

The Impact of Terrorism in Nigeria on Public Health and Religious Freedom

Galadima, A. U.

Adamawa State College of Nursing and Midwifery Yola, Adamawa State.

Corresponding author:

Galadima, A. U., Adamawa State College of Nursing and Midwifery Yola, Adamawa State.

Email:

galadimawa2002@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Terrorism has become a significant challenge in Nigeria, affecting various aspects of life. This study was designed to explore the multifaceted impacts of terrorist activities on people's health and religious freedoms in Nigeria, focusing on the period between 2010 and 2015.

Methods: A comprehensive literature review and case study analysis were employed, encompassing primary data from affected regions, government reports, peer-reviewed articles, and other relevant sources. The study also utilized interviews and surveys conducted with affected populations, health workers, religious leaders, and governmental officials.

Results: The research findings elucidated that terrorism in Nigeria has led to grave consequences such as: health effects - premature deaths, injuries, displacement, overcrowding, epidemic outbreaks, disruption of health services, and the subsequent negative impact on overall health; and religious effects - imposition of religious views, limiting access to religious knowledge, indiscriminate killings of religious group members, and stigmatization of religions. The study also unveiled the government's role and the need for an unbiased political commitment to combat terrorism.

Conclusion/Recommendations: Terrorism in Nigeria has significantly depleted the general living conditions, leading to health challenges and constraining religious freedom. The research recommends a multifaceted approach, including collaborative health assessments, restoration of healthcare infrastructure, establishment of trauma centers, incentive programs for healthcare personnel, and extensive community engagement among other strategies. Implementing these recommendations could substantially mitigate the effects of terrorism on the Nigerian population and serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges.

Keywords: Terrorism, Health Impact, Religious Freedom, Nigeria, Boko Haram, Trauma Centers, De-radicalization.

Introduction

The rise of terrorism in Nigeria over the past few decades has emerged as a major national and international concern^[1]. Not only has terrorism caused immense physical

destruction and loss of life^[2], but it has also precipitated a multifaceted crisis affecting public health and religious freedom^[3]. This critical review aims to explore the complex ramifications of terrorism in Nigeria, focusing on its impact on the well-being of the population.

Historically, Nigeria has experienced terror-related acts dating back to incidents such as the Maitatsine religious uprising in Kano State in 1982^[4]. However, the emergence of organizations like Boko Haram in 2001 marked a significant escalation in violence and complexity^[5]. While other groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) have been classified as terror organizations^[6], their impact has not reached the devastating levels caused by Boko Haram^[7].

The global dimension of terrorism, especially after the 2010 incident involving a young Nigerian attempting to bomb a U.S. Detroit-bound airplane^[8], further heightened international scrutiny and contributed to Nigeria being blacklisted as a terror nation^[9]. Subsequent local events, such as the aftermath of the April 2011 general elections, have exposed government inadequacies in tackling the spiraling security situation^[10].

Terrorism in Nigeria not only inflicts immediate physical harm but leads to a cascade of effects including psychological trauma, systemic distress, disease outbreaks, and disruptions to religious practices^[11,12]. The insidious nature of this phenomenon necessitates a comprehensive examination of

its underlying causes, the evolving patterns of violence, the meaning this has on Nigerians and the adequacy of counter-terrorism measures^[13,14].

This critical review essay delved into the intricate interplay between terrorism, public health, and religious freedom in Nigeria, drawing on historical context, contemporary developments, and future implications. It aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of a multifaceted problem that has far-reaching consequences for the Nigerian state and its people.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to analyze the impact of terrorism in Nigeria. Specifically, this critical review was carried out through a comprehensive literature review, and case study analysis to identify and analyze primary data from affected regions, government reports, peer-reviewed articles, and other relevant sources. The study further focusses the review on how this impacted the affected populations, especially their health and faith.

Results/Discussion

The critical review generated an in-depth understanding of terrorism in Nigeria,

exploring its causes, its impact on health and religion, and the ways in which these complex factors interact. The multifaceted exploration approach enabled some vital contribution to both theoretical knowledge and practical interventions in the field of terrorism studies.

Definition of Terms

1. Terrorism: Defined by the United States Department of Defence as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological,” terrorism encompasses both the acts and those who commit them, known as terrorists[13].

2. Nigeria: A republic situated in Western Africa, Nigeria has a coastline along the Gulf of Guinea. With its geographical distinction highlighted by rivers like the Niger and its tributary the Benue, Nigeria's rich culture is shaped by its diverse ethnic groups. Governed by a federal system with 36 states and a federal capital territory, Nigeria stands as Africa's most populated country. Ethnically multifaceted and embracing Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions, Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state.

3. Health: Considered a fundamental human right, health encapsulates not merely the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being[15].

- Physical Health: Pertains to the physiological functioning of the body and the capacity to undertake routine tasks.

- Mental Health: Concerns cognitive abilities and coherent thinking.

- Social Health: Focuses on maintaining relationships and socially acceptable interactions.

- Emotional Health: Relates to expressing emotions congruent with stimuli, encompassing feelings, tensions, and anxieties.

- Spiritual Health: While some associate this with religion, it is a broader concept that may include personal or communal spirituality.

4. Religious: This term connects to beliefs, teachings, or practices of religion. Different scholars define religion based on various perspectives, but common themes include belief in a god or gods, rituals, ceremonies, and spiritual communication[16,17]. Lawal defines it as the attempt to correlate temporary and painful life aspects with what

is perceived to be permanent and absolute[18]. In Nigeria, religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, with the dominant practices being Islam, Christianity, and traditional African religions.

These definitions lay a foundational understanding for the examination of the impacts of terrorism in Nigeria on public health and religious freedom. By situating the concepts within specific contexts and diverse interpretations, this section offers a multifaceted lens to approach the critical review of these complex, interrelated phenomena.

The Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism has roots dating back to historical events, such as the reign of terror instigated by Maximilien Robespierre in 1793 following the French Revolution[19]. Such roots defy the common notion that terrorism is a phenomenon of modern times, asserting that the history of terrorism is as old as human's willingness to use violence to affect politics[19].

The concept of terrorism is contentious and does not lend itself to one universally acceptable definition. According to one perspective, terrorism's meaning varies depending on the viewpoint of the affected

parties[16]. For victims, the perpetrators are terrorists, while for perpetrators, terrorism is a means to reform or enforce change[16]. Some describe it as a tactic and strategy, a crime, a holy duty, and a justified reaction or an inexcusable abomination[21]. Others focus on the use of violent actions to achieve political aims or coerce governments[16].

Various international bodies and scholars have defined terrorism in different ways. It has been defined as the unlawful use of force for political or social objectives[22], criminal acts designed to provoke terror in the general public for political purposes[23], and political violence in asymmetrical conflicts to influence targeted audiences and reach political goals[24]. Considering these diverse perspectives, terrorism can be harmonized and defined as an act of psychological warfare driven by fear or panic with the intent to compel governments, institutions, or individuals to act in ways they might not otherwise act, often involving deliberate attacks on civilian populations and infrastructures[25].

Characteristically, terrorism involves:

- Use of unlawful violence believing that violence will usher in a better system.

- Use of unlawful and assorted dangerous weapons.
- Motivation by goals that might be political, religious, or ideological.
- Secretive membership recruitment and locations of residence.
- Strong will and readiness to die for the upheld course.
- Operation as syndicates with financial and military support from loyalists.
- Militancy, coercion, intimidation, and fear-inducing tactics such as suicide bombing, car bombing, rocket-propelled grenades, assassinations, abductions, and hijacking[25].

The targets of terrorism aim at extermination of human lives and destruction of properties, often attacking public squares, government buildings, religious places, schools, bridges, security installations, market squares, and prisons to free inmates, particularly incarcerated members[25].

Terrorism in Nigeria: Historical Trends

The foundations of armed insurrection against the Nigerian state, considered by many to be an early form of terrorism, were laid in the mid-1960s. Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist, led a campaign for greater

autonomy, resource control, and self-determination for the inhabitants of the Niger Delta[2]. As the founder and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Boro sought to address the perceived marginalization and economic exploitation of his people[2]. On February 23, 1966, Boro and 150 recruits attacked a police station, kidnapped officers, blew up oil pipelines, and declared independence for the Niger Delta. This revolt was eventually suppressed, and Boro was imprisoned for treason[2].

Historically, Nigeria has experienced other forms of uprisings, such as the Maitatsine religious uprisings between 1980 and 1985, occurring in various states including Kano, Kaduna, Bulumkutu, Yola, and Bauchi. Later, Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa led the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), demanding autonomy, fair distribution of oil proceeds, and environmental remediation[26]. Despite his peaceful approach, Saro-Wiwa's execution in 1995 marked a turning point in the Niger Delta's politics[^15^]. The years following his death saw a rise in ethnic militias, some employing terrorist strategies that threatened the national economy and security[2,26].

Groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND),

the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Movement for the Advancement of Democracy (MAD), and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have been classified under the umbrella of terror organizations. However, the most prominent terrorist threat in recent years has come from Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. This group's activities have been characterized by a more virulent, sophisticated, and religious dimension[27]. The genesis of Boko Haram's terror acts can be traced to the Maitatsine uprisings of the 1980s in Kano[27].

In recent times, banditry and kidnapping have become rampant, adding to the complex tapestry of security challenges in Nigeria. These evolving threats continue to undermine the stability and well-being of the nation, demanding comprehensive counter-terrorism measures.

The Causes of Terrorism in Nigeria

Understanding the underlying causes of terrorism is pivotal in combating this global menace. A comprehensive exploration of the factors leading to terrorism within societies, especially in Nigeria, reveals a multi-dimensional framework that includes:

1. Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Separatism: Ethnic conflicts often arise from a complex

mix of inequality, political opportunity, mobilization resources, and "ethnic strength." These conflicts can lead to terrorist strategies aiming at nationalist or separatist goals[28].

2. Poverty, Economic Disadvantage, and Globalization: The unequal distribution of resources can push vulnerable groups to terrorism. Links with international terrorist organizations further exacerbate the situation, where globalization plays a role[28].

3. Absence of Democracy: Terrorism can arise when minorities are denied basic rights or lack protection from the state[29]. The two specific scenarios include: arbitrary denial of rights and liberties by the government; and attack by one minority on another without state protection.

4. Disaffected Intelligentsia: According to certain scholars, terrorism could be fueled by disenchanted intellectuals in a social and moral crisis[30]. When rigid social stratification blocks social transformation, terrorism may be seen as a means to reconnect with the masses.

5. Dehumanization: This aspect represents those who are easily indoctrinated into

believing that they must fight for equality and recognition within society[28].

6. Religion: Misinterpretation of religious requirements can lead to fundamentalist beliefs, aiming to conquer and expand religious territories[28].

7. Governance and Political Factors: Poor governance, corruption, lack of amenities, and security can trigger terrorism in Nigeria[31]. The primary cause in West Africa is poor governance, contributing to social unrest and extremist ideologies[22,32-34]. Other factors include climate change, resource competition, and global marginalization[35].

The Nigerian Ambassador to the United Nations stressed that to combat terrorism globally, there must be a coherent international response focusing on underlying conditions, including poverty, unresolved conflicts, discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, and governance. Respect for human rights and the rule of law is vital in this strategy[21].

In the specific context of Nigeria, the rise of terrorism can be attributed to years of poor governance, militarism, abandonment of the Niger Delta and Northern regions, and a conspiracy between state managers, local

elites, and international bourgeoisie. This collusion in expropriating resources has led to a rebellion seeking retribution[28].

Effect of Terrorism on People's Health in Nigeria

Terrorism's consequences extend beyond political disruption, affecting the health and wellbeing of the population in the affected regions. Some critical impacts on people's health in Nigeria include:

1. Premature Deaths and Health Challenges: Terrorism leads to premature deaths, illnesses, injuries, and pain, often overwhelming the local healthcare system[36].

2. Destruction of Healthcare Infrastructure: The local healthcare facilities often suffer damage, making them unable to respond to the community's health needs[37].

3. Disruption of Health Services: Routine healthcare services and preventive initiatives may be disrupted, resulting in long-term adverse health outcomes[38].

4. Environmental Imbalances: Activities such as vandalizing pipelines and illegal mining create environmental hazards, increasing the risk of communicable diseases[39].

5. Psychological Impact: Terrorism can lead to psychological issues such as fear, anxiety, depression, panic, Post-Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD), and other mental health problems[40].

6. Nutritional Deficiencies: The activities of bandits and terrorists like Boko Haram have led to food shortages, malnutrition, and severe nutritional deficiencies[41].

7. Population Movements: Large displacements of populations create burdens on other healthcare systems and communities, leading to increased communicable diseases and other health issues such as increased rates of rape, drug abuse, and poor hygiene due to scarce resources[42].

Effect of Terrorism on People's Religion in Nigeria

Terrorism in Nigeria also profoundly impacts the enjoyment of religious freedom, challenging government authority, especially in areas occupied by Boko Haram insurgents during the peak of the insurgency between 2010 and 2015:

1. Imposition of Religious Views: Insurgents sometimes force victims to convert to their religious perspectives or face death, a

practice contrary to the teachings of Islam[43].

2. Limiting Access to Religious Knowledge: Through terror acts, communities and religious scholars may be disrupted or exterminated, affecting the normal flow of religious education[44].

3. Indiscriminate Killings: The mass indiscriminate killing of members of certain religious groups by terrorists leads to fear and mistrust within communities[45].

4. Stigmatization of Religions: By disguising as members of a particular religion to carry out attacks, terrorists can cause stigmatization against that religious community[46].

Conclusion

The present study has meticulously explored the complex history of terrorism in Nigeria and delineated its profound effects on both people's health and religious freedom. From premature deaths to overcrowding and epidemics, terrorism's multifaceted impact has been evident in the tangible disruption of health services and the consequent negative effect on population health. Furthermore, it has illuminated how terrorism undermines the general living conditions, predisposing individuals to various illnesses and diseases.

Notably, the study has also highlighted the direct constraint terrorism places on the enjoyment of religious freedom, necessitating an urgent call for unbiased governmental action. The war against terrorism in Nigeria requires a political commitment that transcends ethnic sentiment and ensures that the laws of the land apply to all individuals equally, irrespective of religious, political, or ethnic affiliations.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are advanced to alleviate the health and religious impacts of terrorism in Nigeria:

1. Collaboratively identify and assess population health needs across different government levels and development partners[47].
2. Restore and build new healthcare facilities to ensure availability and access to essential services[37].
3. Establish specialized trauma centers to address the diverse trauma needs resulting from terrorism, including psychological, emotional, and physical aspects[40].

4. Implement incentive programs to encourage healthcare personnel to serve in the most affected areas[47,48].

5. Enhance welfare interventions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) by recognizing their needs and ensuring basic facilities for a dignified life[41].

6. Enhance transparency and collaboration with representatives of key constituencies to ensure more effective intervention strategies[42].

7. Enact legislation to protect witnesses and victims and to provide support during trials[49].

8. Initiate a comprehensive de-radicalization program, engaging religious and community leaders to counter extremist views and promote true tenets of Islam[50,51].

9. Foster community engagement to rebuild trust among various stakeholders[50,51].

10. Integrate peace studies and promote respect for religious and cultural diversity within the education curriculum[51].

These recommendations, if implemented, could significantly reduce the impact of terrorism on the health and religious freedom of the people in Nigeria and set a precedent

for addressing similar challenges in other contexts.

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