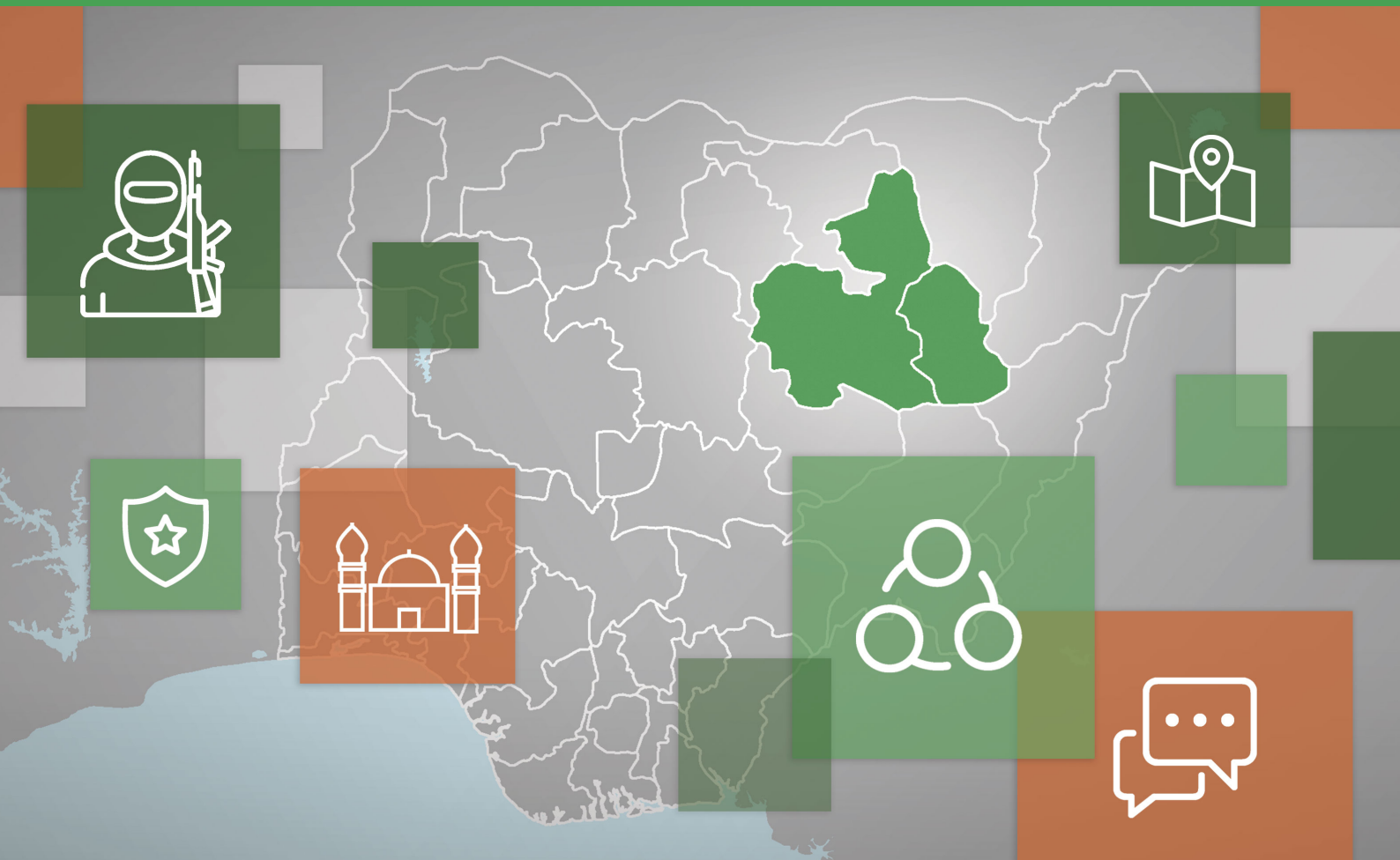


# Making sense of resilience in the Boko Haram crisis

Akinola Olojo



Major risk factors for violent extremism can be found in Bauchi and Gombe, two states in the north-east of Nigeria – the zone where the terror group Boko Haram is active. Yet in spite of risk factors, these two states have not experienced similar levels of violent extremism as other states in the same geographical zone. This study explains the synergy of issues that have shaped the narrative of resilience in Bauchi and Gombe over the last decade.

## Key findings

- ▶ Ethnic affiliation can be an important mobilisation factor for terror groups seeking to exploit it within a geographical space. This has been the case with Boko Haram and the Kanuri people in the countries of the Lake Chad Basin.
- ▶ Traditional institutions are an indispensable part of a society's resilience framework. Their historical origins enable them to convey the depth of legitimacy required for communities to mobilise.
- ▶ The ideological component of terrorism is as much a threat as the violence it inspires. Religious leaders and the organisations they lead have the skills required to address this concern.
- ▶ The unconventional nature of the war against terror groups such as Boko Haram can benefit from the contribution of community-based groups, such as vigilante organisations.
- ▶ Armed responses by the state play an essential role, but their limits are evident in a complex insurgency that requires multiple levels of management to address the threat posed.

## Recommendations

- ▶ Traditional institutions such as the Bauchi and Gombe emirates, as well as local authorities at the district, ward and village level, should strengthen existing coordination. This framework should sustain engagement with CSOs and NGOs which, among other functions, play an important role in sensitising communities to violent extremism.
- ▶ Religious leaders and organisations should continue to provide counter-messages and counter-speech against the ideology of Boko Haram and its factions. This helps to deter the recruitment of members or sympathisers. Islamic clerics are of particular concern because of the nature of doctrinal messaging exploited by Boko Haram's factions.
- ▶ The establishment of peace committees involving community members from the various ethno-religious groups in both states should be encouraged.
- ▶ This creates a platform to facilitate dialogue as a way of resolving disagreements before they escalate to physical violence.
- ▶ Vigilante groups in both states should have clearly defined roles within a rule-of-law framework that enables them to complement the work of state security agencies. Evidence shows that the state's formal community policing efforts are enhanced when there is collaboration with community-based groups that have local knowledge of the landscape of insecurity.
- ▶ Governance gaps in communities remain a risk factor for both Bauchi and Gombe. State governments, in coordination with local government administrations, should invest in economic projects that stimulate the industrialisation of dormant sectors like agriculture while targeting the youth demographic.

## Introduction

Communities affected by violent extremism are frequently considered to possess certain risk factors. Typically cited risk factors include – but are not limited to – socio-economic deprivation, bad governance and religious radicalisation. Across Africa terror groups have exploited these factors in ways that inform their ideologies and perpetuate their activities.

Lake Chad Basin countries like Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria come to the fore when one considers the activities of the terror group Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

To varying extents, there is evidence of linkages between these risk factors and violent extremism or terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin.<sup>1</sup> What is, however, unclear is why certain communities do not experience a high frequency or incidence of violent extremism in spite of the existence of so-called risk factors.

Nigeria's north-east zone has been at the epicentre of Boko Haram's activities for over a decade. Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states have suffered the worst. The socio-economic, political and ideological risk factors contributing to violent extremism in these states are also present in other states in the north-east zone, some of which share borders with the affected ones. Two states considered here are Bauchi and Gombe.

Bauchi and Gombe states are key to any enquiry aimed at understanding why the presence of risk factors have not led to the spread of violent extremism.

Bauchi state shares borders with Yobe and was one of the first places where Boko Haram members openly engaged security forces during the group's major uprising in July 2009. Did Boko Haram sect members merely migrate from neighbouring states to cause mayhem there or were cells active enough to spawn members who took part in the uprising in Bauchi?

If these cells were indeed active in Bauchi and other northern Nigerian states where attacks have occurred, what intervening variables have kept things in check over the last decade?

Gombe state shares borders with all three affected north-eastern states – Adamawa, Borno and Yobe.

Gombe has also experienced attacks by Boko Haram in the past and shares the aforementioned risk factors for violent extremism. However, like Bauchi, it has not seen escalated levels of violence. This raises questions that deserve attention.

This study draws on both primary and secondary sources. A total of 307 interviews were conducted in Bauchi and Gombe states with a focus on 22 local government areas (LGAs), 11 in each state. Some of the respondents in these LGAs had witnessed Boko Haram attacks.

Among the respondents in the various LGAs were Islamic and Christian clerics; traditional leaders and institutions; women groups and associations such as the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN); and youth groups and associations. Other respondents included security institutions and government agencies such as the Nigerian Police and Nigerian Correctional Service; researchers at higher institutions of learning; civil society organisations (CSOs); and a range of community members.

Bauchi and Gombe states are key to understanding the interplay between risk factors and violent extremism

Focus group discussions also proved invaluable for understanding the dynamics in these two states. These were conducted, for instance, with women in communities, youth groups, vigilante and hunter groups, traditional and religious leaders, and academics.

The wider Nigerian context is significant for a number of reasons. Nigeria is listed among the top 10 countries most affected by terrorism in the 2019 Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace. In addition, Boko Haram in Nigeria is among the top four deadliest terror groups globally and also currently responsible for the highest frequency of female suicide terrorism in the world.<sup>2</sup>

This report aims to deepen appreciation of what appears to be resilience in a context where risk factors for violent extremism exist. It also highlights the need to balance the overwhelming focus on the 'drama of attacks'<sup>3</sup> with

analysis from less turbulent zones. In other words, there is a need to look 'on the other side of the hill'.<sup>4</sup>

In this study, attention is drawn to what works in the countering violent extremism (CVE) context in Nigeria, as opposed to offering a routine exposition of violent trends treated by other studies.

## **Nigeria's north-east and a decade of Boko Haram's violence**

The contemporary period sees the Nigerian state in a relentless struggle against violent extremism. This phenomenon is not new to the country. However, since 2009 Boko Haram has led an insurgency that has affected both Nigeria and its neighbours.

Although Boko Haram's activities and attacks precede 2009, the last decade has brought Nigeria to a pivotal phase where an understanding of the crisis must include deeper analysis of parts of the north-east where the crisis has not escalated.

As noted in the introduction, Bauchi and Gombe states will be examined in this regard. Prior to this, however, a brief reminder of a few key features of the Boko Haram crisis may be helpful.

The most notable aspect of the crisis is the frequency of fatalities. Boko Haram is not alone here – since 2016 the breakaway faction of the group, ISWAP, has also made headlines owing to the number of deaths it has caused.

The media often reports fatality figures of the insurgency in the range of 30 000–35 000. However, the death rate is arguably higher than this when one considers the combined number of deaths in attacks attributed to Boko Haram's factions, as well as other forms of violence linked to the insurgency over the last decade.

From 2014–2018 Boko Haram was responsible for 87% of deaths from female suicide attacks, with at least 146 assaults causing over 900 deaths.<sup>5</sup> It also exploits the idea that attacks by women are all the more shocking since they tend to disrupt most communities' gender perceptions.

Furthermore, the group considers children 'cheap labour', easily replenished through abductions. Even before the two mass abductions in the Nigerian towns of Chibok and Dapchi,<sup>6</sup> the group was known to target children. In one instance in February 2014, 59 boys

were killed at a federal government college in Buni Yadi, Yobe state.<sup>7</sup>

Between 2009 and 2015 Human Rights Watch reported that attacks in north-east Nigeria had destroyed more than 910 schools. By early 2016 an estimated 952 029 schoolchildren had fled the violence caused by Boko Haram.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2020 a gruesome video emerged on the Internet showing a boy under the age of 10 executing a Christian man in Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> The boy, believed to be a member of ISWAP, had no doubt undergone indoctrination even though he may also have acted under compulsion.

The media often reports fatalities of the insurgency in the range of 30 000–35 000 but this is an underestimation

This idea of killing the 'infidel' is at the heart of the ideological narrative of Boko Haram. The group aims to replace the Nigerian secular state with its own version of an Islamic caliphate.

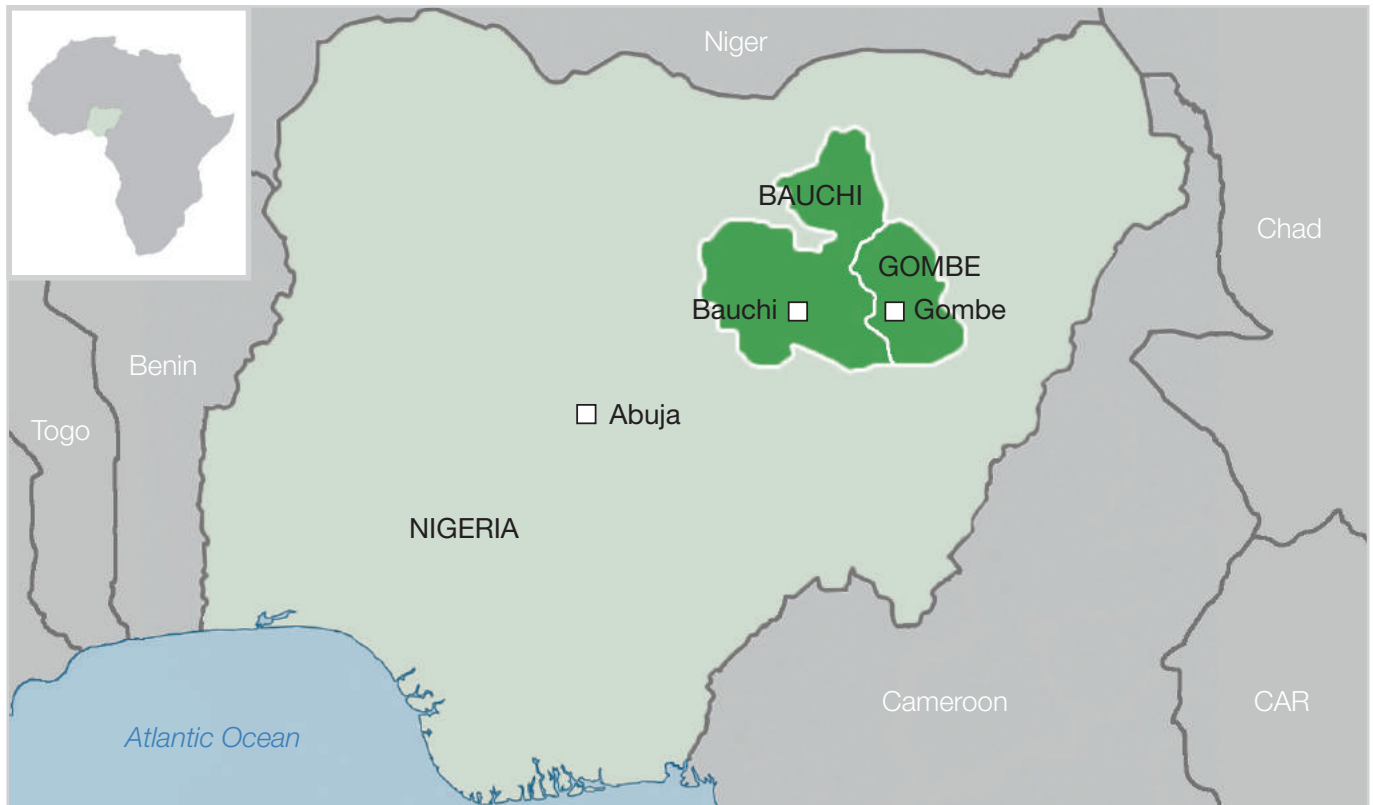
While many Christians have been killed, Muslims have not been spared either. Several churches and mosques have been attacked and both Christian and Islamic clerics assassinated. Between 2010 and 2013 alone, nearly two dozen clerics in northern Nigeria were victims of Boko Haram's targeted killings.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, most of the residents of the states in northern Nigeria where Boko Haram is active are Muslim, and hundreds of thousands of them have lost their livelihoods and suffered internal displacement.

The transnational dimension of the Boko Haram crisis cannot be ignored, and efforts to address the problem go beyond the scope of a single country. The group's membership base hails from parts of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. This is why the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), involving the aforementioned countries and Benin, was created to conduct counter-insurgency missions.

The ideologies of Boko Haram and ISWAP also intersect in some ways with those espoused by groups such as

**Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Bauchi and Gombe states in the north-east zone**



Source: Author

al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). These groups and their affiliates within and outside Africa point to the transnational character of the crisis.

### **Bauchi and Gombe: a profile of risk factors for violent extremism**

During the colonial era (1903–1960) most of the territory of the current Gombe and Bauchi states was administered as part of what was known as Bauchi Province, in the Northern Region of Nigeria. In the post-colonial period, Bauchi became a state in 1976 and Gombe was carved out of Bauchi state 20 years later, in 1996. The administrative histories of the current Bauchi and Gombe states are therefore closely linked.

However, there are some differences in social structure and politics at the local level, both within and between the two states.<sup>11</sup> Both are religiously plural and the majority of the population in each state is Muslim, but there are also substantial Christian minorities. In Bauchi state, the population is estimated to be about 85–90% Muslim and 10–15% Christian, while Gombe state is about 65–70% Muslim and 30–35% Christian.<sup>12</sup>

So far Bauchi and Gombe have not had to endure as much violence linked to Boko Haram as other north-eastern states. However, the history of these states exposes vulnerabilities in the context of socio-economic and ethno-religious issues, which restive or insurgent groups are known to exploit.

Bauchi and Gombe are situated in a region of Nigeria generally considered a potential hotbed of crisis long before Boko Haram's attacks began. Boko Haram was merely a trigger for a crisis already in the making, because the structural conditions for conflict already existed.

The history of these states exposes vulnerabilities in the context of socio-economic and ethno-religious issues

Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung explains a phenomenon that aptly describes this situation, namely structural violence.<sup>13</sup> In Galtung's terms, structural violence exists when state resources are monopolised by a particular group or class to the disadvantage of others.

If people are deprived when such a situation is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed, regardless of whether there is a clear subject–action–object relationship.

This kind of violence expresses itself through social injustice and is made worse when built into state institutions. Thus, as research by the United Nations Development Programme notes, where there is injustice and deprivation, violent extremist ideologies present themselves as a challenge to the status quo as well as a form of escape.<sup>14</sup>

Deprivation cultivates a certain level of risk, especially as the victim develops a degree of receptiveness to a message of ‘hope’ that groups can exploit through religion. The late Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf knew that most of his followers – particularly youth – were economically disadvantaged. The literature on violent extremism is very clear on how weak or poor state governance contributes to increasing the support base for groups like Boko Haram that are keen to exploit such weaknesses.<sup>15</sup>

This is why many scholars have noted that the group’s violence must be understood not just in terms of its extremist doctrines but also through the lens of poverty, inequality and alienation.<sup>16</sup> At the time of Boko Haram’s resurgence in 2010, Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics qualified the north-east zone, to which Bauchi and Gombe belong, as having the second worst indices for absolute and relative poverty.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, out of Nigeria’s 36 states, Bauchi was among the top 10 in terms of absolute poverty, while it ranked second in terms of relative poverty.<sup>18</sup> Gombe state was the third poorest state in the country in terms of absolute poverty, and ranked eighth for relative poverty.<sup>19</sup>

As far as education is concerned, literacy levels in both states are also unimpressive, as much as they reflect disparities between men and women in communities. Details on these disproportions and their implications can be found in Nigeria’s National Literacy Survey.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the doctrines of Boko Haram take on their ‘rationality’ from the wider socio-economic context where the mismanagement of limited resources by a ruling class is conducive to a crisis. Socio-economic deprivation alone is however not always enough to directly cause violence or an insurgency.

Boko Haram’s proselytisation began in the form of a Muslim social movement catering for orphans, widows and the vulnerable.<sup>21</sup> Beyond socio-economic and political conditions there was thus a religious dimension. The group made a call to ‘jihad’ and framed it in a way that persuaded already disillusioned individuals that the Nigerian state had failed and needed to be replaced by a puritanical and just system.

Yusuf was regarded as an orator, and Kyari Mohammed notes that Yusuf travelled to several states in northern Nigeria – including Bauchi – to preach his message.<sup>22</sup>

### Bauchi state was the first place to witness a series of Boko Haram clashes with security forces in July 2009

Other factors that increased the appeal of the group were the US terror attacks by al-Qaeda on 11 September 2001 (9/11). Boko Haram’s rise in 2002–2003 happened in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the group exploited ideological discourses rooted in anti-Western sentiments. In fact, around 2003–2004 some Boko Haram members were referred to as the ‘Nigerian Taliban’.

Eventually, attacks spread across northern Nigeria. This was in part owing to the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf and heavy-handed responses by the state, which served as major push factors for some individuals to join Boko Haram. Even though some later became disenchanted with the group, the attacks persisted.

Some of these attacks targeted Bauchi and Gombe. In 2012 there were a number of suicide attacks on churches in Bauchi city. There were also attacks on banking locations and police stations in LGAs such as Toro.<sup>23</sup> Boko Haram was able to extend its presence into some parts of northern Bauchi state, with reports of militant bases in the savannah forests of Darazo, Ningi and Ganjuwa LGAs. Extension of the group’s presence also entailed open preaching of its doctrine in nearby villages.<sup>24</sup>

Bauchi state was the first place to witness a series of Boko Haram clashes with security forces, in July 2009. Scores of the group’s members attacked a police station and several people were killed.<sup>25</sup>

For many years the faction of Boko Haram led by Abubakar Shekau described itself as the *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* ('Group of the People of *Sunnah* for Preaching and Jihad'). This name was adopted by the group around September 2010 following an attack on a prison in Bauchi state where over 700 inmates escaped, including scores of Boko Haram members.<sup>26</sup>

It is thus clear that Bauchi state was not entirely immune from Boko Haram's violence or presence. However, the factors that helped to stem the spread of the group's influence must still be examined.

As in Bauchi, there were attacks by Boko Haram in Gombe state. In February 2012 the group triggered multiple explosions and a gun battle at a prison facility and divisional police station. A mobile police detachment repelled them from the prison but the police station was overrun and razed, and the armoury emptied of weapons and ammunition. Fourteen people were killed, including four policemen and 10 civilians.<sup>27</sup>

A month earlier, a church was attacked, leaving six worshippers dead.<sup>28</sup> In June 2013 a police station in Akko LGA was attacked.<sup>29</sup> In October 2014 an explosion ripped through a bus station in central Gombe, killing at least 23 people.<sup>30</sup> Another police station in Nafada LGA was attacked in November 2014. In December that year there was yet another attack in Bajoga, a major town of Funakaye LGA situated on the border between Borno and Yobe states.<sup>31</sup>

Besides Maitatsine and Boko Haram, Bauchi and Gombe have witnessed the activities of other highly intolerant groups

According to interviews in other LGAs such as Kwami, police stations were also targeted by the group.<sup>32</sup> Dukku LGA lost dozens of community members during a general election in March 2015.<sup>33</sup>

These scenes of violence are reminiscent of events in the 1980s when societal risk factors contributed to violent extremism in the old Bauchi state. As noted earlier, in the 1980s Bauchi state comprised the contemporary Bauchi and Gombe states. This was when a radical movement called Maitatsine<sup>34</sup> emerged in northern Nigeria.

The violence caused by Maitatsine occurred in phases, one of which was in April 1985 when over 100 people died in Gombe, old Bauchi state.<sup>35</sup> In all, more than 4 000 people died in uprisings across northern Nigeria. In Gombe, most of Maitatsine's followers were ordinary members of the community who sold tea and were cap makers.<sup>36</sup>

The Maitatsine movement flourished amid economic ills associated with inflation, scarcity and unemployment. Similar to Boko Haram, the movement supposedly rejected so-called Western materialism and influences.

Besides Maitatsine, Bauchi and Gombe have both witnessed the activities of certain groups considered to be highly intolerant in terms of religious doctrines. There are the cases of *Kala Kato* in Bauchi and *Aljanna Tabbas* in Gombe, which many view as extreme.<sup>37</sup>

More recently, apart from the fact that Bauchi and Gombe were infiltrated by Boko Haram members from neighbouring states, attacks could only have been possible with the aid of group members, or at least sympathisers, within the two states. As discussed, the risk factors in these states are evident and enough to contribute to the manifestation of violence, but only to a certain extent.

### **Bauchi and Gombe: outlier states in the eye of the storm?**

The de-escalation of Boko Haram's violence and presence in Bauchi and Gombe is the result of a synergy of factors, five of which are examined in this study:

- The role of geography and ethnicity
- The traditional institution that has evolved in both states
- Religious leaders and organisations
- Local vigilante groups
- The role of the state and security institutions

The collective effect of these factors has shaped the narrative of resistance against Boko Haram. However, it must be cautioned that in spite of their apparent potency, Bauchi and Gombe remain predisposed to the very same risk factors that are pervasive in northern Nigeria.

## Geography and ethnicity

Parts of Bauchi and particularly Gombe share borders with the three states most impacted by Boko Haram. However, they are not geographically near enough to experience the full spectrum of violence and activities by Boko Haram members who cross Nigeria's frontiers with northern Cameroon, south-eastern Niger or Chad.

Boko Haram has for years taken advantage of various informal points of exit from Nigeria into neighbouring countries and vice versa. In states like Bauchi and Gombe, sect members do not have such escape routes. They may use temporary hideouts in parts of the Sambisa forest, which extends to Bauchi. However, the sanctuary that Sambisa offers closer to Borno state is more conducive to Boko Haram's attack-and-retreat tactics.

As far back as 2004, Boko Haram launched attacks on police stations in Gwoza and Bama towns in Borno.<sup>38</sup> Following such attacks, members fled to the Mandara mountains along the Nigeria–Cameroon border. An interview with a police officer in Bauchi LGA underscored doubts about any success should a similar escape mission be attempted in Bauchi state.<sup>39</sup>

The radicalisation of Boko Haram took place within a specific geographical context that is especially prone to terrorist activities.<sup>40</sup> The group's military operations have been predicated on its ability to move freely across international boundaries in Nigeria's north-east.

Indeed, the restive nature of insecurity actors in Chad and Cameroon meant Boko Haram militants in nearby Borno state could easily exploit what Abdul Raufu Mustapha referred to as a 'bad neighbourhood' effect.<sup>41</sup>

One can claim that the physical borders connecting these countries are inadequately policed by official authorities. Nevertheless, there are also longstanding socio-cultural, religious and economic factors that play a role in fuelling cross-border concerns. This is a discourse that analysts like Ade Adefuye explored in the context of Nigeria–Chad relations as far back as the 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

Bauchi and Gombe fall largely outside the ambit of these dynamics. Their geographical distance from the epicentre of the Boko Haram crisis is, however, insufficient as a reason for experiencing less violence. This is why it is vital to understand the ethnic dimension of this phenomenon.

The major ethnic group from which Boko Haram has drawn its members is the Kanuri. The Kanuri can be found in the Far North Region of Cameroon, Lac in Chad and places like Diffa and Zinder in Niger. The majority of the Kanuri live in Nigeria and mainly in Borno state, with comparably fewer members residing in Bauchi and Gombe.

Most Kanuris are Muslim and speak the Kanuri language, in addition to other languages such as Hausa.

To some extent, Boko Haram was able to exploit the language, religion and territory of the Kanuri

A cross-section of interviews in Bauchi and Gombe give the impression that Boko Haram was considered to have a Kanuri-related agenda. Its minority ethnic representation in these two states helps to explain why fewer individuals felt drawn to Boko Haram.

Without doubt, most Kanuris within and outside Nigeria oppose the ideas and actions of Boko Haram. In other words, the Boko Haram crisis is not a Kanuri uprising, nor is it fought in the name of Kanuri ethnic identity.

However, Atta Barkindo makes it clear that to some extent Boko Haram was able to co-opt the language, religion and territory of the Kanuri.<sup>43</sup> The Kanuri heartland provides the space and local networks, fishing unions, market groups and farming communities for Boko Haram's recruitment and mobilisation.<sup>44</sup> The use of the Kanuri language as a means of communication also facilitates the movement of arms, training of new recruits and establishment of camps.

The terrain of the region – with its vast forests, the Mandara mountains and unprotected borders – is in many respects ideal for waging guerrilla warfare. Consequently, Boko Haram established camps in areas like Sambisa, Bulabulin, Yujiwa-Alagarno, Balmo, Talafa and Gorun unhindered, and in many other places that for years remained relatively unknown to security forces.

## Traditional institutions

The resilience framework in Bauchi and Gombe owes something to traditional institutions. Like other states in



Nigeria, Bauchi and Gombe are governed based on a formal structure led by a governor, commissioners and other entities such as LGA chairpersons.

Apart from these elected positions and political appointments, the legitimacy of authority in these states is reflected in historically-inspired structures, including an emirate. The emirate consists of districts, wards and villages. An awareness of this leadership hierarchy is essential for understanding the extent of community networks at the grassroots level, as well as the flow of influence across these local institutions when faced with a crisis.

The legitimacy of these local institutions can be understood in light of their historical emergence. In other words, Bauchi and Gombe are emirates that evolved from what was known as the Sokoto Caliphate, which lasted from around 1804–1903.<sup>45</sup>

Following the British colonial conquest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the caliphate's powers were curtailed, even though it retained some authority over its emirates, which still exist in northern Nigeria. The caliphate transformed into a sultanate and is still revered by the people of northern Nigeria as a source of authority on traditional, socio-cultural, religious and even political matters.

In addition to working with district, ward and village authorities, the contemporary emirates in Bauchi and Gombe maintain a close relationship with vigilante organisations, CSOs, religious leaders, women groups, youth groups and state security agencies.

CSOs were instrumental in terms of sensitisation and support for peace and dialogue initiatives in communities

An interview with a traditional leader in Darazo LGA in Bauchi revealed the coordination of community members with regard to the reporting of suspicious individuals and movements. Islamic religious preaching was also scrutinised.<sup>46</sup> Traditional leaders endorsed community policing organised by vigilante and hunter groups, while district, ward and village heads were stakeholders in reviewing the evolving security situation in their respective spheres of influence.

There was the formation of the Yamaltu Security Committee,<sup>47</sup> for instance, in Yamaltu-Deba LGA in Gombe. Similar committees were formed in Funakaye LGA, where residents had experienced a Boko Haram attack in Bajoga, a major town.<sup>48</sup> Owing to the targeting of Funakaye in the past, traditional leaders organised periodic ethnic group meetings during which informants were nominated to take charge of strategic locations in communities.

In these LGAs, under the watch of traditional leaders, CSOs were instrumental in terms of sensitisation and support for peace and dialogue initiatives in communities such as Balanga LGA in Gombe, which shares borders with Adamawa and Borno states.<sup>49</sup> Training sessions and town hall meetings with community leaders and security agencies helped to create awareness of the motives and activities of Boko Haram.<sup>50</sup>

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the New Age Initiative for Youth Development facilitated efforts towards dialogue and reconciliation between rival political groups in parts of Gombe state, such as Akko LGA.<sup>51</sup> Attempts to shape a peaceful societal framework also benefitted from the advocacy efforts of Christian youth groups.<sup>52</sup>

These efforts were complemented by those of *Zauren Sulhu*, a local institution that acted as a peace committee or association of peace mediators. This institution is worth noting also because some community leaders form part of its membership.

### Religious leaders and organisations

The role of religious leaders and specifically Islamic clerics cannot be overlooked in efforts against Boko Haram. In a struggle where winning hearts and minds is paramount, the involvement of community actors who are familiar with the doctrinal elements required to deconstruct a terror group's ideology is crucial.

In Bauchi and Gombe states, Islamic clerics and the organisations they lead contribute to the rejection of Boko Haram's teachings in ways that physical or military force cannot.

Yusuf travelled to states such as Bauchi during the early years of the movement. This was part of a wider effort to expand the presence of the group in northern Nigeria. Although Boko Haram did manage to win some

sympathisers, the majority of Muslims in Bauchi and Gombe state rejected its ideas.

This mass rejection was inspired by various Islamic clerics who spoke out against Boko Haram in mosques, and the dissemination of messages criticising the group. In fact, one repercussion of this was the assassination of clerics across northern Nigeria between 2010 and 2013.<sup>53</sup>

For instance, in Bauchi state, Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi, a prominent *Tijaniyya* (Sufi brotherhood) scholar, made public declarations against Boko Haram but escaped multiple attacks by the group. Sheikh Bauchi is well known for his regular *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis) and commands a considerable followership because of the influential role he occupies in Nigeria's *Tijaniyya* order.

### Community members mobilised through vigilante groups and worked alongside security agencies

Islamic clerics and scholars were persuaded to challenge the rhetoric of Boko Haram because the onus to reclaim ownership of conceptual and doctrinal interpretations was on them. This explains the sensitisation efforts by organisations such as Jama'atu Izzalatu Bid'ah Wa Ikamatu Sunna (JIBWIS) and Jama'atu Nasrul Islam (JNI).<sup>54</sup>

JIBWIS embarked on a ward-to-ward proselytisation of counter-narratives. In addition to discrediting Boko Haram's ideas, many clerics have working relationships with community leaders in various districts, as well as affiliations with traditional authorities.

Most states in northern Nigeria have clerics who serve as patrons or mentors of Islamic organisations through which theological guidance flows. Some of these include the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria, the National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations and Community Youth Dialogue. Most of the members of these organisations are young people, who are most susceptible to doctrinal entrapment by terror groups.

Other organisations that also played a constructive role in preventing many from joining Boko Haram are the National Youth Council of Nigeria, the Gombe State

Students Association, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria and the JNI Youth.

Market and farmers associations also helped,<sup>55</sup> along with a special task force involving groups such as Fityanul Islam of Nigeria, JNI and JIBWIS. This task force was created to foster awareness of violent extremism in several wards in LGAs such as Dukku in Gombe.<sup>56</sup>

### Vigilante groups

Local knowledge and community mobilisation during periods of crisis are vital. Beyond the assurances of security offered by the formal state, community-based groups in northern Nigeria have shown agency in countering violent extremism and Bauchi and Gombe are no exception.

Following an attack by Boko Haram in Katagum LGA in Bauchi, youth groups emerged in self-defence against insurgents. Community members mobilised through vigilante groups and worked alongside security agencies, reporting suspicious persons and sharing information on their activities. In Gombe state, police–vigilante collaboration was also effective, especially in the 2014–15 period when Boko Haram's expansion was at its peak.

Vigilante groups such as *Yan Banga* helped to identify members of Boko Haram in LGAs such as Kwami and Dukku, where an attack occurred in early 2015.<sup>57</sup> Other community groups that have operated along similar lines to defend residents include local hunters, referred to as *Yan Baka*.

In 2012 the Bauchi state government endorsed the establishment of community-based security groups such as Danga Security. This security outfit's members are known to operate through Danga units. They are better equipped than most vigilante groups and residents consider them to be formidable against criminals. In some instances, they appear more effective than the police owing to their local knowledge and connections within communities.<sup>58</sup>

There are similarities between the operational patterns of these vigilante groups and those found in more conflict-affected states like Borno. In the case of Borno, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has proved invaluable in the counter-insurgency efforts of the MNJTF since 2013. In fact, it was when the CJTF began aiding the MNJTF that Boko Haram found it difficult to operate in key parts of Borno, such as the capital city Maiduguri.

The CJTF is still a visible force of response to Boko Haram and its factions. Like other vigilante groups, it is mainly comprised of youth – men and women – who volunteer to gather intelligence and help the military navigate the local terrain. As observed by the author of this study during a field mission in Maiduguri in 2015, the CJTF also operates through organised units known as sectors at strategic locations such as highways, mosques and internally displaced person (IDP) camps.

It is increasingly clear that the state no longer has a monopoly on violence or the use of force. Vigilante groups across the north-east (and Nigeria as a whole) have become a permanent feature of the security landscape. Yet one must acknowledge the risks that accompany this trend, particularly in the event that these non-state actors decide to pursue or are co-opted into an agenda contrary to the public good.

There are several narratives implicating vigilante or community-based groups in the abuse of power against residents. Some members act as political thugs and, in extreme cases, join terror groups.

While the state faces the risk of out-of-control vigilante groups, it is necessary to have a security framework that can constructively engage these groups in communities while still holding them to account for their actions.

### **The state and security agencies**

The habitual response of the state to violent extremism is the use of force. This has been the predominant approach against Boko Haram and was also reflected in Bauchi and Gombe states.

Following the Boko Haram revolt across northern Nigeria in July 2009, the governments of Bauchi and Gombe destroyed the mosques associated with the group.<sup>59</sup> However, demonstrating the inadequacy of the use of force, the then governors of Bauchi and Gombe published letters apologising for the destruction of these mosques. The issuance of these letters came at a time when Boko Haram had stepped up attacks while rejecting the state's attempt at appeasement.<sup>60</sup>

This interaction between Boko Haram and state governments has a political dimension that has been the subject of much controversy over the years. In 2012 there were reports claiming that some governments in northern Nigeria – including that of Bauchi – had

breached an agreement regarding periodic payments of funds to Boko Haram.<sup>61</sup>

A spokesperson for the sect claimed that the agreement with the Bauchi state government was aimed at safeguarding the state from attacks. When the funds were halted, attacks resumed in Bauchi as well as other states like Kano in Nigeria's north-west zone.

## Coordination between state security agencies and communities curtailed Boko Haram's attacks

Consequently, in Bauchi state Nigerian troops faced scores of Boko Haram militants when they attacked in March 2015. Although some damage was done, ground troops engaged the militants and were reinforced by fighter jets. Similar air raids had been conducted a year earlier, targeting camps suspected to be harbouring militants in Bauchi's forests.<sup>62</sup>

In neighbouring Gombe, Nigerian troops were on occasion able to launch air and ground counter-attacks following assaults by Boko Haram on security checkpoints prior to the presidential election in 2015. The ramping up of attacks by the group was an attempt to compel citizens to boycott the election.

In spite of these efforts, there was a need for a more comprehensive approach. Security agencies recognised this to some degree, which is why the army engaged with local community and religious leaders. It also became necessary for the military to work with organisations such as JIBWIS, JNI and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).<sup>63</sup>

Personnel of the Nigeria Police Force also interacted regularly with community members in places such as motor parks, markets, mosques and churches.<sup>64</sup> Coordination between state security agencies and the community institutions examined in this study steadily helped to limit Boko Haram's capacity to launch attacks as the years progressed.

In fact, states like Gombe were gradually considered secure enough by security agencies that Operation Safe Corridor was launched in 2015. This programme was meant to facilitate vocational training, de-radicalisation

and reintegration of repentant Boko Haram members into society.

On a number of occasions, the military or police has been accused of indiscriminate killings of civilians and gross human rights violations. This is not necessarily specific to Bauchi and Gombe, but rather an indictment against security agencies in the north-east in general. Reports by Amnesty international and Human Rights Watch<sup>65</sup> are replete with worrying details, putting military authorities on the defensive.

In all, while the utility of hard approaches cannot be discounted altogether, it is clear that armed responses against Boko Haram must occur within the framework of the rule of law and be complemented by other approaches, as discussed in this study.

## Conclusion

Making sense of the situation in Bauchi and Gombe states requires an understanding of the multiple roles played by local actors and institutions, as well as the varied circumstances that have contributed to societal resilience in communities. This study has tried to delineate the features of this resilience with empirical content drawn from various local government areas in the states concerned.

Five main features were identified, with the first linked to geography and ethnicity as factors of circumstance and opportunity. The network of traditional institutions and the hierarchy of leadership at the district, ward and village level were also explained. The third aspect constituted religious leaders and the particular role of Islamic clerics and organisations. Vigilante groups and the role they play in complementing the state's formal security actors were also an important feature. Without relegating the responsibility of the state, some attention was devoted to explaining the extent to which state security entities have been active in countering the threat posed by Boko Haram.

The combined influence created at different levels of societal engagement in Bauchi and Gombe is a narrative worth noting against the broader background of the ongoing crisis in Nigeria's north-east. This narrative is, however, not a perfect one, because these two states remain predisposed to the risk factors highlighted in this study.

Levels of structural violence still exist in both states, alongside issues of intolerance and discrimination expressed along ethno-religious lines. Recurrent clashes between ethnic groups in parts of Bauchi state such as Tafawa Balewa are a reminder of these problems.<sup>66</sup> In addition, past instances of political thuggery involving gangs known as Sara-Suka, as well as religiously intolerant sects, should not be overlooked.<sup>67</sup>

## Efforts must be made to address the non-violent forms of extremism in Bauchi and Gombe states

Gombe, on the other hand, remains on guard against political violence associated with youth groups such as the Yan Kalare. Although bands of Yan Kalare members were prevented from joining Boko Haram, there is a constant need to ensure that youth are constructively engaged and given a sense of purpose.

As in Bauchi, efforts must be made to address the non-violent forms of extremism that still exist in Gombe. Addressing these issues is part of the comprehensive approach towards strengthening resilience.

Nonetheless, a deeper understanding of the factors of resilience examined in the two states in focus challenges easy theories about the link between risk factors and violent extremism. This study foregrounds ideas capable of filling gaps in knowledge as well as policy on resilience building in communities, while also informing evolving national action plans and regional strategies on the continent.

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Comfort Attah of the Attah Sisters Helping Hand Foundation (ASHH) and Dauda Muhammad Gombe of the North East Youth Initiative for Development (NEYIF). The external reviewers – Atta Barkindo and Jimam Lar – are also appreciated for their comments on the initial draft of the paper. The author takes sole responsibility for the content of this study.

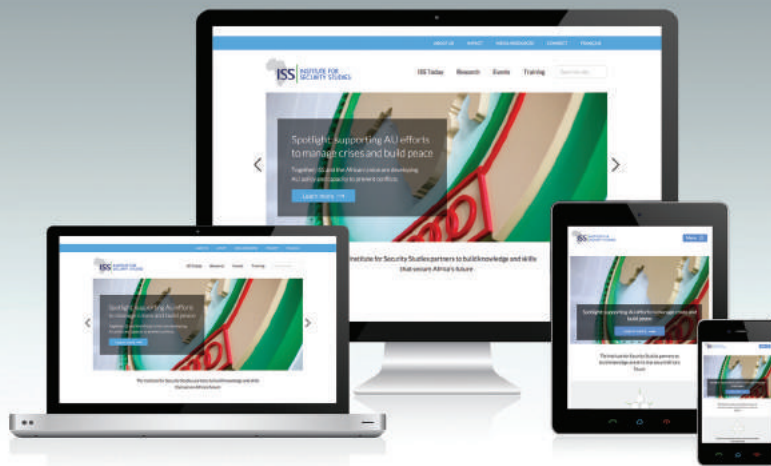
## Notes

- 1 There is an abundance of literature on this, but one of the first books to comprehensively analyse the linkages between the risk factors in focus and the violent extremism caused by Boko Haram in general is M-A Pérouse de Montclos (ed.), *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014.
- 2 Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global terrorism index: measuring the impact of terrorism*, 2019, 72.
- 3 J Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, New York: Routledge, 2005, 47.
- 4 A Schmid, Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: a conceptual discussion and literature review, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Research Paper, The Hague: ICCT, 2013, 32.
- 5 Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global terrorism index: measuring the impact of terrorism*, 2019, 5.
- 6 R Maclean and I Abrak, Boko Haram returns more than 100 schoolgirls kidnapped last month, *The Guardian*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/boko-haram-returns-some-of-the-girls-it-kidnapped-last-month>
- 7 J Hemba, Nigerian Islamists kill 59 pupils in boarding school attack, *Reuters*, 26 February 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-violence/nigeria-islamists-kill-59-pupils-in-boarding-school-attack-idUSBREA1P10M20140226>
- 8 Human Rights Watch, 'They set the classrooms on fire': attacks on education in northeast Nigeria, 11 April 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/04/11/they-set-classrooms-fire/attacks-education-northeast-nigeria>
- 9 S Tanno, Young boy executes Nigerian Christian prisoner in horrifying ISIS video after declaring: 'We won't stop until we take revenge for all the blood that was spilled', *MailOnline*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7911765/Young-boy-executes-Nigerian-Christian-prisoner-horrifying-ISIS-video.html>
- 10 A Olojo, Resistance through Islamic clerics against Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, *African Security Review*, 26:3, 2017, 312.
- 11 A Higazi and J Lar, Articulations of belonging: the politics of ethnic and religious pluralism in Bauchi and Gombe states, north-east Nigeria, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 85:1, 2015, 106.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 J Galtung, Violence, peace, and peace research, *Journal of Peace Research*, 6:3, 1969, 167–191.
- 14 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Journey to extremism in Africa: drivers, incentives and the tipping point for recruitment*, 2017, 85, <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/>
- 15 A Olojo, Nigeria's troubled North: interrogating the drivers of public support for Boko Haram, ICCT Research Paper, The Hague: ICCT, 2013.
- 16 A-R Mustapha, Understanding Boko Haram, A-R Mustapha (ed.), *Sects & social disorder: Muslim identities & conflict in northern Nigeria*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2014, 176.
- 17 Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics, *Nigeria poverty profile 2010 report*, 2012, 16, <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-poverty-profile-2010-report>. Absolute poverty entails a situation where an individual lacks the minimum amount of income or basic needs over an extended period of time. Such basic needs include food, clothing, housing, health access and sanitation facilities, among other essentials. Relative poverty is a bit more nuanced, but can be understood in terms of how the wealth level of an individual is measured in relation to that of other members of a particular country or state within a country. It can be used to measure wealth disparities within a country. Depending on a country, the understanding of relative poverty can change based on local perceptions of what is required to maintain a particular living standard.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics, *The national literacy survey*, 2010, <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/National%20Literacy%20Survey,%202010.pdf>
- 21 K Mohammed, The message and methods of Boko Haram, in M-A Pérouse de Montclos (ed.), *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014, 23.
- 22 S-I Mohammed and K Mohammed, Yusufiyya and the Nigerian State: historicizing the dynamics of Boko Haram phenomenon, *Kaduna Journal of Liberal Arts*, 5:1, 2011, 34.
- 23 Interviews with a witness in Toro LGA and a traditional leader in Darazo LGA, Bauchi state.
- 24 A Higazi and J Lar, Articulations of belonging: the politics of ethnic and religious pluralism in Bauchi and Gombe states, north-east Nigeria, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 85:1, 2015, 115.
- 25 A Hazzad, Nigeria forces kill 32 after attack on police station, *Reuters*, 26 July 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-riots/nigeria-forces-kill-32-after-attack-on-police-station-idUSTRE56POMA20090726>
- 26 D Smith, More than 700 inmates escape during attack on Nigerian prison, *The Guardian*, 8 September 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/08/muslim-extremists-escape-nigeria-prison> Details also corroborated during an interview with an Islamic scholar in Azare, Katagum LGA in Bauchi state.
- 27 A Higazi, Insurgency and counter-insurgency in north-east Nigeria, Centre de Recherches Internationales, July 2013, [http://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/fr/content/dossiersducei/insurgency-and-counter-insurgency-north-east-nigeria#footnote6\\_mzsw9pa](http://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/fr/content/dossiersducei/insurgency-and-counter-insurgency-north-east-nigeria#footnote6_mzsw9pa)
- 28 *Al Jazeera*, Multiple blasts hit Nigeria's Gombe town, 25 February 2012, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/02/2012224223132369404.html>
- 29 Interviews with community members in Akko LGA, Gombe state.
- 30 *Premium Times*, Boko Haram on rampage in Gombe, attacks police station, 4 November 2014, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/170570-boko-haram-on-rampage-in-gombe-attacks-police-station.html>
- 31 Interviews with several residents and entities in Funakaye LGA (Gombe state), including the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Okada (motorbike) riders association.
- 32 Interview in Kwami LGA, Gombe state.
- 33 Interview with several residents, including a member of the Dukku Emirate Council, Gombe state.
- 34 In the early 1970s, Mohammed Marwa, popularly known as 'Maitatsine', engaged in radical Islamic preaching in northern Nigeria. This later resulted in widespread riots and the deaths of more than 4 000 Nigerians. Between 1980 and 1985, northern Nigerian states such as Kaduna, Borno, Bauchi and Kano experienced a spate of violence, with Kano bearing the brunt of fierce riots in October 1982.

- 35 E Isichei, The Maitatsine risings in Nigeria 1980-85: a revolt of the disinherited, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 17:3, 1987, 199.
- 36 Ibid., 201.
- 37 A Barkindo, Tackling Boko Haram: some policy ideas for Nigeria, Africa Research Institute, 23 February 2017, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/blog/tackling-boko-haram-policy-ideas-nigeria/>
- 38 F Onuoha, Why do youth join Boko Haram?, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 348, 2014, 3, [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why\\_do\\_Youth\\_Join\\_Boko\\_Haram.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf)
- 39 Interview with a police officer in Bauchi LGA, Bauchi state.
- 40 A-R Mustapha, Understanding Boko Haram, in AR Mustapha (ed.), *Sects & social disorder: Muslim identities & conflict in northern Nigeria*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2014, 183.
- 41 Ibid., 184.
- 42 A Adefuye, The Kanuri factor in Nigeria-Chad relations, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 12:3-4, 1984, 122.
- 43 A Barkindo, How Boko Haram exploits history and memory, Africa Research Institute, 2016, 1, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ARI-Counterpoints-BokoHaram-online.pdf>
- 44 Ibid., 9.
- 45 See M Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, London: Longman Group Limited, 1967. Murray Last is believed to be the first scholar to use the term 'Sokoto Caliphate'. Some authors have adopted this style while others employ terms such as 'The Sokoto Empire' or 'The Fulani Empire'.
- 46 Interview with respondent in Billiri LGA, Gombe state.
- 47 Interview with Islamic cleric in Yamaltu-Deba LGA, Gombe state.
- 48 Interviews with several respondents in Funakaye LGA, Gombe state.
- 49 Interviews with a district head in Balanga LGA and the chairperson of FOMWAN in Yamaltu-Deba LGA, Gombe state.
- 50 Interview with Comfort Attah, Attah Sisters Helping Hand Foundation (ASHH), Bauchi state.
- 51 Interview with NGO representative in Akko LGA, Gombe state.
- 52 Interview with the secretary of Christian Youth Awareness in Billiri LGA, Gombe state.
- 53 A Olojo, Resistance through Islamic clerics against Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, *African Security Review*, 26:3, 2017, 312.
- 54 Interviews with a community leader in Gamawa LGA, Bauchi state, an Islamic cleric and a leader of FOMWAN in Yamaltu-Deba LGA, Gombe state.
- 55 Focus group discussion with vigilante members and hunters in Gombe state.
- 56 Interview with the Da'wah Secretary of Jama'atu Nasrul Islam (JNI) in Dukku LGA, Gombe state.
- 57 Interview with a community leader in Dukku LGA, Gombe state.
- 58 Action on Armed Violence, The violent road: Nigeria's north east, 12 December 2013, <https://aoav.org.uk/2013/the-violent-road-nigeria-north-east/>
- 59 A Higazi and J Lar, Articulations of belonging: the politics of ethnic and religious pluralism in Bauchi and Gombe states, north-east Nigeria, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 85:1, 2015, 115.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 T Ogundiye, The Boko Haram insurgency: tracking the sect's cash flow, *The Nation*, 29 January 2012.
- 62 A Mohammed, Nigeria: Boko Haram – fighter jets raid Bauchi forests, *Daily Trust*, 24 May 2014.
- 63 Interview with a military and a police officer in Shongom LGA, Gombe state.
- 64 Interviews with a police officer and the General Secretary of the Nigeria Automobile Technicians Associations (NATA), Shongom LGA, Gombe state.
- 65 Amnesty International, *Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands. War crimes committed by the Nigerian military*, May 2015, [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/afr4416572015english.pdf?jEQfxSTywnDd0r5tMXea8fX\\_OTIFGTC=](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/afr4416572015english.pdf?jEQfxSTywnDd0r5tMXea8fX_OTIFGTC=;); Human Rights Watch, 'They didn't know if I was alive or dead': military detention of children for suspected Boko Haram involvement in northeast Nigeria, September 2019, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/nigeria0919\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/nigeria0919_web.pdf)
- 66 There are numerous studies on this. A recent one is I Suleiman, Ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria: a case study of Tafawa Balewa LGA, *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 1:2, 2019, 30–37.
- 67 A-S Yakubu and A-M Ali, The effects of Sara-Suka political thuggery on democratic and social activities in Bauchi State: a study of 2015 general election, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22:11, 2017, 1–10.

Visit our website for the latest analysis, insight and news

The Institute for Security Studies partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future



**Step 1** Go to [www.issafrica.org](http://www.issafrica.org)

**Step 2** Go to bottom right of the ISS home page and provide your subscription details

### **About the author**

Dr Akinola Olojo is a senior researcher in the Complex Threats in Africa Programme of the Institute for Security Studies, based in Pretoria. Before this, he was a visiting scholar at the Institut d'Études Politiques (Sciences Po), France and a visiting research fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), The Hague.

### **About ISS West Africa Reports**

West Africa Reports provide the results of in-depth research on the latest human security challenges in the region. Some reports analyse broad conflict trends and threats to peace and security in specific West African countries. Others focus on challenges in the region such as electoral reform, corruption or intra-state conflict.

### **About the ISS**

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. The ISS is an African non-profit with offices in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible policy research, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

### **Development partners**

The ISS is grateful for support from the members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the European Union and the governments of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

---

© 2020, Institute for Security Studies

Copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Institute for Security Studies and the author, and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of both the author and the publishers.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the ISS, its trustees, members of the Advisory Council or donors. Authors contribute to ISS publications in their personal capacity.

Cover image: Amelia Broodryk/ISS

---

ISSN 2617-8184 Print  
ISSN 2617-8192 Digital

