RELIGIOUS-MOTIVATED INSURGENCY WITHIN THE ISLAMIC CONTEXT: TRENDS, NEXUS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Sustainable peace is vital to human existence, prosperity and happiness of all irrespective of religious or ideological differences. The objective of this article is to analyze the trends of religious-motivated insurgency within the Islamic context as well as their nexus and implications for sustainable peace in Nigeria. It employed desk research method relying on information derived from existing secondary sources and primary sources of Islamic law. Findings revealed that Nigeria's Northeast since 2009 has been plagued by a religious insurgency championed by the Boko Ḥarām movement with questionable and contradictory religious and ideological inclinations. It is equally established that the group's motivation for terror campaigns is to maim, kill, destroy, destabilize, and cause confusion, thus her ideology contradicts teachings of Islām that advocate for peace, orderliness, mercy, compassion, preservation of life and peaceful coexistence. Consequently, the horrific and condemned religious insurgency has, among other things, worsened Nigeria's standing in the world's peacefulness rankings, increased insecurity, exacerbated religious intolerance, intensified Islamophobia, and aggravated hostility, mutual suspicion, and anxiety among the country's dominant ethno-religious groups. The article concludes that Boko Ḥarām's religious insurgency has caused serious havoc to the quest for sustainable peace in Nigeria. It recommends, among other things, regulation of Muslim organizations' activities, effective collaboration among Islamic bodies, support for governments in the battle against religious insurgency, intra- and inter-religious dialogue, provision of sustainable employment opportunities and efficient socio-welfare services, and effective post-conflict peace-building initiatives.*

Keywords: *Boko Ḥarām, Islamic context, religious-motivated insurgency, sustainable peace.*

INTRODUCTION

The frequency of religious insurgency perpetrated by some militant groups in a bid to promote religious superiority and reject competing ideologies is intrinsically linked to the state of the world today. These organized groups have become highly fixated on how they propagate religious doctrines and interpret theological matters in a way that reflect excessive exposure to religious dogmatism and extremism (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Dauda, 2021). Thus, there is an increase in religious insurgency on a global scale posing a serious threat to international peace, security and harmonious coexistence. Religious-motivated conflicts, according to Sulaiman (2016), have the potential to cause people to suffer physical, emotional and psychological harms, and the society, a peaceful coexistence.

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Apparently, there have been cases of radical groups justifying their violent behaviors in the name of religious propagation, which invariably have resulted in the rise in religious-motivated violence and Islamophobia (Dauda, 2020; Maregere, 2011).

Existing studies have established the alarming rate at which Islamic-leaning insurgent groups have proliferated, sparking an increase in attacks with lethal weapons against governmental buildings, ministries/ agencies, private and public property, houses of worship, and citizens (Nkwede, Moliki & Dauda, 2017; Nkwede, Dauda, Moliki & Orija, 2018; Egbejule, 2019). Consequently, peace has been replaced by anarchy globally. Typical examples of such organizations are Al-Qaʻeda and its affiliates, ISIS, Ṭālibān, Al-Shabāb, and Boko Ḥarām, among others, found in countries not limited to Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria. Boko Ḥarām, unquestionably one of the deadliest armed groups in the world (Institute for Economic and Peace, 2021), has wreaked havoc in northeastern Nigeria and its environs (Akinbi, 2015; Nkwede et al., 2017; Folarin, 2020; Dauda, 2021).

Since its inception in 2009, the Boko Ḥarām movement's reign of terror has resulted in over thirty thousand fatalities, over two million forced relocations, more than five hundred abducted secondary school girls, and hundreds of kidnapped young men and women (Nkwede, et al., 2018; Oriola, 2023). The group after capturing some towns named Gwoza the capital of its Caliphate. Although the Federal Government was able to free some of the kidnapped students, halt the Caliphate's expansion, and recapture the territory lost, markets and banks gradually began to reopen, and previously halted sporting events, flights, and regular business operations also resumed, yet the insurgency has continued unabated with records of brutal attacks and ambushes that have killed hundreds of Nigerian military and civilians (Egbejule, 2019; Folarin, 2020; Lawal & Dauda, 2023). The insurgency has continued to place Nigeria on the global list of top unsafe and less peaceful nations (Akinloye, 2018; Nasiru, 2020; Ndujihe, 2022).

Meanwhile, the ultimate objective of Allāh [SWT] for humanity, according to Islamic legal frameworks, is peace. Both the holy Qur'an and Ḥadīth or Sunnah (teachings and deeds of the noble Prophet Muḥammad [peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him]) emphasizes on maintaining peace with God, one's fellow human, and all other living things. These sources recommend that peace is essential for inter- and intra-religious harmony, for peaceful cohabitation, for the preservation of life, and for the right use of resources (see Qur'an 4:90; 5:5; 5:32; 6:151; 16:93; 16:125; 22:41; 60:9). Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] enjoined that: "You will not enter Paradise until you believe and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I show you something that if you do you would love each other? Spread peace between yourselves" (Saḥīḥ Muslim, 1:194).

However, previous studies and reports have blamed Islām and its adherents for series of heinous attacks being perpetrated by extreme ideological-inclined groups, such as the Boko Ḥarām movement. For instance, Walker (2012), Agbedo and Osumah (2014), Asfura-Heim and McQuaid (2015), Voll (2015), Iheanacho (2016), Lang (2017), Ogbondah and Agbese (2017), and Oriola (2023) have established a connection between Islamic religion and the emergence of the Boko Ḥarām movement. The aforementioned works did not extensively interrogate the connection between the activities of the sect and Islām. Moreover, little to no scholarly attentions have been devoted to investigate the implications of the Boko Ḥarām's insurgency for sustainable peace in Nigeria. Therefore, this article attempt to fill these gaps in the literature.

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To accomplish this task, the article is organized into five sections. The introduction is covered in the first section. The second section focuses on a review of the literature on religious insurgency and sustainable peace. The third section identifies and discusses the research methodology. The fourth section concentrates on results and discussions. The last section contains the study's conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Insurgency

It is difficult to ignore the linkage between religion and the recent wave of insurgencies being experienced around the world. Conflicts for identity based on race, ethnicity, and religion, as argued by Abu-Nimer (2000), are the primary driver of the majority of wars after the Cold War. This suggests that religion often described as 'two-edged sword' is perceived as one of the major sources of conflict globally (Maregere, 2011). Insurgency, according to Ladan (2012), is a crime against public order as well as a pattern of tensions and internal discontent that puts the public's safety and peace at peril. In the same vein, insurgency is described by Powell and Abraham (2006), cited in Nkwede, et al. (2017), as a violent action by a group of people or religious or political movement to revolt against a recognized authority with the specific objectives of either overthrowing the government or making the country ungovernable or insecure or by upsetting its socio-economic and political lives.

Given the aforementioned circumstances, religious-motivated insurgency is a risky type of structural conflict as a result of excessive exposure to religious dogmatism and extremism, marginalization of a religion or religious community, as well as abhorrence of western materialism, education, and culture. As Lawal and Dauda (2023, p. 447) have described it, religious insurgency occurs when extremist religious groups employ sporadic acts of violence to further their political, ideological, or theological goals, dehumanising anyone who do not adhere to their particular brand of religion or way of life. For instance, the Boko Ḥarām movement aims to depose democratically-elected governments and replace them with ones that are consistent with their political, ideological, and religious goals based on Islamic Caliphate with strict adherence to Sharī'ah-based rule and governance (Walker, 2012). They perpetuate this by using arbitrary violence that is intended to instill fear, kill defenseless civilians, destroy property, displace civilians, and disrupt societal peace and stability.

Sustainable Peace

Developing comprehensive strategies to tackle the issues of insurgency that modern countries, like Nigeria, face is necessary to usher in a world of peace and prosperity. Positive relationships, cooperation, and the lack of violence or conflict are frequently linked to the idea of peace. A basic human desire, peace is also essential to the socioeconomic growth and well-being of people, communities, and countries. As enunciate by Dauda (2021), peace can be understood as a state of stability and security, devoid of fear or violent threats, as well as a condition of calm and harmony marked by the absence of conflict or war. But it takes cooperation from people, groups, and organizations to keep society safe and stable.

According to a 2012 statement attributed to Lakshmi Puri, the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, there can be no sustainable peace if violence in our communities and nations is tolerated at all. The notion of sustainable peace elucidates the necessity of attaining enduring peace and stability in a manner that guarantees the well-being and prosperity of the

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populace. While this concept highlights the relationship between environmental sustainability, development, and peace, the main goal of this article is to address the root cause of the Boko Ḥarām insurgency in the northeastern Nigeria among other regions and neighboring countries, and proffer theological solutions to its security threats. Therefore, in order to foster inclusive and participatory processes that involve all relevant parties in Nigeria's peacebuilding project, it is emphasized that government institutions and other stakeholders work toward reconciliation, justice, mutual trust, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence. Without these, there cannot be a lasting peace that the conflict-prone countries, like Nigeria, desire for sustainable development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article employed desk research method, involving collection of data from library resources without the need to carry out field work. It relied on information obtained on the Boko Ḥarām movement and her insurgencies from the existing secondary sources, including journal articles, published and edited books, printed and online newspapers, magazines, websites, conference proceedings, as well as reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Institute for Economics and Peace, The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), and U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria. The primary sources of Islamic law including the holy Qur'an in translated form and Ḥadīth or Sunnah, as narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, were also used. The information obtained from these sources were analyzed using content analytical approach. The analyzed contents and identified themes were appropriately applied in this work. The rationale for choosing desk research method is because of its relevance to the current study and cost-effective nature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trends of Religious Insurgency of the Boko Ḥarām Movement in Nigeria

Despite the controversies surrounding its formation, the majority of academic writings established that Ustādh Muhammed Yusuf (1970–2009), a Girgir born Muslim cleric, founded the Boko Ḥarām movement in 2002. The movement was formally known as Jamā'atu Ahlis Sunna lidda'wati wal-Jihād, which is translated to mean "Brethren committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and holy war." The sect draws in and enlists young people from northern regions and neighboring nations, including Lake Chad, Cameroon, Sudan, and Niger. These individuals are not always Muslims, but after being indoctrinated and trained in accordance with the sect's ideology, they have wreaked havoc on those who live in the northeastern region, and other parts of the country (Akinbi, 2015; Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015; Iheanacho, 2016; Nkwede et al., 2018; Folarin, 2020; Lawal & Dauda, 2023).

According to Yusuf (2019), the Boko Ḥarām movement is linked to violence, the destruction of lives and property, and other negative outcomes. Initially a small group of young Muslims influenced by Wahhabism and Salafism beliefs, the movement gained strength to become an internationally recognized modern terrorist organization, expanded its operations, and proclaimed Islamic Caliphate (Folarin, 2020). It is well-known that the Boko Ḥarām's operations were once peaceful but changed to becoming militant in 2009 after the group's commander, Muhammad Yusuf, was killed extrajudicially while being held by the police (Yusuf, 2019; Dauda, 2021). The late Muhammad Yusuf claimed that the movement's ideology is to declare Jihād against everything western and seeks to replace the western form of

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government, democracy, with an Islamic system of government, where *Sharīʿah* law would be fully implemented (Yusuf, 2008).

More generally, Akanni's (2015) study provides that the central messages of the Boko Ḥarām movement include that: i) western education is the source of corruption, which true Muslims must avoid if they are to achieve felicity; ii) western-based incursion has undermined religious values and beliefs among Muslim communities; and iii) western ideology breeds injustice, poor leadership, and egregious deprivation of individual rights to better lives, among other issues facing the world in general and Nigeria in particular. This suggests that the movement thrives on the notion that democracy is the source of all evils in Nigeria and other western societies, and that western civilization is made up of ambiguous issues that are in opposition to Islamic teachings and mandates.

Supporting the aforementioned position is a statement attributed to one of the group's spokespersons and reported in *Tell Magazine* (2011), that "...the only solution to what is happening is for [the] government to repent, jettison democracy, drop the [current] constitution and adopt the laws of the holy Qur'an" (p. 50). This is further supported by Agbedo and Osumah's (2014) findings that the Boko Ḥarām movement's main goal "is to abolish democracy and institute *Sharīʿah* law." (p. 215), as was earlier echoed by one of the group's spokespersons as follows:

> "We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out Jihād (religious war) in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the Holy Prophet. We would never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islām because that is the only way that the Muslims could be liberated" (Agbedo & Osumah, 2014, p. 216).

Furthermore, the movement is based on the radical Salafist philosophy of purifying religious beliefs and practices, which includes strict devotion to *Sharīʿah*, the construction of an Islamic Caliphate, and rule or administration in line with *Sharīʿah*. In 2010, the Boko Ḥarām insurgents took control of towns and villages spread across more than twenty local government areas in Yobe, Adamawa, and Borno States, including Gwoza, Bama, Abadam, Kalabaldi, Mubi, Gubio, Magumeri, Marte, Kukawa, Mobbar, Baga, Banki, Gudumbali, Kala Balge, and Guzamala, though some have been recovered. On 24 August 2014, the organization formally proclaimed Gwoza as the capital of its Islamic Caliphate. In his remark, Abubakar Shekau noted that:

> "We don't believe in the name Nigeria. We are in [an] Islamic Caliphate. We have nothing to do with Nigeria. Thanks be to Allāh, who gave victory to our brethren in Gwoza and made it part of the Islamic Caliphate. By the grace of Allāh, we will not leave the town. We have come to stay" (Yossef, 2015, p. 20).

The analysis presented above shows that religious or ideological leaning serves as the primary explanatory element for the insurgency by the Boko Ḥarām movement. However, existing studies, such as Iheanacho (2016), Nkwede et al. (2017), Nkwede et al. (2018), Yusuf (2019), and Folarin (2020), have indicated that the group also opposes the concentration of the nation's wealth in the hands of a small group of avaricious political elite; rejects democracy, modern science and politics; and the continued dominance of western culture and globalization, all of which have contributed to the complex problems of bad governance, distrust, division, civil unrest, starvation, political alienation, greed, and bad leadership; as well as poverty, unemployment and economic mismanagement.

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Religious Insurgency of the Boko Ḥarām Movement within the Islamic Context

It suffices to point out that the Boko Ḥarām's insurgency is not only rooted in partisan politics and injustice, but also that religious radicalization and extremism have played a crucial role. However, insurgency, which entails murders and planned acts of terrorism against the public and property with the intention of making life difficult and the nation unfriendly, is strongly condemned in Islām. Unjust killing of human being is outright condemned as stated in the holy Qur'an thus:

"Verily, he who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all mankind, and he who saves a soul will be as if he had saved the lives of all mankind..." (Qur'an 5:32).

The aforementioned scripture makes it clear that every soul is sacred and that Islām strongly forbids the loss of any soul by acts of violence. In the same vein, the Qur'an 17:33 provides that: "And do not kill the soul which Allāh has forbidden except for a just cause..." 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr reported that the Prophet [PBUH] said: "Whoever kills a person who has a truce with the Muslims will never smell the fragrance of Paradise" (Saḥīḥ al-Bukhāri, 6516).

Although Jihād is inextricably linked to Islamic principles that seek to establish a perfect, just, and peaceful community. Islamic law, however, clearly states that even if physical Jihād should be undertaken, it is governed and regulated by a number of principles, including: i) its necessity must be determined by a constituted authority as the last option; ii) vulnerable members of society, such as old people, women, and children, must be spared; iii) trees, places of worship, such as churches, synagogues, and monasteries, must not be attacked; and iv) it must not be carried out to promote mischief and injustice in the land (Qaradawi, 2009, p. 40).

Based on the aforementioned principles, it can be deduced that the group's 2009 violent confrontation with security forces may have been perceived as their last option by Abubakar Shekau, the group's second-in-command at the time, in response to the extrajudicial killing of the group's founder, Muhammad Yusuf, to express their resentment over the injustices meted out to them. If to some extent this is acceptable, what about other principles that govern this struggle? How would the movement defend the murders of multiple elderly, female, and juvenile victims? What about kidnappings involving women and children? How would it excuse the desecration of mosques and churches, as well as suicide bombings and assaults on believers who are both Muslims and Christians? How would that explain the allegations of theft, kidnapping for ransom, theft of food and livestock, cattle rustling, and armed robbery attacks committed to support their living in their different camps?

Furthermore, previous researches have categorically denounced the Boko Ḥarām's motives and activities. One of such studies claims that this group's views of Da'wah, Jihād, battle, and martyrdom are flawed because of their ideological orientation (Tell Magazine, 4 July, 2011). Similar views are expressed in the study by Yusuf (2019), which focused on the Boko Ḥarām Jihād's claim regarding her willful destruction of life and property in accordance with Islamic law. It is argued that the conception and application of the Jihād are fundamentally flawed, and that rather than fostering peace and stability, justice, and fairness, the Jihād encourages instability, injustice, and chastisement. This is because members of the group carry out attacks indiscriminately against the dictates of Sharī'ah, which regard life and property as sacred values that must be jealously guarded (Yusuf, 2019).

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Additionally, Azeez and Salako (2015) evaluated Boko Ḥarām's activities in Nigeria from an Islamic perspective using the indices of western education, Jihād, and homicide (*qatl*) and found that such criminal behaviors have no validity in Islām. In addition, As-Shaykh 'Abdullah bin Bayyah in his explanation of the Islamic principles for fostering peace posit as follows:

> "While some try to justify conflict in Islamic terms, these values are not Islamic. They are western Hegelian values, for it was Hegel who believed that 'Destruction is the basis for construction' and that society is based only on the struggle between slave and master... Demolition and destruction are not Islamic values; they are values that grew out of ignorance and intolerance. Islamic tradition teaches that trust and love are the basis for coexistence." (Bayyah, 2015, p. 2).

In the same vein, As-Shaykh 'Abdullah supports his claim with the example of Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, who instructed his governors not to destroy any synagogue, church, or fire temple during his rule (Bayyah, 2015). This follows what was obtained during the Orthodox or rightly-guided Caliphs. For instance, Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph, while issuing warnings to war commanders instructed as follows: "Destroy not fruit or trees nor fertile field in your paths. Be just and spare the feelings of the vanquished. Respect all religious persons who live in hermitages or convents and spare their edifices." (Hashimi, 2020, p. 474). The following passage from Stoddard (1921, p. 13, cited in Hashimi, 2020) corroborates the above position:

> "The Caliph 'Umar took the utmost care to attend to the sanctity of the Christian holy places and those who became caliph after him followed his footsteps. They did not harass the many denominations of pilgrims, who came annually from every corner of the Christian world to visit Jerusalem." (p. 476).

It can be inferred from the foregoing that Islām do not only support the preservation and protection of lives, places of worship (including mosques, churches, and temples), trees bearing fruit, and fruitful fields, are equally revered. In addition, it is sufficient to note that numerous Muslims have been killed in various horrific atrocities committed by the Boko Ḥarām movement under the pretense that they are hypocritical moderate Muslims that establish relationship with non-Muslims. This is in contrary to the legacy and traditions by Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] on religious tolerance. Hence, the saying of the noble Prophet that: "Whoever carries arms against us is not from us." (Saḥīḥ al-Bukhāri, 6874), demonstrates why members of the Boko Ḥarām movement cannot be regarded as authentic Muslims. Therefore, the ideologies and preaching of this movement as presented above are in conflict with Islamic teachings, and as a result, could not represent Islām.

Implications of the Religious Insurgency for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria

Consequent upon the violent and deadly religious insurgency of the Boko Ḥarām movement, which began in 2009, peaceful coexistence as the case may be has rapidly descended from bad to worse. The following are therefore identified as the implications of religious insurgency of the Boko Ḥarām movement for sustainable peace in Nigeria:

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Poor Ranking of Nigeria in Peacefulness

As a consequence of religious insurgency of the Boko Ḥarām movement, Nigeria has been consecutively ranked very low in peacefulness in the Global Peace Index (GPI) since when the conflict had assumed dangerous dimension in 2009. GPI is published annually by the Institute for Economic and Peace, a non-partisan and non-profit organization in Sydney, Australia. It measures the position of 163 independent countries, according to their levels of peacefulness, based on 23 indicators to ascertain not limited to the number and duration, death recorded, intensity and impact of internal and external conflicts, including insurgency.

Table 1. Global Peace Index and Global Peace Ranking of Nigeria, 2009-2020

Year	Global Peace Index	Global Peace Ranking
2009	2.599	127º
2010	2.628	131º
2011	2.613	137º
2012	2.707	146º
2013	2.693	148º
2014	2.710	151º
2015	2.910	151º
2016	2.877	149º
2017	2.849	149º
2018	2.873	148º
2019	2.898	148º
2020	2.865	147º

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2009–2021

It is shown in Table 1 that peacefulness in Nigeria has declined considerably since the last twelve years. The reports, indexes and rankings indicate that Nigeria remains less peaceful among the comity of independent nations in the world. There are years, the country was retained in same position which depicts that there are no noticeable changes in the security management of the armed conflicts ravaging some parts of the country. Worrisomely, Nigeria has remained top five least peaceful countries in sub-Saharan Africa and was ranked alongside the violent-ridden countries, such as Somali, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Central African Republic (CAR) (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2021). This situation has dampened the image of Nigeria to the extent that some countries tagged it as one of the unsafe nations to invest or visit (Akinloye, 2018; Nasiru, 2020; Ndujihe, 2022), which invariably had dealt a deadly blow to the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Unprecedented Loss of Life and Property

Religious insurgency, as perpetrated by the Boko Ḥarām movement, has resulted in indiscriminate killings of both civilians and security agents, and assassinations of whoever criticised their ungodly activities, including religious clerics and traditional rulers, as well as destruction of government's facilities, private infrastructures, and places of worship. Over 30,000 deaths are traced to the group. In the first instance, the government's clampdown in 2009 led to killings of 800 members of the movement. Consequently, Mohammed Yusuf, the

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group's leader was killed thereafter in police custody. Hundreds of suicide attacks had been carried out by mostly young women and girls (Nkwede *et al.,* 2018).

The analysis of credible media sources and data collected by human rights defenders, think tanks and academic institutions conducted by Amnesty International (2015) on bombing attacks in Borno, Gombe and Yobe states in 2015, revealed that Boko Ḥarām attacks had claimed the lives of at least 3,500 civilians in 2015 alone. In the first eight months of 2019, at least 615 military officers were killed by the Boko Ḥarām movement (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). With the bombing of United Nations Headquarters in Abuja, Boko Ḥarām insurgents gained an international recognition as a deadly terrorist group. Several persons at various times had sustained degrees of injuries. Amnesty International (2015) reported that:

> "Boko Ḥarām gunmen frequently rounded up residents, shot those who tried to escape and executed men and boys. Fighters stole any supplies they needed and set fire to people's homes, shops and markets. Bomb attacks also continue to kill and cause injury to civilians across North-East Nigeria. They have routinely targeted locations with no military objective, including markets, transport hubs, bars, restaurants and places of worship" (p. 2).

In addition to the above, prominent Islamic clerics, who opposed the activities of the sect and spoke against its doctrinal and theological narratives have been brutally assassinated. The list is endless but include Shaykh Muhammad Auwal Albani (the most famous of the Salafiyya scholars), Shaykh Adam Nafada popularly known as Adamu Misra (Tijaniyya scholar), Ibrahim Birkuti (Saudi-Arabian inspired Wahabbi group leader), and Sani Yahaya (National Chairman, Jamaʻatu Izālatul Bidʻa in Jos), among others. It was also reported that Boko Ḥarām insurgent killed an unidentified Islamic cleric along other three persons at Kurumari village in Magumeri Local Government Area of Borno State (*Premium Times*, 18 September, 2017).

Few weeks into January 2020, shocking news of the murder of Reverend Lawani Andimi, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) chairman in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, who was abducted early January was reported. He was beheaded after the Church could not meet the demand of €2 million ransom. Another CAN member, Reverend Dennis Bagaure, was killed a day before when the insurgents' attempt to abduct him failed (Owolabi, 2020). In 2015, two bombs were detonated in a crowded Yantaya Mosque, and Shagalinku, the Muslim restaurant, simultaneously, in the central city of Jos, leaving 51 people dead, and 67 people injured. Similarly, a female suicide bomber was reportedly stricken a crowded service of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Potiskum, killing six people (Mohammed & Faul, 2015).

Stephen Apagu in Mohammed and Faul (2015) reported that 32 churches and about 300 homes in several villages were burned down across the Nigeria's Northeast. Bomb blasts on 25 December 2011, at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla claimed at least 37 lives and 57 were injured (Reuters, 30 December, 2011). Kabiru Abubakar Dikko Umar, popularly known as Kabiru Sokoto, was alleged to have masterminded the attacks. Traditional rulers were not spared either. On 30 May 2014, the Emir of Gwoza, Idrissa Timta, was shot dead in the Tashan Alade area of Borno State. The Emir of Uba, Ali ibn Ismaila Mamza, and the Emir of Askira, Abdullahi ibn Muhammadu Askirama, were also in the convoy but escaped death. In July 2012,

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a suicide bomber attempted to kill Shehu of Borno, Umar Garbai El-Kanemi, as he left Jumu'at service (*Zee News India*, 31 May, 2014).

The report published by the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (13 April, 2018) indicates that since the conflict started in Northeastern zone, at least 2,295 teachers have been killed and more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed. In an official presentation made by Governor Babagana Zulum of Borno State, it was declared that the Boko Ḥarām insurgents destroyed 47,615 houses, about 5,000 classrooms, 202 health facilities, 22 Council Secretariat complexes, 800 municipal buildings, including hospitals and police stations, 1,613 water facilities and 713 energy distribution stations and transformers worth over N1.9 Trillion. He noted further that not only has the insurgency claimed 32,000 lives, it has witnessed destruction of property worth $9.2 billion (N3.42 Trillion) in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states (Musa, 2020). This implies that the heinous activities of the movement had posed a serious threat to human lives and property.

Heightened Insecurity

The fear of insecurity of the Boko Ḥarām movement is the beginning of wisdom is not a gainsaying remark given the dangerous dimension of the crisis in the past decade. The 2019 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) placed Nigeria in the third position among the Top 10 countries that are laden with high level of insecurity occasioned largely by religious insurgency. Other countries in the list were Iraq and Afghanistan (ranked first and second, respectively), Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, India, Yemen, Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Unfortunately, the persistent attacks, bombings, killings, murder, abductions and suicide bombings by Boko Ḥarām had constituted major security threats to the nation and equally made the North-East, a dangerous region to inhabit or visit (Nkwede *et al.,* 2017).

The insurgency has led to abduction of women and children, rape, forced marriages, intimidations and assaults. For instance, on 14 April, 2014, 276 girls were abducted by the Boko Ḥarām militants from a government secondary boarding school in Chibok, Borno State (*BBC News*, 8 May 2017). Prior to the incident, many schools in the region had shut down for fear of attacks. Although some of the abducted girls have been freed following negotiations between the government and the group, more than 100 girls are still missing (Human Rights Watch, 15 April, 2019). The group also kidnapped more than 300 children from Zanna Mobarti Primary School in Damasak in March 2015. Again, another 110 school girls were brazenly abducted on 19 February 2018 from the Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State (Human Rights Watch, 15 April, 2019). As revealed in UNICEF's (13 April 2018) report, more than 1,000 children in northeastern Nigeria have been abducted by the Boko Ḥarām movement since 2013.

Sometimes in 2017, the U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria (5 May 2017) warned all U.S. citizens on its intelligence report of Boko Ḥarām's plans to kidnap foreigners working in Kumshe-Banki axis in Bama Local Government Area, Borno State. Moreover, about three million persons have been internally displaced across the northern region. While the militant Boko Ḥarām is responsible for significant number of displacement in the northeastern part of

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the country since 2014, hundreds of thousands have fled into neighboring countries (Muhammad ibn Yusuf, 2008). However, the failure of security agencies to nip the insurgency in the bud and to ensure adequate protection of citizenry has heightened fear of being attacked among Nigerians at home and in Diaspora, as well as foreigners.

Religious Intolerance

Religious motivated crisis coordinated by a group of young militants with motive to constitute a Sharī'ah compliant government by violence in a secular and multi-religious Nigeria is detrimental to religious tolerance prevalent in the country over the years. Boko Ḥarām movement claims to follow the teachings of Islām in order to establish an Islamically-governed state through Jihād. Their attitude is not unconnected to the conviction that the path they have chosen called Jihād through horrific attacks and killings, is the only divinely ordained path to religious cum spiritual freedom (Ojo, 2017). Such attitudes (as against the dictates of Sharī'ah) are destructive acts that have exacerbated religious intolerance among religious faithful in Nigeria. However, history could attest to the tolerant attitude of Islām towards non-Muslims. Hashimi (2020) argued that the attitude of the holy Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] to the Christians of Najran and the permission to use his mosque for prayers, is sufficient to establish the practical evidence of religious tolerance in Islām (p. 473). Religious intolerance is dangerous to the stability and peace of any society, and the life of the people living within regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations.

Division, Distrust and Mutual Suspicion among Dominant Religious Groups

With increasing bombings of churches and killings of Christians from 2009 onward, scholars of church believe that the insurgency is an attack on Christianity (Lang, 2017). For instance, there were press releases associated with erstwhile president of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Ayo Oritsejafor, who requested that all Christian faithful defend themselves and retaliate any brutal action(s) against them (*Tell*, 23 January 2012, cited in Nkwede *et al.*, 2018). Iheanacho (2016) maintained that the bloody insurgence and wanton destruction of property by the Boko Ḥarām movement has become a spoke in the wheel of relations between the two major religious followers in Nigeria. Consequently, the Boko Ḥarām movement has become a household name for those Muslims, who follows Islamic injunctions by wearing ḥijāb, *khimār*, *niqāb*, *turbān*, and their trousers above ankles, or decided to leave their long beard, in the minds of non-Muslims.

Buttressing the above position, Oyesanya and Oni (2020) averred that the Boko Ḥarām movement has portrayed "Islām and Muslims as war-mongers, whose their sole objectives is to turn Nigeria to a Saudi Arabia and force everyone living in it to become Muslims. This insurgency has created unnecessary suspicion between Muslim and Christian masses." (pp. 227-228). Thus, religious insurgency by the Boko Ḥarām movement has brought division and distrust among the two dominant religious groups, Islām and Christianity in Nigeria, and fueled animosities among the adherents of these religions. In other words, the insurgency has pitted Muslims against Christians and has culminated in confrontations among different Islamic sects.

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Discord, Hostility and Anxiety among Northern and Southern Regions

Indeed, the religious insurgency has also exacerbated level of anxiety, hostility and sowed seeds of discord among Muslim north and Christian south in Nigeria. It has also aggravated the existing dichotomy along the northern Hausas and southern Igbos or Yoruba. The southerners prefer to identify northern Hausas or Fulanis by the name "Boko Ḥarām" rather than their real names. In fact, the insurgency was once considered anti-South, an attempt to destabilize or unseat Goodluck Jonathan-led administration, or an attack on the Igbos in the Northern regions (Nkwede *et al.,* 2018). For instance, 486 northerners who were traders and artisans after their arrest by the Army on 19 June 2014, were branded terrorists and subjected to inhuman treatment as a result of suspicion of being members of the Boko Ḥarām (Edozie & Adibe, 2014). Suspicion and anxiety had pervaded the nooks and crannies of Nigeria due to the provoked dilemma among the people to identify the perpetrators of religious insurgency. When suspicion, tension or anxiety is high in the society, it destabilizes the polity and as such people can no longer freely go about their normal day-to-day activities.

Fear and Hatred of Islām and its Adherents (Islamophobia)

The religious insurgency has increased palpable fear and hatred of Islām and its adherents. In the submission of Dauda (2020), Islamophobia connotes uninformed fear associated with Islām by non-Muslims that do not believe in the peaceful notions of the religion of Islām. It involves the hatred, negative stereotypes and hostility perpetrated towards Muslims due to wrong perception about Islām which reflects in verbal and physical attacks, harassment, discrimination, torture, murder, bombing, kidnapping, arson and vandalism, etc. Thus, Christians perceive all Muslims as terrorists and Islām as a religion of terrorism. Iheanacho (2016) noted that the Boko Ḥarām movement nurtures and propagates segregated ideology rooted in the philosophy of hate, discrimination and bigotry against other religions that are at variance with their notion of Islām. As a result, the religious insurgency of the Boko Ḥarām movement has resulted in Islamophobia, which in turn threatens peaceful and harmonious coexistence not only in Nigeria but other countries around the globe.

Human Rights Violation

The Boko Ḥarām movement has failed to acknowledge, accommodate and accept the rights of individuals to religion of their choice from other faith or moderate Muslims. Ojo (2017) asserted that palpable apprehension among the citizens due to the Boko Ḥarām insurgencies is an abuse of human rights. In its 2019 report, the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (2019) explained that the Boko Ḥarām movement's attacks in the northeast of Nigeria indicate a pattern of vicious and indiscriminate attacks and massacres, burning down of villages, attacks on protected sites, such as places of worship and schools, and the slaughter of people taking refuge in such sites; torture, cruel and degrading treatment; abduction on a massive scale, including of children; forced displacement; child recruitment; and extremely severe and widespread violations of the rights of women and girls,

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including sexual slavery, sexual violence, forced marriages and pregnancies, are all in violation of individual human rights and international humanitarian law principles.

The brutal assaults and killings of students, teachers, worshippers, religious leaders, traditional rulers, civilians and security agents, and bombing of mosques, churches, police posts, motor parks, markets, restaurants, public and private property, are attacks on their fundamental human rights to life, freedom of movement, rights to peaceful assembly, association and religion, freedom from unlawful interference with a person's privacy, family or home, and acquisition of property. Abduction of school girls, children and women; displacement of persons, abuse of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in their various camps; murder, torture, rape, forced marriages and the recruitment of child soldiers; and acquisition of territories, are a serious threat to rights to freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, freedom from slavery and servitude, freedom from unlawful detention, and the right to freedom of thought, expression, conscience and religion.

CONCLUSION

Despite being regarded as the religion of peace, Islām has certainly been used as a cloak for insurgence or terrorist activities. It has evolved into a manipulative instrument in the hands of unscrupulous members of society to engage in various wicked behaviors, hurting both the reputation of the religion and that of its devotees. Undoubtedly, the goal of Islām's state of peace is to promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. However, a look into the Boko Ḥarām movement's activities shows that its religious and ideological stands are in opposition to the teachings of Islām that it purports to represent. Aside from causing an unprecedented loss of life and property, Boko Ḥarām insurgency has also increased religious intolerance, worsened Nigeria's global peace ranking, and increased insecurity. Along with sowing the seeds of fear, dissension, and worry among the Northern and Southern regional groups, the insurgency has also intensified Islamophobia and the human rights crises. Additionally, it has led to a mutual mistrust, division, and suspicion between various religious organizations. Above all, the Boko Ḥarām terror campaign has significantly impeded efforts to advance sustainable peace in Nigeria.

In light of the foregoing conclusions, the article recommends that the Nigerian Supreme Councils for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) take the necessary steps to control the activities of Islamic organizations and, in particular, the doctrines of their Islamic clerics, in order to ensure that they are consistent with the messages of peace, tolerance, and good neighborliness that Islām promotes. Second, the NSCIA and Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) should collaborate with other national and local Islamic organizations to safeguard the current Muslim Ummah, particularly the youth, from extremism, dogmatism, and all other forms of blind obedience to radical preachers and to instill in them the imperative of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence in society as outlined in the holy Qur'an and *Aḥādīth*. This can be achieved by holding national conferences, forums, lectures, and seminars on a biannual or annual basis at the national stadium across the six geopolitical zones.

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Moreover, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or political differences, all peace-loving Nigerians should publicly condemn any faith-based group whose activities and teachings promote violence, intolerance, bigotry, and discrimination. They should also support the government in its battle against religious insurgency in Nigeria and neighbouring countries. Additionally, in order to enhance sustainable peace, the Federal Government should consider dialogue with the militants' leaders top priority, continue its rehabilitation programs for the movement members who have remorse, compensate the victims, and strengthen post-conflict peace-building initiatives in the impacted areas.

Most importantly, the government at all levels should improve on how they provide socio-welfare services to the populace. People's dissatisfaction with successive governments is mostly due to the dire economic situations, inept leadership, high levels of poverty and corruption, poor governance, and maladministrations. Therefore, governments should ensure that graduates, the majority of whom are unemployed youths, have access to sustainable employment opportunities and empowerment programs. By doing this, the likelihood that they will be manipulated or enlisted in dangerous organizations, where they are used for violent crimes like murder, arson, bombing, and property destruction is reduced.

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