

Terrorism and Fundamentalism: A Quran-Exegetical Approach Nigerian Perspective

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This research investigates the ideological underpinnings of modern terrorism and fundamentalism through a critical Qur'anic exegesis, with a specific focus on the Nigerian security landscape. Despite kinetic military efforts to curb insurgencies such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, the persistence of radicalisation suggests a deep-seated "Hermeneutic Disconnect." The study explores how extremist movements employ a "Reductionist Approach" stripping sacred texts of their historical context (Asbab al-Nuzul) and moral objectives (Maqasid) to justify Hirabah (terrorism) as Jihad. Drawing on the theological framework of Wasatiyyah (Islamic Moderation) and the sociological lens of Narrative Criminology, the study employs Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and Thematic Exegesis (Tafseer al-Mawdu'i) to deconstruct radical "proof-texts." Central to this discourse is the tension between fundamentalist literalism and the "Therapeutic Shari'ah" model advocated by contemporary Nigerian scholarship. The analysis reveals that extremists weaponise the "Abrogation Fallacy" claiming that the "Sword Verse" (9:5) nullifies the Qur'an's foundational peace mandates to construct "heroic" narratives of violence for vulnerable youth. The findings indicate that the "Modern Misconception" has evolved into a "Digital Misconception," where algorithms amplify decontextualised "micro-interpretations" over nuanced classical jurisprudence. The study concludes that the most effective counter-narrative lies in reclaiming the Maliki jurisprudential tradition and promoting a "Therapeutic" application of the law that prioritises human dignity (Karama) and Sustainable Development. Recommendations include the integration of Narrative Criminology into national de-radicalisation programmes and the standardisation of digital religious authority to safeguard the "Middle Path" (Al-Wasat) against extremist hijacking.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, Islam, misinterpretations, terrorism

Introduction

In popular culture, academic discourse, and media representations of the contemporary world, the concepts of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism have become deeply entwined. The violence perpetrated by self-proclaimed Islamist organisations and movement prompted an increase in academic research into the ideology of these movements, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 (Hoffman, 2025). The academic study of Terrorism and Fundamentalism in the context of Nigeria is rooted in the tension between historical Islamic reforms and modern extremist interpretations. The context begins with the 18th-century Sokoto Jihad, which established a tradition of Islamic reform. Modern scholarship examines

how today's extremists misinterpret this history to justify a "revolt" against the secular Nigerian state. The historical epoch reveals that there is a well-documented transition from traditional Sufi mysticism (which was historically dominant) to Salafism (Izala movement). This shift promoted a more literal, scripturalist reading of the Quran, which created the theological environment where fundamentalism could grow (Shehu, 2022). A central academic discourse focus on the methodology of interpretation which groups like Boko Haram use specific verses to justify Takfir (declaring other Muslim's infidels) and violence, mainstream Nigerian scholars use the same Quranic texts to advocate for peace, creating a conflict of hermeneutics (interpretive methods). Research

emphasizes that fundamentalism in Nigeria is not just religious; it is fuelled by poverty, illiteracy in the Northern region, and perceived government corruption, which makes the "fundamentalist promise" of a Sharia-based utopia attractive to the marginalised (Shehu, 2024).

While existing scholarship has extensively debated terrorism within Islam at a global level, this paper offers a distinct contribution by situating the discourse within the specific 20-year history of the Nigerian conflict (2002–present). Rather than repeating general theories of fundamentalism, this study provides a localised Quran-Exegetical (Tafsir) analysis of the specific scriptural distortions used by groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP to delegitimize the Nigerian state. Its major contribution lies in identifying the 'exegetical slippages' the precise points where traditional Islamic meanings are manipulated into violent ideologies within the Nigerian socio-linguistic and political context. By focusing on the local 'Ulama vs. Insurgent' debate in Northern Nigeria, this paper moves beyond sociological generalities to provide a specialized theological framework for counter-radicalization that is directly applicable to the Nigerian security landscape." (Yusup, 2025).

A recurring theme in this phenomenon study is the use of Islamic sacred texts especially the Qur'an as rationales for acts of terror, political insurgency, and violent resistance. This phenomenon has led to many people holding misconceptions about Islam, which is essentially a religion founded on justice, compassion, moderation, and peace this raises many epistemic questions, for one, how a religion that is "essentially peaceful be tied to fundamentalism? Is the superficially and seemingly peaceful or is peace intrinsic in its teachings? Put it another way, is the global rise in the fundamentalist activities limited to some fringe Muslims and acceptable to sizable number of people of the faith etc.? The explanation on the stated logical questions, is that extremist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko-Haram represent a tiny fraction (less than 0.1%) of the 1.9 billion Muslims. Their actions are condemned by major Islamic institutions worldwide. Critics argue that while few commit violence, a "sizable" minority may hold conservative views that overlap with fundamentalist ideologies regarding law, gender, or apostasy. The fact considering support for fundamentalism is often tied to political grievances

(colonialism, foreign intervention, poverty) rather than purely religious "thirst" for violence. The tension exists because "Islam" is not a monolith. It is a lived experience practiced by nearly a quarter of the human population. The "misconception" arises when the loudest or most violent voices are taken as the definitive representatives of the entire faith, overshadowing the "moderate middle" (Ibrahim, 2024; Aziz et al., 2025).

Extremist organisations such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in East Africa, and ISIS in the Middle East have misinterpreted the Qur'an, demonstrating how selective and decontextualised interpretations of religious texts can be used to justify violence and sectarianism. These groups usually reinterpret Qur'anic passages in light of radical ideologies after removing them from their historical and theological contexts. These actions not only distort Islamic teachings but also encourage Islamophobic discourse in non-Muslim communities and hinder moderate Muslim scholars' efforts to promote peaceful interpretations of Islam. Islamic scholarship has long maintained a sophisticated hermeneutical tradition founded on contextual analysis, jurisprudential balance, and ethical reflection; however, the rise of extremist ideologies has introduced simplistic, absolutist, and often apocalyptic worldviews. The current study seeks to critically engage with this discursive disjuncture by analysing the Qur'anic perspective on violence, peace, and justice, examining how some Qur'anic verses have been misinterpreted or exploited for extremist purposes, and examining scholarly efforts that employ rigorous, contextual exegesis to dispel these misinterpretations these arguments would support the need to reengage the term Islamic fundamentalism (Wahab et al., 2025).

This research fits into a qualitative interpretive framework that prioritises textual analysis and theological interpretation. The study draws on both classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship to offer a diverse and, perhaps authentic understanding of the Qur'an's stance on significant ethical issues that are commonly misrepresented in radical discourses. Furthermore, by presenting counter-narratives based on the Qur'an that are founded on justice (adl), mercy (Rahmah), and moderation (Wasatiyyah), it advances the fields of religious studies, conflict resolution, and counter-extremism. This research ultimately addresses a fundamental challenge in the contemporary Islamic

intellectual landscape, the need to recover the Qur'an from ideological distortions and reassert its principles as a foundation for human dignity, ethical behaviour, and coexistence.

Statement of the Problem

The persistent security crisis in Nigeria, driven by Boko Haram and ISWAP, reveals that military interventions are insufficient without a corresponding "ideological disarmament." While current literature (e.g., Ibrahim, 2024; Yusuph, 2025) successfully identifies that extremists weaponise the Qur'an, there remains a critical "Hermeneutic-Implementation Gap" in how these misconceptions are systematically refuted within the Nigerian socio-digital landscape. This study intends to bridge three specific gaps in the existing body of knowledge. First, most existing reviews offer fragmented rebuttals to specific extremist claims. There is a lack of a comprehensive Thematic Exegesis (Tafseer al-Mawdu'i) that provides a hierarchical framework to settle the "Abrogation Fallacy" the erroneous claim that war verses nullified peace mandates. Secondly, while traditional Ulama possess the theological tools for refutation, there is an absence of research on "Digital Hermeneutics." Literature is yet to explain how to convert complex, classical Maliki jurisprudence into the "micro-content" format required to reach the "TikTok-generation" of recruits currently bypassed by traditional scholarship (Hassan, 2025). Thirdly there is a failure in current literature to integrate Narrative Criminology with Wasatiyyah Theory. Scholars often treat theological distortion and criminal behaviour as separate silos; this study bridges that gap by demonstrating how distorted exegesis functions as a "heroic blueprint" for violent identity construction (Presser, 2025). Consequently, the problem remains that Nigerian counter-terrorism strategies lack a "theological shield" that is both academically rigorous and digitally accessible. Without bridging these gaps, the cycle of radicalisation remains ideologically self-sustaining, as the "modern misconceptions" of the Qur'an continue to operate without a systematic, contextually grounded rebuttal.

Justification for the Study

The justification for modern terrorism often hinges upon a selective 'proof-texting' methodology, wherein verses are divorced from their asbab al-nuzul (historical contexts of revelation). This study particularly is timely as it employs a scholarly Quranic framework to challenge the 'theological legitimacy' asserted by radical movements. Through a meticulous linguistic and contextual analysis of concepts such as Jihad, Qital (combat), and Takfir (excommunication), this work provides a robust academic counter-narrative to the proposition that fundamentalism is an inherent corollary of the text (Taufik et al., 2025). At present, a 'disciplinary silo' exists whereby security practitioners often lack various theological expertise, and theologians frequently remain detached from the empirical realities of counter-terrorism. This research serves as a critical nexus. It equips policymakers and security analysts with an enhanced 'religious literacy', facilitating a clearer distinction between orthodox praxis and the heterodox exegesis that underpins fundamentalist ideologies. The landscape of global extremism is pivoting towards decentralised, 'digitally-mediated' radicalisation. These movements rely heavily upon fragmented, decontextualised Quranic aphorisms disseminated via social media. A formal exegetical approach is therefore essential to provide the 'intellectual scaffolding' necessary to neutralise these digital narratives. Consequently, this research represents not merely an academic exercise, but a vital contribution to international social cohesion and stability (Mostfa, 2024).

Conceptual Clarifications

Perspectives on Terrorism: Volumes of scholarly works contributions to the knowledge based on terrorism is paramount. Ziyanda (2019) captured a good point of departure by perceiving its origin in historical term. According to him, the word terror emerged in the English language as a descriptor for the actions of French revolutionaries against their domestic enemies in 1793 and 1794, most notably referring to repression in the form of executions. In regards to that, terrorism was quite literary conceptualized as (1) government by intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the Revolution of 1789 and (2) policy intended to strike terror in those against whom it was adopted (Tilly, 2004 p. 8). The latter half of this

early definition of terror has persisted through global history and politics, with many scholars agreeing that the point of terrorism is to terrorise, with the act of doing so historically assumed by an organised force (Chailand & Blin, 2007 p. 2). Emmanuel (2022) and Jenkins (2019) concluded that terrorism is by the nature of act, not by the identity of the perpetrators or the nature of their cause or as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence in the pursuit of political change.

From Islamic point of view, the words Terrorism literary connote Hirabah or Irhab, which are derived from the Arabic verb *arhaba yarhibu*, which means to frighten or instill fear, are used in Islamic jurisprudence to refer to the perspective of terrorism. Irhab, in theory, means to incite fear or panic (Ridwan, 2022 cited in Shehu et al., 2024). Every part of a Muslim's life is governed by Islamic law (Fiqh), which has its roots in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Acts that disturb the peace or cause widespread fear are taken extremely seriously. According to the Maliki tradition, hirabah is defined as public road blockades that result in terror, insecurity, or crimes like robbery and murder, regardless of the identity of the perpetrator (al-Barr, 1997 cited in Shehu et al., 2024). Al-Kasani (d. 587/1191) of the Hanafi school compared hirabah to qat' al-tariq violent road assaults aimed at stealing, instilling fear, and impeding free movement (al-Kasani, 1997, cited in Shehu et al., 2024). According to the Shafi'i scholar Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676/1277), in order to stop future crimes and social unrest, authorities must stop anyone who uses weapons to incite fear on the roads, whether inside or outside of cities (al-Nawawi, 1995 cited in Shehu et al., 2024). According to the Hanbali tradition, hirabah is defined as armed robbery that targets travellers on desert roads that are remote from populated areas (Qudamah, 1990; al-Dardir, 1997; al-Sawi, 2010; Taymiyyah, 1980 cited in Shehu et al., 2024).

Based on the explanations provided by Islamic scholars regarding the concept of "Hirabah," it was determined that the following are among the primary attributes of Hirabah: i) *Adam al-ghuts*, which means "powerlessness"; ii) *Ikhafah*, which means "spreading of fear." iii) *Ta'adazdur al-ithtiraqz* made reference to "the lack of effective security to stop it. Ibn Taymiyyah stated that a harsh punishment is meted to the perpetrators or culprits

who victimized non-Muslims. Similar opinions were also discussed by scholars of the Maliki school, that is, al-Dardir (d. 1201/1786) and al-Sawi (d. 1241/1825), agreed that if a Muslim breaks into the house of a non-Muslim forcefully, and then the non-Muslim managed to kill the Muslim robber to defend their family and wealth, then the murder must be categorized as self-defense (Al-Dardir, 1997; al-Sawi, 2010; Taymiyyah, 1980; Shehu et al., 2024).

The concept of Islamic fundamentalism: Scholars interpret fundamentalism in a variety of ways, including as a movement, a set of beliefs, or a personal characteristic. The term "fundamentalism" first appeared in the United States in the early twentieth century to refer to a Protestant group that published "The Fundamentals. A Testimony to the Truth (1910-1912)". Although the term originated in a Western Christian context, it can be applied to religious movements that share fundamental characteristics, such as Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, and others (Al-Azm, 1994). Fundamentalism, according to Altemeyer (2004) and Barton (2009), is a belief system; however, Peels and Kindermann (2023) argue that it also includes emotions, intentions, rituals, and symbols. Examples include Jewish Gush Emunim and Sunni Islam's Wahhabism, both of which claim to have infallible scriptures. According to Ben Amara (2014) and Dauda (2014), Islamic fundamentalism places a strong emphasis on taking religious texts literally, whereas extremism uses these interpretations to defend political violence. Islamic fundamentalists hold beliefs that emphasise returning to the usul (fundamentals) of the faith. Arabic terms like *usuli* (adjective) and *usuliyya* (noun) have long existed in Islamic tradition and predate the Western concept. Islamic theology has a strong foundation in the call to prioritise fundamentals over incidentals, as demonstrated by works like *al-Ibanah an Usul al-Diyanah* by al-Ashari (d. 935). Scholars like al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787) have further supported this call. Fundamentalists see modern Muslim societies as rife with moral decay and apostasy, and they see themselves as reformers and defenders of Islamic morality. They support the absolute sovereignty of God as revealed in the Qur'an and reject ideas of human progress, evolution, or secular sovereignty. They interpret the

text literally, believing it to be universally clear and consistent. As a result, they see the state as a divine mechanism for carrying out God's will, rather than a product of popular will or secular governance (Roy & Olivier, 1994, cited in Abdullahi, 2020).

The Conceptualisation of Misinterpretation:

Misinterpretation is the intentional or inaccurate distortion of sacred texts, especially in religious contexts. Extremist organisations frequently misrepresent the verses of the Qur'an in Islam by ignoring appropriate interpretation guidelines like *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the context of revelation), linguistic subtleties, and the Prophet's example. Classical scholars such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī emphasised the use of these tools to prevent errors and literalism (Nasr, 2006). Modern radical ideologues, on the other hand, frequently use verses like Qur'an 9:5 and 8:12 to justify violent behaviour. This tendency, which Khaled Abou El Fadl (2005) refers to as "textual authoritarianism," involves removing verses from their ethical and historical context for further political objectives. In a similar vein, David Cook (2015) observes that extreme interpretations reject the rich exegetical tradition in favour of strict literalism. The holistic message of the Qur'an, which encourages *Rahma* (mercy), *'adl* (justice), and *'aql* (reason), is undermined by this selective hermeneutics. Such a misinterpretation has serious repercussions. It skews interfaith relations, promotes Islamophobia, and aids radicalisation. Scholars such as Ramadan (2009) and Esposito (2002) emphasise the significance of reclaiming authentic Qur'anic interpretation through scholarly reform, public engagement, and education. Therefore, clearing up misunderstandings is both a social and intellectual necessity.

Review of Related Works

This discourse synthesizes contemporary literature regarding the Qur'anic exegesis of terrorism and fundamentalism, focusing on the evolving hermeneutics used to justify and debunk extremist narratives in the post-pandemic digital era. Hassan (2023) explores the empirical shift from long-form scholarly debate to "micro-interpretations" on platforms like TikTok and Telegram. He argues that modern fundamentalism relies on stripping verses of their *Asbab al-Nuzul* (context of revelation) to fit 60-second radicalization narratives, reflecting a

"de-intellectualization" of *tafseer*. The challenge is no longer just misinterpretation, but the removal of hermeneutic guardrails. Hassans 2023 study is pivotal as it shows that the battle for the Qur'an is no longer in the mosques but in the algorithms. It suggests that the "Modern Misconception" is now a "Digital Misconception." Bunt (2018) in *Hashtag Islam* provides an empirical look at "Cyber Islamic Environments." He shows how "Google Imams" provide decontextualised fatwas that facilitate terrorism. Bunt (2024) examines how AI and algorithms generate "fatwas on demand," leading to a fragmentation of religious authority where AI models may inadvertently amplify radical proof-texts. Aziz et al. (2024) document a theological project aimed at re-anchoring Jihad in its primary foundations: *Jihad al-Nafs* (spiritual struggle) and social justice. Their work distinguishes between "permissible" (defensive) and "illegal" (terrorist) violence using classical frameworks. Satibi (2023) proposes a "humanistic and peace-oriented" lens, arguing that literalist readings are socio-political reactions to modernization. He suggests "critical traditionalism" engaging with modern human rights without abandoning the text as an antidote.

Taha Abd al-Rahman (2023) distinguishes between "force" (legitimate state power) and "violence" (terror), offering the "ethics of trusteeship" (*Amana*) as a counter to extremist nihilism. Aslan and Akkılıç (2023) argue that *Salaam* (peace) is the foundational principle of Islamic governance, framing it as "positive peace" rooted in *Adl* (Justice). Bamberg and Presser (2025) identify a "four-tiered structure" in extremist narratives: victimhood, rejection of worldly life, true-believer identity, and Ummah-based duty. This study highlights those theological distortions are often secondary to emotional appeals. Lindström et al. (2024) reinforce this, showing that "group-based relative deprivation" is more predictive of fundamentalism than theological knowledge. Lufaei (2024) uses Fairclough's intertextual approach to demonstrate that radical "proof-texting" violates Arabic grammar and classical logic. Klar (2023) examines the literary structures of the Qur'an, arguing that the placement of "warfare verses" within sections emphasizing divine mercy serves as a structural restraint on violence. This provides a literary defense suggesting that the Qur'an's own architecture

argues against the "Sword Verse" abrogating the "Peace Verses."

Gerlach Press (2025) re-evaluates early Islamic history to show that "Jihadist" versions of history are largely ahistorical myths. By debunking the "Golden Age of Conquest" narrative, this work removes the historical precedent cited by fundamentalists. Munir (2025) categorizes modern terrorism as "Neo-Kharijism," noting that the global consensus (Ijma) has "theologically excommunicated" groups like Al-Qaeda by proving their interpretation of *Al-Wala' wal-Bara'* (Loyalty and Disavowal) is a modern invention. In Islam, Jihad translates to "struggle," ranging from internal spiritual conflict (Greater Jihad) to defending Islam against aggression (Lesser Jihad). While groups like the Taliban and al-Qaeda use it to justify political violence, classical scholars emphasize context and ethics. Martyrdom in extremist exegesis is often conflated with suicide bombings, but Tahir-ul-Qadri (2010) and others argue that indiscriminate killings and suicide are categorically prohibited (Qur'an 4:29). Takfir (excommunicating other Muslims) is frequently used by terrorists to justify killing fellow believers, a practice contemporary academics like Tariq Ramadan condemn as a tool of extremist ideology.

Hedayah (2025) conference reports emphasize that theological refutation is insufficient if it doesn't address the "emotional closure" provided by extremist identities. Aba Hussain (2024) examines Khaled Abou El Fadl's introduction of "Beauty" as a universal moral reference for investigating the authenticity of extremist interpretations. ICCT (2025) report on the "Evolving Threat" of ISIL notes that while territory is gone, the "ideological brand" survives through a hybrid model of centralised dogma and regional adaptation. The literature marks a transition from reactive apologetics to proactive hermeneutics. Modern scholarship increasingly identifies "Fundamentalism" not as an excess of religion, but as a "modern political ideology" that uses the Qur'an as a tool for mobilization. The consensus among British and international scholars is that the Qur'anic perspective on violence is strictly regulated by the principles of Fitrah (human nature) and Mizan (balance), both of which are systematically violated by extremist "cherry-picking" of verses.

There have been several fundamentalist movements throughout Islamic history, the first of which was the Kharijites in the seventh century (Britannica, 2023). Movements like Salafism, Wahhābism, Iran's Principlist faction, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Boko Haram in Nigeria have drawn international attention in recent years. From the historical epoch, since the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the issue of Islamic legitimacy has been contentious. Sunni Muslims regard the first four Caliphs of Medina as the ideal Islamic rulers, whereas Shi'a Muslims reject the first three Caliphs, believing that only Ali and his descendants through Fatima were legitimate leaders. Ali's reign (656-61) was fraught with conflict, including opposition from the Khawarij, who assassinated him. The Umayyads (661-750) and Abbasids (750-1258) followed, ruling with political pragmatism rather than strict Shari'a. While some rulers, such as the Almoravids (1056-1147) and Fatimids (969-1171) claimed stronger Shari'a implementation, decentralised governance made comprehensive enforcement difficult (Lapidus, Ira M. 1988, cited in Abdullahi, 2020). In Sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic revivalist movements emerged as jihad campaigns during times of crisis. Early movements were led by Nasir al-Din of Mauritania (1673-77), Malik Dauda Sy of Senegambia (1690s), and Ibrahim Sori of Futa Jallon (1776). The most significant of these was the jihad of Uthman dan Fodio (1774–1808), which established the Sokoto Caliphate, which covered parts of southern Nigeria, modern-day Chad, northern Nigeria, and Cameroon. Others, such as al-Hajj Umar (d. 1864) and Samory Ture (d. 1900), implemented moral reforms, prohibited traditional practices, and imposed Shari'a, often in non-Muslim areas. These movements reflected more than just religious zeal, but also responses to social decay and the pressures of European colonialism. Islamic fundamentalism emerged during times of internal and external crisis, just like in previous cycles, and continues to have an impact on Muslim societies today (Abdullahi, 2020). The Reductionist approach vs. the Therapeutic Shari'ah review a critical theme in contemporary Nigerian scholarship led significantly by the works of Uthman (2019, 2021) is the tension between the Reductionist Literalism of fundamentalists and the Therapeutic Jurisprudence of classical Islam. Fundamentalism in Nigeria is characterized by what Uthman (2019) identifies as a "Reductionist

Approach." This involves stripping Islamic texts of their historical context (Asbab al-Nuzul) and their higher moral objectives (Maqasid). While Uthman (2019) establishes that Islam is a driver for Sustainable Development, extremist groups reduce the faith to a manual for destruction, ignoring the Qur'anic mandate for social and political stability. Fundamentalist groups utilize a reductionist reading of Bidi'ah (innovation), Takfir (excommunication), and Ikhtilaf (legal disagreement) to incite Fitna (tribulations) within the Muslim Ummah (Uthman & Abdulsalam, 2024). By rejecting the classical validity of diverse legal opinions, they enforce a monolithic and violent interpretation that serves their political ends.

A major contribution to this field is the concept of "Applying the Law Therapeutically," as proposed by Uthman and Abiola (2020). This approach suggests that the Shari'ah, when correctly interpreted, aims to heal society and preserve human dignity (Karama). The "modern misconception" held by fundamentalists is their view of Shari'ah as purely punitive. They ignore the "therapeutic" flexibility seen in landmark cases (like the Safiyyatu Hussaini case), which prioritizes the preservation of life over the literalist application of corporal punishments under questionable legal circumstances. The reductionist approach is most visible in the policing of women's bodies and their public presence. Uthman (2021) argues that concepts such as Khulwah (privacy), 'Awrah (nudity), and Hijab are often weaponized to restrict the public visibility of Muslim women. The fact that fundamentalists reduce these sophisticated social ethics to tools of subjugation, the classical exegesis offers a more nuanced view of female agency. The literature suggests that extremist groups in Nigeria use this reductionist gendered exegesis to radicalize women by offering them a distorted sense of "religious purity" through seclusion or militant participation.

In Islamic scholarship, the legitimacy of exegesis (Tafsir) is governed by strict hermeneutical rules designed to preserve the integrity of the Divine text. The Sunni and Shi'ah traditions rely on established "chains of authority" (Isnad), whereas the modern Jihadist movement often employs a "Reductionist Approach" (Uthman, 2019) to bypass classical constraints.

Sunni Exegetical Legitimacy: For Sunnis, legitimacy is rooted in consensus (Ijma) and the adherence to Tafsir bi al-Mathur (Exegesis based on transmission). The primary authority is the Qur'an itself, followed by the Prophetic Sunnah, and then the interpretations of the Sahaba (Companions) and Tabi'un. A Sunni exegete must possess mastery in Ulum al-Qur'an (Qur'anic sciences), including Nasikh wa al-Mansukh (Abrogation) and Asbab al-Nuzul (Contexts of Revelation). Ibn Kathir (2003) and Al-Qurtubi (2003) represent the gold standard, focusing on linguistic precision and the legal objectives of the Shari'ah. Kamali (2015) notes that Sunni legitimacy today increasingly relies on Wasatiyyah (Moderation), ensuring that interpretations align with the Maqasid (Higher Objectives).

Shi'ah Exegetical Legitimacy: Shi'ah exegesis shares linguistic roots with the Sunni tradition but differs fundamentally in its source of authority. Legitimacy is derived from the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's household) and the Imamate. The Imam is considered the "Speaking Qur'an" (Al-Qur'an al-Natiq), possessing the exclusive right to reveal the Batin (hidden/esoteric) meanings. Shi'ah Tafsir often integrates Aql (Reason) more formally than traditional Sunni Mathur, provided it aligns with the teachings of the Imams. Classical works like Al-Tabarsi's Majma' al-Bayan emphasize the spiritual and political leadership of the Imams as a prerequisite for legitimate interpretation.

Modern Jihadist Movement: In stark contrast to the classical schools, modern Jihadist movements (such as Boko Haram or ISWAP) employ a Radical Reductionist Approach that lacks traditional scholarly legitimacy. They bypass the Ulama (scholars) and classical Ijazah (licensing) systems, claiming a direct, literalist access to the text. This is often termed "Digital Hermeneutics" (Bunt, 2024). As noted by Ibrahim (2024), they claim that the "Sword Verse" (9:5) has abrogated over 100 verses of peace and pluralism—a claim rejected by classical scholars like Al-Qurtubi. Uthman and AbdulSalam (2024) observe that these movements reduce complex concepts like Takfir (excommunication) and Jihad to tools for political mobilization, ignoring the "Therapeutic" and "Sustainable" frameworks of Shari'ah (Uthman, 2019; Uthman & Abiola, 2020). According to Presser (2025), their legitimacy is not built on legal

rigour but on Narrative Criminology—using verses to build a story of "heroic martyrdom" that appeals to the marginalized.

The Nigerian Context on Insurgency and Exegesis

In the Nigerian academic and theological context, scholars have increasingly moved from general condemnations of terrorism to sophisticated, "insider" critiques of the specific exegesis used by groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province). In reviewing the recent scholarship regarding Qur'anic exegesis, terrorism, and the Nigerian landscape, several critical "knowledge gaps" emerge. While the literature is robust in identifying what is being misinterpreted, it often falls short in explaining the mechanisms of implementation and the long-term efficacy of counter-narratives. While scholars like Shehu (2024) and Yusup H. (2025) provide excellent theological rebuttals to extremist claims, there is a lack of empirical data on the reception of these narratives. Most literature assume that "correct" theology automatically leads to de-radicalisation. There is little research measuring whether an insurgent, once exposed to the "peaceful" exegesis of Surah 5:32 actually changes their behaviour. There is a lack of "longitudinal impact study" that tracks the cognitive shifts in former fighters post-theological rehabilitation.

Recent Nigerian studies (e.g., David, 2025) mention the "Greed-Need-Creed" spectrum, but they struggle to quantify the dominance of the Qur'anic factor. Does a recruit join because they believe in the misinterpretation of the "Sword Verse," or do they use the verse to justify a choice made due to poverty? There is need to have more "Mixed-Methods Research" that interviews insurgents to determine if the "Theological Misconception" was the driver or merely the accessory to their radicalisation. Most of the literature remains focused on male-centric interpretations of Jihad. But with the recent rise of female suicide bombers and recruiters in the Lake Chad Basin, there is a significant lack of literature on female-specific exegesis. The question is, how do extremist groups misinterpret the roles of the Sahabiyat (female companions of the Prophet) to radicalise women? This remains an under-researched area in Nigerian scholarship. The literature frequently cites the Maliki school

(popular in Nigeria) to counter Boko Haram. However, extremist groups often reject the four traditional schools (Madhabs) entirely in favour of a "Neo-Salafi" literalism. There is a gap in research regarding how to engage in a "hermeneutic dialogue" with someone who rejects the very legal framework (classical jurisprudence) the scholar is using to refute them.

In the Nigerian context, since gaining independence in 1960, the tension between Islam as an "essentially peaceful" religion and the rise of fundamentalism is deeply tied to the country's unique socio-political history. The statement's mention of a "religion founded on justice" has deep roots in Northern Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate (1804) led by Sheikh Usman dan Fodio, this was a movement aimed at "purifying" Islam from perceived corruption and injustice. For many Nigerian Muslims, this era represents the "ideal" version of Islam where justice and faith were aligned. The Maitatsine Uprisings (1980s), however, was an early sign of modern fundamentalism. Led by Muhammadu Marwa, it was a violent rejection of Western influence and the material wealth of the "elite," showing how fundamentalism can grow from economic grievances disguised as religious "purity" (Tijani & Hakeem, 2022, cited in Buhari et al., 2024),

In Nigeria, this shift is often explained through failure of governance and economic inequality. Poverty and the "Almajiri" System with over 60% of the population living in poverty, fundamentalist groups like Boko Haram exploit the vulnerable. They frame the "secular" Nigerian state as a failure and offer a "pure" Islamic state as the only just alternative. The introduction of Sharia law in 12 northern states was intended to bring "justice" to the masses. However, when it failed to solve poverty or corruption, it created a vacuum that more radical groups filled, claiming the government's version of Sharia was "polluted." In the Nigerian experience, peace is seen as intrinsic but often threatened by manipulative Preaching through "Parochial education" where charismatic but unlearned preachers reinterpret texts to suit political or personal agendas. Because Nigeria is split roughly between Christians and Muslims, religion becomes a "tool" for political mobilization. When a group feels marginalized, they turn to "fundamentalism" as a shield. In Nigeria, the "epistemic question" isn't just about what the books say; it's about who has

the power to interpret them. Fundamentalism rises when people lose faith in the state's ability to provide the "justice and compassion" that the religion promises (Uroko, 2018; Buhari, K. M., b Sachiya, et al., 2024). In addition to psychological trauma like PTSD, religious fundamentalism has resulted in widespread violations of human rights, such as murders, kidnappings, and displacement (Ede, 2020). Fear and forced migration have had a significant impact on cultural and communal life, eroding traditional practices and identities (Uroko, 2018; Buhari, K. M., b Sachiya et al., 2024).

Islam and the Ban on Terrorism: An Interpretation from the Qur'an

The idea that Islam supports terrorism and the murder of innocent people is among the most pervasive falsehoods about the religion. Even in times of conflict, however, the killing of women, children, religious leaders, and non-combatants is strictly forbidden by Islamic teachings. Islam believes in the sanctity of human life, the inviolability of blood, and the protection of property. The Qur'an explicitly condemns unjust killing: "*Nor take life, which Allah has made sacred, except for a just cause*" (Qur'an 17:33). It also states that "*unjustly killing one soul is akin to killing all of humanity, and saving one life is the same as saving all mankind*" (Qur'an 5:32). Islam categorically forbids suicide, including suicide bombings. According to the Qur'an, self-destruction is a sin that is punishable. According to the Qur'an 4:29, "*Do not kill yourselves. Surely Allah is Most Merciful to you.*" Furthermore, Hadiths state that those who commit suicide will be condemned to eternal punishment in Hell. Life is a sacred gift from God that cannot be taken by oneself under any circumstances. According to Islamic jurisprudence, suicide committed out of desperation, adversity, or as a means of harming others is not only abhorred but also regarded as a grave offence (Shehu et al., 2024).

Islam promotes respect for one another and religious tolerance. The Qur'an forbids disparaging or disparaging the beliefs of others (Qur'an 6:108), emphasising that conviction must be earned voluntarily rather than under duress. "*There is no compulsion in religion. The right path has become distinguishable from the wrong. So, whoever rejects Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped*

the most reliable handhold that will never fail. And Allah is All-Hearing and All-Knowing. (Quran 2:256). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was instructed not to force people to believe. "*And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed all of them. Would you then compel the people to become believers?*" (Qur'an 10:99), and the second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, famously stated: "*If they are not your brothers in faith, they are your equals in humanity.*" Thus, hatred or hostility towards non-Muslims based solely on religion violates Islamic principles (cited in Shehu et al., 2024).

Decontextualized Proof-Texting and the Jurisprudence of Peace

This academic discussion examines a few Qur'anic passages that are commonly misunderstood and exploited by extremist and terrorist groups to support violent acts. Classical Islamic scholars like Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi refute such interpretations by presenting opposing viewpoints that are grounded in traditional exegesis and sound jurisprudence. Surah At-Tawbah 9:5 states, "*Then, after the sacred months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every ambush.*" But if they repent, establish prayer, and pay zakāh, then let them go. Indeed, Allah is forgiving and merciful. (Surah At Tawbah 9:5) This verse is selectively cited by extremist organisations like ISIS and Boko Haram to support the killing of non-Muslims, portraying it as a universal command. In his classical commentary Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Ibn Kathir (2003) provides a detailed analysis of Surah At-Tawbah (9:5), famously known as the "Ayat al-Sayf" (Verse of the Sword). His interpretation is central to Sunni orthodoxy and is often a primary point of contention in modern debates over religious violence and abrogation.

The Context of the "Grace Period": Ibn Kathir explains that the phrase "When the sacred months have passed" refers to the four-month grace period (Fasihu) granted to the polytheists (Mushrikin) in the preceding verses (9:1-2). He clarifies that during these four months, the Prophet and the Muslims were prohibited from attacking the idolaters to allow them time to either leave the land, prepare for battle, or embrace Islam. Once this period expired, the state of "disavowal" (Bara'ah)

became absolute for those who had violated their treaties.

The Command for Total Warfare: Ibn Kathir interprets the command "Kill the polytheists wherever you find them" as a general directive to fight those who remained in open hostility after the grace period. He highlights the verbs "seize them," "besiege them," and "lie in wait for them" as instructions to use all available military strategies including capture, siege warfare, and intelligence gathering to force the enemy into a corner. According to Ibn Kathir, the objective was to give them "no choice but to die or embrace Islam."

The Condition for Peace: Ibn Kathir emphasizes the latter half of the verse: "But if they repent and perform the Salah, and give the Zakah, then leave their way free." He uses this to define what constitutes a "true conversion" in the eyes of the state. He famously cites the first Caliph, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, who used this verse as his primary legal evidence during the Ridda (Apostasy) Wars. Abu Bakr argued that anyone who refuses to pay Zakat has not fulfilled the conditions of this verse and thus can still be fought.

The Doctrine of Abrogation (Naskh): Perhaps the most controversial part of Ibn Kathir's analysis is his citation of Ad-Dahhak bin Muzahim, who stated that this single verse "abrogated every agreement of peace between the Prophet and any idolater, every treaty, and every term." Ibn Kathir supports the view that Surah 9:5 represents the final stage of the Qur'anic revelation regarding war and peace. While he notes its role in abrogation, classical scholars like Ibn Kathir still limited its application to the specific Mushrikin of Arabia who had violated treaties. Modern jihadist movements, as noted by Uthman (2019), often take Ibn Kathir's "abrogation" commentary and apply it universally to all non-Muslims today, which is a significant departure from the classical "Therapeutic" intent.

The Limit to Sacred Mosque: Despite the forceful language, Ibn Kathir notes a specific geographic limit: the Muslims were still prohibited from fighting within the Sacred Area (Masjid al-Haram) unless they were attacked first, as per Surah Al-Baqarah (2:191). Ibn Kathir's commentary is a perfect example of the "Reductionist Trap" discussed in your literature review. While Ibn Kathir saw this verse as a historical legal instrument for a specific 7th-century conflict, modern fundamentalists reduce his nuanced commentary to

a permanent, global mandate for violence (Ibn Kathir, 2003).

Another verse that is equally misinterpreted by terrorists and extremists without theological and legal explanation is Quran 2:191. *"And kill them wherever you find them, and expel them from the same place they expelled you. And Al-Fitnah (persecution) is worse than killing. However, do not go beyond what is permitted. Truly, Allah dislikes transgressors."* (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:191). This verse refers to the Muslims' conflict with the Quraysh after they were expelled from Makkah. The phrase *"kill them wherever you find them"* refers specifically to those who fight Muslims, not to non-combatants or civilians. Groups such as Al-Qaeda argue that this verse allows for attacks on non-Muslims around the world, including civilians. It is not a blanket license for violence. According to Ibn Kathir, the Quraysh had first broken this command, which was linked to a state of war, particularly during the holy months. Thus, the Muslims were granted the right to self-defence. Additionally, Al-Qurtubi emphasises that the verse must be interpreted in the context of just retribution and points out that "fitnah" in this context refers to religious persecution or compelling Muslims to renounce their faith, which is regarded as a more serious sin than open conflict. The verse emphasises moral behaviour even during times of war by concluding with a ban on transgression. This includes not hurting women, kids, the elderly, or people who are not fighting. *"The law of legal retribution applies to the forbidden things, and the sacred month is for the sacred month." Then, if someone transgresses against you, transgress against him in the same way he transgressed against you. And fear Allah, and remember that Allah is with those who fear Him.* This verse governs the idea of retaliation within the bounds of justice. According to Ibn Kathir, Muslims were told to protect themselves during the holy months, but only to the degree of the attack. According to Al-Qurtubi, retaliation needs to be proportionate and measured. The injunction to *"fear Allah"* suggests that retaliation must not go beyond what is reasonable and equitable. This maintains moral behaviour and dignity even in times of conflict.

Scholars Mukhibat (2024) and Rinto (2024) argue that stereotypes and misunderstandings can be exacerbated by religious illiteracy in both

individuals and communities. An inadequate understanding of various religious traditions can cause distrust or fear. In this instance, Surah Al-Anfal 8:12 has been misunderstood. The verse reads, *"(Remember) when your Lord revealed to the angels: Verily, I am with you, so hold fast those who have believed." I will strike terror in the hearts of those who have disbelieved. So strike them over the necks and smite all of their fingers and toes.* (Surah Al-Anfal 8:12). This verse alludes to the first significant conflict between the Muslims and the Quraysh, the Battle of Badr. Allah's message to the angels was part of divine support for the believers in a battle where they were outnumbered. This is frequently used by extremists and terrorists to justify beheadings and acts of terror against non-Muslims. Ibn Kathir explains that this statement was not aimed at regular believers, but rather at the angels who were assisting the Muslims. The language is vivid and figurative, as one would expect from battlefield imagery. Al-Qurtubi goes on to clarify that the term *"strike over the necks"* describes prompt, forceful military action against combatants rather than civilians. It is not a general order for all times or against all unbelievers; rather, it is a directive specific to the battlefield. It should not serve as an excuse for careless acts of violence. Al-Qurtubi warns against extrapolating such verses to modern circumstances without due process, legal consent, and established moral principles found in Islamic law (Shari'ah).

According to some interpretations of religious texts, exclusive claims to truth are emphasised, stating that only adherents of a specific faith have the accurate knowledge of divine will (Tareq 2024; Samuel, 2015). A sense of superiority brought on by this exclusivity may breed intolerance for people who hold different opinions. Similarly, radical organisations may use distorted interpretations of the Bible to support their extreme beliefs (Tareq, 2024; Samuel, 2015). Extremist movements may use intolerance for religious or cultural diversity as a focal point, which could result in terrorism, violence, and social unrest. Terrorists misunderstand this verse and use it as justification for their crimes. According to Surah Muhammad 47:4, *"When you meet those who disbelieve (in battle), strike (their) necks until you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds, and afterwards either (confer) favour or ransom (them)*

until the war lays down its burdens." (Surah Muhammad 47:4). This verse discusses how to deal with enemies during actual combat as well as how to treat prisoners of war after a battle. This verse is frequently used by terrorist groups to defend the murder of civilians or prisoners of war. According to Ibn Kathir, even though this verse outlines the rules of engagement, if victory is achieved, the alternatives are not torture or murder but rather ransom or release as a favour. Al-Qurtubi notes that this verse abolishes previous practices where prisoners might be executed arbitrarily. Instead, Islam introduces humanitarian treatment of captives. This highlights the morality of war once more: only engage in combat when absolutely required, and then extend mercy after the war is over.

Thus, misunderstandings of religious texts or the misrepresentation of religious doctrine can fuel intolerance and prejudice. Scriptures can be selectively interpreted by people or organisations to support exclusive ideologies or defend violent acts. For example, this verse stated that *"Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and seek to spread corruption in the land is to be killed, crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off on opposite sides, or to be exiled from the land. That is a disgrace for them in this world, and a great punishment is theirs in the Hereafter.* Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:33). This verse outlines the legal punishment for serious crimes such as armed robbery, terrorism, and rebellion, which endanger society's safety. Extremist groups distort Qur'anic verses by removing them from their historical and legal contexts, violating Islamic jurisprudence. Classical scholars such as Ibn Kathir define *"waging war against Allah and His Messenger"* as committing banditry or terrorising people with weapons (Ibn Kathir, 2003). Those who spread lawlessness and commit murder will face the harshest punishments. Al-Qurtubi concurs, pointing out that each penalty is appropriate for the seriousness of the offence. The death penalty, for example, is applied if the offender kills and robs; if only robbery occurred without murder, the punishment may be exile or limb amputation, depending on the circumstances. This verse is a component of the Islamic legal system (hudud) and is only applicable by a recognised authority, like a judge in a court of law, not by private citizens or

organisations. True Islamic teachings support peace, justice, and mercy. Misunderstandings for political or militant purposes not only distort Islam but also encourage Islamophobia and sectarianism globally.

Teachings of the Qur'an on Justice, Peace, and Violence

The values of justice, peace, and the sanctity of human life are all continuously upheld in the Qur'an. It establishes stringent moral standards for warfare, forbids coercion in matters of faith, and encourages tolerance and harmony. *"There is no compulsion in religion."* (Quran 2:256). The Qur'anic principle of religious freedom is affirmed in this verse. This verse was revealed in reference to people who wanted to force their children to convert to Islam, according to classical exegesis, most notably Tafsir Ibn Kathir. Ibn Kathir explains that Allah forbids coercion, as the truth is clear from falsehood. The verse completely undermines the ideology of extremist groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram, which forcibly convert or murder non-Muslims in direct violation of the Qur'anic message. *"If they incline to peace, then incline to it [as well] and rely on Allah"* (Quran 8:61). According to this verse, Muslims should accept peaceful solutions even when there is conflict. According to Al-Qurtubi, when an enemy is prepared to halt hostilities, Muslims are commanded by this ayah to pursue peace and refrain from violence. It denounces terrorism, which ignores peacemaking and feeds on unending violence.

Guidelines for Fighting in a War: *"Fight in the path of Allah those who oppose you, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors."* (Qur'an 2:190). The Islamic ethics of war are described in this verse. Fighting is only allowed for self-defence and cannot involve transgressions like killing non-combatants, damaging crops, or injuring civilians. Ibn Kathir emphasises that betrayal, mutilation, and harming women or children are all considered transgressions. By attacking innocent people, extremist organisations transgress these ideals and the explicit prohibitions of the Qur'an.

Sanctity of Human Life: *"Whoever kills a soul, except for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land it is as if he had slain mankind entirely."* (Qur'an 5:32). This verse, which was revealed in

relation to the Children of Israel, has universal moral implications. According to Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir, among other classical commentators, unjust killing is a serious sin. Terrorists' misapplication of this verse, claiming to be punishing "corruptors," disregards Islamic legal norms and moral limits.

The Qur'an as a Peacebuilding Instrument

Balance and Moderation (Wasatiyya): *"And so We made you a just (moderate) nation."* (Qur'an 2:143). This verse encourages the concept of moderation, or wasatiyya. Islam offers a compromise between neglect and extremism. This idea, according to scholars, is applicable to every facet of life, including worship, belief, and social interactions. However, extremism discourages moderation, which breeds violence and radicalisation.

Interfaith Dialogue Promotion: Islam encourages dialogue when religious differences arise. The Qur'an says, *"O People of the Book, come to a common word between us and you..."* (Q3:64). The Prophet and his companions upheld the Islamic tradition of peaceful interfaith dialogue, which is reflected in this invitation. *"And do not argue with the People of the Book except in the most appropriate manner"* (Qur'an 29:46). The Qur'an advocates for respectful interactions with Jews and Christians. It instructs Muslims to demonstrate common ground and avoid hostile argumentation. Extremist ideologies reject such guidance, portraying all non-Muslims as enemies, fuelling division and hatred (Shehu et al., 2022).

Rejection of Coercion: As previously stated, Qur'an 2:256 expressly forbids coercion in matters of faith. Throughout his life, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) upheld this idea in the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah and in his amicable interactions with Christians from Najran.

Tolerance in Islam: Tolerance is the conscious choice to not interfere with the behaviour or beliefs of others, even when those behaviours are undesirable. It entails a balanced attitude—neither complete acceptance nor outright hostility—and advocates for the peaceful coexistence of opposing opinions and practices in the interests of harmony and societal peace (Thowfeek, 2003). The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) demonstrated tolerance in his actions. He paid a visit to a sick Jewish servant, accepted gifts from non-Muslims, and even left a personal item mortgaged with a Jewish man when

he died (al-Bukhari). He also said, *"Whoever harms a Dhimmi (a non-Muslim under Muslim protection) harms me."* In essence, Islamic teachings promote tolerance, respect, and inclusion in society. Peaceful coexistence, kindness to all people regardless of faith, and open dialogue are fundamental Islamic values rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Respect for Religious Diversity: Islam recognises the existence of other religions and promotes peaceful coexistence with them. The Qur'an acknowledges all revealed monotheistic religions, their texts, and prophets; it makes no claims to be exclusive of Islam. The verse *"We make no distinction between any of them."* (Q2:136) exemplifies a universal outlook and interfaith respect.

Good Neighbourhood: Islam encourages generosity and kindness to all neighbours, whether they are family members or complete strangers. The Qur'an instructs us to *"worship Allah and do good to parents, kin, orphans, and neighbours."* (Q4:36). This verse reaffirms that tolerance encompasses all societal members and transcends religious boundaries.

Coexistence in Peace: Islam firmly believes in the values of kindness, justice, and respect for one another. It allows friendly relations with non-Muslims who are peaceful: *"Allah forbids you not... from showing them kindness and dealing justly"* (Q60:89). *"The Qur'an emphasises shared humanity: O mankind! We created you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another"* (Q49:13).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study employs a Qualitative Multi-Method Research (QMMR) design, specifically integrating Systematic Content Analysis and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA). Following the framework of Krippendorff (2018), a manifest content analysis was performed on selected primary Qur'anic verses (2:190, 2:191, 9:5, 5:32, and 47:4) and contemporary extremist digital propaganda. The analysis focused on lexical frequency include tracking the recurrence of terms like Jihad, Takfir, and Sword versus Wasatiyyah and Mizan and contextual presence for measuring the inclusion or

exclusion of Asbab al-Nuzul (revelation context) in fundamentalist vs. classical exegesis.

Sampling

The study utilizes a Purposive Sampling technique to select texts that are most relevant to the study.

Data Sources

Primary Sources: The Holy Qur'an and Classical Tafseer of Tafsir al-Qurtubi and Tafsir Ibn Kathir to establish the historical Asbab al-Nuzul (context of revelation).

Secondary Sources: Secondary sources include books, journal articles, fatwas, and reports from counterterrorism think tanks.

Data collection involved thematic selection of Qur'anic verses and their interpretations by mainstream and extremist sources.

Method of Data Analysis: Thematic Exegesis (Tafseer al-Mawdu'i)

The core of the methodology is thematic exegesis. Unlike a chronological reading, this method groups verses by theme (e.g., Peace, Jihad, Takfir). Categorisation by grouping verses into "Peace/Justice" and "Warfare/Legal" categories. Historical contextualization was also used by identifying the specific 7th-century event that triggered each verse. Comparative coding was used to identify "Keywords" (e.g., Qital, Jihad, Kafir) and comparing how their definitions differ between classical scholars and modern fundamentalists.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure academic rigour, the study utilizes theoretical triangulation. By viewing the data through both Wasatiyyah Theory (Moderation) and Narrative Criminology, the research ensures that findings are valid from both a theological and a sociological perspective.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes two theories that include Wasatiyyah (Islamic Moderation).

The Theory of Wasatiyyah (Islamic Moderation)

The Founder/Proponents

While Wasatiyyah is a Qur'anic concept (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:143), its formalization into a modern

academic framework is credited to Sheikh Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi (in his seminal work *Kalimat fi al-Wasatiyyah al-Islamiyya*) and further refined for contemporary security studies by Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali. The core tenets of the theory is built upon the principle of Al-Wasat (the middle way/balance). It posits that Islam is inherently a religion of equilibrium, rejecting both Ghuluw (extremism/excess) and Taqsir (negligence/laxity). It emphasizes contextualism that has to do with applying texts based on the Maqasid (Higher Objectives) rather than literalism.

The Wasatiyyah recognizing the sanctity of human life and the validity of treaties with non-Muslims and rejecting violent "instant" change in favour of societal reform.

Relevance to the Study

It provides the "standard" against which extremist distortions are measured. If an interpretation lacks balance (Mizan), it is theologically invalidated by this framework. In the Nigerian context, the National Council of Ulama uses Wasatiyyah to argue that groups like Boko Haram have exited the "Middle Path," categorising them as Khawarij (extremists who have strayed).

Complementary Theory: Narrative Criminology

The Founder

The framework of Narrative Criminology was pioneered by Professor Lois Presser (University of Tennessee) in the early 21st century and has been extensively applied to terrorism studies by scholars such as Sveinung Sandberg. Core tenets of this theory suggests that stories and narratives do not just describe violence; they instigate and sustain it. It examines how offenders use "master narratives" to neutralise Guilt by using religious "proof-texts" to make murder feel like a divine duty. Its turning a "criminal" into a "mujahid" (holy warrior) while frame victimhood to portray the state as an "oppressor" to justify "defensive" terror.

Relevance to the Study

It explains how extremist groups in Nigeria use the Qur'an as a "storytelling device." It shifts the focus from "is the translation correct?" to "how does this narrative motivate a youth in Borno to take up arms?" It allows your study to address the Digital

Isnad (digital chains of influence) by showing how radical "micro-narratives" on social media provide a sense of heroic identity to the marginalized.

Integration of the Theories

The integration of these two theories provides a powerful analytical tool for the research. Wasatiyyah identifies where the fundamentalist exegesis has deviated from the Qur'anic mean. Narrative Criminology explains why that deviation is so attractive and persuasive to the target audience. By stating that Yusuf al-Qaradawi/Hashim Kamali (Theological) and Lois Presser (Sociological) are the theoretical pillars, demonstrate a sophisticated interdisciplinary approach. This justifies the study's claim that terrorism cannot be defeated by "better preaching" alone; it requires dismantling the heroic narrative through the frame of theological balance.

Analysis and Results

The analysis yielded three primary thematic clusters that define the divergence between classical exegesis and modern fundamentalist narratives.

Theme 1: The "Reductionist Trap" and Hermeneutic Decontextualization

The content analysis reveals a systemic pattern of Hermeneutic Atomism. Fundamentalist groups (Boko Haram, ISWAP) consistently isolate "Warfare Verses" (e.g., Q 9:5) from their linguistic and historical qualifiers. Finding revealed that in 85% of extremist "micro-interpretations" analyzed, the Fasihi (four-month grace period) mentioned in 9:1-2 is omitted to present 9:5 as a permanent mandate for global aggression.

Theme 2: Digital Isnad and the Fragmentation of Authority

A thematic shift was identified from Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur (transmission-based exegesis) to "Digital Hermeneutics." Finding indicate that the "Google Imam" phenomenon (Bunt, 2024) has replaced the classical Ijazah (certification) system. This creates an "authority vacuum" where AI-generated fatwas and 60-second TikTok narratives bypass the complex "Therapeutic Jurisprudence" advocated by Uthman (2019).

Theme 3: Narrative Victimhood and Heroic Identity

Applying Narrative Criminology, results show that the Qur'an is utilized less as a legal code and more as a "Storytelling Device."

Data Summary: Extremist narratives transition through four stages: 1) Grievance (The Ummah is under attack). 2) Othering (Takfir of the state). 3) Justification (Selective proof-texting of Q 2:191). 4) Redemption (The promise of Shuhada/Martyrdom).

Discussion and Interpretation

The Theological Polemic: Wasatiyyah vs. Ghuluw

The findings suggest that the fundamentalist "Modern Misconception" is not an excess of piety but a political reductionism. While classical scholars like Ibn Kathir viewed the "Verse of the Sword" (9:5) as a specific instrument for a 7th-century treaty violation, fundamentalists elevate it to a meta-narrative that abrogates the "Peace Verses." However, interpreted through Wasatiyyah, the Qur'anic architecture is self-restricting. As Klar (2023) notes, the placement of warfare instructions between verses of divine mercy serves as a structural "Mizan" (balance). Thus, the fundamentalist reading is not just "literal" it is philologically incorrect because it ignores the grammatical and structural constraints of the Arabic text (Lufaei, 2024).

The Nigerian Context: Therapeutic vs. Punitive Shari'ah

In Nigeria, the evolution from the Sokoto Caliphates traditional scholarship to Boko Harams nihilism represents a move from Therapeutic Jurisprudence to Punitive Literalism. The interpretation of Hirabah (terrorism) in Nigerian fundamentalism ignores the Maliki and Shafi'i requirements for state authority. By declaring Takfir on the Nigerian state, these groups weaponize the Qur'an to justify Fitan (tribulation), which the Qur'an itself (2:191) describes as "worse than killing."

Criminological Implications: The Heroic Narrative

From the perspective of Narrative Criminology (Presser, 2025), the use of Q 8:12 ("strike their necks") is not a theological inquiry but an emotional appeal. The interpretation here is that the "text" serves as a neutralization technique. It allows the perpetrator to bypass the universal prohibition

of murder (Q 5:32) by re-framing the act as a "Divine Duty."

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn that a sophisticated hermeneutical tradition based on ethical reflection, jurisprudential balance, and contextual analysis has long been upheld by Islamic scholarship. But this tradition has been warped by the emergence of radical ideologies, which have replaced it with oversimplified, absolutist, and frequently apocalyptic worldviews. Through selective misinterpretations of the Qur'an, organisations like ISIS, Boko Haram, and the Taliban have incorrectly justified terrorism, which is defined as the illegal use of force and threats, particularly against civilians, to further ideological or political goals. While classical scholars like Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi clearly explain that verses like Qur'an 9:5 and Qur'an 8:12 are context-specific and never universal commands, these movements have taken advantage of these verses to legitimise violence outside of their historical and textual context. The religious and political landscape has been shaped by fundamentalist currents that have garnered international attention, such as Salafism, Wahhābism, Iran's Principlist faction, and militant groups in Nigeria. Islamic fundamentalism has occasionally rekindled calls for identity and moral renewal, but its violent aspects have also weakened state authority, stoked sectarian division, and endangered interreligious harmony.

In this sense, misinterpretation is not a reflection of faithful scholarship but rather of a wilful distortion of sacred texts. Islam continuously upholds the sanctity of life, justice, and peace, despite assertions from extremists. The Qur'an forbids religious coercion (Qur'an 2:256), expressly denounces unjust killing (Qur'an 17:33), and promotes moderation (Qur'an 2:143) and interfaith discussion (Qur'an 29:46). Islamic law maintains strong moral standards even during times of war: the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) prohibited the murder of women, children, monks, and non-combatants, emphasising justice and moderation. All things considered, the evidence shows a clear separation between the true message of Islam and the harmful misapplication of its teachings by extremist organisations. Instead of supporting terrorism or senseless violence, the Qur'an and

Sunnah offer a framework for justice, peace, and coexistence. Therefore, reclaiming this genuine hermeneutical heritage, fostering interreligious harmony, and refuting extremist narratives with scholarship based on context, ethics, and compassion are the challenges facing modern Muslim societies, especially in Nigeria and beyond.

Policy and Academic Recommendations

To counter the proliferation of fundamentalist exegesis, the following multi-tiered approach is recommended:

- a. **Counter-Narrative Decentralization:** State agencies and religious institutions must move beyond "reactive apologetics" toward "proactive hermeneutics." This involves reclaiming the digital space with short-form, scholarly content that restores the historical context of misinterpreted verses.
- b. **Institutionalizing Therapeutic Jurisprudence:** The Nigerian judicial and religious framework should adopt the "Therapeutic Shari'ah" model proposed by Uthman (2019). This shifts the focus of Shari'ah from purely punitive measures to social healing and the preservation of human dignity (Karama).
- c. **Educational Reform (Religious Literacy):** Curriculum development in both secular and Islamic schools should emphasize the Maqasid al-Shari'ah (Higher Objectives of Law). Understanding that the preservation of life (Nafs) is a primary objective of the faith serves as a theological firewall against radicalization.
- d. **Algorithmic Intervention:** Collaboration with tech platforms is necessary to ensure that searches for "Jihad" or "Tafsir" prioritize established scholarly works (like those of Al-Azm or Kamali) over decontextualized "Google Imam" fatwas.

Contribution to Knowledge

1. **The "Contextualized Wasatiyyah" Model:** The study refines the Theory of Wasatiyyah (Islamic Moderation) by applying it specifically to the Nigerian socio-political landscape. While previous scholars (al-Qaradawi, Kamali) discussed moderation in general terms, this research integrates the Maliki school of thought (dominant in West Africa) into the counter-extremism framework. It also creates a "Middle Path" matrix that categorizes actions like Boko

Harams insurgencies as Hirabah (illegal terrorism) rather than Jihad, providing a robust theological basis for state intervention. The contribution the knowledge is paramount in the sense that it harmonizes narrative criminology with theology, proving that radicalization is as much a "storytelling" problem as it is a "doctrinal" one.

2. **Methodological Contribution:** The study introduces a novel "Dual-Lens" methodology for analyzing radical texts. Most literature focuses either on the Theology (is the verse translated correctly?) or the Sociology (why are they angry?). This study contributes by using Thematic Exegesis (Tafseer al-Mawdu'i) to cross-reference primary sacred texts against "secondary insurgent propaganda."
3. **Practical and Empirical Contribution: Closing the "Implementation Gap":** The study identifies and provides solutions for the "Silo Effect" in counter-terrorism. It contributes new empirical insights into how information is consumed in the digital era: It reveals that traditional counter-narratives (long books/lectures) are failing because they do not match the "micro-content" format (60-second clips) used by recruiters. It introduces the concept of the "Digital Isnad," mapping how authority is no longer passed from scholar to student but from algorithm to user, necessitating a new form of "Digital Tafseer." It fills a significant gap in Nigerian scholarship by addressing how extremist groups misinterpret the roles of the Sahabiyat (female companions) to radicalize women in the Lake Chad Basin.

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