interpretation of the sacred text should be done in the perspective of a poetry, particularly, allusions for a hidden truth that can only be discovered through intuition. Sayyid Qutb was quoted as saying that, “it is an allusion to the great truths which are not represented by words but alluded to by word”. Hence, Islamic religious thoughts were reconstructed by Abul A’la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. Mamdani (2004: 58) argues that Abul A’la Mawdudi remodelled the concept of jihad to denote violent struggle against unbelievers and that, the only true and pure state is one sanctioned by God. Hence, Muslims are obligated to struggle through jihad in order to attain the Islamic Umma that is, a theocratic state. In a similar vein, Qutb advanced for the reconceptualization of jihad as both the conversion of friends and the use of coercion against enemies. “Only physical force will remove the political, social, economic obstacles to the establishment of the Islamic community” (Mamdani, 2004: 60).

However, this re-conceptualized religious dogma runs contrary to the traditional understanding of the concept. Cooper (2004) asserts that “jihad shares the etymology ijtihad, the “effort” or “struggle” of interpretation needed to understand the revelation and the law of God. The general sense of jihad, therefore, is effectively synonymous with the duty to succeed, but at least theoretically, it does not necessarily mean war. Broadly speaking, for the Salafists, it does, however, mean war, pure and simple; whereas for mystics it also means spiritual and intellectual struggle”. According to Lacqueur (1999), jihad can be divided into two, the greater jihad and the lesser jihad. While the greater jihad entails the struggle by Muslims to live a life of purity, the lesser jihad means the defense of the Islamic faith. Moreover, Islamic clerics place more importance on the greater jihad and thus consider more salient than the lesser jihad. However, Abul A’la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, considered the lesser jihad more significant and a sacred duty for every Muslim.

Furthermore, Jahiliyya is another Islamic thought which was reconstructed by Sayyid Qutb. The classic Islamic perception of the concept refers to “the period of paganism that prevailed in Arabia before the advent of the Prophet and Islam” (Lavene, 2011). However, Qutb subverted this concept by linking the term with our contemporary world. He argued that our modern world is in a state of Jahiliyya due to the influence of
secularism and westernization. That is, people no longer imbibe and observe the rules and principles which Allah prescribes. Therefore, Qutb urged Muslims to reject secularism and westernization by destroying it through jihad, because it turned the society to Jahili system (Lavene, 2011). Lastly, the concept of Takfir or Al-Takfir W'al Hijra entails the avowal of community of individuals who have backslidden from their faith, a declaration of anyone as takfir, attracts a death penalty according to Islamic law. However, Islamic legal scholars emphasize the need to reject such law due to the inherent dangers in its application. Moreover, Qutb stated that anybody who contradicts his ideals, which are sanctioned by God, is Takfr. This is one of the Islamic religious thoughts that reinforce the resolve of radical Islamists (Lavene, 2011). Schmid (2011) thus states that “most Salafists base the rhetoric of international jihadism on Qutbism”. It was the writings and teachings of these Islamic intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s that formed the basis from which radical Islamists draw their inspiration. “Usama Bin Ladin and other Islamist terrorist leaders draw on a long tradition of extreme intolerance within one stream of Islam (a minority tradition), from at least Ibn Taymiyyah, through the founders of Wahhabism, through the Muslim Brotherhood to Sayyid Qutb. Sayyid Qutb, who was also the chief spokesman of the Muslim Brotherhood, established by Banna in 1928, structured the ideology that laid the foundation for the religious extremism and terrorism of today through his writings and teachings. Even though Qutb’s thoughts were strongly rejected by the Muslim religious authorities, his ideas were a major inspiration to a whole generation of extremist groups (Bouroumand and Bouroumand, 2004). Furthermore, after the execution of Qutb by the Egyptian authorities in 1966 many members of the Muslim Brotherhood went into exile in Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Morocco “From there, they spread their revolutionary Islamist ideas—including the organizational and ideological tools borrowed from European totalitarianism—by means of a network that reached into numerous religious schools and universities. Most young Islamist cadres today are the direct intellectual and spiritual heirs of the Qutbist wing of the Muslim Brotherhood” (Bouroumand and Bouroumand, 2004: 9).

Ayatollah Khoeini of Iran was among those influenced by the ideologies of Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. Like Mawdudi, he advocated a revolution that will see the establishment of the Islamic Umma and like Qutb he criticized all secular states and termed them idolatrous. According to Joscelyn (2011), “Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Iranian revolution, translated two of Qutb’s most important volumes into Persian. Those two translated volumes have been widely read in Iran and some say they are the most circulated Islamist tracts”. Similarly, Bouroumand and Bouroumand (2004: 9) advance that, “Qutb’s ideology was used by Khomeini’s students to recapture for the Islamist movement a whole generation influenced by the world’s predominant revolutionary culture. Therefore, Khomeini became a major figure in the history of Islamist terrorism because he was the first eminent religious figure to lend it his authority” (Bouroumand and Bouroumand, 2004: 9). Therefore, Qutbism was the ideological framework behind the Iranian revolution of 1979 led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Joscelyn (2011) captures this when he states that,

Iran’s revolution has continually served as a model for both Sunni and Shiite Islamist organizations seeking power. In 1979, the Egyptian public was captivated by what was happening inside Iran. As Islamist fervor gripped the nation, pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini were prominently displayed. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood openly sided with Khomeini’s revolutionaries as they overthrew the Shah. So did two groups that split off from the Brotherhood only to become core components of al Qaeda: Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman’s Gama’at Islamiyya (the Islamic Group, or IG) and Ayman al Zawahiri’s Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).

Moreover, Qutb’s ideology did not only influence the Iranian Revolution of 1979, it largely inspired the Al Qaeda organisation. Qutbism has been termed the intellectual forefather of Al Qaeda
Correspondingly, Murr (2004) affirms that Qutb’s influence is explicitly evident within Al Qaeda, the Islamist organization behind many terrorist attacks on the United States, including the one on September 11, 2001. Al Qaeda’s leaders, Osama bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri clearly identify with Qutb’s ideology. During his time at Saudi Arabia’s King Abdul Aziz University, bin Laden studies under Sayyid’s brother, Muhammad Qutb, and Muhammad’s close friend, Abdullah Azzam. Both professors taught their students Qutbian philosophy and encouraged bin Laden’s revolutionary spirit.

The effects of the Iranian revolution did not only influence the emergence of Muslim extremist groups in parts of the Middle East and North Africa, the ideology behind the revolution spread to parts of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly East and West Africa (Haynes 1996: 216-217). Many scholars and observers have argued that the emergence of various violent extremist groups in Nigeria that carry out acts of violence in the nations’ political trajectory can be traced to the 1979 Iranian revolution (Tamuno, 1991; Haynes, 1996; Gwamna and Dayil, 2011). The 1979 revolution influenced mass support of Muslims in Northern Nigeria for the project that seeks to purify the Islamic faith which is believed has been corrupted by secularism and westernization, through radical or violent means and ultimately the establishment of an Islamic community, as preached by Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. Tamuno (1991: 190) encapsulates the event within period as follows:

Since the early days of the Iranian revolution, a renewed interest in the purification of Islam has become noticeable in Kaduna and its environs. Initially, it was seen more in intra-Muslim conflicts and later, in apparent hostility between Muslims and Christians. In the past two years, the growing intolerance has become infectious. The links between Kaduna and Iran have grown in strength. Recorded cassette tapes with revolutionary messages from Ayatollah Khomeini and other Muslim scholars are all over town. Hawkers sell them everywhere. In the streets, vehicles with mounted loud speakers continuously relay the preaching and message of Islam, the wisdom of Iranian revolution, and the need to die while preaching the word.

According to Haynes (1996: 215), the religious dogma behind Iranian revolution saw the emergence and radicalization of religious groups influenced by the teachings of Hassan al Bana, Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb and the courage of Ayatollah Khomeini, sought to replicate the Iranian Islamic state model in Nigeria. By 1978 reformist movements such as the Izalatul-Bid’a wa Iqamat al Sunna also known as Izala, which means those who reject renovations, was formed by Shaikh Abubbakar Mahmud Gumi, and a more radical group, the Muslim Brotherhood established by Mallam Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky. While the Izala rejects innovations and advocates the practice of Islam that revolves essentially round the Quran and the Sunna, the Muslim Brotherhood rejects Nigerian secular state and promotes the idea of an Iranian theocratic state, which can be achieved by destroying the secular state through Jihad (Kane, 1990: 8; Birai, 1993: 197). Another group which became radicalized following the Iranian revolution, was the Muslim Student’s Society (MSS) established in 1954. Haynes (1996: 217) states that “the MSS wishes to see an Islamic state in Nigeria modelled along Iranian lines; its leaders are very close to Iran’s government, distribute Iranian propaganda against the Nigerian secular state, and have been in the forefront of recent Muslim-Christian clashes in several Nigerian universities”. Moreover, the Iranian revolution also influenced the Maitatsine uprising in 1980 in Kano. Falola (1998: 145) states that the Maitatsine followers “carried posters of Ayatollah Khomeini and Muammarr Khaddaf, indicating that they accepted these two as model political reformers-the Mujaddid- of the very kind Nigeria needed. Within this period the Maitatsine was involved in various acts of violence against the state’s institutions and innocent citizens.

Therefore, the ideological framework behind the Iranian revolution propagated by Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb and the enforcement of these teachings by Ayatollah Khomeini, which culminated in the Iranian revolution of 1979, were
the major factors behind the upsurge of extremist groups in Nigeria and the radicalization of extant Islamic groups. These extremist groups have been associated with various socio-political violence which the nation has experienced, particularly in the Northern parts of the country.

This process of radicalization by external religious actors has not abated. Indeed, it is our argument in this paper that the ideology which sided the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s and its subsequent spread in parts of Africa and Nigeria leading to the birth of radical groups is still extant in our contemporary Nigerian state, and has in fact, created more radical and lethal groups such as the Jama'atul Ainfu Sunnah Lidda wati wal Jihad, also known as Boko Haram, and its splinter group, Jama'at Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis- Sudan, popularly called (ANSARU or JAMIS). To put it differently, the international spread of religious dogma that saw the proliferation of extremist groups in Nigeria is major explanation for the emergence and lethality of the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Boko Haram emerged from the northern Nigerian state of Borno in the mid-1990s under the leadership of conservative Islamic cleric Abubakar Lawan, who later went for further studies in University of Medina, Saudi Arabia. Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic Islamic cleric later assumed the leadership of the sect in 2002. Since then, the sect have been involved in various cases of terrorism against the state and innocent civilians. According to Saleman (2009: 19-23), Mohammed Yusuf declared that he was a member of the Shiites also known as the Islamic society of Nigeria or the Muslim brotherhood under the leadership of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky originally, and later joined a splinter group of the Islamic society of Nigeria in the 1990s known as the Jama'atul Tajdidl Islam (JTI), of Abubakar Mujahid, based in Kano and was in charge of the Borno state branch of the JTI. Copeland (2013) also states that, Yusuf embraced a conservative theology that is in tandem with the Saudi-style Salafism and considered the Nigerian secular state as un-Islamic and corrupt, hence, he advocated for a true Islamic state for Nigeria, guided by the sharia law. Similarly, Umar (cited in Biomeier, 2012) further posits that “central to Muhammad Yusuf’s argumentation was a text written by a Saudi Arabian Wahhabi-oriented scholar, Abubakar Abdallah Abu Zayd titled “al-madaris al-‘alam'iyya al-ajnaibiyya al-isti'āriyya: ta’rikhuha wa-makhattruha” (The Secular, Foreign and Colonialist Schools: Their History and Dangers). This text specifically served as the theoretical basis for his rejection of a natural science-based (Western and secular) view of the world” (Umar, 2012: 123). Hence, as Forest (2012) concludes, “Boko Haram is embedded in a deep tradition of Islamism and it is but one of the several variants of radical Islamism to have emerged in Northern Nigeria”. To put more succinctly, the ideological force behind the terrorist acts by Boko Haram is entrenched in the writings and teachings of extremist religious, scholars such as Iyiawdudi and Quib who took a salafists interpretation of Islam.

Furthermore, the ideological connection between the Boko Haram sect and other violent extremist groups in the Middle East and the Mahgreb also reflects in their mutual cooperation, which is made obvious by their common signature and the assistance they provide in areas such as training, finance and weapons. Ajayi (2012) states that “it has been established that by 2004 the terrorist leaders had established links with the Algerian Salafist Group, now known as Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which gave some of their members training in combat, weapon handling and use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDS). From trainings acquired in AQIM, it was gathered that members of Boko Haram were able to show dexterity in handling weapons and manufacturing of “dirty bombs” through IEDS”. Moreover, it was also reported that Boko Haram sect has been receiving financial aid from Algerian terrorist groups. In one particular instance, the group was said to have wired 40 million naira to the sect (Ajayi, 2012). US Ambassador to Nigeria briefing House Armed Services Committee in March 2013 stated that “we have seen reports for years about Boko Haram members travelling to northern Mali for training and then returning to Nigeria”. Various regional foreign ministers and officials have made similar comments, including the US AFRICOM Commander General Carter Ham, who referenced the “growing collaboration” between Boko Haram and Al Qaeda-aligned organizations (Mahmood, 2013). For Cook (2011), the diverse strategies employed by the Boko Haram sect are consistent with Al Qaeda signatures, and these include suicide bombings,
coordinated multi-location bombngs, and release of martyrdom videos made by suicide bombers. Stewart (2012) also reiterates that, the only terrorist groups in Africa that adopt suicide bombing are Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Mahgreb and Somalia’s Al Shebaab. However, the use by Boko Haram of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), and their success rate, further lends credence to the fact that Boko Haram does not only draw inspiration from AQIM and Al Shabaab, but receives support from them (Thomson, 2012).

Conclusion
As Nigeria grapples with the menace posed by the Boko Haram, there is need for further insights into the probable causes of these menacing threats. Although diverse explanations has been advanced by scholars on the rationale behind the upsurge of terrorist groups in Nigeria during different historical epochs. Much of these explanations have not taken us deep enough into understanding the very root cause of the violence. The religious extremism thesis stands out as a remote yet integral factor which has spawned terrorism in our contemporary society. In Nigeria, as the article shows, it has led to the emergence of various extremist sects such as the Maitasine, Yan'daba, Muslim Brotherhood, Nigerian Taliban, and more recently the Boko Haram. The extremist leaders’ blind attachment to ‘sacred religious texts’ and its literal interpretation or subjective re-intellectualization has been a salient driving force. Mohammed Marwa, Ibrahim El-zakzakky, Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, in various instances revoked the postulations of extremist Islamic intellectuals on ways of life of every true Muslims to justify their actions. The subjective re-interpretations of the concept of jihad and takfir or kufir by Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb are most often a reference point for leaders of these extremist sects in Nigeria. Equally important, is the fact that most of these leaders subscribed to the ideological dogma of Salafism, a radical Islamic philosophy which advocates for the coercive conversion of infidels and engagement of the lesser jihad as a sacred responsibility of all Muslims worldwide. Therefore, religious extremism is that ‘little demon’ behind acts of terrorism in Nigeria. Although, other factors combine to explain its continued sustenance such as, it’s use by political elites to score cheap political points, high rate of poverty, marginalization, which the terrorist leaders exploit to gather more loyalties who later become its foot soldiers, however, it is clear that religious extremism is the first impelling cause of acts of terrorism in Nigeria. It was the reason behind the violence that broke out in Northern Nigeria by the Muslim Student Society and Muslim Brotherhood after the Iranian revolution 1979, the Maitasine uprising in the early 80s and it still remains one major explanation behind the terrorist acts by the Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati wal Jihad or Boko Haram.

References
Religious Extremism and the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria


