



Civil disobediences to violent extremism: understanding Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Modu Lawan Gana^{1*}, Ku Hasnita Binti Ku Samsu² and Mohd. Mahadee Bin Ismail²

¹Department of Public Administration, Mai Idris Aloomo Polytechnic Geidam, Nigeria

²Department of Nationhood and Civilization Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
gana.lawan@yahoo.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 7th October 2018, revised 6th January 2019, accepted 10th January 2019

Abstract

This is narrative study that analysed transition of Boko Haram insurgent group from nonviolent resistance movement to violent extremist insurgent group in Nigeria. Since the eruption of Boko Haram violence, to date it was alleged to have killed over 30,000 people, 2 million displacement and about 5 million are forces into serious situation of humanitarian crises. More so, efforts by the state to curtail the menace remained fruitless as frequented attacks of the group continue to manifest in the north. The data used for this analysis is largely deduced from author's experience about the insurgent group since its establishment to the eruption of its violence in the north. The analysis show brute military force used in annihilating the movement created impetus for violence hence eruption of the insurgency. It recommends that in future, authorities should desist from using force in containing nonviolent movement rather to address the cause amicably.

Keywords: Boko haram, civil disobedience, violent extremism, military.

Introduction

Since 2009, Nigeria security land scape is in disarray majorly arising from violent confrontation of its state security institutions with Islamist armed group Boko Haram in the country's north. Boko Haram, a colloquial literally 'western education is sacrilege' is Islamic fundamentalist opposed to contemporary civilization, formal government, democracy, gender equality and obtaining formal education other than Islamic one Gana, Samsu and Ismail, 2018¹. The group started in Maiduguri, headquarter of Nigeria's defunct north-eastern region. It however escalated rapidly to other states, regions and across the international boundaries to countries of Niger, Chad and Cameroun along Lake Chad Basin. To date since the launching of it insurgency, Boko Haram have cause colossal damages on human and material asset on the states and citizenry, tempered the psyche of vast majority beyond it hotbeds, but other areas of Nigeria state. Account of damages are scarce, yet some conservatives have indicated over 30,000 people are brutally murdered as well as more than 2 million people are displaced into different displacement categories Azuma, 2015². Moreover, over 5 million population forces into desperate live of misery and destitutions Onuoha 2012³.

The rise, unprecedented growth and escalations of Boko Harm is however not without measures, Nigeria's federal government, the affected states in collaboration with governments of Chad, Nigeria, Cameroun and civilian groups have adopted numerous measures to combat the insurgent group. Among other approaches include military and political approach. The military approach however remained dominant as exemplified by

unprecedented deployment of armed troops in conventional front. Presently, there are over 100,000 members of Nigeria armed security in northeast engaging Boko Haram in conventional warfare Folade, 2016⁴. This figure is in addition to 8700 Multinational Joint Task Force donated by member countries of sub-regional economic bloc 'Lake Chad Basin Commission' in 2015 embarking in cross border pursuit of the insurgent group. The political approaches involve deradicalization policy, peace talks as well as declaration of state of emergency and enactment of counterterrorism laws. Prevailing evidences shows these measures render little successes in downgrading the powerful threats of insurgent group Solomon, 2012⁵.

However, Nigeria's authorities and the armed force often claimed defeating Boko Haram, yet spatial reports of attacks reflects on daily papers. In his annual assessment of successes in December 2015, presidents elect 'Muhammad Buhari' whose campaign manifesto focused mainly on ending the insurgency in six months claimed to have defeated Boko Haram technically, however, subsequent evidences shows the fatalities of Boko Haram rise to about 15,000 people Dim 2017⁶. This figure keeps growing as daily report of violent attacks continues non-diminishingly.

Perhaps since the eruption of Boko Haram in Nigeria, there are enormous body of literature that proliferated showing the menace of the insurgency Onuoha and Oyewe 2018⁷, Aghedo and Osumah 2014⁸; Agbiboa, 2014⁹. Others on the counterinsurgency measures Bamidele 2016¹⁰; Agbiaboa 2018¹¹ and Weeraratne 2015¹². However, to date, there is little work

that comprehensively analyses on how the group transitioned from its traditional tactics of civil disobedience to violent extremist activities. This lack of scholarly work has left vacuum in the literature toward adequate understanding of the insurgent group. This study is directed in addressing this vacuum. In doing this, the paper proceeds in five parts. Part one explained the methodological approach of the study, part two highlighted the principles of civil disobedience, part three review background works on history of Boko Haram, part four outlined the process of conversion of Boko Haram to violent extremism and part five is the conclusion.

Methodology

This is narrative study. Information used in analysis emanated partly from authors' personal experience about Boko Haram group from eruption to conversion to violent extremism in Nigeria's northeast. The author is a citizen of Nigeria, resident of the communities affected by the insurgent group since the earlier manifestation of the group in 2002 to the eruption of full-scale insurgency in 2009 in Maiduguri. More so, to ensure reliability, personal data was cross-checked, evaluated and validated with numerous scholarly works on the insurgency and counterinsurgency situation in the north. The reliability of this study therefore depends on the credibility of the data, comparativeness of sources and critical analysis of the situation.

The principles of civil disobedience: To many accounts, civil disobedience is a deliberate disruptive action to sanction or challenge legitimate rulers and to withdraw public support on entrenched leader Rormarynowska 2016¹³. Some scholars also defined civil resistance as a civilian-based campaign involving the use of social, psychological, economic, and political means that does not pertain the use of violence Smithey 2015¹⁴. The general idea about civil disobedience was traced to Salt March campaign launch by Mahatma Gandhi of India in 1930 Suber 2014¹⁵. The Salt March to date remained the critical case for understanding civil resistance movement in most modest literature. The aim of civil disobedience group is deliberately undermine the existence of authoritative orders without resorting to violence action. The purpose principally is to publicize an unjust system and recalcitrant government by appealing to conscience of general public to force negotiation.

Strategy of civil disobedience was found successful in different socio-political set ups. Although, earliest movement was traced to Mahatmas Gandhi through the Salt campaign has not brought independence to India, but some scholars argue it seriously undermined British colonial authority as well as folded India's population for further struggle for decolonization Kurz, 2009¹⁶. Perhaps, since 20th century, civil disobedience is instrumental for changes in different regimes across varying political entities, abrogating illegitimate orders and suppressing unruly behaviour of leaders. Effects of disobedience action have been noted in many angles, but the most popular one are changes from authoritarian rule to democracy. Many scholars have attributed the principle of nonviolent struggle for several regimes changes

during the 2000-2006 in countries such as Serbia in 2000; Madagascar in 2002; Georgia in 2003; Ukraine in 2004-05; Lebanon in 2005 among others Nepstad 2011¹⁷. The statistic in fact keep growing with the recent successfully records noted during the Arab spring. There is general agreement among scholars and practitioners' that nonviolent action is more effective than violent action in properly engaged in entrenching changes on repressive regimes.

Strategies of nonviolent action are myriad and complex. Gene Sharp whose brilliant work 'The Politics of Nonviolent Action' in 1973 laid foundation of modern writings, catalogue 193 strategists of nonviolent action Sharp 1973¹⁸. Popular campaigns include marches, petitions, strikes, boycott, and demonstrations. Others are sit-in and blockades to frustrate and discomfort constituted authorities in discharge of normal function. Extant literature prophesied that if civil disobedience action is kept peaceful, it can easily captivate acquiescence from disgruntled population and send powerful message to outside communities and sway world support to its course. Though, the bulk of disobedience movements were executed by ordinary citizens, however argued to be successful, nonviolent resistances can sometimes co-opt governmental authorities. In most account, the earlier tactics of Boko Haram campaign partly correspond to the principles of non-violent movement as practice by Gene Sharp. This is indeed glaring in the evolutionary history of the group.

Boko Haram: Overview of Origin: Compelling evidences shows Boko Haram started in Maiduguri, an ancient city of about 2 million populations and head quarter of Nigeria's defunct north east state. The group was founded by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, a radical Salafist indoctrinated to the teaching of Ibn Taymiyya, thirteenth century Syrian theology that propagated pure Islamism to be practiced through strict compliance to Islamic scriptures of Qur'an and Hadith [the holiest books of Islam]. Just like Ibn Taymiyya who before his death in 1328 prioritises the supremacy and authoritativeness of the Quran and Hadith in human dealings and organisation, Yusuf modelled his campaign on this principle, agitated for implementation of sharia law in Borno state. Anything contrary to him is infidel.

Perhaps, the radical campaign of Yusuf does not argue well with many clerics including Sheik Mahmud Jaafar, Yusuf's spiritual mentor leading to misunderstanding. In 2000, disagreement with other cleric led Yusuf to either dismiss or withdraw from the committee of preachers in Maiduguri. Therefore, arising from embracement and grievances of the unfortunate dismissal, Yusuf parted and move to deserted warehouse previously owned by his in-law Baba Fugu along Maiduguri main train station. Yusuf's followers with the support of local population, who are opposed to the doctrine of Izalademolished and reconstructed the warehouse to mosque and a portion as Yusuf apartment. In Maiduguri, Yusuf's criticisms toward reformist Islam garnered mass support from the local populace, the aged and the youth

that mostly described Izala clerics as conspirators. Unlike most other sectarian groups in Nigeria that reject revivalism, Izala supported and encourage Muslim followers to participate in government, obtain formal education, including education of girl child. These contentions have long put Izala in different pedestal with various Islamic sect/group in Nigeria that argued Yusuf teaching is taking Muslim back to the Dark Age. Counter-preaching techniques by the Izala clerics yielded little in suppressing recruitment and escalation of Boko Haram ideology. Yusuf's teaching and disobedience action discomfited authorities in Borno state thus culminated to witch-hunting of the groups' followers.

The period of disobedience: Symptoms of disobedience of Boko Haram emerged in year 2000 when Mohammed Yusuf started counteracting the teaching of his mentor Mahmud Jaafar, along with visible disrespect for officials of Borno state attending religious sermons in Mohammed Indimi Mosque in Maiduguri. Disobedience however become apparent in 2002 when some followers withdrew in protest to Kanamma, a local authority office in Yobe state along the Nigeria and Niger Republic international boundary. The groups' aim isto stay in isolation while practicing mundane live. Isolationist opined secular state, government and democracy is modernity thus non Islamic. They argued city/town liveis adulterated with western culture, norms and value that squarely contradicted the provisions of Islamic scriptures. In continued disregard for popular policies and extant law of the state, the group rejected constitutional right of land ownership, thus occupied swath of farmlands owned by the host community without consent. Others includes refusal to answer police queries as well as compliance to bye-laws on fishing rights in the Komadugu Yobe in shore of lake Chad Shuriye and Huud 2013¹⁹. Reflecting on the Gandian strategy of tax evasion, Boko Haram asked local not to pay taxes and levies on fishing ponds. This action favoured host population thus seduced unprecedented support and recruitment. Authorities' efforts to restore order proved abortive as disobedience action persisted until military dislodged the protesters in December 2003. Military clampdown led to colossal damages on members leaving sizeable number of the insurgent massacred. However, survivors fled back to Maiduguri and other northern cities to reengage in anti-government behaviours.

Since then, the movement discomfited authorities thus put them in logger with then group resulting in witch-hunting and arrest of several key officials; conscriptions of banks accounts, and enacting laws to curtail spreads and criminalise activities. Efforts by government to curtail the growing menace remained fruitless as disregard for extant laws and campaign of calumny against secularism, government and democracy persisted unabatedly. Like most other Islamic terrorist, members of Boko Haram declared state representatives as corrupt, illegitimate, and blasphemous Bello 2013²⁰. In fact, disobedience action of Boko Haram intensified in 2004 in the aftermath of the Nigeria's general elections in 2003. Prior to the election, Yusuf

was promised with implementation of Sharia law by Ali Modu Sheriff if they supported his election bid. Sheriff, a senator at the time was campaigning to out seat the incumbent governor Mala Kachalla. Although, Sheriff declared Sharia law in 2005, and appointed BujiFoi, one of the principal leaders of Boko Haram as commissioner in charge of Sharia affairs, however, Yusuf alleged it is belated, process myopic and implementations adulterated with constitutional values. In this context, Yusuf accused Sheriff of deception resulting in vigorous condemnation of Sheriff's governance. Non-compliance to public driving rules, speaking against authorities, and blocking roads to obstruct daily public activities become the order of the day. The activities of Okada riders [commercial motor cyclist] majority who are members of Boko Haram sympathizers verbally attack public officials while wearing skullcaps, as an identity of popular support to the Boko Haram movement.

In 2007, challenged with the increasing public acquiescence and prevalence of the disobedience actions, authorities in Borno state promulgated a law mandating all motorcycle riders to wear crash helmet in the city of Maiduguri. This strategy is to stop Boko Haram members from wearing skullcap whose number is rapidly growing and filling the streets of Maiduguri in disobedient action. The crash helmet law was out rightly rejected by Yusuf. The act also does not argue well for the local population whose member are predominantly *Kanuri*, an ethnic group in Maiduguri well known for artistic caps wearing to display cultural heritage among other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Many locals therefore found the crash helmet as an unacceptable policy henceled many to become sympathetic to Yusuf in his fight against the state even though some has not openly show case this to the public. In this respect, as noncompliance appeared prevalent, the embraced state authorities adopted several punitive measures to compel the law; approach which largely opined to have prompted violent reaction from the insurgent group.

Conversion to Violent Extremist Group: Perhaps, to many accounts, violent overthrowing of secular state does not reflect on Boko Haram's earlier agenda. The groups' motive manifested more on legal reforms toward Islamic principles in the city of Maiduguri rather a nonviolent group involve in anti-west rhetoric Iyekekpolo, 2016²¹. The empirical evidence shows violent interest resituated from brutal approach of authorities in Borno state to compelled crash helmet law in Maiduguri to quell the movement. Arising from this regulation, hundreds of motor bike belonging to insurgent members and local population are impounded, while hundreds of people are arrested, detained and other disappeared saliently. Iyekekpolo moreover argued that frequented agitation for termination of the crash helmet law was initially nonviolent, violent surfaced on Thursday, 11 June 2009. This happened when members of Boko Haram ridding motor bike on funeral procession of their colleagues that earlier died of motor bike accident were stopped by Operation Flush [Special Military Task Force Combating Extremism] for interrogation on why they refuse to wear helmet. The insurgents

did not take the security query lightly thus provoked soldiers to open fire killing six members and wounding seventeen others Waldek and Jayasekara 2011²². Aggrieved by the killings of their members, the group bowed for revenge, thus a genesis for the eruption of violent crises. Many spectators of the Nigeria's security situations maintained that motor cycle law sparked Boko Haram's insurrection otherwise Boko Haram could have been something else.

Although, military humiliations arising from imposition of crash helmet laid foundation for militarization of Boko Haram, it was however aggravated by the crackdown arising from uprising for the extrajudicial murder of their leaders arising from the June 2009 uprising. The uprising that started in Maiduguri on 17 July, 2009 escalated to other towns such as Bauchi, Damaturu, and Potiskum. It started in protest action initially engage lightly in police action. However the movement turned violent upon outnumbering and overpowering the police force leading to looting of police armouries. In fact, there is general belief that access to police weapons prompted Boko Haram to convert to full-scale insurgency. One week of military clampdown through ground bombardment and air interjection to recapture police arms, suppressed the movement and restore order further heightened the guerrilla warfare of Boko Haram. Military firepower resulted in colossal damages on the groups' physical infrastructures and organisation structures. Eye witnesses shows on the second day of the military campaign, streets of Maiduguri; a town previously identified as the most peaceful in Nigeria was littered with death bodies, cartridges and live ammunition scattered around the groups' notorious zone along the rail way station. Conservative accounts show Mohammed Yusuf, BujiFoji and other 1000 people are massacred. Iyekekpolo arguing on this scenario claimed that the killing of the key leaders of Boko Haram marked the turning point in the scale, modus operandi and proportion of attacks by the insurgent group.

Moreover, with the death of Yusuf, the groups' leadership transited to Abubakar Shekau, the erstwhile deputy of Yusuf. It under Shekau Boko Haram turned into full-scale militarization. The group under Shekau beyond gruesome murder of its critiques, turned more conventional capable of engaging in direct gun duels with security institutions, raiding military barracks, bombing making and exploding improvised explosive devices [IED] on public joints. As a kind of demonstration of combat strength, in June 2011, Boko ramped vehicle loaded with IED to the convoy of Nigeria's police general in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city Anyadike, 2013²³. The attacked signified a follow-up, because it came a day after the Police General visited Maiduguri bowing to crush the insurgent group. Barely two months, another suicide bomber ramped onto office building of United Nations causing disturbing damages with some officials killed. Since then to now, frequented attacks of Boko Haram accelerated exponentially. This is despite of the claims by authorities of defeating the insurgent group. In December 2015, the new president elect Mahammadu Buhari claimed Boko

Haram to have been defeated technically Onapajo 2017²⁴. However, despite the purported claimed, growing evidence portrays that the group is far from total defeat. For instance in their annual analysis of 2015, Global Terrorism Index, a global terrorist data as cited by Onapajo, Boko Haram in 2015 earned the highest reputation of being, the number one most deadly insurgent group in the world recording about 300% increase in terrorism deaths. Since then fatality figure keep growing on daily basis occupying the front pages of major Nigeria's daily newspapers.

Conclusion

In most respect, the conversion of Boko Haram from nonviolent movement to violent extremist group emanated from the brutal approach of Nigeria's government to suppress the existentiality of the group. This perhaps not surprising, scholars of civil disobedience argued that when forced is used on nonviolent protesters; it will create impetus for militarism. Excessive force can ignite backlash. Excessive military crackdowns on nonviolent protesters would provoke further mobilization into violent resistance movement. The serial military crackdown on the group leaving unprecedented damages on its followers created impetus for violence thus led to full-scale militarization. In this context, one would comfortably argue militarization of Boko Haram is a factor of grievances that if resolute measures were taken outside the purview of military, for Boko Haram could have been tackled amicably.

This finding therefore has implication for the government. Nigeria has history of violent militia movement since her decolonisation in 1960. To avoid to similar trend, government should desist from the use of force on nonviolent resisters. Moreover, as panacea to the on-going counterinsurgency, on against the military firepower, diplomatic options can be exploited through appeasement and addressing the remote cause for the militarization of the insurgency. In fact, counterinsurgency studies have shown addressing the cause of militia is important than uprooting through coercion.

References

1. Gana M.L., Samsu K.H. and Ismail M.M. (2018). Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Changing the Pattern of Counter insurgency. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2(8), 127-130.
2. Azumah J. (2015). Boko Haram in Retrospect. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26(1), 33-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2014.967930>
3. Onuoha F. (2012). The Audacity of The Boko Haram: Background, Analysis and Emerging Trend. *Secur J*, 25(2), 134-151. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sj.2011.15>
4. Falode J.A. (2016). The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015: A Strategic Analysis. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10(1), 41-52.

5. Solomon H. (2012). Counter-terrorism in Nigeria: responding to Boko Haram. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(4), 6-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2012.714183>
6. Dim E.E. (2017). An Integrated Theoretical Approach to the Persistence of Boko Haram Violent Extremism in Nigeria. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 12(2), 36-50. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2017.1331746>
7. Onuoha F.C. and Oyewole S. (2018). Anatomy of Boko Haram: The Rise and Decline of a Violent Group in Nigeria. Al Jazeera Centre for Studies.
8. Aghedo I. and Osumah O. (2014). Bread, Not Bullets: Boko Haram and Insecurity Management in Northern Nigeria. *African Study Monographs*, 35(3-4), 205-229. <https://doi.org/10.14989/193251>
9. Agbiboa D.E. (2014). Boko-Haram and the global jihad: 'do not think jihad is over. Rather jihad has just begun. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(4), 400-417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2014.891564>
10. Bamidele O. (2015). Beyond the Shadows of Terrorism: Boko Haram Crisis in North-Eastern Nigeria. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, Special Issue, 41-57.
11. Agbiboa D.E. (2018). Eyes on the street: Civilian Joint Task Force and the surveillance of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria. *Intelligence and National Security*, 1-18. DOI: 10.1080/02684527.2018.1475892
12. Weeraratne S. (2017). Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29(4), 610-634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1005742>
13. Rormarynowska R. (2016). Civil Disobedience. *Rockzniki Filozoficzne Tom*, 64(2), 66-77. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rf.2016.64.2-5>
14. Smithey L.A. (2014). Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 26(1), 141-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2014.876333>
15. Suber Peter (2014). Civil Disobedience. In Civil Disobedience H.D. Toreau Ed. Libertas Institute Salt Lake City, Utah, 63-69. ISBN-13: 978-0-9892912-3-1
16. Kurtz L.R. (2009). The Indian Independence Struggle (1930-1931). *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, 1-7.
17. Nepstad S.E. (2011). Nonviolent Resistance in the Arab Spring: The Critical Role of Military-Opposition Alliances *Swiss. Political Science Review*, 17(4), 485-491. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1662-6370.2011.02043x>
18. Sharp G. (1973). The Politics of Nonviolent Action. Boston, Massachusetts: Porter Sargent, Publishers, Inc. ISBN-10: 0-87558-161-7
19. Shuriye A.O., Adeyemi B.K. and Huud S. (2013). Global challenge of manual suspicion: Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 3(5), 105-111.
20. Bello A.H. (2013). Boko Haram: The Greatest Security Threat to the Sovereignty of Nigeria. *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences Research*, 2(2), 67.
21. Iyekepolo W.O. (2016). Boko Haram: Understanding the Context. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(12), 2211-2228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1177453>.
22. Waldek L. and Jayasekara S. (2011). Boko Haram: the evolution of Islamist Extremism in Nigeria. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 6(2), 168-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2011.605217>
23. Anyadike N.O. (2013). Boko Haram and National Security Challenges in Nigeria; Causes and Solutions. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4(5), 12-23.
24. Onapajo H. (2017). Has Nigeria Defeated Boko Haram? An Appraisal of the Counter-Terrorism Approach under the Buhari Administration. *Strategic Analysis*, 41(1), 61-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2016.1249177>.