



Research Paper

A Sociological Analysis of Youth Radicalisation and Terrorist Recruitment: The Case of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the sociological reasons why young people from northern Nigeria join terrorist groups, using Boko Haram as a case study. Terrorism has become one of the most pressing global security challenges, affecting even highly developed nations. Nigeria has experienced persistent insecurity over the last two decades, including insurgency, banditry, and militancy, with Boko Haram representing the most violent manifestation. This study applies Max Weber's Social Action Theory and Émile Durkheim's Theory of Suicide to explain how socioeconomic conditions, religious ideologies, and weakened social structures influence youth participation in terrorism. The analysis reveals that poverty, religious manipulation, and social disintegration contribute to recruitment and radicalisation. The paper concludes that addressing structural inequalities and promoting inclusive education and governance are vital for countering extremist recruitment.

Keyword: African, Terrorism, Sociological theory, Boko Haram, Religious extremism

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I. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has emerged as one of the most pervasive and complex global challenges of the twenty-first century, affecting both developed and developing nations alike. It has evolved from isolated acts of political violence into a multifaceted phenomenon that transcends borders, ideologies, and religions (Crenshaw, 2011). While countries in the Middle East and South Asia have historically borne the brunt of extremist violence, sub-Saharan Africa has, in recent decades, become a major theatre of terrorist activity. Nigeria has faced an intensifying wave of insecurity manifested in terrorism, armed banditry, communal clashes, militancy, and kidnapping for ransom (Idu, 2020; Lenshie et al., 2024). The cumulative effect of these crises has severely undermined national cohesion, economic growth, and social stability.

Despite extensive government expenditure on security and the deployment of military operations such as Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai, terrorism in Nigeria especially that perpetuated by Boko Haram has persisted and even adapted to state responses (Shodunke, 2022). Since its official insurgency began in 2009, Boko Haram has carried out large-scale attacks on civilians, military installations, and educational institutions, leading to the deaths of over 35,000 people and the displacement of more than two million, primarily across the north-eastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). The economic cost of this insurgency is equally devastating, with billions of dollars in infrastructure destroyed and agricultural productivity crippled (World Bank, 2023).

Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād, emerged as a radical Islamist movement advocating for the strict implementation of Sharia law in Nigeria. Its founder, Mohammed Yusuf, and his followers rejected Western education Boko in Hausa and governance, which they viewed as corrupt, ungodly, and incompatible with Islam (Walker, 2012). This ideology is clearly articulated in one of the group's early statements:

"We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam... We will continue to fight democracy, capitalism, and socialism."(Leadership, 2011)

Over time, Boko Haram's ideology evolved into a violent campaign aimed at establishing an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria's north-east. Its operational tactics include suicide bombings, kidnappings, mass abductions, and attacks on educational institutions, notably the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok (BBC, 2021). These actions are not random; rather, they reflect deep-seated grievances that are both socio-economic and political in nature.

The socio-demographic composition of Boko Haram's members underscores the complex interplay of structural deprivation and ideological persuasion. Recruits come from varied backgrounds ranging from university graduates and unemployed youth to religious students (almajirai), herders, and economic migrants from neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Agbibo, 2013; Onuoha, 2021). The group primarily draws its followers from the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups, which dominate northern Nigeria and have historically faced marginalisation and underdevelopment compared to the southern regions (Mustapha, 2014). High poverty levels, youth unemployment, corruption, and poor access to education have created fertile conditions for radicalisation (Musa, 2023). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) reports that nearly 70% of individuals who joined extremist groups in West Africa cited economic hardship as their main motivation.

Beyond material deprivation, Boko Haram also exploits religious and cultural narratives to legitimise violence. Through selective interpretations of Islamic texts, charismatic clerics and recruiters persuade young people that violent jihad is a sacred duty and a path to spiritual redemption (Nte et al., 2021). This ideological indoctrination appeals particularly to those who feel alienated by modernisation and state failure, thereby transforming religious conviction into an instrument of social protest (Loimeier, 2012). The interplay between economic marginalisation, religious manipulation, and identity politics has thus entrenched terrorism as both a social and ideological phenomenon.

From a sociological perspective, understanding why young people join terrorist organisations such as Boko Haram requires a nuanced exploration of the interaction between individual agency and structural constraint. Socioeconomic deprivation alone does not automatically lead to terrorism; rather, it operates within a broader context of social disorganisation, weak institutions, and cultural influences that shape individual choices and group behaviour (Weber, 1978; Durkheim, 1951). Consequently, this paper applies two foundational sociological theories Max Weber's Social Action Theory and Émile Durkheim's Theory of Suicide to examine how social meanings, religious ideology, and systemic failure converge to produce patterns of radicalisation among northern Nigerian youth. By applying these frameworks, the paper aims to provide a deeper sociological understanding of terrorism not merely as an act of violence, but as a symptom of a broader social pathology rooted in inequality, alienation, and moral disintegration.

II. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Max Weber's Social Action Theory

Max Weber (1864–1920) conceptualised sociology as the interpretive study of meaningful social action actions to which individuals attach subjective meanings within a shared social context. According to Weber, understanding social phenomena requires an analysis of the motives and intentions that underlie human behaviour, rather than mere observation of external acts (Weber, 1978). He identified four ideal types of social action: traditional, affective, value-rational, and instrumental-rational. Each represents a distinct mode of reasoning that guides individuals' choices and reflects broader cultural and structural influences.

- **Traditional action** refers to behaviour guided by established customs and inherited habits.
- **Affective action** arises from emotional states or passions.
- **Value-rational action** is motivated by a conscious belief in the inherent value of an act, regardless of its outcomes.
- **Instrumental-rational action** involves calculated, goal-oriented behaviour where means are selected to achieve specific ends.

Weber's framework provides a useful lens for understanding why individuals particularly young people from northern Nigeria choose to join terrorist organisations like Boko Haram. Nigeria currently has one of the largest populations living in extreme poverty, with more than 70 million people surviving on less than \$2 per day, most of whom are concentrated in the northern region (World Bank, 2023). In such a socio-economic environment, Weber's instrumental-rational social action can help explain participation in terrorism as a survival strategy. For many recruits, joining Boko Haram represents a rational decision driven by economic necessity, access to food, shelter, or income, and a sense of belonging denied by the state (Onuoha, 2021; Institute for Security Studies, 2022).

From this perspective, individuals are not necessarily ideologically radicalised at the outset but rather compelled by pragmatic concerns such as unemployment, hunger, and social exclusion. The insurgency's promise of financial incentives, security, and social recognition appeals to disenfranchised youth who have few alternatives

(Idu, 2020). This reflects Weber's notion that social action can be rational within the actor's limited context, even if it appears irrational from an external standpoint.

In contrast, Weber's traditional social action sheds light on the religious and cultural influences that sustain Boko Haram's ideology. The northern Hausa-Fulani region has a long history of religious movements, most notably the 19th-century Sokoto Jihad led by Usman dan Fodio, which sought to purify Islam and establish governance based on Sharia (Loimeier, 2012). Boko Haram's rhetoric consciously draws on this heritage, portraying its struggle as a continuation of divine obligation rather than rebellion. Many of its adherents, therefore, perceive participation not merely as political resistance but as an extension of ancestral religious duty. This traditional orientation is deeply embedded in communal identity and provides moral legitimacy for violent activism (Agbiboa, 2013).

Weber's value-rational dimension also plays a role, as some participants are motivated by what they perceive to be moral or spiritual ideals. Within Boko Haram's discourse, martyrdom is portrayed as a noble sacrifice for the preservation of Islam, aligning with value-rational reasoning. However, this conviction is frequently shaped by selective interpretation of religious texts and manipulation by charismatic leaders (Umaru et al., 2018). Boko Haram's propaganda machinery uses sermons, social media, and informal Qur'anic schools (tsangaya) to redefine the moral boundaries of violence, thus transforming personal faith into collective militancy (Hoffman et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, Weber's typology faces limitations when applied to terrorism. It assumes voluntary action and rational choice but does not adequately explain coerced or manipulated social behaviour. In northern Nigeria, many young recruits are indoctrinated or forcibly conscripted under threat, deception, or religious coercion (UNDP, 2021). Clerics and local preachers often exploit economic desperation and low literacy levels to persuade followers that martyrdom guarantees immediate entry to paradise and eternal rewards, such as the oft-cited promise of "72 virgins" (Umaru et al., 2018). This manipulation transforms what might have been rational or traditional motivations into instruments of control, eroding individual autonomy.

Furthermore, Weber's theory gives limited attention to the structural context that shapes social action. Nigeria's pervasive corruption, inequality, and weak governance have eroded citizens' trust in the state (Badewa, 2022). The collapse of educational institutions, poor infrastructure, and absence of social welfare systems create a vacuum in which non-state actors assume the roles of protector, provider, and moral authority. The weakening of social institutions—family, religion, and government—thus alters the framework within which social action occurs, making terrorism appear as an alternative mechanism for achieving economic and social stability (Temitope Faluyi et al., 2019).

Weber's conceptual lens is therefore invaluable for identifying the subjective meanings and motivations that drive individuals toward terrorism. Yet, his theory must be complemented by structural analyses to capture the interplay between agency and constraint fully. In the Nigerian context, personal decisions are embedded within broader systems of inequality and marginalisation. The failure of the state to meet citizens' socio-economic needs transforms rational action into an act of desperation. In this sense, Boko Haram's recruitment process thrives on the intersection between rational calculation, traditional belief, and structural deprivation a nexus that Weber's framework illuminates but does not exhaustively explain.

Émile Durkheim's Theory of Suicide

Émile Durkheim's (1951) Theory of Suicide remains one of the foundational sociological frameworks for understanding the relationship between the individual and society. Durkheim proposed that suicide, though seemingly a personal act, is profoundly shaped by social forces. He argued that the degree of social integration (the extent to which individuals are bonded to their communities) and social regulation (the degree of control exerted by norms and institutions) determine the likelihood of self-destructive behaviour. Based on these dimensions, he identified four types of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic.

Durkheim's concept of altruistic suicide where individuals willingly die for a collective cause—offers a compelling framework for understanding suicide bombing, martyrdom, and religiously motivated self-sacrifice in terrorist movements (Kendhammer, 2019). In such cases, individuals perceive their death as meaningful because it serves a higher moral or religious objective. The act is not driven by despair but by perceived duty, devotion, or transcendence. For example, Boko Haram's ideology glorifies martyrdom (shahada) as a pathway to eternal life and divine reward, echoing Durkheim's notion that excessive integration into a collective moral community can compel individuals to sacrifice themselves for its perceived good (Durkheim, 1951; Pape, 2005).

In the context of Boko Haram, religious indoctrination serves as a potent mechanism of integration and control. Young recruits are often taught that participation in jihad guarantees immediate entry into paradise (Jannah), where their sins will be forgiven, and they will receive divine blessings (Nte et al., 2021). Such beliefs reinforce Durkheim's description of acute altruistic suicide, where an individual's identity and agency are completely absorbed by collective religious ideals. The person's life gains value only through its service to the

community's spiritual mission. This internalisation of moral duty transforms killing and dying into religiously sanctioned acts of virtue.

However, Durkheim's theory also sheds light on the structural weaknesses that make individuals vulnerable to such manipulation. He argued that when social institutions such as family, education, and government fail to provide moral guidance and social cohesion, societies experience a condition known as anomie. Anomie represents a state of normlessness in which traditional values and rules lose their binding force, leaving individuals disoriented and disconnected from societal expectations (Durkheim, 1951). In Nigeria, persistent poverty, corruption, and unemployment have eroded trust in state institutions, producing widespread disillusionment and social alienation (Ikelegbe, 2020; Nyadera et al., 2020). These conditions mirror Durkheim's notion of anomic suicide, in which the weakening of social regulation leads individuals to seek alternative forms of moral order and belonging.

The appeal of Boko Haram among northern Nigerian youth can thus be understood as both a symptom and a consequence of anomie. The failure of state institutions to ensure security, education, and economic stability leaves many young people searching for meaning and identity. Extremist groups fill this vacuum by offering not only financial incentives but also a sense of purpose, belonging, and moral certainty (Hoffman et al., 2020). In Durkheimian terms, Boko Haram provides a substitute form of collective consciousness a system of moral regulation that replaces the absent state with a totalising religious ideology.

Gender dynamics further illuminate Durkheim's insights. The 2014 Chibok abduction, in which over 100 schoolgirls were kidnapped, demonstrates how coercion intersects with weakened social integration. Many of these girls were forced to convert to Islam and marry Boko Haram fighters; some eventually internalised the group's ideology, blurring the line between victimisation and participation (BBC, 2021; Pearson & Zenn, 2021). This phenomenon reveals how social breakdown and coercion can transform imposed subjugation into perceived religious or communal identity. In Durkheim's terms, the coercive environment of Boko Haram replaces the individual's autonomous self with the collective identity of the group, thereby fostering conditions under which altruistic and anomic tendencies coexist.

Moreover, Durkheim's perspective helps to explain the cyclical reproduction of extremism. The families of suicide bombers are often celebrated within Boko Haram's community, reinforcing collective approval for self-sacrifice and perpetuating social norms that valorise death in the name of faith (Bloom & Horgan, 2019). Such collective glorification strengthens social integration within the group even as it erodes integration with wider Nigerian society. Thus, the act of suicide terrorism becomes not an aberration but an expression of the internal moral logic of a highly integrated, yet deviant, subculture.

In summary, Durkheim's theory demonstrates that terrorism is not merely an individual pathology or religious fanaticism but a social phenomenon rooted in structural disorganisation, moral regulation, and collective identity. Boko Haram's success in recruiting and retaining members illustrates how social isolation, economic deprivation, and moral disorientation can lead individuals to embrace death as an act of religious fulfilment. Through this Durkheimian lens, counterterrorism efforts must therefore address not only ideological extremism but also the social fragmentation and institutional failures that sustain it.

III. Discussion

Max Weber's and Émile Durkheim's sociological theories provide complementary frameworks for understanding the persistent involvement of young Nigerians in terrorist movements such as Boko Haram. When examined together, they reveal that youth participation in terrorism is shaped not merely by religious fanaticism or ideological radicalisation, but by a complex interplay between individual rationality, social meaning, and structural dysfunction. Weber's typology of social action allows us to interpret terrorism as both a rational response to socio-economic deprivation and a traditional practice embedded in cultural and religious expectations, while Durkheim's theory of suicide reveals how weakened social bonds and moral disintegration create fertile ground for extremist recruitment.

Socioeconomic Deprivation and Instrumental Rationality

The link between socioeconomic deprivation and radicalisation has been one of the most enduring findings in terrorism and conflict studies. Poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion form the underlying structural conditions that make young people vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups. In the Nigerian context, these factors are particularly acute in the northern regions, where systemic inequality and neglect have persisted since colonial times (Temitope Faluyi et al., 2019; Mustapha, 2020). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) reports that northern Nigeria accounts for nearly 87% of the country's multidimensionally poor population, with the North-East alone contributing more than half of this figure. States such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa areas most affected by Boko Haram have recorded poverty rates exceeding 70%, alongside some of the lowest literacy levels in sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations Development Programme, 2021).

In such circumstances, Max Weber's concept of instrumental-rational action (*zweckrational*) provides a compelling framework for interpreting youth participation in Boko Haram. According to Weber (1978), instrumental rationality refers to actions undertaken with deliberate calculation toward achieving specific goals, often under structural constraints. Within this perspective, individuals who join Boko Haram are not necessarily driven by fanaticism but by pragmatic decisions aimed at survival, protection, or economic gain. When legitimate means of livelihood are absent, participation in armed groups becomes a rational alternative to destitution (Onuoha, 2014; Akinyetun & Ambrose, 2021).

Empirical evidence substantiates this argument. A major study by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2022) involving 119 former Boko Haram members revealed that 61% joined primarily for economic survival, citing chronic unemployment, food insecurity, and political neglect as decisive factors. Likewise, a longitudinal report by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2021) found that youths from households below the poverty line were three times more likely to be recruited by insurgents than their counterparts from relatively stable families. These findings are corroborated by Mercy Corps (2016), which showed that economic incentives such as the promise of steady income, access to looted goods, or marriage prospects play a central role in recruitment. For many impoverished young men, the insurgency provides not only material sustenance but also a semblance of purpose and masculinity that conventional society denies them.

From a Weberian lens, this form of participation can be understood as a rational adaptation to structural failure. Nigeria's northern economy has long been characterised by agricultural underdevelopment, declining state investment, and rising inequality (World Bank, 2023). The decline of traditional livelihoods such as farming and pastoralism made worse by climate change and desertification has further deprived young men of viable income sources (Okoli & Lenshie, 2021). In this socio-economic void, Boko Haram and similar groups exploit local grievances by offering financial rewards and basic welfare provisions to attract recruits. The group's internal economy, sustained through taxation, ransom payments, and resource looting, enables it to provide financial stipends to fighters and their families often ranging between ₦10,000 and ₦50,000 per month, far above the earnings of many rural labourers (Zenn, 2020).

Weber's notion of instrumental rationality also encompasses subjective meaning: actions are rational not merely in economic terms but because they align with individuals' perceived sense of value, security, and recognition. For many recruits, joining Boko Haram restores a sense of dignity stripped away by systemic marginalisation. Participation in the insurgency can thus be seen as a bid to reclaim agency in a society that renders them invisible (Agbiboa, 2013; Mahmood, 2017). The promise of belonging to a powerful collective coupled with narratives of heroism, social status, and spiritual reward imbues their actions with symbolic worth, transforming survival-driven choices into meaningful social acts.

Moreover, Boko Haram's recruitment networks often function as informal welfare systems in regions abandoned by the state. The group offers food, housing, and medical assistance to members and their families services that are otherwise inaccessible in remote communities (Thurston, 2017). This substitution of state responsibility by a non-state actor demonstrates how social breakdown transforms violent extremism into a parallel governance structure. Thus, economic deprivation not only precipitates insurgent recruitment but also normalises Boko Haram's presence as an alternative provider of livelihood and identity.

Comparative evidence from other regions further supports this relationship between deprivation and insurgent mobilisation. Studies in Somalia, Mali, and Niger have shown that poverty and youth unemployment are among the most significant predictors of violent extremism (Botha & Abdile, 2019; United Nations Development Programme, 2023). These cross-national patterns affirm that terrorism often emerges from environments where state failure, inequality, and social disempowerment intersect. In this sense, Boko Haram's appeal among northern Nigerian youth reflects not an exceptional phenomenon but a broader sociological pattern consistent with Weber's theory: individuals pursue rational, goal-oriented actions within the boundaries imposed by structural scarcity and moral disillusionment.

The dynamics of instrumental rationality also help explain why some individuals disengage from or defect from Boko Haram. As ISS (2022) notes, many ex-combatants left the group when promised payments or benefits failed to materialise. This indicates that their initial commitment was transactional rather than ideological. Such fluid membership patterns reinforce the argument that participation in terrorism can be a strategic means to an end, rather than a reflection of inherent extremism.

Ultimately, the prevalence of socioeconomic deprivation in northern Nigeria renders Weber's instrumental-rational action theory indispensable for understanding Boko Haram's endurance. In a context where state institutions are unable to provide employment, justice, or education, joining an insurgent organisation becomes a logical, albeit destructive, route to survival. The insurgency thus thrives not merely on theological conviction but on the everyday rational choices of individuals navigating poverty, insecurity, and systemic neglect.

Religion, Tradition, and Value-Rational Motivation

While economic rationality provides one critical dimension in understanding the motivations behind youth participation in terrorism, Max Weber's notions of value-rational and traditional social actions deepen our comprehension of the ideological, religious, and cultural justifications that sustain violent extremism in northern Nigeria. Weber (1978) asserted that human actions are often guided not merely by utilitarian considerations but by deeply internalised values and belief systems that individuals perceive as inherently meaningful. Within this context, Boko Haram's leaders have effectively constructed their insurgency as a religious vocation rather than a political rebellion, embedding it within an interpretive framework of spiritual purity, divine obligation, and moral salvation.

Boko Haram's founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and his successor, Abubakar Shekau, consistently invoked Quranic rhetoric to legitimise their insurgency as a sacred duty. In their sermons and recorded messages, they depicted the Nigerian state as "taghut" (an idolatrous entity) and Western education as a system of moral corruption (Walker, 2016). Their rejection of secular governance and "Western knowledge" (Boko) was therefore not an arbitrary stance but a deliberate attempt to portray violence as a form of moral purification. As Yusuf argued in a 2009 sermon: "This war we wage is not for wealth or fame but for the restoration of Allah's law on earth." Such statements represent examples of Weber's value-rational social action, where individuals act out of commitment to an ethical or spiritual principle rather than instrumental gain. The violence thus becomes meaningful, even redemptive, in the eyes of adherents who perceive themselves as participants in a divinely sanctioned mission.

Religious manipulation plays a central role in reinforcing this value orientation. Radical clerics and itinerant preachers exploit the limited religious literacy of impoverished youths, distorting Quranic concepts of jihad and shahada (martyrdom) to mobilise them for violence (Mahmood, 2017). For instance, Shekau's audio messages routinely promised recruits instant entry into Jannah (paradise) if they died fighting the infidels. Such messaging resonates particularly with vulnerable young men who have been socialised in conservative Islamic settings where clerical authority commands unquestioning obedience. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2021), more than 40% of former Boko Haram combatants cited "religious obligation" or "divine approval" as their primary reason for joining, revealing the deep internalisation of these moral narratives. Weber's concept of value-rationality captures this dynamic perfectly: these recruits are not coerced into violence purely by force or poverty, but by their conviction that such actions fulfil a transcendental moral purpose.

Moreover, Boko Haram's appropriation of the concept of istishadi or martyrdom represents one of the most visible manifestations of value-rational action in the modern Nigerian context. The group's operational strategy heavily relies on suicide bombings, a tactic that conflates self-destruction with divine sacrifice. Between 2011 and 2018, Boko Haram deployed over 450 suicide bombers, including more than 240 women and adolescent girls, many of whom were indoctrinated with promises of heavenly reward (Galehan, 2019; Bloom & Horgan, 2019). The glorification of these acts within Boko Haram propaganda underscores the Weberian principle that actions are often guided by subjective interpretations of moral worth rather than instrumental logic. In the minds of these actors, the act of self-detonation is not a crime but an expression of devotion to God a tragic but powerful instance of how belief systems can override the instinct for self-preservation.

Beyond individual conviction, the broader cultural legacy of religious militancy in northern Nigeria amplifies this ideological resonance. The historical memory of the Sokoto Caliphate's 19th-century jihad, led by Sheikh Usman dan Fodio, continues to shape collective consciousness in the region. The Caliphate's narrative of moral purification through armed struggle against corruption and impiety provides a historical template that modern extremist groups reinterpret for their own ends (Loimeier, 2012). Boko Haram's rhetoric of "restoring the true Islam" mirrors dan Fodio's language of renewal (tajdid) and reform (islah), effectively situating their violence within a lineage of perceived religious authenticity. This appeal to historical continuity endows the movement with symbolic legitimacy among certain marginalised northern communities who perceive their struggles through a historical lens of religious resistance against moral decay and foreign domination.

In this way, Boko Haram's insurgency draws on what Weber described as traditional social action behaviour shaped by long-standing customs, inherited meanings, and deeply rooted moral expectations. Many recruits do not merely fight for economic survival but to enact inherited notions of religious heroism transmitted through generations of oral history and cultural memory. The idea of jihad as both a defensive and purifying act has become embedded in northern Nigeria's socioreligious identity, particularly in areas such as Borno and Yobe, where historical jihadist movements once flourished (Loimeier, 2012). Boko Haram's recruiters capitalise on this legacy, portraying the group as the spiritual heirs of dan Fodio's Caliphate and its mission to purify Islam from corruption and Western contamination.

Furthermore, this blending of value-rational and traditional motives allows Boko Haram to sustain its legitimacy even in the face of brutal violence. Communities that have historically perceived the Nigerian state as corrupt and unjust are more likely to accept narratives that cast the insurgency as a divine correction of social wrongs. Studies conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2020) indicate that some local

populations initially viewed Boko Haram's early sermons favourably because they condemned government corruption and moral decadence. Over time, this perception evolved into passive complicity, as the group's violence became intertwined with the symbolic restoration of "true Islam." This demonstrates how traditional beliefs and collective memory can be reactivated in contemporary contexts of deprivation and political disillusionment to legitimise extremist ideologies.

Religious radicalisation is therefore not simply a theological deviation but a sociological process that transforms faith into a moral economy of violence. In Weberian terms, Boko Haram's moral universe represents a reinterpretation of Islam's value system under conditions of modernity, dislocation, and inequality. The young insurgent who detonates a bomb in Maiduguri does so within a structure of meaning that portrays his act as righteous sacrifice rather than murder a perverse but consistent expression of value-rational action. This illustrates Weber's broader insight that ideas, when institutionalised through charismatic authority and traditional legitimacy, can become powerful engines of social transformation, even when they manifest in destructive forms.

In summary, the persistence of Boko Haram cannot be understood without recognising the symbiosis between religious ideology, historical tradition, and moral rationality. Weber's concepts illuminate how the group's actions are anchored in systems of meaning that transcend material deprivation. Boko Haram's violence is sustained not merely by poverty or coercion but by the moral conviction that their struggle represents divine justice. Through the fusion of historical memory, theological distortion, and charismatic leadership, the insurgency transforms religion into both the justification and vehicle of social action an enduring testament to the sociological power of belief.

Coercion, Indoctrination, and the Breakdown of Social Structure

Beyond rational or value-driven motivations, coercion, manipulation, and structural decay play decisive roles in perpetuating terrorism in northern Nigeria. While some individuals join Boko Haram voluntarily due to economic hardship or ideological conviction, a significant proportion is drawn into the insurgency through force, deception, or social coercion. This coercive recruitment often blurs the boundary between victim and perpetrator, as individuals are simultaneously oppressed by and complicit in the system of violence that engulfs their communities.

The 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Borno State, remains one of the most striking examples of such coercion. Many of these girls, abducted from their boarding school, were forcibly married to insurgents or used as suicide bombers after undergoing months of indoctrination and abuse (BBC, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Some survivors later reported that they were subjected to religious re-education sessions, in which Boko Haram preachers compelled them to memorise Quranic verses distorted to justify violence and submission (Amnesty International, 2021). Others were given a stark choice: "convert or die." This reflects a process of psychological conversion under duress, rather than genuine ideological commitment.

Boko Haram's recruitment strategy has evolved to rely increasingly on abduction, blackmail, and fear (UNICEF, 2019; Happi, 2020). Many boys are kidnapped during village raids and forced into combat roles after being shown graphic images of death or being coerced into killing relatives to sever emotional ties with their communities (ICG, 2020). Similarly, girls are frequently enslaved, exploited as sexual partners or cooks, and later indoctrinated as suicide bombers. This method of recruitment undermines the notion of voluntary participation and instead exposes the structural violence inherent in extremist mobilisation.

From a Weberian perspective, such acts reveal the limits of Social Action Theory. Weber's framework assumes that social actions are guided by meaning and agency yet, in contexts of coercion, individuals act under conditions of structural domination, where choice is severely constrained or entirely absent. In the Boko Haram insurgency, coercion replaces rational motivation. Acts of violence, participation, or submission are not necessarily expressions of belief but manifestations of survival behaviour in an environment where moral and institutional order has collapsed. As Weber (1978) observed, when legitimate authority fails, illegitimate actors often appropriate its functions, using force and ideology to sustain control. Boko Haram's use of violence and fear thus becomes a perverted form of social regulation, replacing the absent authority of the Nigerian state.

The Nigerian state's inability to provide security, justice, and welfare functions that Weber classified under the domain of legitimate state authority has eroded citizens' trust in formal institutions. Empirical studies reveal that in many rural areas of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, state presence is virtually non-existent (Zenn, 2020; Akinyetun & Ambrose, 2021). Where the state does intervene, it is often associated with corruption, arbitrary arrests, and human rights violations. Amnesty International (2024) documented widespread abuses by Nigerian security forces, including extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions of civilians suspected of aiding Boko Haram. In some cases, entire villages have been destroyed during military operations, pushing displaced persons into territories controlled by insurgents, where they are then offered protection in exchange for loyalty.

This institutional collapse has led Boko Haram to emerge as a pseudo-governmental authority in parts of the Lake Chad Basin. Within territories under its influence, the group has established its own administrative structures, including courts based on its interpretation of Sharia law, taxation systems, and distribution of food

and medicine (Matfess, 2017). For communities long neglected by the state, this alternative governance even when imposed through coercion creates a perverse sense of order. As Durkheim (1951) would argue, this situation exemplifies anomie: a condition of normlessness in which the breakdown of legitimate social regulation leads individuals to seek meaning and order within deviant systems. Boko Haram's ideology thus becomes a substitute for the absent moral framework of the state.

The process of indoctrination within Boko Haram-controlled areas is methodical and relentless. Recruits undergo religious and ideological training, during which verses from the Qur'an are selectively interpreted to legitimise violence, obedience, and self-sacrifice. Studies by Mahmood (2017) and Mercy Corps (2016) demonstrate that indoctrination is often coupled with incentives and threats: loyalty is rewarded with food, shelter, or money, while dissent is punished with death. This systematic conditioning creates a psychological dependency, aligning with Durkheim's argument that excessive integration within a moral community can suppress individuality and critical thought.

Furthermore, coercion extends beyond direct violence. In many cases, insurgents exploit social and familial networks to compel participation. Individuals are threatened with harm to their relatives if they refuse recruitment. Communities are also forced to provide sons for "jihad" as proof of allegiance (Happi, 2020). Such mechanisms of control reveal that terrorism in northern Nigeria functions not only as a military or religious project but as a total social institution, restructuring daily life through fear, dependence, and distorted moral obligation.

In this sense, the breakdown of Nigeria's social structure is both a cause and consequence of Boko Haram's expansion. The failure of public education, the collapse of rural economies, and the absence of equitable governance have dismantled traditional social bonds. Without access to legitimate systems of justice, welfare, or identity, individuals become vulnerable to alternative authorities, even when these operate through coercion. As Durkheim (1951) observed, when social norms disintegrate and the moral boundaries of society weaken, deviance and self-destruction proliferate. Boko Haram's coercive order thus thrives within the moral and institutional vacuum created by state neglect.

This dynamic creates a vicious cycle: coercion perpetuates indoctrination, indoctrination reinforces dependency, and dependency sustains the breakdown of social structure. Communities entrapped in this cycle gradually internalise violence as normality, eroding traditional moral values. Consequently, what began as enforced submission often evolves into psychological conformity, demonstrating how coercion and ideology merge to reproduce terrorism across generations.

Durkheim's Altruistic Suicide and the Cult of Martyrdom

Émile Durkheim's (1951) concept of altruistic suicide where individuals willingly sacrifice their lives for what they perceive as the collective good offers a profound framework for understanding the phenomenon of suicide bombing and martyrdom within Boko Haram's insurgency. Durkheim posited that excessive integration into a moral community can lead individuals to internalise the group's values to such an extent that self-preservation becomes secondary to collective identity. This concept is vividly illustrated in Boko Haram's operational use of suicide bombers, particularly among young women and adolescents, who are indoctrinated to view their deaths not as acts of destruction but as acts of faith and divine duty (Bloom & Horgan, 2019).

Between 2011 and 2018, Boko Haram deployed at least 244 female suicide bombers, accounting for 56% of all suicide attacks in Nigeria during that period (Galehan, 2019). This unprecedented feminisation of martyrdom challenges conventional understandings of both terrorism and gender roles. In Durkheimian terms, these bombers embody the culmination of over-integration where the boundaries between self and collective dissolve, and death becomes an expression of ultimate solidarity with the group's moral cause. The bomber ceases to exist as an autonomous individual and becomes a symbolic vessel of communal sacrifice.

Boko Haram's indoctrination process meticulously constructs this moral over-integration. Recruits undergo rigorous spiritual manipulation, during which clerics reinterpret Qur'anic verses and Hadiths to legitimise self-destruction as martyrdom (*shahāda*). Verses such as Qur'an 9:111 "Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise" are selectively decontextualised to glorify death in battle (Okoli & Lenshie, 2022). This process aligns with Durkheim's assertion that in societies or groups where religious dogma dominates, the collective conscience becomes so powerful that it subsumes individual agency.

Moreover, Boko Haram's leadership employs psychological and social conditioning to transform death into honour. Recruits are repeatedly exposed to sermons and imagery glorifying past martyrs, accompanied by promises of Jannah (paradise), forgiveness of sins, and eternal companionship with virgins (Zenn, 2020). This mirrors Durkheim's observation that altruistic suicide is sustained by a shared belief that self-sacrifice secures transcendental reward and communal approval. The act is therefore not perceived as pathological but as an affirmation of social belonging and divine favour.

Notably, Boko Haram's strategy of deploying female suicide bombers also reveals the group's instrumentalisation of gender norms. Many of these women are victims of abduction, forced marriage, or sexual

violence who later become indoctrinated and coerced into “martyrdom missions.” A Human Rights Watch (2019) investigation documented testimonies from former female captives describing how they were persuaded that dying in the name of God would absolve them of past “sins” and elevate their status within the afterlife. This phenomenon reflects what Durkheim described as the moral coercion of collective consciousness, a condition where the community’s moral demands eclipse individual will, leading individuals to view self-annihilation as a moral necessity.

Furthermore, the religious glorification of martyrdom resonates deeply within northern Nigeria’s cultural context, where religious identity is central to social life. This deep religiosity amplifies the moral authority of religious leaders who endorse jihadist ideology. The Boko Haram leadership’s manipulation of this collective faith exemplifies Durkheim’s notion of how social cohesion, when excessive, transforms solidarity into fanaticism. In this state, the moral imperative to serve the group replaces the instinct for individual survival, culminating in what Durkheim called “the purest expression of the social spirit” a voluntary yet coerced death for the collective.

Consequently, the cult of martyrdom within Boko Haram is not merely an ideological phenomenon but a sociological outcome of hyper-integration within a religiously defined community. It represents a distortion of social cohesion, where the mechanisms that ordinarily bind individuals to society religion, morality, and shared values are redirected towards self-destructive ends. Durkheim’s theory thus illuminates how extreme solidarity, when rooted in dogmatic religiosity and moral absolutism, can produce systematic, organised violence justified in the language of virtue.

Anomie, Youth Alienation, and the Erosion of Social Integration

While Durkheim associated altruistic suicide with excessive social integration, he also warned of its opposite condition anomie, a state of moral deregulation and social disorganisation. In *Suicide* (1951), Durkheim argued that when traditional norms lose authority and social structures fail to provide moral guidance, individuals experience aimlessness, despair, and breakdown of collective meaning. This theoretical lens is vital for interpreting the sociological roots of Boko Haram’s recruitment among northern Nigerian youth.

Decades of poverty, unemployment, and corruption have eroded social institutions that once anchored communal stability. The northern states of Borno, Yobe, and Zamfara consistently record the highest poverty rates in Nigeria, with more than 70% of residents living below the poverty line. The collapse of agricultural livelihoods due to desertification and conflict has displaced thousands of young men and women, creating a large pool of economically and socially alienated individuals (Michael, 2024). In Durkheimian terms, this widespread deprivation represents a condition of collective anomie a societal state where social regulation and moral orientation are absent.

In Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, where over 2.2 million people currently reside (IOM, 2023), youths face bleak prospects. Deprived of education, employment, and psychological support, they experience what Durkheim would classify as “normlessness.” Boko Haram exploits this vacuum by offering alternative structures of belonging and purpose. Through promises of income, religious significance, and brotherhood, the group reconstructs a sense of identity for those excluded from the social mainstream (Mahmood, 2017). This process exemplifies how terrorism thrives in the liminal spaces where state and society fail to provide meaning and integration.

The psychological dimension of anomie also plays a critical role. Many northern youths experience humiliation, hopelessness, and resentment towards a government perceived as corrupt and unjust. (Mockaitis, 2003) observed that persistent inequality and the perception of state neglect act as emotional catalysts for radicalisation. Similarly, the UNDP (2021) found that 84% of former extremists reported joining violent groups after witnessing government failure or experiencing security force abuse. This aligns precisely with Durkheim’s argument that when regulatory institutions, such as law, education, and religion fail to uphold justice, individuals develop moral indifference or seek meaning through deviant collective movements.

The erosion of traditional family structures has further deepened youth alienation. Migration, conflict, and economic collapse have fractured communal kinship systems that once mediated moral conduct. Without strong family or religious institutions to provide guidance, young people are left without normative anchors. As Durkheim suggested, when the individual becomes detached from collective life, “the passions of men no longer know where to rest,” leading to destructive forms of reattachment (Durkheim, 1951). Boko Haram’s ideology thus offers an alternative moral order a counterfeit community promising redemption, identity, and transcendence.

Moreover, the Nigerian government’s militarised approach to counterterrorism, marked by arbitrary arrests and human rights violations, exacerbates this social alienation (Amnesty International, 2021). Such abuse reinforce feelings of marginalisation, validating Boko Haram’s narrative that the state is an oppressor of the faithful. In Durkheim’s framework, this state violence intensifies anomic conditions, eroding social cohesion further and perpetuating the cycle of radicalisation.

In the broader sense, the anomie that pervades northern Nigeria reflects a collapse of moral authority at multiple levels religious, political, and economic. Religion, once a source of social unity, has become fragmented between moderate clerics and extremist preachers. The political elite, mired in corruption, has lost moral legitimacy, while economic inequality fuels resentment. This multifaceted breakdown exemplifies Durkheim's warning that societies undergoing rapid or unequal change are prone to instability, as individuals struggle to adapt to shifting norms and hierarchies (Idu, 2020). Boko Haram's rise, therefore, is not an isolated religious aberration but a symptom of Nigeria's deeper crisis of moral and institutional coherence.

Durkheim's dual concepts of altruism and anomie thus provide a holistic sociological understanding of Boko Haram's endurance. The group simultaneously embodies excessive integration through the glorification of martyrdom and profound disintegration through the collapse of moral and social regulation. It offers identity during normlessness, meaning in despair, and belonging in alienation. As long as northern Nigeria remains trapped between these twin conditions, the structural breeding ground for extremism will persist.

Political Marginalisation and the Failure of Governance

The endurance of Boko Haram as both an insurgent and ideological movement cannot be fully comprehended without examining the chronic governance deficits that underpin Nigeria's political system. These failures have produced a deep crisis of legitimacy, particularly in the northern regions where state authority has long been perceived as alien, corrupt, and morally bankrupt. Both Max Weber's notion of legitimate authority and Émile Durkheim's concept of social solidarity provide valuable frameworks for analysing this phenomenon.

Weber (1978) argued that the legitimacy of state authority depends on citizens' belief in the moral and legal validity of its rule. When the state loses this legitimacy through corruption, injustice, or failure to deliver public goods its authority erodes, paving the way for alternative power structures. Durkheim (1951), meanwhile, posited that social solidarity, the moral glue that binds individuals into a collective, collapses when institutions no longer embody shared norms and values. In Nigeria, decades of political exclusion, misgovernance, and neglect have ruptured both legitimacy and solidarity, creating a vacuum that groups like Boko Haram exploit.

Historical and Structural Exclusion

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, northern Nigeria has lagged other regions in almost every development indicator. The Human Development Index (HDI) in the northeast remains the lowest in the country, averaging 0.35 compared to the national average of 0.53 (UNDP, 2021). Educational attainment is strikingly poor: the literacy rate among young women in Borno and Yobe States is below 35%, compared with over 80% in southern states such as Lagos and Anambra (NBS, 2022).

This persistent developmental gap has been reinforced by ethno-regional political marginalisation. Despite constituting a large proportion of Nigeria's population, the northern region's access to political power and federal resources has often been shaped by patron-client politics rather than inclusive governance (Mustapha & Meagher, 2020). Corruption and nepotism have diverted funds intended for development into private hands, deepening inequality. As a result, many northern communities view the Nigerian state not as a protective institution but as a distant apparatus serving elite interests (Akinyetun & Ambrose, 2021).

Elite Manipulation and the Instrumentalisation of Religion

The failure of governance is compounded by the cynical manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by local elites. Political leaders have historically mobilised religious sentiments to consolidate power, framing themselves as defenders of Islam while enriching their patronage networks (Kendhammer, 2019). This politicisation of religion has weakened the secular legitimacy of the Nigerian state and blurred the boundaries between faith and governance.

Boko Haram capitalises on this disillusionment by positioning itself as a moral alternative to the corrupt political class. Its rhetoric portrays Nigeria's secular government as anti-Islamic, corrupt, and unjust echoing the grievances that many ordinary citizens already harbour (ICG, 2020). In Durkheimian terms, this reflects a profound erosion of collective conscience: the shared moral code that once unified society has disintegrated, leaving individuals vulnerable to extremist ideologies promising moral order.

Militarisation, Human Rights Abuses, and the Reproduction of Violence

The Nigerian state's militarised counter-terrorism approach has further alienated communities in the northeast. Security forces have frequently been accused of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and sexual violence, particularly in counterinsurgency operations (Amnesty International, 2021; HRW, 2019). Between 2013 and 2019, it is estimated that over 20,000 civilians were detained in military facilities across Borno and Yobe without trial (Amnesty International, 2021). Such abuses undermine state legitimacy and reinforce Boko Haram's narrative that the government is an enemy of the people.

Weber's analysis of the state monopoly on legitimate violence has become relevant here. When state violence loses moral legitimacy because it is perceived as repressive rather than protective, it ceases to be "legitimate" in Weberian terms. Instead, insurgent violence gains symbolic justification as a form of value-rational defiance against an unjust system. Many Boko Haram members report joining the group after experiencing or witnessing abuses by government forces (Mercy Corps, 2016). Thus, the state's own actions perpetuate the cycle of violence it seeks to end.

Corruption and the Crisis of Trust

Nigeria's corruption crisis also fuels terrorism by corroding public trust. Transparency International (2022) ranked Nigeria 150th out of 180 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index, highlighting persistent misuse of public funds. Resources meant for the reconstruction of the northeast, such as the Victims Support Fund and the Northeast Development Commission, have been marred by allegations of embezzlement and mismanagement (Dori, 2025). The absence of transparent governance has created widespread cynicism and resignation among citizens, particularly youth who perceive government promises as empty rhetoric.

In this environment, Boko Haram and other insurgent factions assume quasi-governmental roles, collecting taxes, dispensing justice, and providing rudimentary welfare services in territories under their control (Zenn, 2020). This mirrors Weber's notion of a parallel authority structure emerging when legitimate governance collapses. For many rural inhabitants, Boko Haram's rule, though brutal, is at least predictable and consistent qualities they no longer associate with the Nigerian state.

Gendered Dimensions of Political Marginalisation

Governance failure also has a gendered aspect. Women and girls in northern Nigeria face systematic exclusion from education, political participation, and economic opportunity. The patriarchal structure of many northern societies, compounded by poor governance, restricts female agency and mobility. Boko Haram exploits this vulnerability by offering women perceived protection and purpose within the group (Bloom & Horgan, 2019). Moreover, women are often victimised through abduction and coerced radicalisation, further highlighting the intersection of governance failure, gender inequality, and terrorism (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020).

Thus, political marginalisation in Nigeria operates on multiple levels regional, economic, and gendered each reinforcing the other. Weber would interpret this as a disenchantment of political authority, where citizens no longer perceive the state as embodying moral order, while Durkheim would diagnose it as a collapse of social integration, leaving individuals adrift and susceptible to collective deviance.

When analysed through Weberian and Durkheimian lenses, Boko Haram's persistence emerges as a complex sociological outcome rooted in structural inequality, moral disintegration, and rational adaptation to failed governance. It is not simply a matter of religious extremism or ideological zealotry; rather, it reflects a broader pattern of systemic social disorder where violence becomes a socially meaningful response to institutional decay.

From a Weberian perspective, terrorism represents both a rational and moral act within the context of illegitimate authority. Youths in the northeast, facing poverty, repression, and political exclusion, interpret participation in Boko Haram as a meaningful social action, a means to assert dignity, express resistance, and pursue perceived justice. This is consistent with Weber's value-rational defiance, where individuals act in accordance with principles they believe to be morally right, even in opposition to legal authority (Weber, 1978). In this sense, Boko Haram's violent rebellion is a distorted attempt to reclaim moral legitimacy lost by the Nigerian state.

From a Durkheimian perspective, terrorism reflects a profound anomic condition. When social institutions fail to provide moral guidance or economic stability, individuals seek alternative forms of belonging. Boko Haram functions as a surrogate community that restores a sense of purpose and cohesion, albeit through destructive means. The group's religious narratives, disciplinary structure, and communal rituals recreate the collective solidarity that Durkheim identified as essential for social order. However, this solidarity is pathological; it binds members together through violence, not mutual welfare.

The interconnection between economic deprivation, ideological manipulation, and governance failure thus creates a self-reinforcing ecosystem of violence. Corruption and state brutality drive alienation; alienation fuels radicalisation; radicalisation justifies further repression. Each cycle reproduces the social conditions that sustain terrorism. The absence of moral legitimacy transforms political dissent into religious militancy, while the erosion of social solidarity converts despair into devotion.

Ultimately, Boko Haram's endurance underscores that terrorism in northern Nigeria is not a spontaneous aberration but a symptom of systemic disorganisation. As long as governance remains exclusionary, development uneven, and moral authority compromised, extremist movements will continue to find recruits among alienated youth. Therefore, effective counter-terrorism must move beyond military solutions toward restoring legitimacy,

rebuilding trust, and revitalising social cohesion the very elements that Weber and Durkheim identified as the foundations of a stable society.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has examined the sociological motivations underpinning youth participation in terrorist organisations in northern Nigeria, with reference to the Boko Haram insurgency. Drawing upon Max Weber's Social Action Theory and Émile Durkheim's Theory of Suicide, the study has demonstrated that terrorism in Nigeria cannot be reduced to mere religious extremism or individual pathology. Rather, it reflects a multifaceted social phenomenon born out of economic deprivation, moral disintegration, and systemic governance failure. Boko Haram's continued existence reveals the complex ways in which social structure and individual agency interact under conditions of structural inequality and institutional collapse.

The Weberian perspective illuminates how individuals ascribe meaning to their actions within contexts of poverty, exclusion, and moral crisis. For many young people in northern Nigeria, joining Boko Haram represents a rational response to extreme socioeconomic hardship or a value-rational pursuit of spiritual fulfilment framed through distorted religious narratives. Weber's insights into legitimate authority and the moral foundations of governance help explain why the Nigerian state has struggled to maintain legitimacy in regions where corruption, neglect, and repression have become normalised. When the state loses moral credibility, alternative centres of authority such as religious movements or insurgent groups emerge to fill the vacuum, often through violence.

Durkheim's theoretical contribution complements this analysis by revealing how weakened social integration and normative breakdown create the psychological and moral conditions for radicalisation. In a society marked by inequality, unemployment, and corruption, anomie become pervasive. Individuals lose connection to shared values, leading to collective despair and a search for belonging within deviant communities. Boko Haram functions as a pathological form of social solidarity, offering purpose, discipline, and identity to those who feel abandoned by the state and society. In Durkheimian terms, the group transforms anomie into a destructive form of moral order, converting despair into devotion and self-sacrifice.

The interplay between Weberian rationality and Durkheimian anomie underscores a central argument of this paper: terrorism in northern Nigeria is a sociological product of structural decay and moral crisis. It arises where legitimate governance collapses, economic inequality deepens, and religious ideologies are manipulated to justify violence. The persistence of Boko Haram is thus symptomatic of a broader failure of the Nigerian state to sustain moral authority and provide social justice. As Weber noted, the endurance of any political order depends on citizens' belief in its legitimacy; where that belief falters, violence and rebellion become perceived as morally defensible acts.

Addressing terrorism in Nigeria, therefore requires a holistic and sustained social reform agenda rather than a solely militarised approach. While kinetic operations may suppress insurgent activities temporarily, they cannot extinguish the underlying social conditions that breed extremism. Lasting peace demands the restoration of state legitimacy through transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance. Combating corruption must move beyond rhetoric to tangible institutional reforms that ensure equitable distribution of resources and services. Equally, improving access to quality education, particularly in the northern region, is essential for breaking the cycle of ignorance and manipulation that fuels extremist ideologies. Moreover, religious and community leaders must be actively engaged as agents of peacebuilding rather than treated merely as bystanders. Grassroots initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue, civic education, and youth empowerment can strengthen the moral fabric of society and rebuild trust between citizens and the state. Reintegration programmes for repentant insurgents should be complemented by psychosocial support and livelihood training to prevent relapses into violence. International development partners can also play a critical role by supporting locally driven initiatives that address poverty, trauma, and governance reform in the post-conflict northeast.

Ultimately, defeating terrorism in Nigeria is not solely a military or security challenge; it is a profound sociological task. It requires rebuilding the moral and institutional foundations of society what Durkheim described as the collective conscience and what Weber identified as legitimate authority. Only when citizens once again perceive the Nigerian state as fair, just, and morally credible can the lure of extremist movements truly wane. In essence, counter-terrorism must be rooted in social reconstruction, moral renewal, and the restoration of human dignity. Without such transformative change, the cycle of violence, alienation, and rebellion will continue to reproduce across generations.

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