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An Analysis of the Role of Women in Terrorism in Nigeria

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Abstract

Women have become increasingly active in a variety of terrorist activities over the last decade, with increased roles as combatants, suicide bombers, wives to male members of terrorist groups, birthing the next generation of fighters, and handling logistics, among other things. All of these are critical roles in the growth of the menace. However, counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria have primarily targeted male militants while overlooking the fact that women are playing leading roles in terrorism. The study is qualitative in nature as it depends largely on documentary review, observations and interrogations on the involvement of women in terrorism in Nigeria. The study explains why viewing terrorism through a gender lens could provide a reliable understanding of the threats as well as critical intelligence in the battle against terrorism. The study found out that women contribute significantly to terrorism, not only as covert

fighters but also as overt perpetrators. Therefore, the study contributes to existing knowledge in the area of terrorism studies by advocating that a broader consideration should be given to the dynamics of gender by taking terrorism as a gender-neutral concept. Consequently, the paper recommends that women's active participation should be incorporated into counter-terrorism plans and policy interventions that address the grievances identified to cause terrorism.

Keywords: *Women, Boko Haram, Strategy, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism*

Introduction

Women have actively participated in terrorism throughout history and in a variety of contexts, examples include People's Will and the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, Chechen suicide bombers or Black Widows, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). During times of intense conflicts and warfare, women have willingly cooperated with terrorist groups, fought for their beliefs, and faced the same consequences as their male counterparts. In the light of this, there is imbalance in the direction of recent studies on terrorism as women are portrayed primarily as victims of violence initiated by men. In these organisations, women are regarded to have minor logistical tasks such as wives and cooks, while men fought at the frontlines (Adefisoye & Adedokun, 2019). Also, women were not identified as key players in terrorist organizations in relevant literature until the 1970s and 1980s when they were protagonists in Latin America's guerrilla warfare. As a result, a significant growth of research on the subject occurred as Spencer (2016) observes that the study on the roles of women in terrorism has significantly expanded due to the surge of female suicide bombers in the last decade. Since the 1960s, women have been involved in terrorist organisations at different stages from fund-raising to recruitment for suicide bombing missions as they make up approximately 30% of majority of the terrorist organisations and one-third of suicide bombers, with some exceptions such as the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria, where women make up 53% of its total members. Although Boko Haram operationally resorted to violence in 2009, the group made headlines in April 2014 when 270 schoolgirls were abducted in Chibok, prompting the #bringbackourgirls campaign on social media (Bloom, 2022).

Globally, the increased inclusion of women in terrorist activities has, among other things, called into question the orthodox conservative notion of violence as fundamentally masculine. It has become extremely

difficult to acknowledge that female terrorists exist due to the misconception that women are more vulnerable and often victimised. Women, on the other hand, are increasingly playing key roles in terrorism. Their involvement is notable because they execute a variety of tasks, which include but not limited to birthing new generation of militants, logistics management, recruitment for the organisation, functioning as representatives in the national political system, and assuming the roles of operational leaders and fighters. In spite of their participation, counter-terrorism professionals and policymakers have the propensity to downplay the role of women in the success of terrorist groups. The significance of women in terrorism is an issue that demands an in-depth examination, particularly with respect to evaluating the veracity of their involvement in terrorism.

Scholarly literature exists about the specific roles of women in terrorism both as victims and perpetrators, as well as a variety of reasons women victims work as agents for terrorist groups. Women's roles as victims and perpetrators are reproduced and reconfigured in the social and political economy of war, as evidenced by the Islamic State, Al Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM) in Niger, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) in Northern Mali (Laud & Masters, 2015). Nonetheless, an analytical examination of the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Northeastern region of Nigeria reveals that as much as men wilfully victimize women to actualize their political objectives against the government, women are also known to perpetrate violence to promote the group's objectives (Begum, 2019). According to research, a historical comparison to other terrorist organisations shows that Boko Haram has deployed more female suicide bombers overall than any other terrorist organisation (Warner & Matness, 2017). Although some women have wilfully become perpetrators, some others are coerced to carry out suicide bombing missions. To put it simply, the female suicide bombing is a vital component of Boko Haram's operational strategy.

Terrorist organisations comprise of logical individuals who carefully weigh the implication of each violent activity on their tactics and strategies. The increased use of female agents by these organisations can be seen as a change in strategy from a political and tactical standpoint. Women's conventional societal roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers can be exploited both for and against these organisations. However, their roles are greatly influenced by their circumstances at the time of their first contact with the organisation. The fact that these women are

widows, survivors of gender-based violence, or refugees has a significant effect on their vulnerability to being persuaded into accepting extremist ideology and joining terrorist organisations.

Importantly, the study of female terrorists has not been fully recognised as a subject that can contribute to our understanding of terrorism and how to combat it. Boko Haram's tactics and use of women differ from those of its intra-regional competitors, hence, to effectively counter the group's activities, governments and the international community must employ an approach different from its counterparts. The main objective of this paper is to analyse the distinctive roles women play within the Boko Haram organisation, with a focus on the voluntary and involuntary motivations that women participants use to explain their participation in the group. It also aims to explore the current trends in how female terrorists are being absorbed into the group, how their increased involvement, notably as suicide bombers, contributes to Boko Haram's effectiveness as a terrorist organisation as well as how they can significantly contribute to the prevention of and fight against terrorism in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Terrorism

Since the discourse of terrorism emerged and with several attempts to define it, the key question with each new incidence is: "Is this an act of terrorism?" The answer to this question each time influences both the subsequent questions to be asked and the responses to the occurrence. Thus, the difficulty of a universally acceptable definition existed from the beginning and even terrorism experts have been unable to agree on how it should be defined due to its multifaceted nature.

The definitional conflict is not insignificant because definitions can result in diverse analyses of the situation and also impact the outcomes. In 1988, Schmid and Jongman (2005) compiled 109 definitions of terrorism and 22 different word qualities to solve the definitional challenge. Woods (1983) defines terrorism as the weapon of those who are unwilling to employ legal means but rather violence to attain their goals while Friedlander (1984) posits that terrorism simply means the use of threat or violence for political goals by individuals or groups acting for or against constituted authorities when such activities are deliberately to affect a target group other than the immediate victim or victims. Similarly, Christopher (2008) describes terrorism as the purposeful and systematic murder of innocent people in order to instil

fear for political purposes. Terrorism is described by the Federal Bureau of Intelligence as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to frighten or force a government, civilian population, or any other components therein to advance their political or social objectives (Whittaker, 2007). As a result of these various definitions of terrorism, it is essential to focus on operational definitions. Terrorism, according to Enders, Sandler, and Gaibullov (2011), is the "premeditated use of threat or violence by individuals or subnational groups against non-combatants to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims." However, Berkebile (2015) observes that the size of the audience isn't clearly defined, and hence the word "large" should be discarded. From these varying definitions, terrorism can simply be defined as the deliberate use of force, or violence against non-combatants by individuals or a group of persons to achieve desired political or social goals. It is worth noting that the various definitions have common elements which are the use of force or violence to achieve political or social objectives.

Theoretical Framework

The study based its argument on Collier's and Hoeffler's (2000) Greed and Grievance theory. It is vital to begin by noting that the goals of terrorism are based on fundamental, historical, ideological, economic, political, religious, and technological motivations. These two concepts (greed and grievance) allude to two opposing but connected concepts capable of aiding our understanding of the dynamics and nature of human beings regarding wealth and scarce resources. The kernel of this theory is that every conflict has material basis, that is, quest for wealth and control over resources. Greed reflects competition over resources while the latter suggests that conflict arises as a result of grievances caused by deprivation.

Although this theory has been significant in providing explanations to the causes of violence and internal conflicts, it has also been critiqued as having methodological issues. Saygi (2020) holds that due to absence of data and insufficient statistics, we cannot reach a conclusion that there is sufficient evidence to argue a predominance of the material basis for conflicts. Vinci (2006) posits that the theory is limited in its approach by incorporating the realist theory. In his argument, for an accurate understanding of the causes on violence, it is important to

separate individual level motivations from group level motivations. However, Murshed & Tadjoeeddin (2009) argue that the presence of greed and grievance is not sufficient to fuel conflict, but rather an institutional breakdown which causes poverty and underdevelopment.

Therefore, given the peculiarity of its emergence, spread, hostage-taking, ransom-collecting as well as increasing attacks by Boko Haram, there is a sense in which one may be right to agree with proponents of the theory that terrorism exists as a result of combatants' wish for personal wealth, religious ideologies, financial benefits, to exercise control over resources, and the quest for power. Furthermore, poverty and underdevelopment justify the reason for terrorist groups to form and reunite to fight for their demands and change.

Elements that strengthen the capabilities of terrorist organisations either financially or militarily are associated with more incidences of conflict than elements that lead to grievances. In the case of women involvement in international terrorism, the absence of rule of law, kidnapping, and abductions are sources of financial resources for terrorist organisations to purchase advanced weapons, which has increased terrorist attacks. Collier and Hoeffler (2000) attempt to distinguish between preferences and restrictions within the scope of situations that facilitates attacks by terrorist organisations; societies can be more prone to conflict because preferences for terrorism are exceptionally strong or restraints on terrorism are very weak. The former is associated with grievances, whereas the latter is associated with greed. These variables must be established since perhaps a terrorist organisation may have grievances that align with terrorism, particularly in weaker countries in the international political system.

The Greed and Grievance theory has many applications in the research of women and girls' involvement in international terrorism, as its main causes which include discriminatory socio-cultural practises; abandonment of women in the fight against terror and conflict resolution process; religious teachings, appealing financial benefits; outright violations of their human rights and the intention to protest existing societal inequalities; among others can fit into the scope of this theory (Adefisoye & Adedokun, 2019).

Boko Haram

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram terrorist organisation in the Northeast has been actively recruiting women by coercive and voluntary means. Boko Haram which literally means “western education is forbidden” was

established as a school in 2002 in Maiduguri, Borno State, to teach its own version of Islamic beliefs. Between December 2003 and April 2004, this school evolved into a breeding ground for terrorists, but it resorted to the use of force and violence in 2009 after the death of its founder-Mohammed Yusuf, the arrest of nine members, and the seizure of bomb-making materials by the Nigerian Joint Security Forces (NJSF) team during a search of their camp in Bauchi state. Reports show that its operations worsened in 2011 and due to the fact that its activities claimed an estimate of 30,000 lives, it was eventually classified as the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2015, outnumbering Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS in terms of total civilian casualties in a calendar year, including women, the elderly, and children. In 2018, Boko Haram was ranked as the second-largest terrorist organisation in the world (Oluwaniyi, 2021). Since 2009, the group has waged an organised terror campaigns against the Nigerian government and its people, indiscriminately assaulting both hard and soft targets (Okoli, 2017). In carrying out its declared jihadist goal, the group has used a variety of techniques, including mass assassinations, abductions, guerrilla warfare, and suicide bombers, among others. By 2015, Boko Haram's activities had spread over Northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin and by this time, the organisation had successfully attacked Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) and thirty (30) of the Federation's thirty-six (36) states.

The Global Terrorism Index (2022) still categorises Nigeria as one of the top 10 countries mostly affected by terrorism although data suggests that the overall number of deaths as a result of terrorist activities decreased to 448 in 2021 which is the lowest level since 2011. This indicates that terror-related fatalities reduced by roughly half compared with the year 2020. However, between 2020 and 2021, terrorist attacks increased by 49%. ISWA claimed responsibility for 36% of the attacks, Boko Haram for 8%, and the remaining 44% were not linked to any group.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Nigeria

GTI RANK

6

GTI SCORE

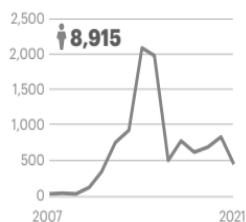
8.233

448 🧑 DEAD

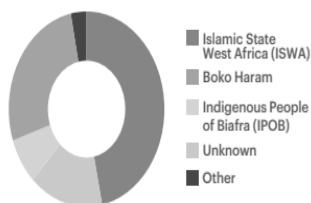
161 🧑 INJURED

204 ★ INCIDENTS

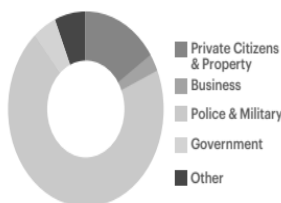
Total deaths since 2007



Deaths by group



Attacks by target



Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2022.

Since its establishment in 2002, Boko Haram's mission, motivation, and strategies have developed substantially. The battle in northeast Nigeria between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government is complicated, as it is ingrained in historical, economic, political and ethnic divisions. The group has grown from a benign movement seeking more religious participation in the Nigerian government to a violent terrorist organisation seeking vengeance and the creation of an Islamic state in Nigeria. During its 2010 re-organisation, Boko Haram started to integrate women into frontline roles. Its leaders have taught acceptance of women and recruited them to join the organisation since its inception in 2002 but the use of women as militants began after the death of its founder- Mohammed Yusuf. Under the pretext of being a champion of Muslim women's rights, Boko Haram has abducted and psychologically manipulated women to enhance its terrorist agenda in northern Nigeria.

The International Crisis Group (2016) argues that women are deemed extremely important to the organisation. Their importance arises from their societal roles and how they are perceived both in North Eastern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole unit. As spouses, women raise their social prestige and provide sexual services or domestic assistance (sometimes through coercion), making them excellent incentives for potential male fighters. Their allegiance either willingly or not, to the group's Islamic teachings can help spread its philosophy among other women, and perhaps young men as well. Women can play roles that are

substantially different from typical stereotypes. As the group progressed in its tactics, women became recruiting agents, spies, servants, labourers, soldiers, and forced or willing suicide bombers (International Crisis Group, 2016). Boko Haram has proven undeniably productive in its use of women by deploying them in both supporting and belligerent roles, and it is regarded as one of the deadliest terrorist organisations in history.

Women have contributed to Boko Haram's efforts to obtain international political and media attention as a result of its growing animosity for the Nigerian government and economic inequalities that exists in the country, with the employment of female suicide bombers as central to these tactics. As regards the utilisation of women as militants, a top commander in the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno state reveals that "they are not many, but they are there. I have even seen one using an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade], ... the women fighters are even more dangerous than the men fighters' because they seem even more fearless than their male counterparts." (Matfess, 2017). It appears that women utilised as militants are frequently taken into their camps; they begin as supporters and volunteers, and over a period of time, they are admired for their vigour and commitment and are subsequently integrated into the group as fighters. Matfess in his analysis notes that in contrast to suicide bombers, women who become combatants are typically older than men. This age disparity is attributed to the fact that they must be integrated into the group for a period of time to be trusted to carry out a mission without making attempts to escape, and then subsequently taught in the art of guerrilla warfare before being used as fighters, whereas suicide bombers are considerably easier to train for a one-time mission. However, given manpower constraints, particularly since 2014, some women and girls were trained to participate in attacks. In the Gwoza Hills, the wife of a Boko Haram leader allegedly used a rifle to kill a vigilante, armed female militants on their motorcycles were spotted in the Sambisa forest and women were allegedly involved in an ambush on the military in 2016 (International Crisis Group, 2016). The group recognised the importance of defying gender stereotypes to gain attention not just from the Nigerian government, but also from the international society. Matfess (2017) emphasises the symbolic importance of recruiting women as members and argues that its ability to instil fear in local populations by challenging gender norms and expectations should not be ignored because female suicide bombers aim to pass a striking propaganda message that anyone can be a martyr. This

is to clearly communicate that no one is safe from the organisation and instils terror in the minds of the people, earning them the respect they seek. Boko Haram is expanding into a contemporary sphere of combat and bypassing traditional tactics by deploying women as combatants rather than solely as suicide bombers, whether out of necessity or willingness.

Modus Operandi for the Recruitment of Women

Concerning the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, suicide bombing has been the primary pattern of women's involvement. In general, the process of selecting women for suicide missions and the approach used to convince them are identical to those used to recruit male militants. In many cases, recruiters take advantage of the victim's ignorance, excitement, personal misery, and desire for vengeance. Orphans that are destitute as a result of conflict are frequently among the most vulnerable demographics to female terrorist recruiters. According to some research, terrorist organisations would sometimes buy female suicide bombers, drug them to commit such actions, and/or blackmail them into the act through threats of either sexual or physical assault.

Furthermore, Human Rights Watch in 2014 describes the connection between gender and terrorism as complex because women increasingly became the perpetrators of Boko Haram's heinous deeds in the Northeast. Sometimes, women leave their communities to terrorists camps with their families and husbands with the intention of raising the next set of militants for the organisation (Ladbury et al. 2016). It is worth noting that women's deliberate cooperation with Boko Haram's to successfully unleash violence is not crystal clear for those who live in violent and conflict-torn environments as it raises the question of how much of a choice it is to support the organisation, especially when the alternative is a terrible punishment. However, in other circumstances and out of necessity, women progress from being victims to perpetrators as they are sometimes brainwashed with promises of financial reward and easy admittance into paradise after they die as martyrs (Warner & Matfess 2017). This strategy of female suicide missions adopted by Boko Haram contributes to the success of their vicious activities as women are more easily assimilated into the populace that will be attacked than men, facilitating the element of surprise when their bombs are detonated. Female suicide bombers in Nigeria's Northeast region target markets, military sites, camps and settlements for internally displaced persons in

the first instance of the strategy in the country's history, with the majority of the attacks targeting churches, mosques and non-state militia regions. The options that women face in armed conflict scenarios, particularly terrorism, highlight the complexities of gender and terrorism, in which women might be victims at one moment and perpetrators at another (Argomaniz & Lynch 2018).

Relevance of Women to Boko Haram's Survival

It is a prevalent misconception that women who cooperate with terrorist organisations do so involuntarily due to the stereotypical belief that terrorists are men. The idea of women as terrorists is frightening and strange, and does not match the social gender construct that designates women as nurturers and non-violent beings. Bloom (2017) argues that it is generally assumed that any woman who participates in terrorism has been forced to do so by a man. However, this assumption contradicts women's active engagement and voluntary service in terrorist organisations throughout history.

Terrorist organisations employ the use of women as one of their tactics for a variety of reasons. The first key reason for women's recruitment is that women are far better at generating support from both genders. Women tend to draw more individuals to their organisations than men because of the perception that they have more pleasing dispositions, which makes them seem more reliable when interacting with the public and during the recruitment process. They are also recruited as incentives to new male recruits by performing domestic and sexual responsibilities. By testing masculinity and providing them the opportunity to prove that they are 'real men', terrorist organisations can steadily increase the number of their members. When there's a shortage of human resources, terrorist groups resort to enlisting women to subtly coerce men, this is a particularly popular method to ensure its survival (Knop, 2007). Also, recruiting women enables the organisation to be able to garner a lot of media attention from around the world, thus, allowing them to advance their cause and spark reactions from a wider populace. They obtain legitimacy through the exposure gained as a result of media attention which consequently enhances their growth (Bloom, 2017).

Understanding the Roles of Women in Boko Haram

In the last decade, Nigeria has witnessed a significant and increasing share of international terrorism records. However, reality has revealed a persistent and increased involvement of women in terrorism both within and outside Nigeria as they play significant roles in terrorist tactics as bargaining subjects, mobilizers, negotiators, intelligence agents, fighters, suicide bombers, and in supporting roles as wives and sex slaves, chefs, and porters, among others. Cragin and Daly (2009) classify women's historical participation in extremist organisations into six functional positions: logisticians, recruiters, martyrs, operational commanders, guerrillas, and political vanguard. According to Cragin and Daly (2009), logistics refers to the acquisition, supply, and shipment of military supplies and fighters; the management of operational details. Logisticians transfer ammunition and finances to leaders and operational teams to ensure smooth running of operations. Women recruiters are assigned by terrorist leaders to recruit new logistics personnels, financiers, suicide bombers, or fighters for their organisation. Often times, women fall into three categories of political vanguard. They act as strategic visionaries who revolutionise the group's ideology and strategy, key committee members who are actively involved in the process of decision-making, and as political officials elected to civilian legislatures to put forward the needs of the terrorist organisation to which they belong.

Amidst these, the use of women as suicide bombers, as well as the abduction of women and children to use as human shields against aggressive counter-terrorism policy actions has become problematic in Nigeria. Boko Haram began using women in suicide missions in 2011 but with a general assumption that younger ladies are compelled to participate while older women participate of their own accord. Women's victimisation began in 2014, and by June 2017, Boko Haram had kidnapped and employed 434 female bombers to 247 different locations during 238 suicide bombing operations (Warner & Matfess, 2017). In particular, at least 56% of the 434 suicide bombers were women, with 81 bombers being children. Since 2014, women have been responsible for 83% of Boko Haram-related deaths, carrying out 146 suicide attacks that have resulted in the deaths of over 900 people, some of which have included the perpetrators themselves (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). Statistics reveals that of these suicide attacks, only 8 had both male and female collaboration, 139 women detonated their

explosives and 34 women were prevented from detonating the explosives strapped to them. This resulted in 3.1 deaths per attack compared to attacks carried out by men, which resulted in 2.6 deaths per attack (Bryson & Bukarti, 2018). This figure could be higher because the gender of the assailants was known in just 72% of these suicide missions (Warner & Matfess, 2017). Since its inception in June 2014, the use of female suicide bombers in Nigeria has been unprecedented on a global scale, far surpassing the records of any other terrorist organisation. Suicide bombing is a strategy that is less expensive with minimal technological know-how but maximises target destruction and instills fear in the populace. The use of women as suicide bombers have proven to be even more effective than the use of male counterparts due to greater accessibility and the influence of the media. They are less likely to be apprehended by troops and security officials because their profiles do not fit into known characteristics of terrorists. Sometimes, they are also able to conceal bombs by posing as late-term pregnant women. This method of concealing explosives helps them to avoid detection by security officers and blend in with the public, their target (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Knop (2007) agrees that women are extremely valuable to terrorist organisations which is why this tendency appears to be on the rise globally.

Women have functioned in different capacities in terrorist organisations, both willingly and unwillingly, however, each terrorist organisation has its own set of beliefs and ideologies and the participation and motivation of women in each organisation are likely to differ. Certain research has discovered common tendencies and motifs based on the type of ideology or type of terrorism (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). For example, women are more likely to hold operational positions in leftist terrorist organisations fighting for independence or liberation from tyrants while the revolutionary nature of left-wing terrorism, as well as its progressive viewpoint, appeals to women who desire a better quality of life through active engagement. Many girls served as conventional terrorists in groups such as the Provisional Irish Republic Army (PIRA) and Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF). They were conferred leadership and operational roles after distinguishing themselves. Women in the PIRA became well-known for carrying out bombing missions against British targets while Women in the RAF bombed stores throughout Germany and conducted high-risk assaults against US sites (Spencer, 2016)

In the light of the above, women engage in terrorist activities for several reasons, and these range from nationalistic, religious, economic, societal, and personal concerns. For individuals seeking martyrdom, religion provides moral justification for being involved in these violent acts because of the belief that they will receive great rewards in the afterlife (Okoli, 2018). Martyrdom requires the desire to pursue death with the assurance that it is for God's sake and in his name as well. Aside from this spiritual insight, the martyr aims to achieve some symbolic and strategic objectives, she sees herself as someone who sends a message to the public about faith, dedication, tenacity, and the failure to submit to a known enemy. This selfless, unselfish dying also serves as a significant example worthy of imitation. Female suicide bombers pass for martyrs when they act with a commitment to the ideologies of the organisation. This suggests that they are persuaded to embark on these missions with the full knowledge that they will die heroically. Otherwise, they would be either villains or victims of the horrific conditions that led to their highest conduct (Bloom, 2017).

In addition to religious and patriotic motivations, female terrorists may be thrilled by material or financial benefits such as significant amounts of money, personal or family reputation and symbolic heroism, however, studies suggest that female suicide terrorism is motivated more by personal reasons than ideological reasons (Gentry, 2018). Personal motivations such as desire for revenge, social alienation, and degrading occurrences/ experiences have sometimes intertwined with ideological motivations to foster indulgence in suicide terrorism. These factors which are frequently exacerbated by poverty and endanger individual sources of livelihood and existence can motivate people to become suicide bombers. Also, these personal reasons also reinforces the basic assumptions of the greed and grievance theory that the mere presence of greed and grievance can lead to violent conflicts.

In the case of women, critical occurrences such as sexual violence or exploitation are contributing factors to why women decide to join these organisations. Due to the existence of these conditions, these organisations and their recruiters may take advantage of the situation to recruit suicide bombers (Bloom, 2022). However, in the majority of cases of female suicide bombing, these women have been pressured, persuaded, frightened or threatened to carry out suicide missions. Nonetheless, whether they are referred to as 'victims' or 'vanguards,' the truth is that they are used by terrorists to achieve a strategic goal by overturning social norms and finding unusual targets to take advantage

of security loopholes to persist in its fight against the state (Onuoha, 2015). Examples of female suicide missions such as the SSNP's female attackers in Lebanon, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the shahids (martyrs) of Lebanon, etc indicate that women's participation in suicide terrorism is not a new phenomenon.

Counter-Terrorism Responses

Boko Haram now understands the value and public attention that the use of women brings to its organisation and the critical functional roles they play in the management of its day-to-day operations. Evidently, the group is inclined to adjust to the culture and the need for women as combatants if it wishes to sustain and increase domestic and international attention. Also, the organisation has evolved into a modernised domain of warfare with traits similar to well-established and internationally known groups. Consequently, the international community and the Nigerian government should put into consideration and adapt to the organisation's unique acceptance of women, as well as the fundamental problems that Boko haram represents in order to suppress them in the North East region of Nigeria.

Regardless of intentions or motivations, it is clear that women's involvement in terrorism can no longer be ignored when formulating counter- terrorism policy actions. Women are more important than ever to terrorist organisations. The adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000 marked a turning point in the process of recognizing the effects armed conflict has on women and their crucial roles within the society in ensuring peace and security, as well as their vital participation at all decision-making levels in the conflict prevention, armed conflict, and post-conflict stages. Following that, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1829 of 2008, which recognises sexual violence as a weapon of war; Resolution 1888 of 2009, which reiterates the threat of sexual violence and facilitates the deployment of experts to regions where occurrences of sexual violence are alarming; and Resolution 1889 of 2009, which emphasises the key roles of women as peace-builders at each stage of the peace process (Fink, et al. 2013).

To put an end to women's involvement in terrorism and advance the principles of UNSCR 1325, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Nigeria launched and adopted the 2nd National Action Plan for the period 2017-2020 to implement the resolution and other related resolutions on peace, women, and security in Nigeria in

May 2017. This was a follow-up to the March 2017 UNSCR; an action that became required in the aftermath of the country's alarming rate of insurgency and terrorist activities, which have harmed women and girls (Adefisoye & Adedokun, 2019). National Action Plans for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 are strategy documents at the national level which clearly states the approach of the government and the course of action for grass root participation and representation of women in all peacekeeping, peace negotiations, peace-building, and post-conflict activities, as well as the decision-making processes at the state level.

There are various paths to counter-terrorism success, but measures that provide thorough approaches which will tackle political, economic, social and cultural concerns are required to combat this menace. Boko Haram must be recognised as a legitimate organisation with legitimate concerns, rather than a group of jobless people who can be subdued by force or pacified with money. From a counter- terrorism standpoint, military re-structuring should not only include being able to defend the population from future attacks but also training on positioning, heightened border security and community interactions. The emphasis should be on Boko Haram's funding, communications and recruitment. Recruitment is easier due to high rate of unemployment and endemic poverty, therefore, tackling these underlying problems is relatively important for a significant reduction in the rate of recruiting new members. Studies have also shown that terrorist groups have financiers, ranging from sympathetic supporters in the diaspora to multinational companies or individuals interested in the natural resources within the region. Huge sums of money are needed to plan and coordinate attacks successfully, thus, identifying the sources of funds is also relevant to counter-terrorism operations (Murshed & Tadjoeeddin, 2009)

Boko Haram is a transnational problem, and foreign support is needed; yet, it is a domestic problem that may not be completely solved if the Nigerian government does not make significant progress in executing real political reforms that will address key grievances of the group as well as underlying economic and social causes of terrorism. These reforms must be sustained, and all attempts must be made to tackle the socio-economic inequalities that exist within the society as expressed by this group.

Recommendations

Against this backdrop, an in-depth understanding of the push and pull elements is pertinent in the formulation and implementation of effective policy actions to tackle this problem. Counter-terrorism policy must address multiple manifestations of women as resources during conflicts and gender concerns must be integrated into policy actions to address systemic concerns that cause and maintain terrorism. It is critical to underscore that women's increased participation must be incorporated into a counter-terrorism plan which provides a unique but critical view point on the examination of the violent actions of the Boko Haram group. Addressing this means that women's potential as change agents in preventing and defeating terrorism has been fully realised since they have become crucial to the war architecture. Rather than categorising the passive roles of women as wives and mothers, it is also vital to ensure their participation in peace negotiations and engagement in post-conflict peace building process.

Women have a special ability to identify signs of radicalization in their children at an early stage, thus, they can play a major role in curtailing violence and ensuring that they do not become easy targets for recruiters (Majoran, 2015). Furthermore, the family unit is fundamental in ensuring societal peace and since women play a crucial role as caregivers, this perspective is important in understanding why women should be key stakeholders in peacebuilding process. They can be educators and agents of change within the family unit, community and the larger society.

Also, their participation in state-building will help the government to develop and implement more gender-sensitive programmes. Women's engagement in national and state governance should be strengthened, inclusive of the adoption of affirmative policy actions with fair quotas. Elements relating to social inequalities, injustices and excessive socio-cultural and religious standards that limit, degrade and incapacitate women should be carefully addressed. From this study, women sometimes engage in terrorism due to economic inequalities or to avenge social and political injustices. As a result, women need economic empowerment and all forms of discrimination against women should be earnestly addressed to eradicate such imbalances.

Conclusion

The increased involvement of women in terrorism challenges the prevalent narrative of women as victims as they have also been recognised as perpetrators as evidenced by female suicide bombings and other passive roles they play to ensure the success of the violent attacks of terrorist groups. Women are rapidly being accepted as strategic assets in insurgent groups as logisticians and particularly in recruitment, acquisition of weapons and ammunition, preparing meals, as spouses, sex providers, domestic help, camp management, and upkeep for insurgents' healthy lifestyles and fully functional camps and hideouts. By examining these women, scholars and analysts may gain a better insight into terrorism by taking into consideration the importance of gender on the field's theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as how these techniques may influence outcomes. Understanding the role of women as victims and perpetrators is critical in formulating counter terrorism measures and this study found that while some women became victims of terrorist actions, others became perpetrators of violence, but in certain circumstances, there are no well-defined differences between being a victim and being a perpetrator.

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