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### Perception of Boko Haram among Nigerians

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**Objective:** Nigeria, Africa's largest nation is plagued with ethnic, political and religious tensions. Boko Haram, a terrorist labeled organization—operating out of its Muslim predominated north eastern states—is an existential threat to the peace and prosperity of the nation. Considering that all terrorism or rebellion is socio-political, this paper investigates the perceptions of Boko Haram within the major religious groupings.

**Method:** Data were obtained from survey respondents who participated in a 2013 ENDS internet survey. 414 completed forms were used for the study. Muslims, Christians, “no religion” and “other” were sampled with 10 questions. The ENDS survey was published on several internet fora, with invitation emails sent out to over 25,000 ProudNigerian.com forum members. The social media sites that participated include: ProudNigerian.com, ENDS.ng, NigeriaVillageSquare.com and NewsRescue.com.

**Results:** Analysis showed that 69% of Muslims considered Boko Haram bad terrorists, compared to 88% of Christians.

Muslims were more likely to support an amnesty for Boko Haram, with OR 5.5 ( $P < 0.0001$ ). 32 Muslims voted for amnesty, 25 rejected it. Of Christians, 238 said no to the amnesty, 24 said yes. 59% of respondents opted not to divide/disintegrate Nigeria to solve insecurity. 47% of Muslims and 30% of Christian respondents view Boko Haram as devil worshipers. 50% Muslims and 25% Christians see the government as being behind Boko Haram.

**Conclusion:** Our findings suggest that most Nigerians across ethnic and religious lines perceive Boko Haram as bad terrorists. There is a high level of suspicion of government and political involvement in terrorism. A large number of respondents categorize Boko Haram as devil worshipers. Muslims were observed to be more favorable to amnesty, though most rejected it; and most Nigerians do not view a disintegration of the country as a solution to the security problems. Importantly, many Nigerians blame politicians and the political process for Boko Haram.

**Keywords:** boko haram, nigeria, muslim, christian, government, politics, terror

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Boko Haram is a terrorist labeled organization in Nigeria that has been blamed and has claimed responsibility in attacks leading to the death and injury of thousands of Nigerians across religious and ethnic lines.<sup>1</sup>

“Boko Haram” is a moniker that this sect has assumed—courtesy of the media—which literally means—“western civilization is bad.” The self instituted name of the cult is—“Jamaatul Ahlus Sunnah lid awati wal Jihad.” This Arabic transliteration can be roughly translated—“congregation of Prophet Pathway followers for preaching and holy war.”

Established around the year 2000, Boko Haram was initially constituted by its now late founder—Mohammad Yusuf, who was killed under “extra-judicial” circumstances after his arrest by the Nigeria’s Musa Yar’adua administration, 2007-2009 (died in office).<sup>2</sup> Boko Haram operated under the law as an extremist ideology preaching Islamic sect, which rejected hallmark principles it believed were western civilization rooted. Initially called “the Nigerian Taliban,” the sect promoted ideas that included— the earth being flat, and rain being a novo-creation and

not the result of evaporation-condensation water cycling as is scientifically documented.<sup>3</sup>

#### Violent transformation

The turn to violence followed events of July 2009 when allegedly, police accosted group members en route a comrades’ burial. The police harassed the motorcycle riding members for not abiding by the state helmet law. A confrontation ensued during which several Boko Haram members were reportedly injured. Following this event, Mohammed Yusuf organized deadly attacks on several police stations and other government institutions. This was the group’s first recognized violent confrontation with the law.<sup>4</sup>

#### Ex-General Muhammadu Buhari and Boko Haram

A new level of sophistication was achieved by the sect in 2011 when the current president of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won a democratic election and assumed office. The new increase in finance, impunity and sophistication of the sect is commonly attributed to an opposition contestant in the April elections of 2011—General Muhammad Buhari, a past military leader of

Nigeria. This perception appears largely connected to serial statements purported to be made by General Buhari in which he professes “bloody mayhem,” as the consequence of “election malpractices.”<sup>5, 6</sup>

A contrasting view on the development of the sect has been provided by the nation’s national security adviser, now late General Andrew Azazi; who is on record in an April 2012 public address video recording, saying that Boko Haram “achieved its new level of sophistication as a result of inner workings of the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), during the party primaries.”<sup>7</sup>

### **National Security Adviser, Late General Owoye Azazi’s remarks:**

“The extent of violence did not increase in Nigeria until there was a declaration by the current president that he was going to contest. PDP got it wrong from the beginning, from the on-set by saying Mr A can rule, Mr A cannot rule, Mr B can rule, Mr B cannot rule, according to PDP’s convention, rules and regulation and not according to the constitution {applause} and that created the climate for what has manifest itself, this way. I believe that there is some element of politicization. Is it possible that somebody was thinking that only Mr. A could win, and if he did not win, there will be problems in this society. Let’s examine all these issues to see whether the level of violence in the North East just escalated because Boko Haram suddenly became better trained, better equipped and better funded, and in any case how did they get it all done...{warning of Boko Haram becoming snipers - who could potentially target elite} But, then I must also be quick to point out that today, even if all the leaders that we know in Boko Haram are arrested, I don’t think the problem would end, because there are tentacles. I don’t think that people would be satisfied, because the situations that created the problems are not just about the religion, poverty or the desire to rule Nigeria. I think it’s a combination of everything. Except you address all those things comprehensively, it would not work.”<sup>7</sup>

General Andrew Azazi was removed from office in June, 2012<sup>8</sup> and died later that year--December 15th, when his helicopter was reported to have exploded while in flight.<sup>9</sup>

Professor and noble prize laureate, Wole Soyinka has shared a similar perception--of Boko Haram terrorism being a consequence of the governing political party, PDP. Quoted as follows:

“PDP is at the heart of the trouble, it’s within PDP they have been making this dirty bargain. ‘You rule for so long, it’s my turn.’ It is not in the constitution. So it’s the PDP members, who really should go and sort out this problem among themselves. But the nation is the one paying the penalty. This is not comfortable because they can protect themselves. They are the ones that divided the country into two--the North and then, the South.”<sup>10</sup>

Veteran Nigeria researcher, Jean Herskovitz described Boko Haram as a complex, evolving terrorist organization. In the New

York Times article published January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, captioned, “In Nigeria, Boko Haram Is Not the Problem,”<sup>11</sup> she wrote:

“Boko Haram began in 2002 as a peaceful Islamic splinter group. Then politicians began exploiting it for electoral purposes. But it was not until 2009 that Boko Haram turned to violence, especially after its leader, a young Muslim cleric named Mohammed Yusuf, was killed while in police custody. Video footage of Mr. Yusuf’s interrogation soon went viral, but no one was tried and punished for the crime. Seeking revenge, Boko Haram targeted the police, the military and local politicians — all of them Muslims.

It was clear in 2009, as it is now, that the root cause of violence and anger in both the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness.”

Herskovitz further described:

“Meanwhile, Boko Haram has evolved into a franchise that includes criminal groups claiming its identity. Revealingly, Nigeria’s State Security Services issued a statement on Nov. 30, identifying members of four “criminal syndicates” that send threatening text messages in the name of Boko Haram. Southern Nigerians — not northern Muslims — ran three of these four syndicates, including the one that led the American Embassy and other foreign missions to issue warnings that emptied Abuja’s high-end hotels. And last week, the security services arrested a Christian southerner wearing northern Muslim garb as he set fire to a church in the Niger Delta. In Nigeria, religious terrorism is not always what it seems.”<sup>11</sup>

The failure of Boko Haram to promote clear, well defined, achievable ideology, has led to increased tensions, suspicions and distrust, and varying perceptions on the true reason, participants and motives of Boko Haram. A history of Hausa/Fulani ethnic violence,<sup>12, 13, 14</sup> particularly involving Igbo’s and Christians in the extreme Northern states and some parts of what can be recognized as the Middle Belt has further nurtured the distrust and suspicion, with Boko Haram believed by some to be a Northern and Muslim-cause ethnic militia of sorts.

Nigeria has a long history of ethnic tensions; outside the scope of this paper. However politico-ethnic and religious lines have been regular reasons for bloodshed in the nation, with a population of over 159 million and over 500 ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> The northern extremes have some of the highest concentration of Muslims, with Hausa/Fulani in the North western region, a predominantly Muslim ethnic classification, and Kanuri, Shuwa Arab and Marghi, predominantly Muslim populations in the North Eastern, Boko Haram enclave States.<sup>16</sup>

Colonial discombobulation has been accused in the ethno-religious tension in the country. Inveterate, iterant tensions are related to purposeful power retaining machinations of the British colonialists.<sup>12</sup> Politics has always been tinged by the divides, and blood shedding is hardly infrequent. A date of note was 1966, when Nigeria experienced its first Military coup attempt and subsequent Military take over. The “Kaduna Nzeogwu coup,” during which top Northern elite, including the northern Muslim

leader, Sardauna, were killed, flared up some of the strongest historical ethno-religious and politically related conflicts. Kaduna Nzeogwu was a southern Igbo, who grew up in the north, and this event has been debated in view of ethnic connotations.<sup>14</sup>

Nigeria's civil war, 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970, otherwise known as the Biafra war, during which there were accounts of between five hundred thousand to two million hunger related civilian deaths, in the south, predominantly affecting the Igbo ethnic group, is another event in history with strong bearing on the perceptions and implications of ethnic related militancy of the Boko Haram nature.<sup>17, 18</sup> "Igbo-targeting" is often referenced.

A tortuous history and a highly undefined terrorist threat, preempted this study - of the perceptions of Nigerians to Boko Haram. Remaining largely undefined has been an obvious strategic tactic of the organization. However, cultural and religious affiliations, and the impacts of the media, and political and religious jockeying, are expected to have fomented policy determining and underlying, varying perceptions within the multi-ethnic populace.

There is clamor in some quarters, for Nigeria to be divided or disintegrated, the advocates of which, believe can be a solution to the problems of corruption and the recurrent security related ethnic strife. This study raised this question and collected respondents' views on division or disintegration as a solution to insecurity.

The president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan recently agreed to a proposition to initiate an amnesty for Boko Haram. Nigerians' views on this amnesty were also investigated.

## METHODS

### Participants

The study drew data from a study specific 2013 ENDS online 10 question survey, with caption: Boko Haram - We would like to know your perceptions on Boko Haram.<sup>19</sup> 414 completed responses were analyzed from survey 830 total results as at May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. Every Nigerian Do Something, ENDS, also known as the March 18<sup>th</sup> movement, is a Nigerian "action group" constituted after the March 18th terrorist attacks at a Bus Stop in Kano, Nigeria.<sup>20</sup> The survey program was hosted on the ENDS.ng website.

### Procedures

Voluntary respondents were recruited from the online pool via emails sent out by ProudNigerian.com Nigerian internet forum.<sup>21</sup> Respondents were also invited on NigeriaVillageSquare.com forum,<sup>22</sup> NewsRescue.com<sup>23</sup> and the ENDS facebook page.<sup>24</sup>

10 questions were asked with single option check boxes response fields, multiple choice response fields and multiple choice response fields with comments.

### Survey Questions:

1. What do you consider Boko Haram? Check any that apply:  
Bad terrorists; Freedom fighters; A good revolution; Other:

2. How do you feel about Boko Haram activities? Check any that apply:

I don't care; I hate them; I support them; Other:

3. Who do you think are members of Boko Haram Check any that apply:

Muslims; Christians; Muslims and Christians; Devil worshippers; Other

4. Who do you think is behind Boko Haram? Check any that apply:

Government; Christians/CAN; Muslims; Radical Nigerian Muslims; CIA; Arab world; Israel; Southerners; Northerners; Hausa/Fulani; Igbo; Niger Delta; Yoruba; Other:

5. Do you support an amnesty for Boko Haram? Choose one of the following answers:

Yes; No; No answer

6. Do you believe Nigeria should not remain as one country as the solution to the problems of insecurity? Choose one of the following answers:

Yes; No; No answer

7. What is your religion? Choose one of the following answers:

Muslim; Christian; No religion; Other

8. What is your ethnicity? Choose one of the following answers:

Hausa/Fulani; Kanuri; Yoruba; Igbo; Tiv; Ijaw; Nupe; Edo; Efik-Ibibio; Gwari; Other, please enter in comment field

9. Do you consider yourself religious? Choose one of the following answers:

Yes; No; Other; No answer

10. What's your age range? Choose one of the following answers:

<19; 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60+; No answer

Surveys were not time limited and could be submit incomplete.

### Statistical Analysis

Data was gathered from a cross-sectional survey run on an independent lime survey module. All results were collected and exported as SPSS file with its corresponding data set file. Responses were categorized for analysis as Muslim, Christian, no religion and other. Student's t-test were used to access differences between groups. Statistical tests were considered significant at  $P < 0.05$ . All analyses were performed using SPSS 18.0.

## RESULTS

Fewer Muslims were represented in the survey. Total number of Muslim respondents was 79. Christians were 315; those who selected "no religion," were 12, and 8 selected "other." (Fig. 1)

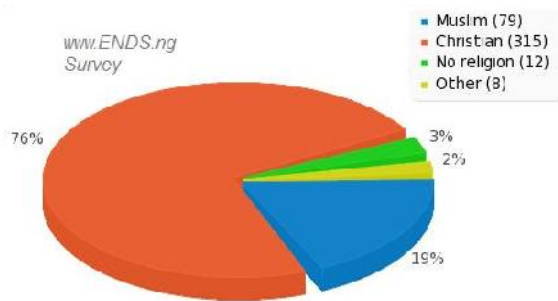


Fig 1. What is your religion?

69% of Muslims considered Boko Haram “bad terrorists,” N=55, while 88% of Christians regarded them “bad terrorists.” N= 279.

5% of Muslim respondents selected that they perceived Boko Haram as “freedom fighters,” while 3.8% of Christian respondents regarded them as such.

Only 2 Muslims and 5 Christians thought Boko Haram was a good revolution. 11 out of 12 respondents with no religion indicated that Boko Haram were bad terrorists.

Several comments were filled in response to question 1, on respondent’s regard of Boko Haram. Most referred to Boko Haram as misguided, ignorant murderers. Several respondents referred to them as being politically motivated and political thugs, with one Christian respondent stating his belief that the president was behind them. One Muslim commented that the government should allow them practice their religious right. One Christian said he pities them (Boko Haram). Another commented, “I support their freedom fighting and hate their terrorism activities.”



Fig 2: How do you feel about Boko Haram activities?

In response to the question on how respondents feel about Boko Haram; most respondents indicated “hating,” the terrorists. (Fig. 2) 5% of Muslims and Christians selected “I don’t care.” Christians were more likely to hate Boko Haram, 79% compared to 67% for Muslims. 1 Muslim and 1 Christian responded that they “supported” Boko Haram. Most comments regarded Boko Haram as heartless and inhuman. One Christian regarded them as “fighting for their rights.”

50% of Muslims felt the government was behind Boko Haram, compared to 25% of Christians. 1 Muslim selected “Muslims,” as being behind Boko Haram, while 50 Christians did. “Radical Nigerian Muslims,” had the most selections as being behind Boko

Haram (Fig. 3), with 12 Muslims and 125 Christians selecting that option. 6 Muslims believed it was Christians. No Christian did. 63 Christians believed it was the “Arab world.” 5 Muslims felt it was Igbo or Niger Delta citizens. Many respondents filled in “other,” for this question and typed their comments. 7 Muslims felt it was the CIA.

“Greedy politicians,” “politicians,” “northern politicians,” “anti-government”, “selfish politicians,” and similar responses dominated comments in regards to Boko Haram sponsors.

On who they felt constituted the membership of Boko Haram. 57% of Christian respondents chose “Muslims,” as the members of Boko Haram, while 47% of Muslims chose “devil worshipers” as the members of Boko Haram. 30% of Christians felt Boko Haram members were devil worshipers. Comments included; bad Muslims, political thugs, ignorant Muslims, northerners, terrorists, satanic people, anybody, unpatriotic people and “goat.” One Christian respondent filled in, “Buhari is leader.” Most Muslims typed in responses that were other than Muslim, including “terrorists,” “foreign elements,” “infidels.”

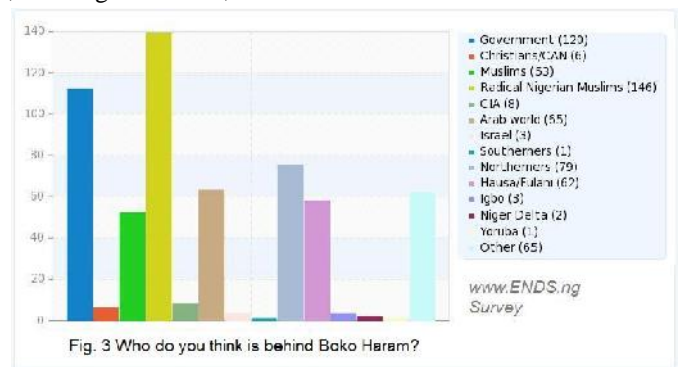
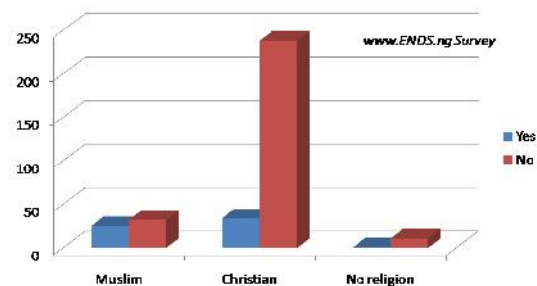


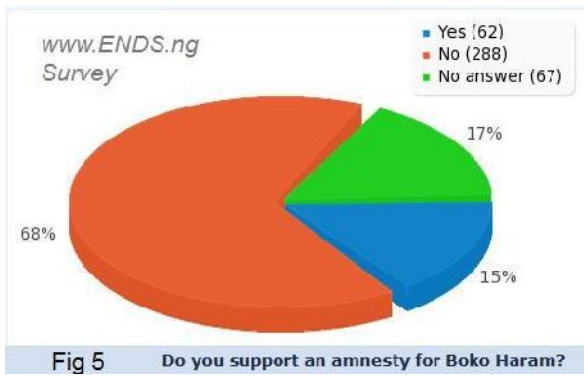
Fig. 3 Who do you think is behind Boko Haram?

Muslims were more likely to support an amnesty for Boko Haram, with OR 5.5 (P<0.0001). But overall more Muslims rejected an amnesty with 32 selecting “no,” and 25 respondents selecting “yes,” to the amnesty. 238 Christians chose “no,” while only 34 chose “yes,” to the amnesty. (Fig. 4)

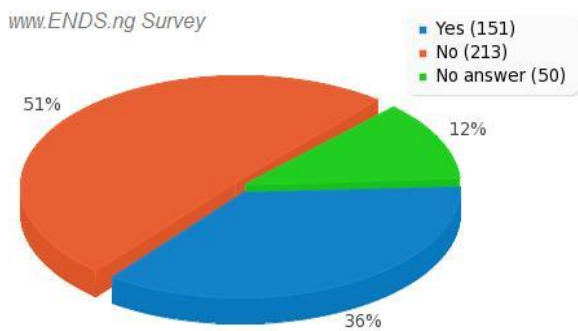
Fig. 4 Do you support an amnesty for Boko Haram?



70% of Nigerians rejected an amnesty. (Fig. 5)



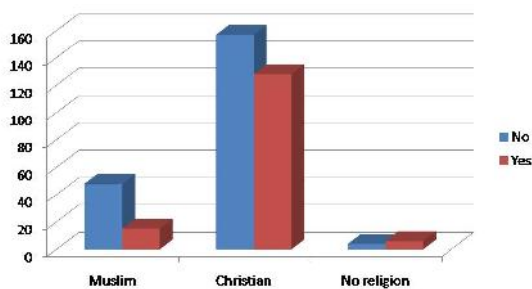
Overall most Nigerians felt Nigeria should stay together, with 59% of respondents who made a selection on that question, opting for “no,” to a division. (Fig. 6)



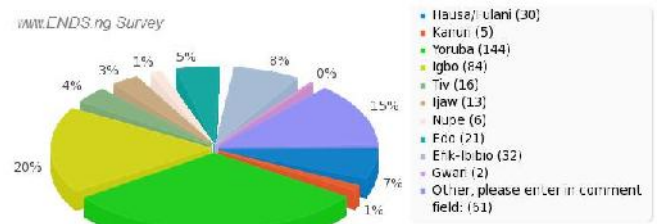
**Fig. 6 Do you believe Nigeria should not remain as one country as the solution to the problems of insecurity?**

Christians had higher odds of believing Nigeria should not remain one country, as the solution to its crises (OR 2.60; P = 0.0026). Respondents who selected “no religion,” gave a 6:4 response in favor of not remaining as one country. (Fig. 7)

**Fig. 7 Nigeria Should Not Remain As One Country as the Solution to the Problems of Insecurity**



34 Yoruba Muslims, 24 Hausa/Fulani Muslims, 1 Tiv and 1 Ijaw Muslim, and 4 Edo Muslims were represented. For the Christians, 102 were Yoruba, 76 Igbo, 15 Tiv, 16 Edo and 31 Efik-Ibibio. 6 without religion were Yoruba, 2 Igbo, 1 Kanuri, 1 Efik-Ibibio and 1 Edo. (Fig. 8)



**Fig. 8 What is your ethnicity?**

72% of Muslim respondents regarded themselves as religious, compared to 65% of Christian respondents. 93% of respondents were in the age range: 20-49 years, with 77% between 20 and 39.

## DISCUSSION

There is a dearth of information on the perception of Boko Haram among Nigerians. The perceptions of citizens toward such extremist groups, is of import in any sustainable and effective combating of terrorism from such organizations within countries. If the people openly or silently support such extremists, it becomes impossible for the government to battle and defeat them, as people’s support and assistance is key to eliminating terrorism among civilian populations.

A plethora of factors contributes to the security challenges of Nigeria. Nigeria is a largely heterogeneous society. A history of mal-governance and ethno-religious politics has contributed to the evolution of intractable problems within the country. The surfacing of Boko Haram appears to be a facet of decades of government neglect and mismanagement, as well as a complication of cultural and religious-related social renderings.

Boko Haram presents a unique terrorism threat in recent history. The group has remained largely undefined, its sponsors have eluded clear identification—at least to the general public, and the motives of the organization have also intentionally remained encrypted. The only two consistent and recognizable goals Boko Haram seems to have achieved over their four major years of violence, are – sustaining an environment of chaos and promotion of sectarian strife and division.

Any reasonable attempt to eradicate this terrorist group, must consider the will of the people and their perception towards it. This study investigated and discovered reasonable levels of suspicion among the Nigerian populace, particularly toward the government. Such levels of suspicion limit the ability of the government to combat such terrorist threats.

A high level of support for Boko Haram and their activities was not elicited among the Muslim respondents, who are of the same religious group as that claimed by the Boko Haram terrorists. This finding is helpful in developing trust between the major religious groups for the needed cooperation in dealing with such a threat.

Though this study presents findings of a majority believing the country need not divide or disintegrate as the solution to its

security problems, we believe this result may not be accurate, due to negative phrasing of the question which may have hampered its validity. Other factors further limiting the reliability of the result are in our limitations.

We noticed that very many respondents took time to input “politicians,” and “politics,” in response to question 4. This, despite the “government,” option being on the list. Unfortunately we did not include a “politics,” or “politicians” option, but it seems very many Nigerians blame politics for the spate of ethnic and religious conflicts. We would suggest corroborative studies measure this.

In conclusion, our data suggests that most Nigerians across religious lines, strongly dislike and do not support Boko Haram terrorism. A large number of Nigerians believe the group is devilish and more than half of the country does not view division or disintegration as a solution to issues of insecurity. Importantly, a large number of respondents finger politics and the government as being at the root of Boko Haram terrorism.

One important limitation of our study is the small number of Muslim respondents. This limited the power of the study. Another limitation relates to the fact that the data was collected online, hence narrowing respondents to the more educated and internet savvy. Our respondents’ age bracket—most falling within the 20-39 range supports this assertion. Future studies should attempt to verify our results using larger sample sizes with non electronic questionnaires.

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