

New Trajectory of Islamic Extremism in Northern Nigeria: A Threat-Import Analysis of Shiite's Uprising

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Abstract

Since the division of the Muslim Brotherhood in Nigeria during the 80s, Nigerian Muslims experiences series of infighting. Such internal disputes culminate into the birth of several sects that either accepts or oppose the Nigerian state. More so, the two main divisions of the Muslim Brotherhood are the Saudi Arabia sponsored Izala (Movement for the removal of innovation and re-establishment of Sunna in Islam) Sunnist movement and the Shiite's Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) which is backed by Iran. Between 1979 and 1999 the IMN engaged in series of armed clashes with the Nigerian forces. In this article, we analyse how the December 2015 faceoff and the simultaneous crackdown on the IMN could trigger the movement into the campaign of violence against the Nigerian state. We used the framing theory to explain how the Shiites may perceive the Sunni/Shiite divide as well as the actions of the Nigerian state against it. Framing theory is inadequately examined in explaining group violence. Hence, this study adopts the IMN as a case evidence to underscore the relevance of framing in explaining why groups adopt violence.

Keywords: Shiite, Sunni, Nigeria, Framing, Radicalisation Violence

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a secular state with an avowed respect for free religion and secular principles. There is a strong persuasion of Islam and Christianity among the Nigeria population. There is also a significant expression of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in the country. These religions have co-existed amidst occasional tension and distrust (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014). Over the years, Nigeria's claims to free religion and secularism have been vigorously challenged by the rising trend of religious fundamentalism and intolerance. More importantly, the contradictions of inter-religious relations in Nigeria have often engendered violent confrontations among the adherents of Christianity and Islam (Ngare, 2012). Moreover, these religious confrontations have created internal disputes within sects, particularly within Islam in Nigeria. The splintering of the Muslim Brotherhood in Nigeria into the Shiites and the Sunni movements marked the proliferation of different Islamic movements (Loimier 2012). While the Shiite movement has remained under the Umbrella of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), the Sunni movement has disintegrated into several denominational persuasions, ranging from nonviolent extremist sects (e.g. Izala and Ahlus Sunnah) to violent extremist ones (e.g., Boko Haram) (Loimeier 2012). The implications of the emergence and activities of these groups vis-a-vis the corporate existence of Nigeria, but also to her national stability and sustainability, have been ominous, to say the least.

The *Boko Haram* insurgency, for instance, has so far plunged Nigeria into the morass of dire humanitarian crises, exemplified in tremendous human fatalities, morbidities and population displacements (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Unfortunately, while Nigeria battles the scourge of Boko Haram insurgency, another Islamist uprising hitherto oblivious in Nigerian history seems to be emerging. This new threat is associated with the 12 December 2015 confrontation between the Nigerian military forces and the members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), which sparked growing local and international reactions both from governmental and non-governmental circles.

The IMN is an umbrella organisation of Shiites in Nigeria which had severally disagreed with the Nigerian authorities in the 70s -90s (Paden, 2008; Isa, 2010). It is also engaged in decades of theological disputes with

other Salafist groups in Nigeria, apparently because of the spillover of the global Sunni-Shiite schism. This article seeks to assess how history, sectarian dispute, grievances, and international influence may motivate the Shiites in Nigeria to resume violence as a resistant, Islamist group against the Nigerian state and other Sunni groups in Northern Nigeria. In this article, we use both the IMN and the Shiite interchangeably based on the informed understanding that the Shiites has manifestly been under the theological and ideological superintendence of the IMN.

To properly understand the transformation of sectarian movements from peaceful to violent traditions beyond the narrative of religious schism in Nigeria, it is important to look at the role of the state in the radicalisation process of oppositional groups or the movements whose ideology is at variance with the state. The Nigerian state is often known for using the organised violence in curtailing the violent approaches of such oppositional movements. During the 1970s and 80s, the IMN had several violent clashes with the Nigerian forces, but in 1999 the IMN became a peaceful movement because of both military and diplomatic approaches by the Nigerian authorities. Additionally, the use of military approach was effective in the decapitation of movements such as the Maitasine movement. However, The Nigerian state thought it could apply the same approach to end Boko Haram at the embryonic stage of the movement, but the same strategy contradicted, leading incidentally to the escalation of the group (Loimeier, 2012; Agbiboa, 2013; Walker, 2015). Several studies bothering on anti-terrorism indicate that the use of force is counter-productive (Byman, 1998; Rosendorff and Sandler, 2004). This has become more instructive particularly in this era of new terrorism which is characterised by Islamist extremism and lethality (Neuman 2009). Contemporary discourse on group violence is dominated by studies and policy decisions about de-radicalisation and Counter Violent Extremism (CVE). This contemporary debate puts into account the blow-back effect of combating dissident movements and the need to address issues such as ideology and psychosocial factors that tend to predispose individuals or groups to commit violent atrocities.

This study appropriates the theoretical position of the framing theory to explain the thinking of the IMN regarding the Islamic schism in Nigeria as well as the position and response of the Nigerian government towards it. Using this theory, the study intends to surmise the likely adoption of a violent strategy by the IMN against the Nigerian state. We also use the IMN as case evidence to demonstrate the relevance of the framing theory in terrorism. Moreover, the study seeks to predict the target selection of the IMN if it eventually adopts a violent strategy. Besides academic contribution, the study has a policy implication of regarding de-radicalisation and CVE. By adopting the framing theory for this study, we support the claim of Borum (2011) by attempting to establish the relevance of the theory to the radicalisation of individuals into violent extremism. Similarly, we also support Borum's idea on the need to understand not only what individuals or groups think, but how their thinking ultimately turns to action. Borum (2011) sees radical and violent extremism as a process individuals hold feelings that both justify and compel violence.

This study incorporates data from extant academic articles on Islamic radicalism, news reports from both reliable local and international media outlets and reports by human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Islamic Human Rights Watch (IHRC). Additionally, this research adopts a longitudinal case study method approach in studying the phenomenon. This would help in proffering an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. It also allows for both theoretical and empirical studies to be applied. One of the limitations of the study is the absence of statistics of number attacks and casualties to explain the measure, the trend and intensity of violence of the Shiite movement in the 80s and 90s. The number of attacks and casualties in these years are undocumented. Although the background of the authors as Nigerians may be seen as prejudiced; it nonetheless strengthens the study with empirical knowledge of the religious history and dynamics in Nigeria which researchers outside Nigeria may not boast of. This knowledge also helps to interpret and analyse available sources on the phenomenon.

2. Theoretical Framework: Situating the Framing Theory

There are two broad perspectives of framing when it comes to terrorism. Scholars in communications view framing as the words, images and style of presentation and reportage of a speaker, organisation or media outfit to an audience. Whereas, scholars in political or social sciences view it as a cognitive process of individual's normative perception and interpretation to events or situation (Chong et al., 2007). Hence we adopt the second conception of framing in this discourse.

In his view about the relevance of Social Movement Theory (SMT), Borum (2011) argues that the framing theory has been under-utilised in the extant literature about countering terrorism. Furthermore, the author suggests that radicalisation has been narrowly focused on ideological radicalisation. This assertion about the one-

sided view about radicalisation mirrors Schmid (2013) argument. Schmid argues that the role of government is often neglected amidst the drivers of radicalisation processes of violent groups.

On a broader note, framing as an act gives different interpretations to events (Shmueli et al., 2006). Pokalova (2010) suggest that framing is a process facilitates peoples' conception of issues. It helps to interpret fuzzy and puzzling circumstances by clarifying it through discussions that lead to actions (Laws et al., 2003; Shmueli, 2006). Furthermore, it is suggested that framing is an interpretive lens that gives meaning to events and situations; creating thereby a set of worldview to an individual that helps in justifying goals, actions and outcome. (Shmueli et al., 2006).

The several conceptions of scholars about framing have some commonalities which are anchored on constructing events and situations into meaning. Such meanings facilitate the justification of actions by individuals. Moreover, it is fair to argue that such actions could either be passive or active. Hence, it is important to explore the Shiite narrative to support the normative position of the framing theory.

Benford and David (2000) suggest that framing includes the 'strategic communication to mobilise members of a group for political action. It encompasses a continues group disposition for the justification of grievances and the promotion of identity through either violent and non-violent actions (Sa'ndig, 2015). Benford and David's argument also accounts for the reason why leaders within organise constituents within groups to carry out actions against perceived enemies. Sa'ndig (2015) suggest that the outcome of framing (violent or non-violent) is dependent upon different cultural background. For instance, Sa'ndig (2015) in a comparative study of Boko Haram (BH) Islamic militants and the MASSOB (Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign Biafra) Sa'ndig (2015) asserts that both movements have similar economic and political narratives of alienation but different approaches to rebellion. The author argues that BH is motivated by the culture of radical Islam in Northern Nigeria whereas MASSOB's non-violent approach is for the peaceful secession of the Eastern Nigeria through internationalised campaign.

3. Emergence and Evolution of the Elzakzaky Shiite Movement

Nigeria had experienced radical Islamist movements from the Danfodio Jihad, and the Mahdiyya movement before its independence in 1960. However, the awakening of radical Islam in post-colonial Nigeria is traced to the IMN, a movement led by Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzaky who was inspired by Iranian revolution of 1979 (Isa 2010). El-Zakzaky and his followers had several violent confrontations with the Nigerian government due to their radical views and rejection of state symbols such as the coat of arm, national anthem and the institutions of state (ibid). The followers abhor anything secular or Western and term them un-Islamic. As a result of his anti-state postures, El-Zakzaky was jailed in nine prisons in 1981-1998 (Paden 2008). To avoid further violent extremism, the then governor of Kaduna State, Ahmed Makarfi appointed El-Zakzaky as a special adviser (ibid).

El-Zakzaky embraced a nonviolent approach to Islamic evangelism. His new approach to Islamic evangelism gained more moral and financial support from Iran and El-Zakzaky was able to organise strong movement by encouraging supporters to pursue Western education, and engaging in charity work (Baba-Ahmed 2015). These reforms have increased and motivated membership of the group, particularly among the socially and economically deprived Muslims (majority Shiites). Its condemnation of Boko Haram ideology and its vociferous criticism of the United States (US) support for Israeli policies towards Palestine (ibid) were also factors that have helped El-Zakzaky to recruit more than a million members and create a cult following around his personality (ibid). The Shiite headquarters and spiritual centre (Husainiyyah Baqiyyatullah) is situated some few meters from El-Zakzaky house in Zaria, Kaduna state, where he was born where El-Zakzaky. The IMN has numerous of branches spread across Nigeria particularly in the North-West of Nigeria

4. The Shiite and Salafiyah (Sunni) Divide in Nigeria

Initially, El-Zakzaky headed the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni movement whose members are the majority of students and the alienated (Adesoji 2010). Although Islam in Nigeria is characterised by sectarian disputes such as the Izala and Sufi schism, the splinting of the Muslim Brotherhood into the Izala and the IMN marked the beginning of the Sunni and Shiite sectarian contestations in Northern Nigeria (Loimeier 2012). The Izala movement is the largest Sunnist group in Nigeria which is backed by the Saudi Wahabbist. The majority of other Sunni groups emanated from the Izala movement due to infighting (ibid). They still adhere to one doctrine which is guided by the strict belief in the Quran and Sunna and the total rejection of innovations in Islam. The major cause of the rivalry between the Nigerian Sunnist and the IMN is that the Sunnis see the Shiites as the major facilitators of Islamic innovations. More recent is the claim that the Sunnis' claim that the Shiites reject and

insult the wife and companions of Prophet Mohammed (Sanusi 2015). Apart from the IMN dispute with moderate Izala and other Salafiyya sects, Boko Haram adherents hate and detest Shiites creed (Salkida 2015).

The Shiites are known for their long history of procession particularly during Al-Quds, Arba'een, and Maulud Nabi celebrations. Blocking of roads during prayers or religious occasions and, noise pollutions from all religions is a commonly tolerated nuisance in Nigeria. But the Shiites procession makes a movement for commuters difficult due to their population. In addition to uneasy movement, other Salafiyyah groups find it very offensive and these have remained worrying to them for years (Baba-Ahmed 2015).

According to the Pew Forum report of 2009, out of the 240.6 million of Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa, 78, 056 million Muslims populations which constitute 50.4 percent of Nigeria's population (Pew Forum Report 2009), the Shiites constitute about 4 million followers. The rest are Sunnis of the Maliki school of thought (Isa 2010) except for minority groups such as Boko Haram which follow the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah of the Hanbali school of thought (Loimeier 2012). Irrespective of this divide, the Nigerian Muslims are to some degree bonded by the NSCIA (Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs) and JNI (*Jama'atu Nasril Islam*: Umbrella group of Muslim community in Nigeria). These bodies are headed by the Sultan of Sokoto (the spiritual head of the Sokoto Caliphate) who is the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims (Amirul muminin) The Sultan performs spiritual functions such as announcing the sighting of the moon for fasting during Ramadan periods. He also represents and advocates for interests the Muslims within Nigeria.

5. Zaria Massacre: 2014/2015

Two massacres occurred in Zaria, both in 2014 and 2015. Before the 2014 massacre, there was a clash between the Shiite group and the Nigerian police in 2009 during the Alquds procession (IHRC report 2014), resulting in the death of four Shiites. In July 2014 during another Alquds procession (ibid), the Nigerian army attacked the Shiites and raided the Husainiyyah. Three of El-Zakzaky's sons and thirty-four others were killed with an unknown number of injuries (Sahara Reporters, 2014). El-Zakzaky claimed that his sons were killed through torture by the Army (ibid). The IHRC (Islamic Human Right Commission) Report of 2014 indicts the Nigerian Army for human rights violation. These enabled the Nigerian Army to set up an investigation committee in 2014. However, no prosecutions were made. After the killings, Sheikh Ahmed Gumi; the son of Abubakar Gumi, the great spiritual leader of the Izala movement, published an open letter condoling El-Zakzaky over the death of his sons and at the same saying that El-Zakzaky deserved what befell him because of his un-Islamic practices (Gumi 2014).

Before the December 2015 massacre, some Shiite members were reportedly attacked during their procession in the outskirts of the Northern state of Kano by Boko Haram in November 2015. A day after, El-zakzaky claim it was not a Boko Haram orchestrated attack (Lere, 2015); thereby, creating an impression that there is a collaboration among the security agencies and other Sunni groups. On 12 December 2015, the Chief of Army Staff's (COAS) convoy clashed with the Shiite procession in Gyallesu at Zaria. The clashed erupted into violence where the army fired several gunshots at the procession, and subsequently, the house of El-Zakzaky and Husainiyyah were invaded and destroyed by the army (Report Afrique 2015). More than 300 people were reported dead including the wife of Zazzaky and top Shiite leaders including the leader of the Kano branch, Sheikh Mahmud Turi (Leadership 2015).

After the killings, the Army accused the Shiites of trying to assassinate the COAS and claimed they had no option other than to fire bullets on the group (Ahmed 2015). The group claimed it was doing its peaceful spiritual duties and the Army descended on them (ibid). However, a short video footage went viral showing how the Army were pleading with Shiite members to pave the way for them to pass, but the members of the group were adamant (ibid). A video was also in circulation showing how the Nigerian army laid siege on the Shiite leader's house and Husseiniiyya (Afrique Report 2015).

6. Reactions and Complications of the Zaria Massacre within Nigeria

Shiites held protests within the Northern states of Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Bauchi, Niger, Sokoto and, Zamfara against the killings (BBC 2015). The Nigerian Human Rights Commission, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other groups condemned the brutal attack and urged the Nigerian government to investigate the incident. It took the Nigerian government more than 48 hours to comment on the attack (Tukur 2015). A revered human rights activist, Chidi Odinakalu, also expressed concern that President Buhari's "body language" (passivity) could further complicate the situation regarding resolving the crises (Aljazeera 2015).

On 16 December 2015 Ibrahim Musa, the Shiites spokesman noted the grievances and demands of the movement. They rejected the panel of inquiry set by the Nigerian government under the Police Area Commander. They said that the Commander is a "junior officer compared to the perpetrators of the attack on their members". They demanded that a panel should be set up with the inclusion of elderly citizens and with people from different human rights organisation. The Shiites also rejected another investigative committee was set-up by the government of Kaduna state comprising of perceived anti-Shiites (Channels TV 2015)

Sequel to the rejection of the government panel of inquiry by the Shiites, Governor el-Rufai of Kaduna banned the group from procession and insisted that El-Zakzaky must face prosecution. The group also showed its displeasure and branded el-Rufai an extremist and anti-Shiite. This displeasure has been worsened by el-Rufai's notification to the movement about demolishing their spiritual centre. He claims that the structure is not permitted by the government (Dailypost, 2015). By 24th December, the movement's centre was destroyed while some residents loot properties from the demolition site (Sahara Reporters 2015).

While Other Salafiyah clerics remain silent over the incident, others blame Elzakzaky for the incident. However, the two most senior Muslim leaders condemn the attack. The Sultan of Sokoto expressed his sadness and urged the federal government to investigate the incident (Premium times 2015). Emir Sanusi of Kano and a senior Muslim leader blames the Shiite for blocking of roads and insulting the companions of Prophet Mohammed but blame the Army for applying excessive force against the Shiite.

7. International Reactions, Emerging Evidence and Regional Dimensions

While Amnesty International urged the Nigerian government to investigate the event, Human Rights Watch (HRW 2015) claims that about 300 members of the IMN were killed. Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) avers that there is evidence of mass burial of the killed Shiite members by the Army. Several protests against the crackdown on the movement and as well as the detention of El-Zakzaky erupted by Shiites in other countries such as Iran, India (Aljazeera online 2015), and Pakistan (Ahlulbayt News Agency, 2015). On 14th December Iranian foreign ministry summoned the Nigerian ambassador in Tehran to receive Iran's protest letter, while Iranian President called on the Nigerian government to conduct investigations into the killing, the Iranian lawmakers suggest that the killings are covertly supported by US and Israel (Freeman 2015).

In a contrary reaction, King Salman of Saudi Arabia applauded the Nigerian president for the killing of the Shiites. He said it was a fight against terrorism and pledged his support in helping Nigeria's counterterrorism (The Herald, 2015). The differing opinion of Iran and Saudi Arabia is not surprising because of the existing Shiite and Sunni divides in the Middle-East. It is fair to argue that Nigeria may be caught in between the cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This is also evident in Nigeria's decision to join the Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance (Reuters 2015; Usman-Janguza 2016). This cooperation includes Saudi Arabia and 34 other countries with the exclusion of countries which practice the Shiite brand of Islam. By this arrangement, Nigeria can give military assistance to any of the countries under the Islamic Military allowance on any event of aggression.

Over time, the cold war between Iran and Saudi-Arabia could escalate to North and West Africa because sub-state groups cold within these regions may be armed against their home countries due to ideological solidarity from Iran and Saudi-Arabia. Both countries have attracted accusation and criticisms for supporting violent groups across their national boundaries (Byman, 2015; Chomsky, 2016). The grievances of the IMN and the sympathy and solidarity of Iran provides a fertile ground for the IMN to turn into a violent oppositional group against Nigeria such as the Iranian-sponsored Houthi which rebels against the Yemeni state.

8. Unresolved Crises: Government Ban and Mob Attacks on the Shiites 2016

El-zakzaky was arrested in the aftermath of the December 2015 Zaria confrontation. H has remained in detention ever since his arrest. On the 26th of September 2016 his followers troop into the Nigerian capital to protest the continued detention of their leader. There were claims by the members of the group that they were meted with police brutality and stopped from entering Abuja (Guardian 2016). On 7th October 2016, the Kaduna state government announced the banning of the IMN as a movement, declaring it as an unregistered organisation whose doctrine is repugnant to the constitution of the Nigerian state. This decision was based on the recommendation of the Commission Inquiry Report (Ibrahim 2016).

After the ban, a member of the commission, Jibrin Ibrahim, released an article titled; "Proscribing the Islamic Movement in Nigeria: A plea for second thoughts". In this article he expressed his individual opinion by advocating the religious rights of the IMN; he rather suggested that the group must be forced to act within the

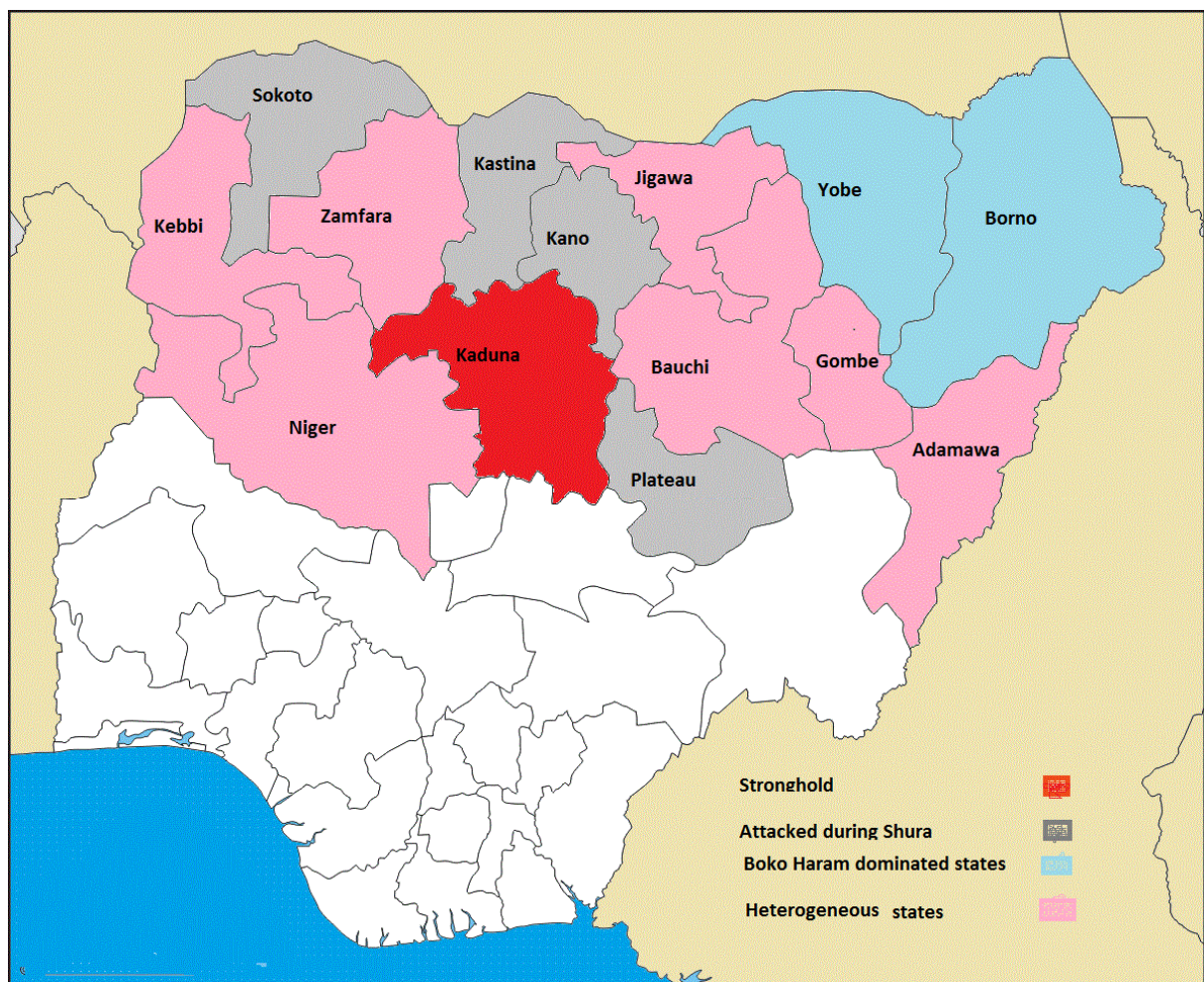
confines of the Nigerian laws (ibid). The Ashura celebration of the Shiites coincided with the outlawing of the group. On 12 October 2016 during the Ashura celebration which is an event that commemorates the death of the grandson of Prophet Mohammed, Shiites processions were attacked by a mob (which may appear to be Sunnis) in five States. There was an attack on the Shiites in Tudun Wada area of Kaduna metropolis, where a school belonging to the sect was destroyed (Thisday 2016).

In Funtua, Katsina states, 9 members of the group were killed (BBC 2016). At the Kofar Mazugal area of Kano city, there was a clash, but no casualty or damage was recorded (Thisday, 2016). More so, there was an attack on the Shiites in the Angwan Rogo area of Jos metropolis, but there was a timely intervention of by the police (ibid). Subsequently, the Shiite group accuses the Nigerian forces of collaborating with irate mobs while the Nigerian forces blame the Shiites of provoking public annoyance by impeding the smooth moment of the public (ibid). The Nigerian forces also accuse the Shiites of carrying illegal weapons (ibid). These attacks indicate the growing number of Salafiyya zealots and the increasing reflection of the violent faceoff of the Shiite-Sunni as experienced in the Middle-East.

9. States at Risk of Shiite violence

Figure 1 below highlights the states that are at risk of possible Shiite attacks. These selected geographical areas may be the target selection of the Shiites if they decide to engage in a campaign of violence. The Shiites may engage in violence due to strong Sunni-Shiites divides and events that generated grievances.

Figure 1 (Map of Nigeria indicating states at risk of Shiite violence)



The region labelled red represent Kaduna state where Zaria is a local government and the headquarters of the IMN. Additionally, Kaduna is an influential Northern city which is greatly divided between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. Sokoto is major Islamic city; it is referred to as the state of the caliphate because of the Uthman Danfodio Jihad of the 19th Century. Sokoto has both Sunni and Shiites, but it has a huge number of Sunni

population of the Maliki school of thought (Isa 2010) Moreover, it is one of the states where members of the IMN were attacked during the Ashura celebration in 2016. Plateau state is Christian dominated state in the North-central part of Nigeria, but it is at risk of Sunni-Shiite conflict because of the 2016 attack on the Shiites during the Ashura day. Borno and Yobe states are states dominated by Sunni Muslims. Both states can have a huge number of Boko Haram members whose ideology totally rejects the Shiite theology. Bauchi, Jigawa, Kebbi, Niger and Zamfara states are also at the risk of sectarian clashes. Even though the numbers of both sects cannot be quantified, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Shiites are the minorities and suffer rejection from the Sunni. More so, anecdotal evidence also suggests that Adamawa state has presence of Boko Haram, but what possess threat in the region is the Sunni-Shiite divides

10. Conclusion: Implications and Recommendations

It is important to note that Boko Haram escalated due to similar extra-judicial killing and disproportionate use of force by the Nigerian security (Agbibo 2013). There are some factors that may motivate Shiites to violence. These factors include; 1) Their violent antecedent 2) Violation of their human rights by the Nigerian Army 3) Perceived anti-Shiite decisions by Governor el-Rufai's 4) The theological disputation between them and other Salafist sects. 5) The hatred of the group by Boko Haram. 6) International support from Iran and other ideologically bonded groups 7) the slow reaction and passivity of the Nigerian central government in addressing the crises 8) the group's revivalist mission 9) and the ultimate prosecution of their leader who is still in detention.

The Shiites have shown some indications of adopting a violent strategy against the Nigerian state. We argue that these factors mentioned above have helped in forming a narrative about Shiite repression. More so, the protest by the members of the group and accusations against Sunni groups and the Kaduna state government indicates the narrative that the IMN has formed about a conspiracy about its members. The IMN's perception underscores the arguments that framing connotes the ability of individuals to interpret situations and events and arrive at a certain conclusion (Laws et al., 2003; Shmueli et al., 2006). Moreover, the collective decisions of the Shiites to reject the decisions of both the Federal and the Kaduna state governments, as well as the protest for the release of their leader, also mirrors the theoretical position of framing, regarding the using situation and events to justify actions and outcomes (Shmueli 2006). So far, the response of the Shiites after the December 2015 event has been non-violent. However, the actions and inactions of the Nigerian government regarding the Shiites may degenerate into violence. Sa'ndig's (2015) argument about the cultural background (radical Islam) of Northern Nigeria in influencing groups to choose violent political action can be relevant in understanding the transformation IMN to a violent movement. The relevance, in this case, involves the acrimonious rivalry between different sects (Shiite and Sunni) within Muslims in Northern Nigeria.

If the Shiite's crisis is not addressed through nonviolent and diplomatic means, Nigeria may expect a similar narrative that inspired Boko Haram to adopt a violent strategy. Aggrieved radical Islamists take a longer time to organise and execute atrocities. For instance, after the extra-judicial killing (Kanama battle) of its leader and the destruction of its camps by the Nigerian securities (Walker 2015) in 2009, Boko Haram carried out few attacks 2010 before it retreated and became a fully-fledged terror group in 2011 (ibid). After 9/11 attack of the World Trade Centre and the consequent invasion and man-hunt of the Taliban members by the US in Afghanistan, the Taliban migrated to Pakistan to re-enforce themselves into a stronger violent movement. Islamists frame These forms of retreat as *Hijra*. It can be traced to the migration of Prophet Mohammed's from Mecca to Medina for refuge, before his return to Mecca to defeat his enemies (Isa 2010).

Historically, Nigerian forces are characterised by the use of excessive and extrajudicial force on dissident groups or communities perceived to harbour rebels with examples such as Zaki Biam (HRW 2001) and Odi (HRW, 1999) massacres. The majority of scholars and policy makers advocates for a soft approach to combating and preventing violent extremism but even with the enactment of NACTEST 2014 (National Counterterrorism Strategy) Nigeria still adopts the conventional use of brute force. NACTEST seeks to address ideological, economic and political factors that radicalised groups and, it emphasises on the partnership of Nigerian government with civil society organisations and faith-based organisations in counter-narrating radical ideologies. Nonetheless, the NACTEST also have its shortcomings; it does not address the role of government in the extrajudicial killing and torture of dissidents or oppositional groups. Hence the massacre of the members of the IMN as well as the crackdown on pro-Biafran activists in Aba (Sahara Reporters 2016) by the Nigerian forces. The onslaught was targeted at the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) separatist movement, but unarmed pro-Biafra supporters were shot. The attacks on both groups further underscore the argument of Schmid (2013) on the need to put into account the implication of state actions which triggers group violence.

Already, the IMN has what it takes to become a violent and a radicalised movement. It has the well-established structure of command, with branches across Nigeria that can control different cells and garner international support from its external Shiites confraternities and allies. It also has more than a million members, the majority of which can be turned into agents of extremist atrocities, often premised on some historical grievances against the Nigerian state and as well as financial benefits. All can snowball into high intensity of violence following the pattern of Boko Haram. A pragmatic approach to countering the impending threat must emphasise the need to evolve a counter-narrative to negate the anti-secular, anti-state and violent doctrinal orthodoxy of the radical sect.

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