

A STUDY OF TERRORIST LONGEVITY: THE CASE
OF NIGERIA

By

AHMED NASIRU

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Stephen Nemeth

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Holley Hansen

Dr. Peter Rudloff

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Name: AHMED NASIRU

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Abstract: Why do some terrorist organizations survive longer than others? This paper investigates the longevity of domestic terrorist groups in Nigeria and seeks to uncover the determinants of longevity. The sample, drawn from the Extended Data on Terrorist Groups (EDTG) and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), consists of 25 diverse terrorist organizations operating in Nigeria from 1979 to 2022. I find that religion does not affect group duration in Nigeria. However, I find that terrorist organizations located in states with extensive water cover tend to have a longer duration than groups in the forest. This finding is noteworthy, as no existing literature discusses the effect of waterways on group lifespan. Finally, the author provides areas to advance future research and make policy recommendations to concerned authorities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Research Question

Terrorist groups have existed for centuries, and the motivations for their formation and maintenance have varied. Certain terrorist organizations are driven by religious or ideological convictions, whereas others are influenced by political or social grievances. (Vittori 2009; Young 2019). These factors can affect a group's lethality, targeting decisions, tactics, and organizational structures, ultimately shaping the group's overall behavior and impact (Hoffman 1994; Young and Dugan 2014).

At the same time, we know little about the factors that affect group longevity. History provides us with several examples of particularly long-lasting groups. One of the earliest known examples of a long-lasting terrorist group is the Sicarii, a group of Jewish rebels who fought against the Roman Empire in the 1st century AD and were able to maintain their operations for several years before ultimately being defeated (Rappaport 2011). Recently, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), an organization seeking the reintegration of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, conducted a campaign of violence in Ireland, and the United Kingdom for nearly thirty years (Cronin 2006). Other groups include Al-Qaeda, which despite significant degradation, has demonstrated the capacity to execute sophisticated operations since the late 1980s. The Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka represent another example, as they engaged in a prolonged conflict with the government over several decades before ultimately being defeated (Flanigan 2008; Gambetta 2005).

Africa has also witnessed the emergence of several resilient terrorist factions. For example, Al-Shabaab has conducted numerous attacks in Somalia since 2006 and has extended its operations to neighboring states like Kenya and Uganda. Similarly, Boko Haram has been active in Nigeria since the early 2000s and has effectively sustained its existence and endurance (Aksoy, Carter, and Wright 2012).

Given that the accepted wisdom argues that most terrorist organizations do not last longer than one year (Rapoport 1992), it is important to know what factors account for some of the outliers discussed above (Cronin 2006; Rappaport 2011). Researchers - like Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler (2011); Gaibulloev and Sandler (2008); Young and Dugan (2014) have recently started to expand our knowledge, not only educating our understanding of why the variations occur but offering more specific variables that influence their lifespan. In this vein, scholars have made significant progress in uncovering the dynamics that allow certain groups to persist and thrive, while others falter and disintegrate. Therefore, the study of group dynamics, particularly in relation to the longevity of terrorist organizations, is a fertile area of research that can yield valuable insights.

Unfortunately, the analysis of terrorist organizations has on average focused on international rather than domestic groups (Sánchez-Cuenca and De la Calle 2009). This is problematic for several reasons. First, international groups are not representative of the average domestic group, as they typically have greater resources, manpower, and capabilities. Further, most attacks are domestic; Rosendorff and Sandler (2005) note that domestic terrorist incidents exceed international ones by a factor of 9:1. Lastly, Smith and Zeigler (2017) have noted that domestic terrorist attacks have been on an upward trajectory since 9/11. The increasing activities of domestic terror groups pose a significant threat to national and international security and understanding what enables them to survive over an extended period is crucial for developing effective strategies to counter and disrupt their activities.

The paper investigates the factors contributing to the longevity of terrorist groups in Nigeria. In particular, I ask what explains the differences in group duration in Nigeria. The historic legacy of colonization has left Nigeria divided along multiple ethnic and religious lines, notably called “North-Side divide”¹. This has resulted in a predominant extremist religious group in the north and extremist nationalist groups in the south. Both groups differ in ideology, size, resources, and operational tactics. Due to the increasing counterterrorism measures implemented by the government, these groups are forced to evolve and adapt to threats. It is also not uncommon for terrorist group to seek protection in remote and inaccessible terrains such as mountains, forests, or waterways (Gaibulloev, Hou, and Sandler 2020; Metz and Millen 2014). Differences in ideology, choice of safe havens, membership size and other features might likely explain their longevity.

More importantly, this study is important because Nigeria presents an extreme case when it comes to terrorism in West Africa (Gerring 2008). Data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) shows that between 2000 and 2020, Nigeria suffered nearly 5500 terrorist attacks while Niger and Ghana suffered 217 and 17, respectively². It seems readily apparent that the operating environment for terrorist organizations is somehow different, and unfortunately better, in Nigeria than in its neighbors.

A number of potential factors exist to explain this. One may be the wide variety of natural and terrain features existing in Nigeria. These range from the dense forest in the South, the wide River Niger flowing through the country to exit in the Niger Delta, to the expansive savannah in the Northeast (Ajide 2021). Ghana is relatively flat and lacks dense forests or vast water bodies that can provide conducive environments for terrorist groups to establish operational

¹ North-South divide explain the socio-economic and ideological differences between Northern and Southern Nigeria.

² I selected 2000 for the start year since it was the first full year since the establishment of democracy in Nigeria. 2020 is the last year for the most current version of the GTD.

bases (Oyewole 2015). Niger, while having some challenging terrains such as the Sahara Desert which does not provide a good operational environment for terrorist groups.

Another explanation may be the ideological landscape of the country. The country of Nigeria, with a population of over 220 million – more than twice the combined population of Ghana and Niger – is heavily divided amongst religious and ethnic lines (Obi 2006). Both Ghana and Niger have relatively homogenous populations in terms of religion and ethnicity, which reduces the potential for polarization and radicalization compared to Nigeria (Oyewole 2015; Udama 2013).

In the next chapter, I will examine the literature that focuses on group longevity, with a focus on research from an organizational perspective in addition to more traditional work centered on a group's external environment. This is followed with my theory and hypotheses, which posit that religious ideology – an organization attribute and rough terrain – an external factor – are positive drivers for group duration in Nigeria. My analysis shows inconclusive support for religion as a driver of group duration but also reveals that waterways aid group longevity. I conclude by discussing further avenues for research as well as policy recommendations for the Nigerian government.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Group Longevity: The Literature

While scholars have been engaged in the quantitative study of terrorism since the mid-1970s, their attention has mainly been focused on understanding the violent activities of terrorist groups rather than their longevity. This is primarily because attacks are visible and easy to quantify (Gill et al. 2017). Such a focus provides insight into the tactics, strategies, and motivations of terrorist groups, which can then be used to identify risk factors, develop predictive models, and inform counterterrorism strategies (Araj 2008; Phillips 2015a). However, the study of violent activities alone can lead to a narrow and incomplete understanding of terrorist groups because it focuses solely on their production of violence and fails to consider the other activities carried out by violent extremist groups (see Heger, Jung, and Wong 2012).

The case of Hezbollah illustrates the significance of comprehending group longevity. The group has been in operation since the 1980s and has transformed from a resistance group with a focus on fighting the Israeli occupation of Lebanon to a political and military organization with a significant presence in Lebanese politics and society. Initially, their insurgencies were characterized by violent attacks and armed resistance operations. (Berzinji, Kaati, and Rezine 2012). However, their continued existence has enabled them to accumulate resources, establish connections with regional and global actors, and consequently gain a degree of legitimacy (Sharp 2006).

2.2 Foundational Arguments

In one of the foundational papers on the subject, Rapoport (1992) suggested that most terrorist groups last less than a year and the few that survive beyond a year cease to exist at the tenth year. His claim is based on the fact that most groups are typically small, loosely structured, and lacking a broader support base, unlike more well-known groups like the Al-Qaeda or the Al-Shabab, which had more hierarchical structures and significant support base from specific segments of the population. These characteristics mean that most groups are vulnerable to external pressures such as government repression and a more hostile political environment like conflict, quickly leading to disintegration (Phillips 2015b).

Subsequent studies on group duration (Cronin 2006; Abrahms 2007; Berzinji, Kaati, and Rezine 2012) have confirmed Rapoport's (1992) claim and found that most terrorist groups do not have a long duration. These groups tend to quickly flame out due to leadership disputes and loss of popular support (Young 2019). Cronin (2006) attributes this to burnout and loss of morale among members due to competition from rival groups. Lastly, Abrahms (2007) found that groups tend to quickly fail because they lack a clear political objective and have an overreliance on violence to achieve their goals.

Price (2012) argues against Rapoport's (1992) estimates, asserting that the latter's data consists of irrelevant groups that have committed few, if any, attacks. Instead, Price (2012) employs data that includes groups only if they have committed at least four attacks related to terrorism and have caused at least one fatality. According to his findings, terrorist groups typically last around 14 years on average. Price's approach is reliable and informative since it considers only terrorist activities carried out by terrorist organizations, as opposed to criminal groups.

Phillips (2019) challenges Rapoport's (1992) views on the longevity of terrorist groups, arguing that many organizations go through cycles of activity and dormancy, making it difficult to accurately assess their lifespan. Furthermore, groups may splinter or transform into new organizations, complicating efforts to determine if they are the same group. To mitigate these

issues, Phillips studied groups that were formed as a result of splintering as well as those that never splintered. He included groups based on their first date of formation rather than their first attack, and for the end date, he used the latest year instead of the last attack. Only when there was no reliable source for the group's end date did he include the last attack in the data, following the exception made by Cronin (2006). Results from Phillips' (2019) analysis show that, on average, 38% of groups survive for 2.4 years before they splinter. Others that never splintered since formation survive for over 5 years. Phillips' method of survival timeframe analysis aligns with the works of Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler (2011), Gaibullov, Hou, and Sandler (2020), and Young and Dugan (2014).

2.3 Organizational Attributes

One factor that may account for group duration is the organization's internal attributes. Like all organizations, terrorist groups have some sort of structure which provides for a balance of operational efficiency and organizational security (Kilberg 2012; Shapiro 2019). Structure is important because it allows terrorist organizations to effectively plan and execute their operations, while also providing security measures to protect their members and activities from being disrupted by competing groups or authorities.

According to Kilberg (2012), some terrorist organizations operate like bureaucratic bodies, characterized by a hierarchical structure with distinct departmental boundaries, well-defined lines of authority, structured reporting mechanisms, and formal decision-making procedures. These groups are the most durable because they have a clear chain of command and decision-making process, allowing them to efficiently carry out their operations and adapt to changing circumstances (Kilberg 2012; Crenshaw 2012). Additionally, Kilberg (2012) noted that terrorist organizations with bureaucratic structures tend to have strong ideological and political motivations that translate

into a unifying force for members, making them more resistant to internal dissension and external pressures.

On the other end, Kilberg (2012) describes terrorist groups that possess minimal organizational hierarchy as “all channels network”. These groups typically lack central authority or formal chain of command. Their decision-making authority and influence are distributed among all members of the network, and there is often a sense of equality and shared power, which often leads to disagreements and conflicting priorities among members, as their codes of conduct are not accountable to a central authority. Also, communication and collaboration tend to flow freely in multiple directions, without strict reporting lines or levels of authority. Organizations with this type of structure typically lack greater member cohesion and such groups tend to act more impulsively in attacks, threatening a group’s survival (Snow and Byrd 2007).

The discussion about organizational attributes is not complete without leadership. The ability of an organization to survive depends on leadership capabilities to get resources, recruit, and maintain internal cohesion (Rowlands and Kilberg 2011). In these cases, charisma is one the most important attributes of a leader (Price 2012). A charismatic leader may use their personality and charm to establish a sense of belonging, commonness, and purpose among followers. On the other hand, they can also exhibit manipulative tendencies, taking advantage of the trust and admiration they receive from followers. This can silence dissent, discourage critical thinking, and create an environment where blind obedience is valued over independent thought (Magaloni 2008; Phillips 2015a; Price 2012). Sometimes, the death of charismatic leaders has a substantial impact on group duration. The demise of leaders like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of ISIS had a significant impact on the groups’ operations and longevity. While these leaders were able to mobilize followers and establish a strong presence, their deaths resulted in internal power struggles and weakened the groups' cohesion, leading to internal divisions and declining operational capabilities (Freeman 2014).

2.3.1 Ideology

Similar to Drake (1998) who argued that ideology is critical to group target selection, ideology is also key terrorist organization's survival. According to Berman (2004), Cronin (2002), and Juergensmeyer (2004), religion provides a solid ideological foundation for terrorist activities by ensuring a sense of identity and purpose and offering a justification for violence and militancy. It also serves to unite individuals, strengthen their commitment to the cause, and provide a moral code that allows them to rationalize, if not condone, extreme forms of violence. Religion, as Cronin (2002) argues, is the most influential determinant of longevity, primarily because of their allegiance to a certain deity that often connotes commitment, sacrifice, and reward in the afterlife. Cronin (2002) concludes that a high level of commitment fosters ideological group's longevity due to their ability to withstand adversity and willingness to endure hardships over a long period of time.

Gaibullov, Hou, and Sandler (2020) conducted a study of transnational terrorist organizations which suggests that religious groups are likely to survive longer than other ideologies. While they may not be as likely to achieve their goals or participate in the political system, viewing political involvement as corrupt and incompatible with their religious principles, they are more likely to endure over time. Gaibullov and Sandler's (2008) analysis on ideological groups indicates that extremist religious groups tend to last longer than other ideologies, particularly in North Africa or the Middle East. This is due to the deeply ingrained religious and cultural traditions in these regions, which make it easier for extremist religious groups to gain support and legitimacy.

On the other hand, Crenshaw (2010) argues that ethnonationalist groups have the greatest longevity due to their well-established leadership and proximity to local support, which allows them to maintain continuity and stability, even in the face of disruptions such as leadership changes. Brooke (2018) and Kim and Sandler (2021) concurs to Crenshaw's (2010) argument above. They suggest that terrorist groups strategically position themselves in areas closer to their communities for recruitment and safety. Such an approach allows them to benefit from shared beliefs, nationalist

sentiments, and forming a new nation-state that resonates with broader interests within their communities. Additionally, proximity to local support networks provides a source of resilience, as they can draw on sympathetic individuals' physical and mental support within their communities.

Left-wing groups have a shorter lifespan (Sharp 2006), because their ideology often encompasses a wide range of beliefs that can be controversial and not resonate with the broader population. For instance, their opposition to capitalism, socialism, or communism, among other things, may only appeal to a small segment of the population, which in turn limits their inclusivity and representation. Similarly, the diversity of stances and appeal to a smaller population can also create internal divisions, leading to fragmentation and the eventual collapse of the group (Sharp 2006). Also, Left-wing groups tend to put a lot of emphasis on getting young people involved in their cause, which can lead to a lot of changes happening quickly and make it hard for them to stay organized. According to Cronin (2000), these groups often prioritize sticking to their ideals over getting things done practically, which can make it tough for them to form partnerships or keep support from the larger community. In comparison, right-wing groups – as noted by Berman (2004), tend to have a different approach.

Finally, Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler (2011) show that Far-right organizations have a higher survival rate of approximately 6% to 8% compared to other types of groups. This is because of their extremist ideologies, which often involve strong opposition to issues such as diversity and inclusion, and advocacy for the marginalization of certain ethnicities or races. As a result, these organizations are more likely to face broader condemnation from mainstream society, leading to social stigma being attached to members of the organization, quickly leading to their disintegration.

2.4 Environmental Attributes

Terrorism is a strategic method employed by groups who may feel alienated from a country's political process and resources-sharing formula. It is a tactic utilized by those who lack the power to pursue alternative options (Metz and Millen 2004). To ensure their continued existence

in perpetuating violence, groups have evolved and adapted to varying factors that aid their survival. In this regard, Metz and Millen (2004) developed a framework that applies to the study of group longevity. The authors observed that groups typically seek sanctuaries to shield their activities and evade detection by security agencies. These sanctuaries often take the form of natural covers, such as jungles, tropical forests, and urban areas. Their framework is in tandem with existing literature on external determinants, and proponents of this work maintained that external attributes provide the training grounds for groups and protections from government operations (Gaibulloev, Hou, and Sandler 2020; Young and Dugan 2014; Larue and Danzell 2020).

2.4.1 Terrain

A study conducted by Young and Dungan (2014) on transnational groups has revealed that groups situated in the Middle East and residing in mountainous areas can survive for approximately one and a half years. Despite the relatively shorter survival period, the authors assert that these groups have the potential to persist even longer. The mountainous regions provide natural barriers that can impede aerial surveillance, rendering it challenging for security forces to infiltrate and govern the area. On the other hand, an analysis of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist organization in Southeast Asia by Swanny (2014) demonstrates that difficult terrain poses a significant challenge for the Filipino government in countering the group. The Abu Sayyaf Group has shown a high degree of mobility, as they are able to move through underground mountain enclaves to avoid detection. Occasionally, they also use mountains as cover during airstrikes, which consequently contribute to their survival over time (Swanny 2014). Lastly, research found that mountainous terrain provides strategic depth and a safe haven for terrorists to regroup, retrain, and launch attacks. As per the author's argument, the landscape in certain areas provides terrorist groups with operational sanctuaries, which helps them preserve their organizational structure, procure additional resources, and sustain their activities (Kilcullen 2015).

2.4.2 Forest Cover

Forests offer a sense of isolation and seclusion, which can facilitate the formation of tight-knit bonds among terrorist group members, fostering camaraderie and loyalty. This, in turn, reinforces morale and a sense of purpose, thus potentially contributing to duration (Braithwaite 2016). Gaibullov and Sandler (2013) show that forest cover in the tri-border region between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan are used by numerous extremist organizations, like ISIS, Taliban, and Al-Qaeda as safe havens, and bases for their operations. Their results show that forest cover is a strong determinant for group survival, on average, they survive for 3.2 years. This is, in contrast with groups not in forested areas; they survive for less than a year, conforming to Rapoport's (1992) estimates.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter presents an analysis of the organizational and environmental factors that contribute to group survival. In line with previous research highlighting the importance of ideology for group survival, the chapter examines the varying impact of ideology on group lifespan. Additionally, I discuss external environmental factors that contribute to group survival. Previous research on external factors produced different estimates of group survival, and interestingly, groups located in forest areas appear to survive longer than those situated in mountainous regions. The theory section of the paper employs the framework proposed by Metz and Millen (2004) to establish the external determinants of group survival in Nigeria. This framework will provide a valuable tool for analyzing the various environmental factors that may affect the survival of Nigerian groups.

CHAPTER III

THEORY

3.1 A Theory of Group Longevity in Nigeria.

Nigeria has experienced the emergence and sustained existence of various terrorist groups, which has led to a number of domestic security challenges. One notable terrorist group in Nigeria is Boko Haram, which has been active for over a decade (Ajide 2021). The longevity of groups in Nigeria can be attributed to a complex web of factors such as group ideology and external environment attributes. These factors, which often intersect and reinforce each other, have contributed to the resilience and continued existence of groups in Nigeria, despite the government's and international partners' extensive efforts to counter their activities. In this section, I discuss how religious ideology, forest cover, and water cover act as central drivers for a group's duration.

Like previous work linking religion to group duration, I argue that, in Nigeria, groups with religious ideology will survive longer than groups of other ideological orientations. Religious ideology in Nigeria, characterized by the coexistence of Islam, Christianity, and indigenous African traditional religions, has been identified as one of the contributing factors to the emergence of terrorism in the country (Ogundiya and Amzat 2008). The diversity of religious beliefs and practices, coupled with political, economic, and social grievances, has created a complex environment in which extremist ideologies can take root and be exploited by radical groups (Odunsi 2021).

Regarding the external environment, I claim that groups operating in areas with extensive water and forests covers are more likely to survive. These natural features provide a conducive environment for mobility and concealment. The use of waterways and forests as hideouts and for protection has several benefits to the group; first, Boko Haram, for example, uses the Lake Chad region as a safe haven, taking advantage of its vastness and remote islands to launch attacks against targets before melting back into the labyrinth of water channels (Njoku et al. 2018).

Also, the Sambisa forest located in northeast Nigeria has been discussed to have provided strategic advantages for terrorist groups in the region, allowing them to train, and plan (Akanji 2019). The seclusion provided by Sambisa Forest can also shield these training camps from surveillance, making them difficult to detect and dismantle (Abah and Nwokwu 2015). Additionally, the pristine and untouched nature of forests provide a powerful propaganda tool for groups, portraying themselves as defenders of the environment and garnering support from local populations and sympathetic individuals (Okuyade 2011; Onuoha, Nwangwu, and Ugwueze 2023).

In the following pages, I discuss how religion affects group duration in Nigeria. This is followed by a hypothesis. I then do the same for water and forest cover.

3.2 Nigeria

Nigeria has grappled with terrorism for decades (Lutz and Lutz 2010). One of the primary drivers often associated with terrorism is the country's deep-seated ethnic, religious, and economic divisions (Ajide 2021). For example, the North-South divide and the Muslim-Christian divide have contributed to alienation and exclusion among some communities, which extremist groups have exploited to recruit and radicalize individuals (Miles 2015). Similarly, due to north-side divide, economic disparities and a lack of opportunities have also contributed to recruiting young people who feel disillusioned with the government and the current state of affairs (Njoku et al. 2018).

The north-south divide is particularly a salient issue. It has deep historical roots going back to the colonial era. During the British colonial period, the north and south were distinct regions

with separate authorities and varying religious practices. The northern region was predominantly Muslim, and its people typically adhered to Islamic tenets alongside existing Hausa-Fulani traditions. On the other hand, the southern region was predominantly Christian and mostly composed of the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups (Adesoji 2010). Colonial rulers primarily orchestrated the unification of both regions in 1914 to exploit resources from both regions under the umbrella of one country, Nigeria. However, due to differences in religion, ethnic backgrounds, and population sizes, the unification resulted in an uneven distribution of political power, economic resources, and social privileges. The colonial authorities favored the northern region, and this favoritism further exacerbated existing regional differences and led to tensions and conflicts affecting Nigeria's political and social landscape (Igwe and Amadi 2021). After the colonizers left, power-sharing became a contentious and divisive topic (Ogundiya and Amzat 2008). The federal government initiated a rotational arrangement, called the "zoning system" whereby the presidency and other key political positions were rotated between the North and South (Ikelegbe 2005). However, this system was marred by corruption, nepotism, and political manipulation, which exacerbated the North-South divide and fueled grievances amongst several tribal and religious groups (Akanji 2019; Odunsi 2021)

Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria is a clear example of how the north and south divide along political and religious lines. The region Boko Haram emerged from has a long history of Islamic scholarship and education, which rogue clerics have exploited over time to spread extremist rhetoric (Pape 2003). Their ideology rejects Western education, democracy, and secularism, and it seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate and impose Sharia law (Heerten and Moses 2014). In the south, nationalist groups like the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) emerged due to long-standing grievances related to poverty, underdevelopment, and perceived marginalization by the central government (Onapajo and Uzodike 2012). The NDA, for example, is fighting for greater control over the region's oil wealth, which they say has been siphoned off by foreign companies and corrupt politicians (Okoli 2019). The group has attacked

oil installations and pipelines, causing significant damage to the country's economy (Okuyade 2011). The Oodua People's Congress, an ethnic militia, while less lethal than other groups, seeks to promote and protect the interests of the Yoruba ethnic group in southern Nigeria (Aderoke and Olanrewaju 2013).

3.3 Religious Ideology

Nigeria is home to a wide variety of religious groups (Mustasilta 2019). Religion plays a significant role in the daily lives of Nigerians, as it shapes their moral and ethical values, social practices, and political views. However, the country's religious landscape is marred by religious extremism, which has resulted in violence and social upheaval (Abah and Nwokwu 2015). Despite efforts by the government and various religious leaders to curb extremism, the problem remains a significant challenge to the country's stability and social cohesion.

The composition of religions in Nigeria is approximately 40 percent Islam and 50 percent Christianity, with the remainder in traditional religious groups (Ajide 2021). The Islamic community in Nigeria is diverse, with various schools of thought and practice, including both Sunni and Shia denominations. Both denominations are commonly found in the Northern part of the country and the system in place is intolerant to secular practices (Okoli 2019). Many parts of the Northern regions of Nigeria have Sharia law in addition to state and federal laws³ (Okuyade 2011). The relationship between Sharia and violent extremism in Nigeria has been a subject of debate as religious scholars believe it has helped promote social justice and provide a sense of identity to the Muslim population, while others have criticized it for being discriminatory, unconstitutional, and extremist (Njoku et al. 2018).

³ States in Nigeria possess some degree of autonomy to legislate laws that guide moral conduct (Okafor 2011)

While it is important to mention that Sharia does not promote or condone terrorist acts, there are instances where its doctrines have often been misinterpreted to suit sinister motives. For example, Boko Haram, sees the implementation of Sharia as a way to combat what they perceive as Western influence in Nigeria (Nmehielle 2004). Similarly, the Shia Islamic Movement of Nigeria advocates for implementing Sharia law for the same reason as Boko Haram and has clashed with the Nigerian government over its demands. In 2015, the Nigerian military raided the Islamic Movement of Nigeria headquarters in Zaria, resulting in the deaths of over 300 members (Onapajo 2017).

One area where religion has a significant impact is in Nigeria is by enhancing group organizational capacity (Afinotan and Ojatorotu 2009; Chinwokwu 2013). For instance, Berman's (2004) religious club model proposes that terrorist groups function as exclusive clubs that offer certain benefits to members but require significant self-sacrifice in return. This creates a strong sense of loyalty and commitment among members, and helps to prevent defection, thereby consolidating the overall structure of the organization. The preceding context of Berman's (2014) club model appear to be consistent with Nigeria's group internal practices, where terrorist leaders promote moral and ethical teachings that emphasize honesty, integrity, accountability, and fairness (Onapajo and Uzodike 2012; Oriola 2012). These values are essential for building trust among members and establishing a strong ethical culture. Organizations that embrace and promote these religious values are more likely to enjoy the trust and confidence of their members and stakeholders, leading to increased organizational capacity.

On the other hand, nationalist groups in Nigeria, due to their ideology often lack the same level of organizational capacity and operational effectiveness compared to their religious counterparts; they tend to be prone to internal divisions and infighting, as different factions within the group may have competing visions for the nationalist movement or the desired outcome of their activities. This can lead to fragmentation and weaken the group's overall organizational capacity. (Chinwokwu 2013). Additionally, many nationalist groups in Nigeria are loosely organized, often

lacking a clear chain of command and coordination — the lack of uniformity in their operations has limited their ability to sustain prolonged campaigns (Okafor 2011).

Furthermore, unlike Boko Haram and other religious fundamentalist groups, which use suicide bombing as operational tactics, NDA and similar groups often rely on conventional warfare tactics. These tactics involve direct confrontations with security agencies or attacks on government installations, which can be more easily countered by the state's superior military capabilities. This susceptibility to counter-terrorism efforts weakens the organizational efficiency of such groups, which can lead to their abrupt disintegration. (Amadi, Imoh-Itah, and Obomanu 2016; Joab-Peterside, Porter, and Watts 2012).

Overall, the above situations underscore the power of religious ideology in fostering organizational survival. This to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *Religious groups in Nigeria will have a longer duration than other ideological groups.*

3.4 External Environment

Groups in Nigeria have long utilized the country's diverse and vast terrain to evade detection and frustrate counterterrorism efforts (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009). These areas, ranging from remote waterways to dense forests, provide cover for terrorists to launch attacks, regroup, and plan their next moves. The country's expansive and unpopulated areas afford these groups ample cover to avoid detection, impede counterterrorism efforts, and execute their objectives with ease (Oriola 2012). The challenges of tracking their hideouts, coupled with the natural protection offered by the extensive forest or water coverage, play a critical role in their survival (Adebayo 2014). Furthermore, the complex terrain and insufficient infrastructure in these regions have contributed to the challenges in responding promptly to emergencies. For instance, in some remote areas, the absence of proper road networks or communication systems has impeded

the security forces' ability to respond expeditiously to distress calls or mobilize troops to trouble spots (Njoku et al. 2018).

3.4.1 Water Cover

Water transportation has been a vital part of Nigeria's history, with its extensive network of rivers, lakes, and coastal areas serving as important trade routes, sources of livelihoods, and cultural practices for its people (Onapajo and Uzodike 2012; Oriola 2012). Nigeria's waterways extend to the River Niger, Lake Chad, and the coastal areas of the Gulf of Guinea, playing a significant role in trade. However, some water channels have been exploited by terrorist groups for illegal activities (Ikelegbe 2005). The natural cover provided by the dense mangrove forests in water enables groups to establish hidden camps and launch attacks from unexpected locations, further complicating counter-terrorism efforts (Amadi, Imoh-Itah and Obomanu 2016). The logistical challenges posed by the swampy terrain hinders the government's ability to effectively deploy resources, and conduct patrols, thereby undermining the overall effectiveness of the government's efforts to combat the group activities (Okuyade 2011).

Notably, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) amongst others has adeptly capitalized on the intricate network of creeks, rivers, and swamps that pervade the Niger Delta, utilizing them as strategic escape routes and elusive hideouts to elude security forces. The region's dense mangroves and numerous water bodies create natural obstacles that hinder the movement of security forces, rendering the task of tracking down the militants arduous. This advantageous water cover has provided the NDA with unparalleled mobility, enabling them to strike with impunity and regroup covertly.

Hypothesis 2: *Groups located in states with high levels of water cover will have a longer duration than those that are not.*

3.4.2 Forest Cover

Forests cover about 6.1% of Nigeria's land area, and one of the remarkable features of Nigeria's forests is the unique geographical distribution, with the most extensive forests located in the northeastern and central regions of the country (Ume 2017). Studies have shown that most of these forests are mostly characterized by a combination of savanna woodland, rainforest, and montane forests, showcasing a diverse range of vegetation types and habitats (Ezebilo 2011).

The densely populated nature of Nigeria's forests has become a security concern in recent years as it has provided cover for Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations to mobilize and coordinate activities (Pegg and Zabbey 2013).⁴ Attempts to combat Boko Haram's activity in the notorious Sambisa Forest have been unproductive due to dense vegetation and limited visibility during operations (Okoli 2019). Also, the lack of forest infrastructure like lookout towers and roads to provide logistics or to aid the deployment of security forces further complicates efforts to monitor and control group activities (Amadi, Imoh-Itah, and Obomanu 2016).⁵

The reliance of Nigerian terrorist organizations on waterways and forests to evade detection and ensure their longevity is a departure from the classic urbanization perspective (Metz and Millen 2004). Proponents of the positive effects of urbanization such as Asthana and Nirmal (2009), Beall (2007), and Karber (1971), primarily believe that terrorist organizations tend to achieve better operational success and longer campaigns in urban areas due to dense populations, anonymity, and ease of blending with the populace. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that modern cities are well-equipped with robust law enforcement and intelligence agencies, advanced surveillance technologies, and stringent security measures, which may significantly impede the activities of terrorist groups. In the last two decades, Nigerian cities have invested in urban planning and design strategies that prioritize security considerations (Okeke, Chendo, and

⁴ Densely populated forests are places that has a high concentration of trees and other vegetation.

⁵ This refers to the physical and organizational systems that support the management and utilization of the forest like roads, bridges, and trails.

Amobi 2019). For instance, urban infrastructure, like buildings and public spaces, are designed with security features, such as access control, surveillance systems, and blast-resistant materials, to deter terrorist attacks. Likewise, city planners work closely with security agencies to identify and address vulnerabilities in the urban environment that could be exploited by terrorists, such as unregulated slums or informal settlements. These urban planning and design strategies have contributed to making Nigerian cities less susceptible to terrorism (Okeke, Chendo, and Amobi 2019; Ogunsote 2014).

Consequently, counterterrorism efforts yield more fruitful results against groups operating in urban areas. For instance, In 2009, Boko Haram's primary attack targets were civilians, politicians, and government installations located in urban areas (Adesoji 2010). However, their operations in urban areas had serious economic implications when many foreign investors fled the country (Ossai 2019). The consequences of urban terrorism became more visible and led the government to both review the Terrorism Prevention Act in 2011 as well as increase the national defense budget (Attah 2019). The Act, which primarily includes curbing terrorism financing, was augmented with a \$2.38B increase in military spending, a near 20% increase from 2010 (Abiodun, Asaolu, and Ndubuisi 2015). Consequently, this translated to the purchase of the latest military hardware, better training and deployment of military personnel, and surveillance equipment, most of which are strategically positioned in urban areas. A study by Adebayo (2014) showed that urban terrorism attacks in Nigeria dropped by 43% due to intense counter security measures. This validates my claim that unlike water or forest cover, urbanization has no sustainable impact on terrorist group longevity in Nigeria, and if it does, it is only ephemeral.

Hypothesis 3: *Groups located in states with forests cover will have a longer duration than those that are not.*

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND METHODS

4.1 Data and Methods

To build my dataset of Nigerian terrorist organizations, I use the Extended Data on Terrorist Groups (EDTG) compiled by Hou, Gaibullov and Sandler (2020). This is a dataset that provides group-level information like – group ideology, geographical distribution, size, and base country – on over 760 different terrorist organizations around the world. I use this to first build my database of terrorist organizations in Nigeria from 1979 to 2016.

This information is supplemented by additional group information from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The GTD is a publicly available database maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). It contains information on approximately 200,000 terrorist incidents worldwide from 1970 to 2020. Attacks are defined as the illegal use of force by non-state actors to attain political, economic, religious, or social goals (GTD Codebook 2020). From these data, I identified six additional groups in Nigeria. It is important to note that all groups in the EDTG can also be found in the GTD, but not all GTD groups are in the EDTG.

Specifically, groups enter and exit the dataset based on their start and end dates. I define a start date as the year when a group is formed rather than when they commit the first attack. Often, some groups are likely to be active for several years before they have the capacity to commit the first attack. Notably, the EDTG data shows Boko Haram had existed since 2002 but refrained from attacks until 2009 (Hou, Gaibullov, and Sandler 2020). End dates refer to when a group ceased to exist or completely disbanded. Here again, an end date does not have to be the cessation of attacks;

groups can often persist after their last attack. In the EDTG data, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) ceased attacks in 2012, recently, in 2022, the group's leader had threatened the Buhari led administration with attacks if their recent demands are not met (Adesoji 2010). While it is difficult to assess whether the threat is credible, absent a statement or indication that the group no longer exists, MEND is treated as continuing to exist in my data. When start and end years could not be found in the EDTG, I sought out credible sources to fill in the missing information and documented it accordingly. These sources vary; they range from news reports, published research, and other datasets on terrorist groups, such as those compiled by Cronin (2006) and Jones and Libicki (2008). Groups in which the start and end date were difficult to determine were not included in the data. In the end, I had a total of 161 group/year observations for Nigerian terrorist organizations active between 1979 and 2020.⁶

4.1.1 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the age of the group. This is calculated as the differences between the current observational year and the group's start date. As mentioned earlier, the start date is defined as the first year of a group's operation not its first attack.

4.1.2 Independent Variables

I use three main independent variables. The first is a group's ideology. I use the four-part classification system – religious, nationalist, left-wing, and right-wing - used by Jones and Libicki (2008). Given that the only two ideologies in my dataset are nationalist and religious, I create a dichotomous variable indicating whether a group is religious or not. Based on my hypothesis, I expect that religion will be associated with longer durations.

⁶ Please see Appendix A for a list of groups, their start and end dates, size, ideology, and supporting citations.

The second and third independent variable is forest and water. This is measured as the average percent of forest and water cover per state year. To create this measure, I utilized the PRIO-GRID data structure (Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012). The PRIO-GRID is a set of 50x50km cells covering all terrestrial areas of the globe. For each cell, a variety of variables ranging from population, mountainous terrain, and GDP are included. For each Nigerian state, I averaged the value of the water and forest cover variable. These variables for water and forest cover come from Meiyappan and Jain (2012). I logged these variables to account for any potential decreasing effect and to reign in outliers. I expect that forest and water cover will be associated with greater longevity.

4.1.3 Control Variables

To control for potential confounding factors, I include a number of control variables. The first is group size. As stated by Gaibullov and Sandler (2013), larger groups are likely to have a longer duration because they are likely to possess more resources, operational capabilities, and member support. My group size measure comes from two sources. The first is the EDTG (Hou, Gaibullov, and Sandler 2020). For those groups that are not in the EDTG, I consulted a variety of sources to get an approximate measure. To account for the ambiguity of group size measures, I follow Jones and Libicki (2008) and transform the measure using the base ten logarithmic scale: 0 for less than ten, 1 for 11-99, 2 for 100-999, and so on. I expect that as group size increases, terrorist organizations will endure longer.

Second, states with high GDP per capita may provide a better environment for groups to endure. This is because states with high GDP per capita may have high-profile targets, such as prominent businesses, international organizations, or foreign expatriates. These targets tend to provide attractive opportunities for terrorist groups to carry out attacks, generate publicity, and further their ideological agendas (Krueger and Malečková 2003; Rose and Blomberg 2010). The measure I use here comes from the World Bank (2020); to facilitate interpretation across years, it

is in constant 2015 US \$. My measure of GDP is consistent with ones from Young and Dugan (2014) and Hou, Gaibullov, and Sandler (2020). I expect that as GDP increases, a group's lifespan should also increase.

Lastly, I include civilian target proportion. I expect that the more a group attacks the civilian population, the less likely a group will survive. More civilian attacks are likely to generate backlash, hurting the group's ability to recruit and maintain members (Ross and Gurr 1989). This has been shown in a number of cases; one particular instance was the Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) group, which lost public support mainly due to kidnap and killings of high profiled government officials. The incident had a significant impact on public opinion, with many Quebecers and Canadians condemning the FLQ's actions as unacceptable and undermining their cause (Ross and Gurr 1989). This variable is constructed using the GTD *targetype* variable. I aggregated both the number of civilians and total attacks per group/year. I then divided civilian attacks by the total. I expect a high civilian target proportion to negatively impact group age.

4.2 Method

Given that my dependent variable (group age) represents a continuous variable, OLS regression is well-suited (Gaibullov and Sandler 2008). It also provides straightforward and interpretable results in terms of estimated coefficients for variables, allowing for a direct assessment of the impact of ideology, forest, or water cover on group survival (Blomberg, Hess, and Orphanides 2004). In contrast, event history analysis, which typically focuses more on time-to-event data, involves more complex modeling techniques and interpretation of results can be complex (Lin and Zelterman 2002; Schmid 1992).

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

5.1 Results

Table 1: Regression Analysis for Terrorist Organizational Lifespan.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religious Ideology	6.399 (5.392)	11.32*** (3.245)	3.354 (3.121)
Water Cover	4.341** (1.783)	11.45*** (1.897)	
Forest Cover	-5.498** (1.806)	5.470 (3.859)	
Water Cover x Forest Cover		2.952*** (0.965)	
Travel Time			-7.115** (2.531)
GDP per capita	17.80** (7.783)	20.36** (7.680)	17.82** (8.090)
Group Size	7.497*** (2.326)	4.864* (2.248)	1.153* (0.623)
Proportion of Civilian Targets	-2.535 (4.037)	-1.799 (3.739)	-1.051 (4.416)
Constant	-149.0** (64.26)	-190.1** (65.15)	-94.11* (52.60)
N	161	161	161
R ²	0.486	0.571	0.415

Robust standard errors clustered on group. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

The results of my analysis are shown in Table 1. Model 1 provides inconclusive support for my first hypothesis; there is no indication that groups with religious ideology survive longer than nationalist groups in Nigeria. This finding is similar to Carter (2012) who finds an inconclusive result on religious ideology, as the author has acknowledged data limitation regarding group lifespan as the likely primary reason. While data limitation may not primarily be the case in my result, one possible explanation for my inconclusive result may be that news reports, which GTD is based on, may be biased towards reports on only the most capable religious and nationalist organizations. Because the analysis is then between two sets of long-lived groups, no statistically significant difference could be detected. Therefore, it is possible that GTD may not be representative of the true prevalence of terrorism across different groups and regions.

Further research should consult multiple and reputable sources like government reports, academic research, and interviews with experts or members of the organizations in question. This will offer a comprehensive and balanced view of the groups and their activities, and potentially reduce bias associated with relying solely on media reporting. Nevertheless, this study adds to the existing literature on this topic and highlights the need for future research to consult multiple data sources and complexities associated with studying group dynamics and ideology in Nigeria.

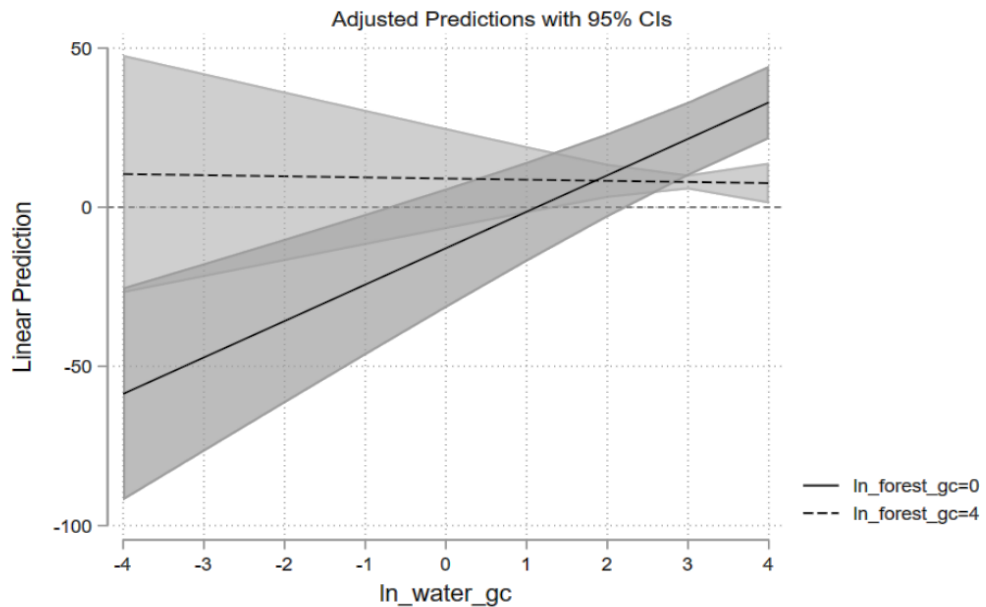
The model also shows that water cover significantly increases a group's lifespan, as suggested by my second hypothesis. Specifically, I find that a unit change in water cover increases a group duration by 4 years. This is an interesting finding, based on the fact that there is no existing study that demonstrates the same finding on water cover in relation to group longevity.

Forest cover in Model 1 does not support my last hypothesis. It shows a negative and statistically significant effect on group survival. Substantively, I find that as forest cover increases by a unit, group age decreases by approximately 5.5 years. This finding is somewhat consistent with Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler (2011)'s findings, which shows a significant but negative influence of tropical forest cover on transnational group's survival. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the resource competition hypothesis (Grover 1997). Forests, particularly

tropical forests, are known to be rich in natural resources such as timber, minerals, and fertile land. As the demand for forest produce increases, it may attract increased human activity, including logging, mining, and agriculture, which could lead to resource competition from local, private, and government enterprise, thereby gradually dislodging terrorist bases (Coomes and Grubb 2000; Forrester 2019).

Because many groups in Nigeria – like MEND, NDA, and Boko Haram– persist in areas containing both water and forest cover, I wished to see whether it has a joint effect. Model 2 provides a test of this by using an interaction term of water and forest cover. The coefficient indicates a significant and negative relationship between the two, because interaction terms are difficult to assess by looking just at the coefficient, I follow Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006)'s and provide a graphical illustration of the effect as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Water and Forest Cover Interaction.



Because it is difficult to show a continuous-by-continuous interaction, I chose to show the interaction between water and forest cover by choosing two particular values of forest cover – one where forest cover is low and the other where it is high. In those cases where forest cover is low, as denoted by the solid line, the impact of forest cover on group duration is only significant when water cover is relatively high. This indicates that forest cover – whatever might exist in these cases – only has an effect when there is a modest amount of water present. More specifically, in this case, the joint impact of both factors is probably predominately carried by water. In the other case of high forest cover, its impact on group longevity appears to be consistent regardless of degree of water cover. This indicates that forests are probably a more significant determinant of group age than water cover.

Given that forest and water cover are essentially measures of inaccessibility, I substitute these variables for a PRIO-GRID measure of mean travel time in Model 3 (Tollefsen et al. 2012). Following the same procedure, I used for water and forest cover, I compiled all the cells for Nigeria and averaged across each Nigerian state that a group is headquartered in. This value is then logged. Travel time, according to the PRIO-GRID code-book, is defined as the estimated time to arrive at the nearest major city of over 50,000 inhabitants (Uchida and Nelson 2009). I believe that this can also be thought of as the average amount of time it may take security forces to travel within a particular cell. The results indicate that as travel time increases terrorist organization's age declines by 7 years. Likely explanation is that, longer travel times make it more difficult for terrorist groups to receive support and supplies from outside networks. This can limit their ability to maintain their operations, acquire weapons and other resources, and sustain their organization over time.

Across the models, the results for controls appear to be in line with expectations. GDP per capita is positive and significant in all models, indicating that groups tend to have a longer duration when the economic environment is favorable. This is consistent with Young and Dugan's (2014) findings on the outcome of GDP and group survival. I also find that group size is positive and statistically significant with group duration. This is in line with researchers whose results shows

that larger groups tend to have a longer duration (Hou, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2020; Phillips 2015b; Young and Dugan 2014).

Finally, the proportion of civilian targets is not significant. This suggests that reputation as measured by civilian targeting may not be a factor that affects organizational lifespan in Nigeria. This may be because groups are able to legitimize victims as deserving of their fate. For religious organizations, victims are routinely vilified as infidels and apostates (Juergensmeyer 2005). This type of justification, employed either before an attack or afterward, may insulate the group from criticism in the face of civilian victimization. Boko Haram extremist groups have been known for its indiscriminate attack on civilians including children, women, and the elderly (Adesoji 2010; Asongu et al. 2019; Kah 2017). Despite these brutal attacks on civilians, the group is able to legitimize its actions by portraying, as deserving and justifying its violence based on its extremist religious ideology (Adesoji 2010). This has helped to insulate the group from criticism and maintain support among its followers, enabling it to persist over time (Asongu et al. 2019). This may also work for nationalist groups, as civilian targets of other ethnicities may be deemed as “acceptable” (Cronin 2006).

5.2 Additional Analyses

This additional analysis represents a departure from existing beliefs and studies that classify Boko Haram as a religious fundamentalist group (Adesoji 2010; Asongu et al. 2019; Kah 2017; Oyewole 2015). The aim is to reclassify Boko Haram as a nationalist group based on recent concerns that the group's ideology may be more complex than initially thought (Onuoha, Nwangwu, and Ugwueze 2023; Tanchum 2012; Tonwe and Eke 2013; Zenn, Barkindo, and Heras 2013). Proponents of this perspective believe that the group's initial formation focused mainly on education-related issues, perceived corruption of the Nigerian state, and marginalization of the Hausawas. These are typical reasons for dissent among nationalist groups (Tanchum, 2012, p. 76). Furthermore, Shekau, the group's leader, frequently stated that his ultimate aim was to create a

separate state for his ethnic group, Hausa-Fulani (Onuoha, Nwangwu, and Ugwueze 2023). Only later did religion become a more prominent part of the group's message (Adesoji 2010). This suggests that the group's ideology and motivations may have shifted over time rather than being fixed initially. Considering this perspective, I conducted an analysis that reclassified Boko Haram from a religious to a nationalist group to evaluate its impact on group survival, and Table 2 presents the outcomes.

Table 2: Alternative Analysis Re-coding Boko Haram

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religious Ideology	11.47* (6.225)	10.78 (6.151)	3.073 (4.690)
Water Cover	5.082*** (1.168)	7.341*** (1.820)	
Forest Cover	-6.880*** (1.741)	-2.381 (3.997)	
Water Cover x Forest Cover		-1.237 (0.885)	
Travel Time			-6.550** (2.433)
GDP per capita	20.72** (7.455)	21.09** (7.497)	17.43** (8.090)
Group Size	9.103*** (2.010)	7.313*** (2.228)	1.230* (0.631)
Proportion of Civilian Targets	1.511 (3.258)	2.076 (3.031)	0.984 (4.014)
Constant	-175.1** (60.28)	-182.1** (60.88)	-94.19 (55.52)
N	161	161	161
R ²	0.556	0.575	0.406

Robust standard errors clustered on group ***p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

From the above table, re-coding Boko Haram from a religious to nationalist group does not appreciably change the result; ideology is still inconclusive although it does achieve a p value of $<.10$. Both this result and the one from Table 1 seem to point at the direction that religious ideology does not contribute to group duration in Nigeria. Again, as suggested earlier, this might be as a result of my sample size or from data artifacts in the original GTD data. Other results in Table 2 like GDP per capita, group size, and civilian proportion are consistent with the Table 1 results.

Result from Table, Model 2 does not change much, although extensive water cover appears to add to group survival by 7.3 years which is also similar to previous model in Table 1. More importantly, the interaction between water and forest cover in model 2 is insignificant, a sharp contrast to Table 1 outcome. Other results in Table 2, model 2 like GDP per capita and group size are consistent with Table 1, except for civilian proportion's result that show inconclusive.

The result in Model 3, which tests for security agencies travel time to group hideouts, is consistent with the previous Table. It shows that, regardless of group ideologies, travel time negatively impacts group survival. The control variables result in model 3 are consistent with other models in Table 2 and again, civilian proportion appear to be the only difference across models in Table.

Finally, I decided to drop the civilian target proportion variable in Table 1, because the table may have accounted for religion variable twice, given that religious groups are likely to attack civilian targets. Table 3 below presents the results for this inquiry.

Table 3: Alternative Analysis Omitting Civilian Proportion.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religious Ideology	5.991 (5.200)	11.08*** (2.880)	3.168 (2.585)
Water Cover	4.300** (1.804)	11.49*** (1.963)	
Forest Cover	-5.353** (1.764)	5.686 (3.999)	
Water Cover x Forest Cover		-2.982** (0.998)	
Travel Time			-7.078** (2.495)
GDP per capita	16.98** (7.508)	19.81** (7.402)	17.49** (7.624)
Group Size	7.380*** (2.010)	4.754* (2.288)	1.145* (0.621)
Constant	-142.7** (62.35)	-186.0** (63.36)	-91.77* (49.30)
N	161	161	161
R ²	0.482	0.569	0.414

Robust standard errors clustered on group *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

From the above table, Omitting Civilian Proportion does not appreciably change the result; ideology is still inconclusive. Again, both this result and the one from Table 1 and 2 seem to point at the direction that religious ideology does not contribute to group duration in Nigeria. This further reinforces my earlier suggestion that it might be because of my sample size or from data artifacts in the original GTD data. Other results in Table 3 like GDP per capita, group size, and civilian proportion are consistent with Table 1 results.

5.3 Variance of Inflation Factor (VIF)

I ran a Variance of Inflation factor (VIF) report across the three tables to measure multicollinearity in my analysis. In Table 1, the average number of VIF in models 1 and 3 is 3.55 and 1.29, respectively, which is below the acceptable threshold of 5.0. However, model 2 presents an outrageously high mean VIF of 15.09. The majority of the individual variable mean VIF in the models have been shown to be within the acceptable range, except for a few. A similar pattern of results appears to be consistent with the rest of the tables; model 2 in Table 2 also shows an outrageously high collective mean VIF score of 11.5, and the same is true for model 2 in Table 3, which shows a mean VIF score of 17.26. More information is provided in the appendix section.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

6.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

This thesis investigates the factors that explain the differences in group lifespan in Nigeria. The results reveal, at best, limited support for religious ideology as a factor affecting group survival. While the results on religious ideology are predominantly inconclusive, the result is consistent with the work of Carter (2012) and in contrast with many scholarships in the field (Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler 2011; Young and Dugan 2014). Given the inconclusive result, religious or nationalist groups are essentially equally likely to endure. This reinforces the notion both groups, pose a significant – and persistent – threat to the government and people of Nigeria.

My terrain findings show that water cover contributes to group survival while forest cover does not. My water cover findings are notable; to the best of my knowledge, no other research on group duration has taken this factor into account. This neglect is surprising because there are instances of transnational terrorist organizations operating near waterways in East Africa, particularly the Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Akanji 2019). One of the numerous Al-Shabaab's base locations is characterized by complicated waterways, similar to terrains in Nigeria (Abuza 2008; Banlaoi 2006). This has served a variety of functions for the group, allowing it to generate resources as well as to serve as a natural obstacle against counter-terrorism efforts (Middleton 2008). It is important that researchers look more carefully at the effect of waterways, as they may have a substantial effect on group maintenance and longevity.

The negative result for forests is unexpected, Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler's (2011) analysis for group survival finds forest cover be an insignificant predictor for longevity. However, subsequent analysis proves otherwise, showing that Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group located near Colombia forest survive for over 3 decades (Gaibullov and Sandler 2013). While the result for forest across tables statistically reduces group age by varying estimates, studies in the future, on similar topic and method of analysis might reveal a contrary result i.e., forests cover might add to group age. Thus, from a policy perspective, the results of forests in this study should not be overlooked as they are subjected to change. Policymakers should consider incorporating forest management as part of their counterterrorism strategies⁷. This may include efforts to establish forest units or having military develop close ties with those who have a good understanding of the local environments. Additionally, governments should strive to make forests more accessible by building roads to hasten the response time of security operatives during emergencies.

6.2 Future Work

While this project has provided some insight into the factors that affect group longevity in Nigeria, more can be done. One area for improvement lies in the data collection process. The Extended Data on Terrorist Groups (ETDG) by Gaibullov, Hou, and Sandler (2020) provided relatively limited information on group size, number of bases, and attack diversity on terrorist groups in Nigeria. To supplement this, I compiled data from a variety of additional external sources. Even then, I did not have complete information on significant groups such as MEND, IPOB, and NDA. Future research should employ more significant data collection efforts so that the complete universe of groups in Nigeria can be analyzed. Additionally, future work should incorporate a spatial dimension in the study, which could provide insights into the significance of geographical

⁷ Incorporating forest management refers to the practice of planning, implementing, and monitoring activities in forests to achieve specific goals and objectives.

location in relation to group survival. For instance, analyzing the spatial distribution and patterns of terrorist groups across different regions in Nigeria can help identify hotspots or areas where certain groups are more prevalent, and explore how geographic factors such as proximity to borders, access to resources, or cultural dynamics may impact group dynamics and longevity. Spatial analysis can also provide insights into the diffusion and migration patterns of groups, as well as their interactions with local communities and security forces in specific geographic locations.

In terms of security concerns and future strategy, government should recognize collective information for human intelligence gathering and should establish a special inter-agency unit that will work in collaboration with local and state authorities, albeit equipped with technology-driven intelligence and communication resources. Similarly, government should bolster the air force and particularly, border security, facilitate global information sharing, combat terrorist financing via collaboration with financial institutions, and enhance crisis response. Lastly, the Nigerian government should actively encourage neighboring countries to shoulder more responsibility in addressing terrorism threats and develop their counterterrorism capacities through global engagement efforts.

Finally, it is critical for Nigerian government to recognize that providing amnesty to "repentant" terrorist – just like it was demonstrated in 2019 – while neglecting the welfare of combatants who are actively engaged in counter-terrorism efforts leads to demoralization and loss of motivation (Felbab-Brown 2018). Therefore, it is imperative for the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) to ensure that the welfare of security personnel is sufficiently addressed, including fair and competitive pay grades, as well as other compensations that reflect the risks and sacrifices related with their work in the frontlines.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX: GROUP VARIANCE INFLATION FACTOR (VIF).

Table 4: Variance of Inflation Factor (VIF) Report

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religious Ideology	4.14	5.14	1.56
Water Cover	6.61	36.13	
Forest Cover	2.33	18.72	
Water Cover x Forest Cover		34.76	
Travel Time			1.43
GDP per capita	1.21	1.27	1.23
Group Size	5.77	8.36	8.36
Proportion of Civilian Targets	1.22	1.22	1.20
Mean VIF	3.55	15.09	1.29

Table 5: Variance of Inflation Factor (VIF) Report.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religious Ideology	2.78	2.84	1.34
Water Cover	5.11	19.06	
Forest Cover	2.35	15.36	
Water Cover x Forest Cover		28.59	
Travel Time			1.24
GDP per capita	1.31	1.31	1.24
Group Size	6.59	12.20	1.07
Proportion of Civilian Targets	1.24	1.25	1.07
Mean VIF	3.23	11.50	1.19

Table 6: Variance of Inflation Factor (VIF) Report.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religious Ideology	4.0	5.04	1.40
Water Cover	6.60	36.08	
Forest Cover	2.28	18.47	
Water Cover x Forest Cover		34.61	
Travel Time			1.42
GDP per capita	1.08	1.15	1.11
Group Size	5.67	8.19	1.03
Mean VIF	3.92	17.26	1.24

Table 7: Group Information

Group Name	Start Year	End Year	Ideology	Size	Source
Al-Sunna wal Jamma	1991	2004	Religion	4,500	Al Sunna Wal Jamma (globalsecurity.org)
Ansaru (Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan)	2012	2020	Religion	2,000-3000	Zein and Weiss (2021)
Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM)	2010	2018	National	12000	Biafra Day: Police Confirm Arrest Of BZM Leader, Benjamin Onwuka – Independent Newspaper Nigeria
Boko Haram	2002	2020	Religion	15,000	Boko Haram at a glance - Amnesty International
Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF)	2013	2020	National	26,000	https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerias-civilian-joint-task-force
Concerned Militant Leaders (CML)	2016	2017	National	650	Millitants threaten showdown over Anambra election The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News — Nigeria — The Guardian Nigeria News – Nigeria and World News
Delta Democratic Militia	2011	2011	National	3000	START 2020
Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)	2012	2022	National	10,000	Nigeria’s Biafran Separatist Upsurge Crisis Group
Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)	1999	2022	National	7.5M	Refworld Nigeria: Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); date formed; leadership; location of offices; recruitment of members; whether membership cards or other documents are issued; and whether claims to membership can be verified (2000-2005)

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)	2004	2021	National	15,000-25,000	Nigerian Ex-Militant Leader Accepts Government's Niger Delta Vow - Bloomberg
Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)	2016	2019	National	100 +	Who are the Niger Delta Avengers? Center for International Maritime Security (cimsec.org)
Niger Delta Freedom Fighters (NDDF)	2008	2008	National	1300	GTD (2020)
Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM)	2016	2020	National	6750	https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1405116/download
Niger Delta Justice Defense Group (NDJDG)	2016	2016	National	800	N'delta Justice Defense GROUP Facebook
Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF)-Nigeria	2005	2022	National	2,500	https://allafrica.com/stories/202208080218.html
Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)	2004	2004	National	5,000	Survey (2007)
Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV)	2003	2004	National	4,000	Niger Delta Vigilante - Wikiwand
Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)	1991	2023	National	7.5m	Heerten and Moses (2014)
Red Egbesu Water Lions	2016	2016	National	3500	New Niger Delta Militant Group Emerges, Issues 7-day Ultimatum – THISDAYLIVE
Islamic Movement (Nigeria)	1979	2019	Religion	4M	Islamic Movement in Nigeria: The Iranian-inspired Shia group - BBC News

VITA

Ahmed Nasiru

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: A STUDY OF TERRORIST LONGEVITY: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

Major Field: Political Science

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Political Science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2023.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Political Science at University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo in September, 2018.