

Economic Origins of Terrorism in the Sahel: An Examination of Terrorism in Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso

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Introduction

In the decade leading to the new millennium terrorism's nature undertook a drastic shift from political extremism toward radical religious fundamentalism. Religiously entrenched insurgent groups emerged in greater numbers moving beyond national borders and threatening states regionally as well as internationally. The Global War on Terrorism [GWOt] is now focusing on West Africa as more insurgent and terrorist networks have emerged since 2011. The Islamic State of the Greater Sahara [ISGS], Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin [JNIM], Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa [MUJAO], among others, have proliferated across national borders in West Africa. Their motives are wide-ranging, but Islamic extremism based primarily in Wahabism or Salafism remains the 'official' core impetus. However, consistent economic impoverishment and political suppression marks the history leading to the foundation of many West African terrorist and insurgent groups. Initially limited to Northern Mali and Southern Algeria, groups have spread across West Africa to establish significant conflict zones in Nigeria, Niger, and as of the last few years, Burkina Faso. The definition of terrorism used in this paper is taken from former Ambassador and Professor at the University of Michigan Ford Public Policy School Melvyn Levitsky because of its encompassing for any derivation of various terrorist organizations. His definition goes as follows,

“The use of targeted and indiscriminate violence and the threat of further violence by state, state-sponsored or non-state groups against individuals, states, state institutions or state property with the goal of creating fear and weakening political will in order to promote a political, religious or social agenda.”¹

One of the most active terrorist organizations is Boko Haram which emerged out of Northeastern Nigeria's Borno State. Currently led by a savage and brutal man named Abubakar

¹ Melvyn Levitsky (November 2020).

Shekau, Boko Haram's claimed *raison d'être* is based in Salafi scripture. Previous to 2009 they were a religious protest movement against what they saw as the degradation of Islamic values in Northern Nigeria. For much of their existence they operated as a civil disobedience group, but with the extrajudicial killing of their foundational leader Muhammad Yusuf in 2009 the organization transformed overnight to an incredibly violent insurgent group. Boko Haram claims its aim is to establish a theocratic Islamic Sharia state roughly within the boundaries of the medieval Kanem-Bornu Empire (700 C.E.-1380 C.E.) which dominated much of the Central Sahara from Northeast Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Northern Cameroon.

Niger, unlike Nigeria, faces threats from multiple terrorist organizations including Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province [ISWAP], JNIM, and ISGS, among others. Large scale operations by such organizations began in earnest between 2010 and 2011 during the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Libya's fall precipitated the expansion of many terror groups providing necessary arms pilfered from Gaddafi-era military outposts to assert themselves across the West African Sahara. Since this period of rapid expansion groups now challenge the Nigerien government's authority with aims from creating a theocratic Sharia state to creating a new Caliphate as was done in the Levant by ISIL. At least, these are the stated goals for several groups. True intentions may, in fact, be more complex than what is presented publicly as is the case in Burkina Faso.

As for terrorist organizations operating within Burkina Faso, the majority have established themselves in neighboring Niger and Mali but conduct attacks into Burkinabe territory. Ansarul Islam, founded by Malam Dicko in 2016, is the only terrorist organization of note native to Burkina Faso itself. Their aims mirror those of Boko Haram, agitating for a new political order based on grievance and fundamentalist Islamism as cures for socio-economic conditions in the country. Professing a desire to create a new theocracy, Dicko and his

successors attempt to manipulate impoverished individuals into their fold while also attempting to stoke ethnic tensions between Fulani pastoralists and the central government.

Throughout the last twenty years, the international security community and much of the professional literature produced has concluded religion is the primary motivating factor behind terrorist organizations in West Africa. Such conclusions are logical when taking into consideration the origins of many of these organizations and the zealous messages produced their leaders over time. For example, in multiple videos Abubakar Shekau expressed disdain for ‘Western Influences’ in Nigeria while making threats against anyone perceived as antithetical to his extremist version of Salafist Islam:

“In every nation, in every region, you [they] now have a decision to make. Either you are with us, I mean, we are Muslims who are following solid footsteps, or you are with the Obama, Françoise Holland, George Bush. Bush! Clinton! I forgot not Abraham Lincoln. Ban-Ki Moon and his people generally, and any unbeliever... kill kill kill kill kill kill! This war is against Christians, I mean Christians generally.” (New York Times Published on YouTube) ²

Compounding the religious veneer for many observers is the often Quranic education associated with recruits and leadership. However, I do not agree with this sentiment and argue that for most members in West African Islamist insurgent groups, religion plays a secondary role in their decision-making process. High-ranking leadership might use Salafism or revenge for acts of violence by a country’s government as their explicit principal motivation, yet in this paper I assert typical members have more pressing concerns.

Extreme poverty is a principal issue afflicting many West African countries and directly affects the decision making of the majority of recruits to join a terrorist group. Religion no doubt plays a role for volunteer fighters, however, no motivating factor is more dangerous in comparison to impoverished desperation in conjunction with a sense that there is nothing left to

² Adam Nossiter, “The New York Times,” *The New York Times* (Youtube.com, May 5, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLAKoJYTLfA>.

lose. These are the circumstances within which terrorism thrives. Extremist groups prey upon communities lacking, or without access to, basic goods and services which facilitate a means of a sufficient dignified livelihood. Throughout this paper a series of country case studies will analyze specific situational backgrounds in Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso where terrorism has emerged. The background analysis allows a further in-depth investigation of the economic factors in the following section establishing how poverty is primarily responsible for the causation of violent extremism. The discussion of the impact of economic factors over religious factors in inspiring terrorism will be finalized in the concluding section.

Assessment of Religious and Economic Discussions

While useful for understanding base factors in numerical terms, quantitative analysis is insufficient to properly gain a greater understanding of the influences which cause individuals to join terror groups. In order to determine the causes of violent extremism in the Sahel, I used qualitative data analysis methods collecting information from scholarly journals, IGO reports [e.g. OECD], U.S. Congressional publications, and newspaper articles. These reports and journals provided the proper informational basis to utilize qualitative tools capable of gauging the nuances affecting peoples' actions. Theoretical conflict theories based on research from Ole Magnus Theisen, James Fearon, and David Laitin form the base analytical framework to determine the importance of socio-economic conditions against religious factors. These three theorists created a series of conflict systems theories intended to for use as tools to gauge the type of conflict and interpret the causes associated with a conflict type once it is identified. This approach is helpful to determine which factorizations are preeminent causations and each describes the rating of factors from the most likely to least likely. Fearon and Laitin detail poor socio-economic conditions as enabling potential radical *fronduers* irrespective of religiously or

ethnically inspired mobilization; however, ethnic grievance politics is frequently used by terrorists in West Africa in attempts to recruit locals. As seen in analyzations of Burkina Faso, appeals to terrorism via ethnic grievances is continuously paired to political-economic marginalization. They propose four factors most likely to precipitate civil conflict: 1.) Poverty 2.) Political Instability 3.) Rough Terrain 4.) Large Populations.³ Notably they exclude ethnic and religious differences in their factorizations consistently. Evidence gathered by Ole Magnus Theisen indicate civil strife being likely to occur in areas experiencing low levels of economic development and high levels of poverty. Simultaneously, he reinforces criticisms of ethnic conflict noting in his analysis high levels of ethno-linguistic fractionalization are not significant determinants of civil strife, though instigators of terror, as mentioned, do often try to use ethnicity as a mobilizer. Rather, he reaffirms known indicators like government instability, sudden regime change, and the exacerbating effects of poverty.⁴ From these theorists I decided to utilize Relative Deprivation Theory as applied by them while analyzing the accumulated research.

Relative Deprivation Theory will be defined in this paper as: An individual or group perception of being disadvantaged inducing a sense of injustice potentially causing civil or violent conflict. Thomas Pettigrew lays out three qualifications of RDT: (1) They first make cognitive comparisons to other societal elements (2) Then come cognitive appraisals that they or their ingroup are disadvantaged (3) that these disadvantages are seen as unfair and arouse angry resentment.⁵ Over the course of time, perceptions of inequality mount until an intolerable threshold is reached at which point individuals organize protest movements. Protests

³ Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003), p. 88

⁴ Theisen, Ole Magnus. "Blood and Soil? Resource Scarcity and Internal Armed Conflict Revisited." *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 6 (2008), p. 811

⁵ Pettigrew, Thomas F. "Samuel Stouffer and Relative Deprivation." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2015), p. 12

categorically shift depending on whether demands are satisfied. Unmet appeals for equality raise possibilities of a violent response. Inversely, abrogating perceived systems of inequality pacify disquieted populations. ⁶

In 2015, an analyst in the Nigerian Ministry of Defense published an article and concluded states located in or around the Sahel region are more likely to be susceptible to terrorist activity. However, the causation superseded Islam, rather the onus is place upon poor socio-economic conditions often present in Sahelian states. The effects of climate change are increasingly taking a toll on Sahelian agro-pastoralists, exacerbating already meager economic conditions which compounds resource scarcity and inter-communal violence. Furthermore, insufficient domestic crop production intensifies poverty and lack of access to basic foodstuffs creating favorable recruitment zones for terrorist organizations like JNIM, ISGS, Boko Haram, Ansar-ul-Islam lil-Ichad wal Jihad [IRSAD], and MUJAO. ⁷ Furthermore, studies conducted on smuggling and trafficking in the Sahara have shown how severe unemployment, lack of opportunity, and crackdowns on smuggling licit household goods forces existing smugglers to increasingly transit illicit products [i.e. drugs, weapons, people] just to survive, rather than out of a desire to foment or assist terrorist groups. ⁸

An article published by *International Affairs* journal in 2005 also discussed conditions precipitating similar insurgencies to Islamist groups like the Niger Delta insurgencies. Titled *Combating Light Weapons Proliferation in West Africa*, it establishes ravenous corruption, youth unemployment, easily acquirable firearms, oil bunkering, and social disintegration as the factors causing conflict in Southeastern Nigeria. Unemployed youths without suitable alternative

⁶ Parvin, Manoucher. "Economic Determinants of Political Unrest: An Econometric Approach." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 17, no. 2 (1973)., p. 271-273

⁷ Ogbogu, Jennifer. "Impact of Middle East Terrorism on North Africa." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 7 (2015)., p. 14

⁸ Mangan, Fiona, and Matthias Nowak. Report. Small Arms Survey, 2019., p. 20

income streams via (in)formal markets have compelling motivation to participate in black markets, illicit trades, or insurgent activity especially if it provides financial resources to sustain their livelihoods. In addition, the article enforces how unemployed youth in Nigeria are often contracted by politicians as hired gangs to intimidate opponents and voters; a very tangible example to what lengths young men will go to for a source of income.⁹ In fact, youth unemployment materializes in the majority of literature featured in this paper. Published in 2002, *The Arms Trade and the Incidence of Political Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1967-97* reinforces inverse linkages between smuggling, political-economic development, and participation in occurrences of civil conflict. The conclusion established a negative relation, meaning when political-economic development and participation are easily accessible civil conflict is less likely to appear and occurrences of smuggling decrease. Additionally, it displays states with low levels of development lack sufficient financial resources to fund public resources such as health care and education or economic markets capable of employing its citizenry without which alternatives to insurgency or illicit smuggling are few.¹⁰ Now it would be foolish to assert religion plays no role for the average fighter. Religion is certainly used by leaders in jihadi terrorist cells as a tool for unity, propaganda and recruiting from Madrasas, like Boko Haram's Mohammad Yusuf did in his Madrasa in Maiduguri. Historian Jeffrey Seul postulated religion may be used as a veil over pertinent factors representing the actual intentions behind any given conflict. The following quotation is simultaneously useful when evaluating causations of ethnic conflict.

“... religious conflicts need not be about religion, and indeed usually have nonreligious cause. They are called religious conflicts because religion serves as

⁹ Vines, Alex. "Combating Light Weapons Proliferation in West Africa." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 81, no. 2 (2005), p. 354, 356

¹⁰ Craft, Cassidy, and Joseph P. Smaldone. "The Arms Trade and the Incidence of Political Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1967-97." *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 6 (2002), p. 699-700

the unifying and mobilizing identity. [...] it frequently supplies the fault line along which intergroup identity and resource competition occurs.” (p. 150) ¹¹

Thus, one observes an underlying current present in the majority of fundamentalist assemblages: economics, inequality, and corruption. As seen in analyzations of Burkina Faso, appeals to terrorism via ethnic grievances is continuously paired to political-economic marginalization. ^{12 13}

14 15 16

However, plenty of opposition exists contending RDT. Multiple academic studies and policy analysts seek to create an absolutist narrative of religious dominance pertaining to jihadist motivation. These explanatory paradigms center typically on public statements by jihadi organizations via social media or from press officers. In-depth examinations dissect intersectional sectarian relationships between disparate theological metaphysical historiographies discussing the nature of conflict within a given state. The nature of said conflicts usually being Christian-Muslim, moderate-extremist, or state-society dialectics and external influences of non-state/state actors in appearance. More absurd and radical examinations of Islamic extremism venture as far as to say it is a civilizational trait inherent in Islam causing fundamentalist terrorism. Such arguments are completely blinded to the nuances behind conflicts and wrongly portray Islam as fundamentally flawed. ¹⁷ In a 2017, the OECD published West African Papers report *Wars and Conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel*. In the report analysts concluded Boko Haram

¹¹ Agbibo, *Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.*, p. 150

¹² Barkindo, Atta. “BOKO HARAM-IS CONNECTION: Local & Regional Implications.” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no. 6 (June 2019)., p. 5

¹³ Dan Suleiman, Muhammad L. "Countering Boko Haram." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 8 (2015)., p. 24

¹⁴ Sulemana, Mohammed. "Islamism in West Africa: Context and Enabling Factors." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 2 (2015)., p. 21

¹⁵ Hansen, Jima, Abbas, and Abia. *Poverty and 'Economic Deprivation Theory' Street Children, Qur'anic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and Other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria*, p. 88

¹⁶ Higazi, Kendhammer, Mohammed, De Montclos, and Thurston *A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and Al-Qa'ida.*, p. 205

¹⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993)

aims to establish a Sharia state in West Africa exploiting pan-Islamist sentiments. The assessment concluded religion as the primary driving mechanism for the organization's violence.

¹⁸ Furthering and exemplifying the influence of sectarian arguments go as far back as British scholar Mervyn Hiskett. In a seminal piece he published regarding sectarian violence in Nigeria [*The Maitatsine Riots in Kano, 1980: An Assessment*] he explained conditions leading up to a series of riots in Northern Nigeria by fundamentalist Muslims. He asserted religion dictated how and why radical Islamists in Nigeria operate disputing arguments stressing socio-economic conditions causing radical Islamism in Nigeria. Specifically, he discusses how socio-economic marginalization simply ignores the complex historiography of Islam in West Africa. ¹⁹ These assessments constitute a common narrative basing sectarian conflicts in strictly theocratic terms.

Perhaps contributing the most to this narrative are Euro-American policy analysts seeking straightforward explanations which often merely examine shallow easily identifiable variables while ignoring deeper socio-economic intricacies. Euro-American governments create programs to curb terrorist activity Sahelo-Saharan Africa focusing specifically on individual or community de-radicalization alongside community engagement to stress positive relations while cursorily acknowledging economic grievances as factor, let alone a large contributing factor. Furthermore, a clear combating strategy specifies greater military strikes against suspected terrorist operations to disrupt supply routes which are often actually local community trade networks cross-cutting state and regional boundaries. No economic stability program is mentioned only reinforcing the preeminence of religious radicalism influencing a person's decision to participate in Islamist terrorism. ²⁰ Given organizations like Boko Haram's

¹⁸ Walther, *Wars and Conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel.*, p. 14

¹⁹ Hiskett, Mervyn. "The Maitatsine Riots in Kano, 1980: An Assessment." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17, no. 3 (1987)., p. 210-211

²⁰ Thomas, Clayton. *Al Qaeda and U.S. policy: Middle East and Africa, Al Qaeda and U.S. policy: Middle East and Africa* § (n.d.), p. 20

conspicuous extremist Salafi dogma, its easily identifiable motivations allow a cut and dry denouement especially when considering statements desiring the establishment of a new Islamic state in West Africa.²¹ Unfortunately, such observations, despite extensive qualitative examination of Islamic historiography, are inherently subject to superficial overview. It is a convenient surrogate conclusion allowing one to write off nuanced detail requiring further study to properly determine causal mechanisms generating fertile grounds in which violent fundamentalist Islam takes root. For example, if Islam is purely the reasoning for terrorism, why then is there a lack of fundamentalist violence in the vast majority of Muslim communities? Analogous arguments for religious fervor undermine nuance and, most critically, inappropriately discriminate against Muslims.

Case Studies of Terrorist Organizations: Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso

Nigeria

In the early 2000s, Mohammad Yusuf transformed a little-known sect called *Sahaba* into Boko Haram, a fervently fundamental Salafist community organization opposed to ‘Western’ education. Yusuf advocated Sharia Law as the only solution to perceptions of sectarian oppression and poor economic conditions in Northern Nigeria. From its inception in 2002, Boko Haram staged peaceful civil disobedience protests, equality advocacy for Muslims in Northern Nigeria, and engaged in community building. Yusuf ardently strived to lessen hardship stemming from unaddressed socio-economics steadily degrading in Northern Nigeria.²² In fact, socio-economic issues contribute to Boko Haram’s continued existence; their recruitment during Yusuf’s era to Shekau’s era capitalizes on disenfranchised unemployed youths.²³ In 2003 their

²¹ Walther, *Wars and Conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel.*, p. 12

²² Okereke, *From Obscurity to Global Visibility: Periscoping Abubakar Shekau.*, p. 18

²³ Dan Suleiman, Muhammad L. "Countering Boko Haram." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 8 (2015)., p. 22-23

headquarters moved to Maiduguri where Yusuf constructed a Mosque and school of Islamic learning promoting moral values he perceived as lost in contemporary Nigeria. Boko Haram's base of operations relocated in 2004 to Yusuf's second residence in Kanamma, but the Maiduguri complexes continued on as the 'face' of the group.

From 2004 to 2009, police crackdowns against Boko Haram rose in relation to their increasing popularity. As crackdowns grew in number and brutality Boko Haram responded in kind when assailed by security services using violent tactics. Consistent arrests combined with heavy-handed policing methods provoked retaliatory attacks on police stations resulting in deadly clashes leaving dozens dead between 2003 and 2009.^{24 25} Tensions reached a breaking point in 2009. In July military forces once again raided a Boko Haram complex seizing weapons and bomb making material. Simultaneously, police halted a Boko Haram funeral procession due to members refusing to obey a new helmet law requiring motorists wear helmets while operating motorcycles or mopeds. A scuffle occurred, police opened fire killing seventeen and wounding dozens more.²⁶ Four days of rioting erupted across Borno State. Yusuf announced retaliatory attacks if the perpetrating policemen were not promptly prosecuted. State officials refused and requested military assistance. Security services brutally suppressed rioters; estimates indicate 700 to 1000 people were killed in five days.^{27 28} Everything culminated when Yusuf and Alhaji Buji Foi, Boko Haram's primary financier, were arrested by local police forces. Foi was quietly murdered in a police station while the arresting officers extrajudicially executed Yusuf in the street before dragging his corpse behind a truck. Radical lieutenant Abubakar

²⁴ Falode, *The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015: A Strategic Analysis.*, p. 43-44

²⁵ Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho, *Onapajo Baptism by Fire': Boko Haram and the Reign of Terror in Nigeria.*, p.46

²⁶ Agbibo, *Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.*, p. 147

²⁷ Adesoji, *The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria / Die Boko-Haram-Unruhen Und Die Wiederbelebung Des Islam in Nigeria.*, p. 98

²⁸ Eveslage, *Clarifying Boko Haram's Transnational Intentions, Using Content Analysis of Public Statements in 2012.*, p. 50

Shekau seized control, fleeing into Sambisa Forest and concocting his revenge while Boko Haram reorganized.^{29 30}

From 2012 to 2015, Boko Haram aimed to create a Salafist breakaway state based loosely on the borders of Kanem-Bornu, a medieval kingdom which stretched across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger. To this end, leadership contacted Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb [AQIM] and Al-Shabaab (allegedly) for technical, financial, and training assistance. During this initial phase, Shekau procured weapons and armored vehicles pilfered from Libyan stockpiles abandoned during the civil war against Muammar Gaddafi. A short list of equipment reveals T-55 tanks, innumerable AK-47's, French Panhard ERC-90 armored vehicles, gunship technicals, anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft weapons, artillery, short-range missile launchers, etc.

2012 marked Boko Haram's meteoric Blitzkrieg across Borno, taking control over the entire state and peripheral regions of other states by late 2013 and early 2014; external operations in Niger and Cameroon at the time were limited to raiding and accessing smuggling networks. In the ensuing chaos of the Nigerian Army's retreat, Boko Haram seized vast quantities of heavy weaponry, army vehicles, and equipment. From 2012 to 2015, Shekau set up a hardline Salafist Sharia government to rule over his newly created state. However, international Euro-American military intelligence assistance stemming from concerns over Islamist extremism in West Africa and the election of a new president aided the Nigerian army's overall logistical, organizational, and operational capacity. The government launched a successful campaign in 2014 to 2015 to retake Borno state. Although defeated territorially, Boko Haram did not collapse. Rather, Shekau organized a retreat back into Sambisa forest.

²⁹ Hansen, Jima, Abbas, and Abia. *Poverty and 'Economic Deprivation Theory' Street Children, Qur'anic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and Other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria*, p. 89

³⁰ Adelaja. Labo, and Penar *Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists A Boko Haram Case Study.*, p 37

Since this significant setback in 2015, Boko Haram's overall strategy has shifted toward guerilla warfare. Conquest and state creation appear to have taken a backseat, instead insisting Sharia Law be instituted across all Nigeria. Furthermore, active operations expanded considerably into Chad, Niger, and Cameroon mirroring the first medieval Islamic state in the area, the Kanem-Bornu Empire. Shekau now controls pockets of territory inside each country, launching raids against villages and police stations to acquire supplies, equipment, recruits, and enslave women and children. These mobile cross-border basecamps for raiding also function as logistics centers for Boko Haram's smuggling operations across the Sahara. The financial importance of smuggling to Boko Haram's operations has increased since 2015. Trafficking routes are the primary funding source for the organization's operations and span existing networks, ancient and new, from the Niger Delta to Libya and Mali to Chad. Drugs are a key commodity in their trafficking system, such as marijuana, psychotropics, heroin [including supplies to make heroin like codeine syrup], other opioids, stimulants, narcotics, and sexual enhancement pharmaceuticals. Much of the drug supply originates from sources in South and Central America shipped across the Atlantic to Southern Europe and the Middle East. They are also involved in human trafficking, gun running, and extortion rackets. Secondary financial flows come from donors, plundering, and, to some extent, their affiliates. Fighters for the group are frequently given opioids before battle to reduce fear and pain sensations if someone is wounded.

Boko Haram's affiliations have changed as well over the last nine years. Previously mentioned, Shekau allied himself to AQIM, now JNIM, under the nominal leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri in exchange for financial, logistical, and training support. However, ISIL shifted Shekau's allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Boko Haram's territorial aims and version of violent fundamentalist Islamism more closely mirrored ISIS' overall strategy than AQIM's

causing them to officially split in 2015. Shekau’s new alliance formed Boko Haram as the Islamic State’s West Africa Province, or ISWAP. While a *de jure* part of ISIS, ISWAP [still colloquially Boko Haram] is *de facto* independent from the terrorist organization, but still receives funding and supplies in exchange for nominal recognition and lip-service.

Niger

Since the mid-2010s, Niger has been experiencing a rapid increase in insurgent and terrorist activity. Unlike Nigeria, multiple terrorist organizations operate in Niger and have become increasingly active. The multiple large terrorist organizations operating in Niger at the moment are JNIM, Boko Haram, ISGS, and ISWAP. These groups have established multiple mobile headquarters and are using a complex network of forward operating combat bases in Niger. Each temporary base operates as a logistical hub and planning centers in neighboring countries.^{31 32} Forward operating bases utilized by terrorist forces are capable of being quickly and easily relocated on a moment’s notice depending on nearby threats. This is possible because of the extremely isolated nature of the majority of Nigerien *communes* [provinces] and extraordinarily low population density.³³ It is exceedingly difficult, therefore, for military personnel to effectively patrol border regions or vast swathes of interior desert. Combat is often brief because these organizations have adopted hit-and-run ambush tactics or suicide bombings and IEDs.³⁴ The open expanse of Niger and its centrality withing the Sahara makes it a

³¹ Walther, O. (2017), “Wars and conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel”, West African Papers, N°10, OECD Publishing, Paris., p. 26

³² Commonwealth Office, “Terrorism - Niger Travel Advice,” GOV.UK (GOV.UK, May 4, 2020).

³³ Pierre Buyoya, “The Recurrent Security Crisis in Mali and the Role of the African Union,” *PRISM* 5, no. 2 (2015): p. 69

³⁴ Walther, *Wars and conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel.*, p. 20

preferable transiting route for trafficking used by these terrorist groups to acquire equipment, and financial resources from drugs and abductees flowing across all of the Sahara.^{35 36}

With the collapse of Gaddafi's Libya in 2011 a flood of small arms, heavy weaponry, and military vehicles permeated the entire Sahel-Sahara region via its porous and poorly secured border regions.³⁷ Tens of thousands of AK-47s ended up in Mali and Niger in time for the Malian crisis in 2012 to 2013. Large scale weapons running operations continued carrying stockpiles to Niger itself, Chad, Mali, and Nigeria. During one raid in 2014, French forces intercepted a convoy carrying several tons of small arms, ammunition, anti-aircraft missiles, a 23mm artillery piece, and 100 anti-tank rockets.³⁸ In the aftermath of this arms proliferation terrorist groups across West Africa's Sahelo-Saharan region were able to acquire enough firearms to markedly increase their combat capabilities. An additional source of instability was the successful military coup d'état overthrowing Niger's democratically elected president.³⁹

Subsequent attacks since the early 2010s have become ever more deadly, especially attacks committed by Boko Haram.^{40 41} Boko Haram supposedly aims to transform the country into an Islamic state based on stringent Sharia law while ISGS and ISWAS wish to conquer Niger to then integrate it into a larger West African caliphate similar to ISIL in Syria and Iraq.⁴² Interestingly, insurgent groups in Niger previous to the 2010s were not primarily focused on

³⁵ Pierre Buyoya, "The Recurrent Security Crisis in Mali and the Role of the African Union," *PRISM* 5, no. 2 (2015): pp. 60-71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26470398>

³⁶ Commonwealth Office, "Safety and Security - Niger Travel Advice," GOV.UK (GOV.UK, May 4, 2020), <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/niger/safety-and-security>

³⁷ Hahonou, Eric Komlavi. *STABILIZING NIGER: THE CHALLENGES OF BRIDGING LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY INTERESTS*. Report. Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016. 5-6

³⁸ MARSH, NICHOLAS. "Brothers Came Back with Weapons: The Effects of Arms Proliferation from Libya." *PRISM* 6, no. 4 (2017)., p. 83

³⁹ Walther, *Wars and conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel.*, p. 14

⁴⁰ Eric Komlavi Hahonou, "Stabilizing Niger: The Challenges of Bridging Local, National, and Global Security Interests," *Danish Institute for International Studies*, January 1, 2016., p. 5

⁴¹ Hahonou, *STABILIZING NIGER: THE CHALLENGES OF BRIDGING LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY INTERESTS*, p. 4

⁴² "Amid Unprecedented Violence, Escalation of Terrorist Attacks in West Africa, United Nations Regional Office Needs Greater Role, Speakers Tell Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," United Nations (United Nations Security Council, January 1, 2020).

religious extremism, rather groups typically aligned themselves to ethno-nationalism in efforts for either greater access to state resources and autonomy or ethno-nationalist separatism. The Tuareg rebellions from the 1990s to the mid-2000s embodied Nigerien intra-state conflict. Each rebellion was instigated because of the Nigerien government's consistent policies disenfranchising Tuaregs economically and politically, like stripping them of pastoral lands for extractive exploitation by foreign companies like the French mining company Areva.⁴³

Burkina Faso

Before 2015, Burkina Faso was known for being a country safe from terrorist activity. A country which had been ruled for three decades, until recently, by military dictator Blaise Compaoré, it was insulated from insurgent activity proliferating in its neighbors. After the first free and fair election in decades Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected president. Not long afterward Burkina Faso experienced its first attacks as groups crossed the Malian border attacking police and military outposts in the northeast during 2015. Yet, terrorist activity maintained a low-profile of cross-border raids until January 2016 when three AQIM affiliated agents attacked a hotel in the capital Ouagadougou killing 30 people and wounding 71.⁴⁴ It is during the transitory stage from a military government to a fairly elected democratic government that several terrorist organizations decided to strike precisely because of the political uncertainty and confusion. Additionally, Burkina Faso's foreign policy changed from a non-aligned neutrality in relation to terror organizations during the Compaoré regime to active participation in the wars against insurgency in West Africa. This change in policy helped transform the country into a legitimate target for terrorist groups.⁴⁵

⁴³ Franklin Charles Graham, "Abductions, Kidnappings and Killings in the Sahel and Sahara," *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 130 (2011), p. 597

⁴⁴ "Burkina Faso: Extremism & Counter-Extremism," October 27, 2020,

⁴⁵ Wendyam Hervé Lankoandé, "Burkina Faso at Crossroads," *Swiss Peace*, 2019., p. 2

Multiple insurgent organizations operate currently within Burkina Faso or along the border areas utilizing its porous entry points to escape into Niger or Mali after raids against security forces and local villages. Initial operations conducted by groups were primarily in the province of Soum in the northeast of the country. This province straddles a tripartite border region between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso which makes it an ideal place to launch attacks. It is also the birthplace of the only terrorist organization of any significance originating from Burkina Faso itself, Ansarul Islam. Translated as ‘Combat for Islam’, Ansarul Islam was led by Malam [teacher] Ibrahim Dicko from 2016 till his death in 2017. Ansarul Islam is now under the leadership of his brother Jafar Dicko. From its inception, Malam Dicko attempted to frame his organization around injustices against Fulani pastoralists committed by the former government in Ansarul Islam’s attempts to attract followers. However, the primary official focus is fundamentalist jihadi Islamism cloaked in Fulani grievances.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Ansarul Islam is not the only significant organization within the country.

Several major terrorist groups are currently active in Burkina Faso which makes all efforts to combat terrorism much more difficult whether operations are conducted by Burkina Faso, its regional allies, or its international partners [France and the United States] assisting their counter-insurgency operations against the major organizations previously mentioned. Other minor groups do exist, however, these are typically affiliates to one of the larger terrorist organizations.⁴⁷⁴⁸ As more groups have begun conducting operations in Burkina Faso the areas affected have expanded from Soum to all of the country’s Sahel region and Centre Nord regions in the north.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Virginia Comolli, “West Africa and the Sahel,” *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 2018., p. 102

⁴⁷ “The World Factbook: Burkina Faso,” Central Intelligence Agency (Central Intelligence Agency, February 1, 2018).

⁴⁸ “Burkina Faso: Extremism & Counter-Extremism,” Counter Extremism Project, October 27, 2020.

⁴⁹ UNHCR, “Burkina Faso: Country Operation Update,” Burkina Faso: Country Operation Update § (2020)., p. 3

In terms of counter-insurgency operations, the Burkinabe military has not been successful in ceasing hostile actors from committing atrocities in their territory. As of 2017, the total of active and deployed military personnel stood at 11,000.⁵⁰ Of these troops, many are ill-trained and not properly equipped to handle insurgent activity at this scale by so many different groups. Their forces do not have the skill sets necessary to counteract the hit-and-run tactics often employed by jihadists, especially tactics deploying IEDs or other landmine type devices. The porosity of Burkina Faso's border is ideal to allow such tactics of guerrilla warfare.⁵¹ Therefore, the Burkinabe army must rely on the combination of their soldiers, local militias, and international military assistance provided by the United States and France. These local militias, known as the koglwego, autonomously from the government take on roles as providers of security in the region, often vigilante justice.⁵² Unfortunately, there are several cases of civilian displacement and casualties because of koglwego militias roaming across the countryside.⁵³⁵⁴ Actions committed by koglwegos are a source of concern for government officials worrying the militias might push victims of their reprisal attacks into the hands of terrorists. Specifically, officials are worried attacks upon Fulani pastoralists will send Fulani (under)unemployed young men to join insurgent groups.⁵⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁰ "Burkina Faso Military Size 1985-2020," MacroTrends, accessed November 25, 2020,

⁵¹ Adam Moe Fejerskov, Signe Cold-Ravnkilde, and Peter Albrecht, "West Africa: MINUSMA, UN, and G5 Sahel," *Danish Institute for International Studies*, January 1, 2017., p. 51

⁵² Snyder, Julie N., Alma Abdul-Hadi Jadallah, Sohini Chatterjee, Péter Krekó, and Lauren Mooney. *COUNTERTERRORISM MEASURES AND CIVIL SOCIETY: Changing the Will, Finding the Way*. Report. Edited by Baydas Lana and Green Shannon N. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2018., p. 36, 38

⁵³ "Atrocity Alert No. 200: Burundi, Burkina Faso and COVID-19," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, April 22, 2020.

⁵⁴ "Atrocity Alert No. 200: Burundi, Burkina Faso and COVID-19," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, April 22, 2020.

⁵⁵ Comolli, *West Africa and the Sahel.*, p. 102

⁵⁶ Augustin Loada and Peter Romaniuk, "Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Toward National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity", *Global Center on Cooperative Security*, June 1, 2014., p. 19

Economic Origins of Terrorism: Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso

Nigeria

To understand the context which helped expand Boko Haram we must look at the economic situation around the time of their expansion around the time of Yusuf's death. From 2009 to 2011 Nigerian economic growth rates averaged 7-8 percent, primarily based in oil exports. Yet, Northern Nigeria's poverty and unemployment rates are astronomically high. Northern Nigeria's population is roughly 60 million and experiences the highest percentage of poverty in country. In 2011, the extreme poverty rate of Northern Muslims was 72 percent [extreme poverty defined by living on less than \$1.25 US per day]. As of 2012, unemployment stood at 64.8 percent in the northeast and 61.2 percent in the northwest.⁵⁷ The average Boko Haram fighter comes from the poorest segments of society, e.g. unemployed urbanites, drug addicts, criminals seeking escape, opportunists, and subsistence farmers unable to provide for themselves. All are victims of Boko Haram recruitment. Youth participation in extremist organizations or insurgent groups is more likely in areas where economic alternatives to violence are worse than taking up arms.^{58 59} Government corruption exacerbates the situation where fraud is interpreted as intentional economic sabotage by Christian politicians in the south. Impingements upon civil-political rights and mass unemployment or destitution are positively linked to outbreaks of domestic terrorism as some citizens feel they have no other political or economic outlet.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Agbiboa, *Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.*, p. 151

⁵⁸ Fearon, Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.*, p. 80

⁵⁹ *The Fight against Boko Haram | Hotspots* (Sky News, 2019).

⁶⁰ Williams *Continuity and Change in War and Conflict in Africa.*, p. 40

Boko Haram’s vicious retaliation becomes alluring in the eyes of the oppressed.^{61 62}

Vulnerable populations, historically demonstrated by communism and fascism, are definitively more susceptible to charismatic demagoguery and Northern Nigerian society is emblematic of a pattern of unrest, demanding basic necessities for sustainable living standards.⁶³ To quote Agbiboa,

“[...] Boko Haram communities had been wrecked by ‘poverty, deteriorating social services and infrastructure... rising numbers of unemployed graduates, massive numbers of unemployed youths, dwindling fortunes in agriculture... and the weak and dwindling productive base of the northern economy.’”⁶⁴

Boko Haram presents itself to the impoverished as the singular avenue for the Umma’s [Muslim community] equality. Imam Bello, a northern cleric, referring to graduates of Islamic schools said, “You are unemployed, you are poor and you have no means of survival. This makes them easy targets of Boko Haram [...] they would be given money; 5,000, 10,000 naira. The moment they see money they get interested. They join.” 5,000 naira is \$13.79; 10,000 naira is \$27.59.^{65 66}

⁶⁷ Boko Haram becomes a form of employment for thousands since the Nigerian government demonstrates either an inability or unwillingness to economically develop Northern Nigeria.⁶⁸

In a series of surveys published by Hansen et. al. (2016), families were asked why their relatives joined Boko Haram. The most consistent response determined income as the most enticing

⁶¹ Barkindo, *Join the Caraban’ The Ideology of Political Authority in Islam from Ibn Taymiyya to Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria.*, p. 37

⁶² Adelaja, Labo, and Penar *Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists A Boko Haram Case Study.*, p 37

⁶³ Adesoji, *Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State*, p. 106

⁶⁴ Agbiboa, *Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.*, p. 148

⁶⁵ Hansen, Jima, Abbas, and Abia. *Poverty and ‘Economic Deprivation Theory’ Street Children, Qur’anic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and Other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria*, p. 90-91

⁶⁶ “How Much Is 5000 Naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) According to the Foreign Exchange Rate for Today,” How much is 5000 naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) according to the foreign exchange rate for today, accessed December 13, 2019

⁶⁷ “How Much Is 10000 Naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) According to the Foreign Exchange Rate for Today,” How much is 10000 naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) according to the foreign exchange rate for today, accessed December 13, 2019

⁶⁸ *The War Against Boko Haram* (Vice News, 2015)

influence in decisions to sign-up. 76 percent of participants responded that their relatives were extremely poor.⁶⁹ Abubakar Shekau takes excellent advantage of mass unemployment incentivizing many while providing a moral justification of their atrocities in the pursuit of wealth via religion. The way young men are recruited demonstrates the importance of economic security over sectarian concerns, specifically how Boko Haram targets destitute young men.⁷⁰

The organization integrated itself within AQIM drug networks in the Sahel currently transporting narcotics, marijuana, and other opioids to northern Africa accessing illicit European pharmaceutical and drug markets.^{71 72 73 74 75} In 2015 alone Nigerian military forces captured a major Boko Haram narcotics smuggler carrying multiple tons of narcotics and opioids. Bases and training camps captured by army units discovered stimulants, opioids, depressants, and coital enhancing drugs. Narcotics smuggling for the purposes of both individual use and for revenue generation illuminates fissures in the sectarian motivation argument for Boko Haram and terrorist organizations generally, e.g. the Haqqani Network, AQIM, Al-Shabaab.⁷⁶ In 2015, Boko Haram's primary drugs and logistics supplier was arrested in Yobe State. He was carrying marijuana, chloroform, and tramadol.⁷⁷ Again in 2016, a drug-runner supplying logistics and trading narcotics were arrested by Nigerian military forces monitoring northeastern border

⁶⁹ Hansen, Jima, Abbas, and Abia. *Poverty and 'Economic Deprivation Theory' Street Children, Qur'anic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and Other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria*, p. 89

⁷⁰ Sulemana, Mohammed. "Islamism in West Africa: Context and Enabling Factors." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 2 (2015), p. 21-22

⁷¹ "Troops Nab Major Boko Haram Drugs and Logistics Supplier," *All Africa*, September 9, 2015.

⁷² Mathieu Bere. "Armed Rebellion, Violent Extremism, and the Challenges of International Intervention in Mali." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 7, no. 2 (2017), p. 71

⁷³ Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho, Onapajo *Baptism by Fire': Boko Haram and the Reign of Terror in Nigeria.*, p. 48

⁷⁴ Agbibo, *Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.*, p. 148

⁷⁵ Niang, Amy. "Ransoming, Compensatory Violence, and Humanitarianism in the Sahel." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 39, no. 4 (2014), p. 232, 237-238

⁷⁶ "Weak Point: Boko Haram's use of Stimulant Drugs." 2015. *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy* 43 (11): 20.

⁷⁷ "Nigerian Troops Intercept Boko Haram Drugs Supplier." *BBC Monitoring Africa*. September 9, 2015.

checkpoints. The man, Kadiri Umate, was caught with tramadol, a highly addictive opiate used during combat to suppress fear responses, treat injured, and enjoy for leisure.^{78 79}

Then in 2019, 21 Boko Haram drug smugglers were captured by a Nigerian Narcotics units. They were ferrying 239.9 kg of marijuana, 57.7 kg of psychotropics, 274 bottles of codeine syrup, and 229.6 kg of other hard drugs; codeine syrup is the primary element when making heroin.⁸⁰ Testimony from the smugglers' ringleader blamed rampant unemployment for he and his men's allegiance to Boko Haram.⁸¹ Their desperation forced these poverty-stricken men into Boko Haram's clutch seeking any monies available. Shekau's deep involvement in trafficking networks has been facilitated by AQIM's own cocaine and heroin trade through the Sahel's porous borders. Drug smuggling is a high-risk-high-reward cash stream providing Boko Haram members income not normally accessible in (in)formal employment sectors.⁸²

NIGER

Niger's economic situation is among the poorest in the world. In 2019, the extreme poverty rate [less than \$1.90 per day] stood at 41.1 percent of the population, or 9.5 million people of a total population of twenty million.⁸³ For Nigeriens economic opportunities enabling upward mobility are limited. Agriculture and pastoral herding comprise forty percent of the country's GDP while employing a disproportionate 87 percent of all Niger's working age-population.⁸⁴ Agricultural livelihood dependence has become increasingly risky as climate

⁷⁸ "Troops Nab Boko Haram Drugs, Fuel Suppliers," *All Africa*, October 31, 2016.

⁷⁹ Colin Freeman, "Nigeria Faces Opioid Crisis; Everyone from Boko Haram Fighters to Students and Farm Labourers Use Drug to Dull Pain," *The Vancouver Sun*, July 27, 2019.

⁸⁰ "(Special for CAFS) Nigerian Police Nab 21 Suppliers of Hard Drugs to Boko Haram," *Xinhua News Agency*, October 3, 2019.

⁸¹ "Boko Haram Drug Suppliers Nabbed in Jalingo," *The Daily Trust*, October 3, 2019.

⁸² *Exploring the Financial Nexus of Terrorism, Drug Trafficking, and Organized Crime: Hearing before the Committee of Financial Services Subcommittee on Terrorism and Illicit Finance, House of Representatives*, 115th Cong. 2 (2018), p. 12

⁸³ "Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$1.90 a Day (2011 PPP) (% of Population)."

⁸⁴ "Overview," accessed November 26, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger/overview>.

change negatively affects regular rainfall patterns and has sped the process of desertification. Highlighting dangers to pastoral communities is a 2017 deficit of 10 million tons of feed necessary to sufficiently supply the countries livestock.⁸⁵ Aside from agriculture, the country is extremely dependent resource extraction like uranium mined by French company Areva, artisanal gold mining, and a growing oil production industry. In fact, oil is projected to go from four percent of the economy to twenty-four percent by 2022.⁸⁶ These extractive industries comprise much of the remaining sixty percent of Niger's GDP. In addition, for years the uranium mining company Areva consistently fought motions by Niger to raise their royalties from 5.5 percent to 12 percent; the royalty did eventually rise in 2013 after twenty years of wrangling.⁸⁷ The state of Niger's economic structuring is inherently detrimental to Nigeriens seeking greater economic opportunity given the resource dependency. Further exacerbating the situation is Niger's high level of unemployment. Official records indicate unemployment ranging from 40 percent to 84 percent.⁸⁸ Youth unemployment comprises 17 percent at the lowest approximation from 2017.⁹⁰ Youth dissatisfaction and unemployment is a significant threat precisely because destitute unemployed youths are much more likely to join insurgent or jihadist groups over other strata in society.

⁸⁵ "Le Bilan Alimentaire Animal, Une Approche De La FAO Pour Booster l'Élevage Et Renforcer La Résilience Des Populations Pastorales Et Agro-Pastorales," FAO.org (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, March 21, 2019), <http://www.fao.org/niger/actualites/detail-events/en/c/1186345/>

⁸⁶ Dalatou Mamane, "Niger Seeks to Step up Oil Production with Pipeline to Coast," AP NEWS (Associated Press, September 18, 2019).

⁸⁷ Idrissa, Rahmane. "Weakened States and Market Giants: Neoliberalism and Democracy in Niger and West Bengal." *Africa Development / Afrique Et Développement* 43, no. 3 (2018)., p. 38

⁸⁸ "Labor Force Participation Rate, Total (% of Total Population Ages 15+) (National Estimate) - Niger," The World Bank.

⁸⁹ Saadatou Sangare and Hélène Maisonnave, "Mining and Petroleum Boom and Public Spending Policies in Niger: a Dynamic Computable General Equilibrium Analysis," *Environment and Development Economics*, 2018., p. 584

⁹⁰ African Development Bank Group, "Niger Economic Outlook," African Development Bank - Building today, a better Africa tomorrow (African Development Bank Group, February 13, 2020).

Compounding issues of unemployment are government operations cracking down on smuggling routes. Described as purely terrorist and drug running routes, the majority of smuggled items are normal commodities like sorghum, pasta, cigarettes, clothing, household goods, gasoline.⁹¹ Smuggling and illegal transiting of goods provides a significant source of income for individuals and communities, especially in the nomado-pastoral communities in the north. The mobility of herdsmen further contributes to trade via caravans formed by pastoralists as they travel across the country along seasonal migration routes.⁹² Illicit trading also functions as a considerable form of employment for those unable to access formal employment markets. However, on all smuggling in the country. These crackdowns do not only affect drug and weapons smuggling, but is also devastating the livelihoods of smugglers, their families, and communities which rely on trading smuggled goods. Entire local economies rely on smuggling for their household goods, trading gold from illicit artisanal mines, to conduct business, and attract migrant labor. The government's crackdown on smuggling is economically hurting tens of thousands of Nigeriens which makes it easy for terrorist propaganda to depict the central government as an evil entity. Now there are thousands of young men formerly involved in the smuggling economy who are unemployed and without a stable source of income. Worse still is how various ethnic groups feel targeted by these policies which infringe on their ability to provide migrant labor, further enabling jihadists to play on economic and ethno-political marginalization.⁹³ People find themselves then conducting high-risk high-reward smuggling for terrorist groups to earn a meager living. Illicit economic activity such as smuggling drugs, running weapons, or selling hostages to terrorists is not preferable to most participants, but is one

⁹¹ Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 95-97

⁹² Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. "Mobile Livestock Keeping in Niger." YouTube video, 13:17. January 23rd, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSzKavitef4>

⁹³ Claes, Johannes, and Anna Schmauder. *When the Dust Settles: Economic and Governance Repercussions of Migration Policies in Niger's North*. Report. Clingendael Institute, 2020., p. 17-22

of the few lucrative avenues available, especially in the Sahel and Sahara.⁹⁴ As Niger's government further cracks-down on cross-border smuggling of even non-illicit goods more young men are being driven to either smuggle illicit products or are being tempted to join jihadist terrorist networks for the financial incentives.⁹⁵

Furthermore, there is significant evidence terrorist organizations provide better financial incentives, paying higher "wages" than most informal-formal work opportunities. Such financial incentives are known to attract mostly unemployed desperately poor young men in Niger who have little to no education. One group in Niger offered €500 to €1,000 merely to join and Boko Haram is well known to offer large sign-up allotments excluding monthly "wages" or wealth pilfered from villages.^{96 97} As stated in a 2017 UNDP report on extremism in Africa,

"...economic factors are likely to be a critical component of the overall incentives and drivers leading to recruitment in many cases, although at the same time are also unlikely to be the sole factor... The economic injustices and relative deprivation faced provide fertile ground for recruitment. The fact that employment was highlighted as an important issue by reference group respondents indicates the threat of future violent extremist expansion in Africa."⁹⁸

As found in the UNDP report the highest percentage of former Boko Haram combatants who joined voluntarily sought employment opportunities and 42 percent reported their monthly earnings being substantially more than local incomes.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Rita Abrahamsen and James Currey, *Conflict and Security in Africa* (Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p. 149-151

⁹⁵ Mangan, Fiona, and Matthias Nowak. Report. Small Arms Survey, 2019., p. 20

⁹⁶ Hansen, Jima, Abbas, and Abia. *Poverty and 'Economic Deprivation Theory' Street Children, Qur'anic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and Other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria*, p. 90-91

⁹⁷ Pezard, Stephanie, and Michael Shurkin. "Is There a Nigerien Model of Resilience?" In *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement.*, p. 83

⁹⁸ *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment* (New York: United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Africa, 2017), p. 59

⁹⁹ *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment.*, p. 58

BURKINA FASO

A land-locked country in the heart of West Africa, Burkina Faso is a largely impoverished country where approximately 40.1 to 44.7 percent of its twenty-one-million-person population lives below the international poverty line [\$1.90]. Much of the poverty is spread across the vast rural areas of the country and is higher in rural areas than the national average at approximately between 47.5 and 51 percent. The poverty rate is extraordinarily higher in northern [68 percent] and eastern [62 percent] provinces where most insurgent activity takes place in the Sahel dry savannah and Sahara Desert.^{100 101} Burkina Faso's population primarily relies on agriculture as a source of livelihood and used to comprise one third of the country's overall GDP, but now accounts for 23 percent in 2019.^{102 103} Estimates gauging how many Burkinabe work in agriculture vary considerably from 60 percent to 90 percent, however, what is agreed upon is subsistence agriculture dominates the industry followed closely by cotton.^{104 105} Adding to potential issues of economic radicalization is growing desertification and resource scarcity affecting agricultural production to northern and eastern Burkinabe farming communities, e.g. water scarcity resulting from invariable rainfall.¹⁰⁶

As for the unemployment rate, no reliable measure exists since 2004 when the last comprehensive survey was completed which indicated a 77 percent unemployment rate. Contemporary measures in the past two years indicate unemployment is somewhere between six

¹⁰⁰ African Development Bank, "Burkina Faso Economic Outlook," February 13, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, "Key Challenges, Opportunities and Risks in Burkina Faso," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

¹⁰² Unctad, "General Profile: Burkina Faso," November 11, 2020, <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/CountryProfile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/854/index.html>.

¹⁰³ "Burkina Faso (BFA) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners," Observatory of Economic Complexity, n.d.

¹⁰⁴ "Creating Markets in Burkina Faso: Growing Burkina Faso's Private Sector and Harnessing It to Bolster Economic Resilience," *Creating Markets in Burkina Faso: Growing Burkina Faso's Private Sector and Harnessing It to Bolster Economic Resilience* § (2019), p. 15

¹⁰⁵ Loada and Romaniuk, *Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Toward National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity*, p. 16

¹⁰⁶ LARA, CHRISTIAN, and GABRIEL DELSOL. *Sustaining Peace in Burkina Faso: Responding to an Emerging Crisis*. Report. International Peace Institute, 2020., p. 2

and nine percent. Given these wild statistical fluctuations it is difficult to ascertain a reliable figure. However, when considering the poverty rate and informal market employment estimates, a reasonable approximation may rest between 30 and 60 percent. Such an elevated formal unemployment rate fits market indicators of manufacturing's share of labor force and the percentage of individuals involved in services whether informal or formal. An indicator supporting this approximation is a World Bank data report suggesting only 42.7 percent of the population was formally employed in 2018.¹⁰⁷ ¹⁰⁸ ¹⁰⁹ From these figures it is clear much of Burkinabe citizens do not have access to employment opportunities which are capable of supporting a livelihood status above the poverty line or allows upward mobility. Furthermore, the Burkinabe economy is heavily reliant on service provision, a reliance that has only increased over the last decade. Services in the formal sector provide approximately 72 percent of the export value while mineral exports are approximately 15 percent.¹¹⁰

All of these economic factors in conjunction presents a serious dilemma to the Burkinabe government. There are substantial worries in government and civil society that destitute unemployed young men and boys will be lured into joining one of the many terrorist organizations operating in the north and east. Furthermore, decades of perceived government mismanagement and discrimination against northern and eastern populations embittered multitudes of communities. Interviews with residents indicate a sense of regional marginalization by government officials. For example, often residents perceive officials from the southern and western areas of Burkina Faso appointed to positions in the north and east use their offices to gain vast sums of wealth at their expense.¹¹¹ Similar to Muslims in northern and

¹⁰⁷ "Employment to Population Ratio, 15+, Total (%) (National Estimate) - Burkina Faso," The World Bank, n.d.

¹⁰⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook: Burkina Faso*.

¹⁰⁹ "Burkina Faso: Economy," GlobalEdge, n.d.

¹¹⁰ UNCTAD, "General Profile: Burkina Faso," November 11, 2020.

¹¹¹ Lankoandé, *Burkina Faso at Crossroads.*, p. 2

northeastern Nigeria, issues of government clientelism and graft exacerbate pre-existing tensions toward the central authorities in Ouagadougou. A sense of socio-economic and political neglect, though not permeating throughout all of northern and eastern Burkina Faso, is present which can be used as an incentivization by terrorist groups like Ansarul Islam or JNIM among others. In fact, reports detail Ansarul Islam's recruitment strategy is to take advantage of feelings of neglect and marginalization.

In 2017, 200 young men joined Malam Dicko's terrorist organization.¹¹² Ansarul Islam is trying to increase recruitment by attempting to exacerbate ethnic tensions in the Fulani community regarding perceptions of poor access to local and government resources just as Boko Haram is doing in Niger and Nigeria in the Muslim majority areas and Hausa communities.¹¹³ Compounding counter-terrorist recruitment is a generational divide straining work opportunity for Burkinabe youth, especially since youth unemployment is proportionally higher leaving youth financially vulnerable to economic grievance politics expressed in Ansarul Islam's propaganda. Thankfully, as of yet, community traction has not shown significant appeal. However, the longer violence devastates northern Burkina Faso hindering rebuilding and rehabilitation efforts by the central government the more likely it is grievance politics may successfully affect recruitment.¹¹⁴ In the meantime, terrorist groups like Ansarul Islam, JNIM, ISGS, al-Mourabitoun, IRSAD, and MUJAO are financing themselves by providing protection to or directly smuggling narcotics and opioids through Burkina Faso which provides needed funds to entice poor young men and boys. In 2018 alone over \$800,000 in cocaine and heroine were

¹¹² Snyder, Jadallah, Chatterjee, Krekó, and Mooney, *COUNTERTERRORISM MEASURES AND CIVIL SOCIETY: Changing the Will, Finding the Way.*, p. 37

¹¹³ Fejerskov, Cold-Ravnkilde, and Albrecht, *West Africa: MINUSMA, UN, and G5 Sahel.*, p. 46

¹¹⁴ Le Roux, *Africa Center for Strategic Studies.*, p. 2-3

seized by military personnel transiting north toward Europe. Vast sums of money traffic through jihadist-controlled areas bringing in criminals and destitute youths alike.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

Clearly there is a strong linkage between poor economic development and cases of sectarian terrorism. Religion holds a preeminent public display for a group's and people's motivations for joining terrorist organizations, however, conclusions unilaterally presupposing the dominance of religion in an individual's decision making does not reflect the more nuanced reality. Those persons who experience extreme poverty are much more likely to join terrorist organizations in the pursuit of better financial conditions and economic security, most specifically if violent extremist organizations pay significantly more than what someone can expect in one month. While religion may factor into a decision to join terrorist groups such decisions primarily revolve around how extirpate oneself from extreme poverty. These conclusions discussed over the course of the paper came into being after extensive research into the relations of current terrorist activity experienced in West Africa and the levels of poverty experienced in those areas in comparison to areas which do not experience extreme levels of poverty. Using economic data, qualitative reports from conflict zones, second-hand interviews, and news reports this paper has been able to demonstrate a clear relation between terrorist activity and economic deprivation over predominant theories of the relation of religion and terrorism.

As the nature of terrorism alters over time so, too, does its perceived rationale. Transitioning from political extremism to religious fundamentalism, extensive time is spent analyzing motivations inspiring acts of terrorism. Scholars and policy analysts create strategies

¹¹⁵ Ardigo, Iñaki Albisu, Matthew Jenkins, and Guillaume Nicaise. Report. Transparency International, 2019., p. 16

designed to counter radicalism in a given locality based off gathered data. The traditional religiously oriented focus of policy and scholarly assessments do not portray facts on the ground linking the reasoning behind a average member of a terrorist organization. Strategists construct programs advocating a two-fold approach. The first component entails military strikes to provide temporary relief, weakening an organization's structure and assault capabilities. The second component comprises deradicalization programs to stem extremist Islamism's continued spread, hopefully crippling any group's recruitment base. Such simple and straightforward plans appear to be sound methods for curbing terrorism. Indeed, military strikes and deradicalization programs are critical elements of any successful counterterrorism effort. However, despite several offensive campaigns targeting groups like Boko Haram, they continue to persist even while casualty counts mount higher. Their menacing reign of terror has not ceased despite over a decade of military campaigning. Deradicalization efforts have failed to undermine local support in throughout the Sahel which is exemplified by new recruits repeatedly filling ranks left vacant from military operations. Such plans ignore the key element inspiring individuals to join such organizations.

A new approach of analysis is needed for the creation of effective programs in order to successfully counter groups like Boko Haram, for example.¹¹⁶ We must reorient our investigations from religious zealotry toward economic deprivation experienced throughout Northern Nigeria's Muslim population. As long as Nigeria's northern Muslims are locked in perpetual grinding poverty people will be willing to fight. High unemployment, severe income inequality, and acute underdevelopment are excellent conditions for recruitment, especially among young unemployed men with nothing to lose. Boko Haram offers significant financial

¹¹⁶ *The Fight Against Boko Haram Tangled Up in Nigerian and Regional Politics Analysis.*, p. 3

incentives to a population of 60 million where tens of millions are surviving on less than \$1.25 per day. When opportunity does not exist in formal employment and informal sectors cannot provide a livable wage it is logical to join Boko Haram when they are able to offer 5,000 naira [\$13.79] to 10,000 naira [\$27.59] to fight, sums greater than what the average unemployed Northern Nigerian can expect to make in one month.^{117 118 119} Underdevelopment and crushing poverty are where conflicts thrive. Clearly fundamentalism is a minor factorization in decision making processes. Moreover, people are willing to undertake extremely dangerous tasks besides combat to earn money. Drug-running generates substantial wealth galvanizing poor Nigeriens and Nigerians which undermines deradicalization programs. Is someone truly a puritanical Jihadist when violating a foundational tenant of Islam proscribing use of illicit substances and when it is ‘officially’ declared ‘haram’ by previous and current leadership? No.

The only way to completely eliminate terrorist groups Boko Haram from Northern Nigeria and the greater West Africa region is to have a combined initiative of economic development and military strikes. Before any such action is undertaken scholars and analysts must investigate further how pervasive destitution affects individuals’ mindset. If we can understand a person’s decision making perhaps a solution can possibly be created in a localized context. Serious study should investigate how poverty influences the mindset of a poor individual in contrast to the affluent and those earning sustainable wages. Further analysis is also required to determine, if possible, at what level of poverty is someone more likely to join an

¹¹⁷ “How Much Is 10000 Naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) According to the Foreign Exchange Rate for Today,” How much is 10000 naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) according to the foreign exchange rate for today, accessed December 13, 2019

¹¹⁸ “How Much Is 5000 Naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) According to the Foreign Exchange Rate for Today,” How much is 5000 naira ₦ (NGN) to \$ (USD) according to the foreign exchange rate for today, accessed December 13, 2019

¹¹⁹ Hansen, Jima, Abbas, and Abia. *Poverty and ‘Economic Deprivation Theory’ Street Children, Qur’anic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and Other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria*, p. 90-91

extremist terror organization. Finally, the linkages between acute poverty and violence have not been studied enough in regard to sectarian terrorist organizations for researchers and policy analysts to have a more nuanced understanding of why people join terrorist groups and how these groups continue to survive.

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Appendix – Summer Practicum with Spirit of America

From May to August 2020, I spent a summer practicum with the NGO non-profit *Spirit of America*. During the four months at Spirit of America I worked as the ‘Field Operations Support Intern’ providing necessary support to three of the seven field managers. Each field manager is regionally focused and the three I supported were the Europe, Africa, and Asia field managers. Over the course of my internship, I threw myself into the work tasked to me with vigor and enthusiasm. Throughout the process of interning for Spirit of America my supervisor frequently encouraged me to be a self-starting and self-sufficient individual capable of creating my own deadlines while remaining in regular contact with superiors. In this, I learned vital aspects of how professional corporate environments inside of the non-governmental organization workspace operate.

Each manager allowed me a considerable degree of individual autonomy to operate how I wished. Their guidance gave me invaluable insight for how professional organizations and corporations desire inter-/intra- company communications, typical standard operating procedures, correct auditing methods, and proper methods of professional communication. Working for Spirit of America gave me critical insight necessary to be a successful individual in a post-academia setting which, otherwise, I would not have been able to acquire purely in an academic scenario. Receiving feedback was a gratifying process wherein I submitted requests for personal progress reports. As all of my superiors gave me glowing accolades over the course of the entire internship. According to the regional managers, my supervisor, and the human relations manager, I performed most admirably in all environs and under all circumstances. The feedback critically bolstered my enthusiasm to work and infused my performance with a sense of pride which only bolstered by overall productivity.

Working alongside the Africa regional manager on development project and security update reports in Burkina Faso and Niger inspired this paper's analysis of both countries alongside previous research I have done on the impact of insurgency in Northern Nigeria. The concise policy writing approach benefitted my ability to quickly gather information and distil information into informative white papers. These reports on Burkina Faso and Niger as well as the guidance from the Africa regional manager furthered my academic and professional interest in Sahelian security and development situations which inspired the core discussion of the relation between economic development and insurgent terrorist activity. Moreover, the Africa regional manager and I sought out new security projects in West Africa that brought us into contact with the G5 Sahel security organization and the United States AFRICOM.

G5 Sahel and AFRICOM asked us to design an intra-organizational communication network capable of transmitting necessary military information to combat troops deployed in separate countries during ongoing operations. Being tasked to create the groundwork for the project, I spent significant hours analyzing the needs and requirements put forth by AFRICOM and researching communications companies which satisfied those requirements. Furthermore, I spent time in direct contact with U.S. Military officers discussing details of the project and current security concerns of the G5 Sahel. Between this project and the reports on Burkina Faso and Niger, I was inspired to make a final graduate report integrating my findings during the practicum with my previous academic research on Nigeria.