

On The Crisis of Boko Haram Terrorism: Causes and Perspectives

Sogo Angel OLONFINBIYI

New York, Routledge, 2023, 190 pages, ISBN: 9781032490717

Burcu TUGAY

Ph.D., Department of Political Science and International Relations, İstanbul University, İstanbul

E-Mail: burcu.tugay@ogr.iu.edu.tr

Orcid: 0000-0002-3106-0466

The book is based on data insights obtained through qualitative research using in-depth interviews with 40 participants while presenting an analysis of the socio-economic factors that are the major reason for Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. The general motivation of the research consisting of nine general headings is the unabated radicalization of Boko Haram jihadists in Nigeria in the last decade. These headings are “General Introduction and Analytical Explanation of Key Concepts in Terrorism Studies”, “Towards a Demystification of Pervasive Understanding of Boko Haram Terrorism”, “Patterns That Maintain the Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria”, “Boko Haram Insurgency Democratic Failure and Youth Degeneration Into Terrorism in Nigeria”, “Boko Haram Terrorism and Socio-Economic Decays in Nigeria”, “Community Policing as an Antidote for Terrorism Lessons From Boko Haram Phenomenon”, “Theories and Perspectives on Terrorism: A Boko Haram Model Analysis”, “Methodology and Qualitative Research Strategy” and a final section, titled “Summary and General Conclusion” that sheds light on the main causes of Boko Haram terrorism and seeks answers to the research questions of the study (who, what, when, where, why and how) with reference to the book in general.

The methodology of the research is based on the recordings and notes of the in-depth interviews, which were transcribed from a local language (i.e. Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe, Gwari, Igbo or Pidgin) into English. Participants included 10 government officials in the field of security and politics and 30 members of non-governmental organization members consisting of students, bussiness people, religious leaders, and committee members. The research focuses on the period of data collection and all problems encountered during the research in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. In the analysis of the data, in contact with different disciplines, social exchange theory, social conflict theory, rational choice theory, general strain theory, and Freudian political psychology are developed to explain the combination of factors that sustain the crisis. This study emphasizes societal issues instead of explaining terrorist activities

through religious extremism. In doing so, it views Boko Haram terrorism as a matter that requires collaboration with different disciplines. The study breaks away from the stereotype that religion is the inspiration and driving force of violence and insecurity in the country. It defines terrorism as the product of unresolved conflict arising from the unequal exchange of governmental hegemonic power that accompanies the failure to meet socio-economic goals.

While the author tries to explain the complex structure and definition of the Boko Haram concept by comparing it with some important studies, he also touches on the complexity of the concept of terrorism in general. Olifinbiyi reveals that living conditions in northeastern Nigeria have worsened due to the greed and corruption of the minority ruling class, leaving a large number of citizens in perpetual poverty and frustration. In doing so, he sees Boko Haram terrorism as a by-product of the socio-political shortcomings and dehumanization of the people living in the northeastern part of Nigeria. According to him, the religion of Islam is actively used by this terrorist sect as a platform through which its members can vent their anger and grievances to the global community. Indeed, religion may be a tool of terrorism, but it does not by itself cause terrorism. The book actually addresses this fact in detail with a comparative theoretical analysis. An important shortcoming of the book is that although it repeatedly underlines that the causes, trends and escalation of Boko Haram terrorism are constantly caused by local socio-economic and political constraints, it fails to provide a striking example.

The study provides evidence that Boko Haram's evolution into religious extremism and terrorism can be attributed to the government's failure to distribute socio-economic resources uniformly and fairly to citizens of the country's northeast. It offers some rather abstract and normative solutions, such as changing the mentality of the ruling elites to serve the interests of the people selflessly and generously. On the other hand, it shows the importance of paying attention to education in the region. Considering the literacy level of the people in the region, if appropriate information and encouragement is provided, the potential to positively influence the minds of young people and to not see harmful alternatives as a solution will increase. The study therefore calls on federal state and local governments to add a new module to their curricula that will focus on terrorism and conflict studies. These suggestions for education can be seen as valuable and important steps. As a matter of fact, with the improvement of education, behavior and thinking methods will become more normative and will help to create a positive perception in people's worldview and increase the general living standards of society.

According to the findings of the study, economic policies aimed at eliminating poverty and hunger, which are the backbone of Boko Haram terrorism in the country, and measures such as establishing programs and support mechanisms for young people in need of rehabilitation come first. The extremist structure allowed by political corruption, Boko Haram's connection with international terrorist organizations and its strong information network are cited as effective factors that helped the Boko Haram fighting force grow unabated. The focus of the study is an emergency call for the region. If the ruling class continues to turn a deaf ear to the strange situations that characterize the country's current democratic dispensation, youth participation in Boko Haram terrorism will gradually increase and violence will continue to escalate.

As a solution, the author proposes that the main way to make life easier in the region is to improve the socio-economic conditions of the citizens. He recommends that in order to win the war against terrorism and eliminate the threat in Nigerian society, the Nigerian state must respond to a new paradigm in counterterrorism strategies, shifting from the violent military approach to more appropriate conflict resolution strategies that are culturally acceptable. He offers a comprehensive theoretical approach, together with the empirical work discussed in detail in the last chapter of the book, which proposes a better understanding of the driving forces and dynamics of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Nigerian context especially on the younger generation. In this comprehensive empirical analysis, the author examines in detail the unstable situation in the Northeastern Nigerian region and the economic consequences of the spread of Boko Haram, from agricultural production to the education and health sectors and ethno-religious/cultural dimensions. The view that the discursive framework of terrorism cannot be isolated from its socio-economic perspectives adds great value to this book. An important impact of the study is that it is an urgent call asserting that if the ruling class continues to turn a deaf ear to the current democratic state of the country, youth participation in Boko Haram terrorism will gradually increase as will the violence.