

Perspective on the Impact of the Islamic Province of West Africa (ISWAP) on Global Terrorism and International Security Within the Sub-Region, 2015-2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700654>

Received: 24 July 2026; Accepted: 29 July 2026; Published: 09 August 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the impact of the terror Islamic fundamentalist group Islamic Province of West Africa (ISWAP), an off-shoot of Al-Qaeda on international security within the West African sub-region and analyzed the effectiveness of international response to terrorism in this region within the decade-2015-2025, the high point of asymmetrical warfare in West Africa. The research methodology adopted a qualitative historical descriptive analysis approach that relied majorly on secondary data. Findings showed that the overall impact of global terrorism on national security among West African states is severe, destabilizing inter-state cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, the study revealed that international counter-terrorism efforts have had limited success due to lack of coordination among affected states and the international system. The paper therefore recommends that governments in West Africa should enhance cooperation with international partners to counter all insurgent and terror groups particularly, the international scope of the threat posed by ISWAP due to its global terror network. Also, counter-terrorism strategies should focus on addressing the root causes of radicalization and extremism. In addition, the paper also recommended that counterinsurgency military operations against ISWAP should be accompanied by non-kinetic policies and programmes aimed at winning the hearts and minds of local communities to cut-off local support and sympathies for terror groups that enables them to have enclaves and launching pads for terrorism campaigns in several countries.

Keywords: Insecurity, terrorism, counter-terrorism, Islamic Province of West Africa, radicalization extremism.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of global terrorism has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges to international security currently across the world. Diagne and Kauffman (2019) argue that terrorism is not merely a series of isolated incidents, but rather a complex, multifaceted dysfunctional issue that requires an understanding of its underlying causes and implications for global stability. The Islamic Province of West Africa (ISWAP), particularly through groups like Boko Haram and its affiliates, has become a significant focal point in this discourse, illustrating how local grievances can escalate into broader security threats (Ibrahim & Olatunji, 2024).

Since 2015, the activities of these terrorist organizations have intensified and have reached an abysmal peak by 2025, a decade of intense terror, which explains the interest in this periodization for this paper, leading to widespread violence and instability across several West African nations, including Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Okafor, 2022). This escalation has prompted international actors to reassess their strategies regarding counter-terrorism and regional security cooperation. According to Okeke-Uzodike & Nwankwo (2021) socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, religious fundamentalism and endemic illiteracy play critical roles in fostering environments conducive to radicalization.

The rise of Boko Haram in particular has drawn attention due to its brutal tactics and ideological motivations rooted in a distorted interpretation of Islam. As noted by Bako & Ibrahim (2021), the group's emergence can be traced back to a combination of historical grievances against state authorities and socio-economic

marginalization experienced by certain communities. This context is essential for understanding why individuals may be drawn into extremist movements.

Moreover, the geopolitical landscape surrounding West Africa complicates the situation further. The region is characterized by weak governance structures and porous borders that facilitate the movement of militants and arms (Zenn & Fandrich, 2019). These conditions create an environment where terrorist groups can thrive with relative impunity. As highlighted by Bakker, De Graaf & Van De Heide (2016), the interplay between local conflicts and global terrorism necessitates a nuanced approach that considers both immediate security concerns and long-term developmental strategies. International responses to terrorism in West Africa have varied significantly over recent years. While military interventions have been prominent such as those led by multinational forces under frameworks like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Omotola (2019) cautioned against solely relying on military solutions without addressing underlying socio-political issues. The effectiveness of these military operations remains contentious; some argue they may exacerbate local grievances rather than resolve them.

In addition to kinetic efforts, there has been an increasing recognition among scholars that community engagement is vital for successful counter-terrorism initiatives. For instance, Adeleke & Ojo (2017) emphasized the importance of grassroots approaches that involve local populations in dialogue processes aimed at preventing radicalization. Such strategies are crucial for building trust between communities and state authorities while undermining extremist narratives.

Furthermore, international organizations such as the United Nations have begun advocating for comprehensive strategies that integrate humanitarian assistance with security measures. According to a report by UN Secretary-General António Guterres quoted in El-Khishin & Al-Mamoudi (2021), addressing root causes including poverty alleviation and education is essential for sustainable peace in regions affected by terrorism. This perspective aligns with findings from various empirical studies indicating that economic development can significantly reduce susceptibility to radicalization (Boas & Torheim, 2018).

The role of the social media in facilitating terrorist recruitment cannot be overlooked either. Menkhaus & Moeller (2016) highlight how online platforms serve as tools for disseminating extremist ideologies while also providing networks for potential recruits. This digital dimension adds complexity to counter-terrorism efforts as it transcends geographical boundaries and requires coordinated responses from multiple stakeholders.

In recent times, it is imperative to consider how evolving dynamics within West Africa will influence international security paradigms further. The ongoing conflict involving various non-state actors poses significant challenges not only for regional governments, but also for global powers invested in maintaining stability through diplomatic means or military interventions (Ogwuche, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

The rise of global terrorism has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges to international security currently ravaging the world, particularly in West Africa. The Islamic Province of West Africa (ISWAP), primarily represented by Boko Haram and its affiliates, has become a significant source of instability not only within national borders, but also across regional and international contexts (Mackenzie, Williams & Smith, 2019). Despite various counter-terrorism efforts initiated by both regional governments and international coalitions, these terrorist organizations have continued to thrive, leading to widespread violence, human rights abuses, and humanitarian crises (Mackenzie, Williams & Smith, 2019).

One critical aspect of this problem is the complex interplay between local grievances and global ideological movements. Murshed and Tadjoeeddin (2018) argue that socio-economic disenfranchisement plays a pivotal role in fostering extremism. In many cases, individuals who feel marginalized or excluded from economic opportunities are more susceptible to radicalization. This phenomenon is exacerbated by weak governance structures that fail to provide basic services or security for their citizens (Ogunleye & Ojo, 2021).

Moreover, the lack of effective governance creates a vacuum that terrorist organizations exploit to gain influence and recruit new members. As noted by Krieger & Meierrieks (2016) and Ogwuche (2023), insurgent groups often thrive in environments where state authority is weak or absent. This situation is particularly evident in parts of Nigeria and neighboring countries where Boko Haram operates. The group's ability to conduct operations with relative impunity underscores the failure of both local and international actors to address the root causes of terrorism effectively.

In addition to local factors, global dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of terrorism in West Africa. The proliferation of extremist ideologies through social media platforms has facilitated the spread of radical narratives beyond geographical boundaries (Ojo-Ade, 2018). This digital dimension complicates counter-terrorism efforts as it allows for rapid recruitment and mobilization across diverse populations. Murshed & Tadjoeeddin (2018) emphasize that understanding these transnational networks is essential for developing comprehensive strategies to combat terrorism.

Furthermore, international responses have often been reactive rather than proactive. While military interventions may temporarily disrupt terrorist activities, they do not address underlying issues such as poverty, unemployment, social and political disenfranchisement that fuel extremism (Krieger & Meierrieks, 2016). As highlighted by Ojo-Ade (2018) and Ogwuche (2022), sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through military means; it requires addressing socio-economic inequalities and fostering inclusive governance. The implications of terrorism extend beyond immediate violence; they also affect regional stability and international relations. Countries that are contiguous to Nigeria have experienced spillover effects from Boko Haram's activities, leading to increased insecurity across borders (Mackenzie, Williams & Smith, 2019).

This interconnectedness necessitates a coordinated response from regional organizations such as ECOWAS and international bodies like the United Nations. Despite these challenges, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how global terrorism emanating from West Africa impacts broader international security frameworks. Existing literature often focuses on specific case studies or individual terrorist groups without adequately addressing the systemic issues at play. This gap highlights the need for an integrated approach that considers both local contexts and global dynamics when analyzing terrorism's impact on security.

Additionally, according to Ogwuche (2025), there is an urgent need for empirical research that examines how different stakeholders, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community leaders perceive threats posed by terrorism and their responses to them. Understanding these perspectives can inform more effective counter-terrorism strategies tailored to specific contexts rather than relying on one-size-fits-all solutions (Ogunleye & Ojo, 2021).

In summary, while significant strides have been made in addressing terrorism globally since 2015 through various initiatives aimed at enhancing security cooperation among nations; however, persistent challenges remain largely due to insufficient attention paid towards root causes driving individuals towards radicalization coupled with ineffective governance structures prevalent throughout West Africa. Therefore, this paper aims not only to shed light upon complexities surrounding the issue, but also provide valuable insights into formulating holistic policies capable of mitigating risks associated with the growing threat posed by global terrorism originating from the Islamic Province of West Africa (ISWAP).

Aims of the Paper

The general aim of this paper is to examine the impact of global terrorism on international security, 2015 – 2025 focusing on the Islamic province of West Africa. The specific aims are to:

- i. analyze the impact of terrorism on national security policies in West African states.
- ii. evaluate the effectiveness of international responses to terrorism in this region.

- iii. assess how terrorism affects regional stability and cooperation among West African nations.

Conceptual Clarification

Terrorism in West Africa

The historical context of terrorism in West Africa is complex and multifaceted, shaped by a variety of socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. The region has witnessed the emergence and evolution of various terrorist groups, most notably Boko Haram and its splinter factions, which have significantly impacted national and international security dynamics (El-Khishin & Al-Mamoudi, 2021).

The roots of contemporary terrorism in West Africa can be traced to the colonial era when arbitrary borders were drawn by colonial powers, leading to the amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups with differing political aspirations. This legacy of colonialism fostered grievances that would later be exploited by extremist groups. Omotola (2019) argues that the lack of cohesive national identities in many West African states has contributed to the rise of insurgent movements seeking to assert their dominance or autonomy.

In the post-colonial period, many West African nations faced significant challenges related to governance, economic development, and social cohesion. The 1980s and 1990s were particularly tumultuous decades characterized by military coups, civil wars, and widespread corruption. These conditions created fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root. For instance, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria during this period can be linked to both domestic discontent and transnational influences from radical groups in North Africa and the Middle East (Okeke-Uzodike & Nwankwo, 2021). Boko Haram emerged in Nigeria in the early 2000s as a response to perceived governmental neglect and corruption. Initially focused on promoting a strict interpretation of Islam through educational initiatives, it quickly evolved into a violent insurgency following its leader's death in police custody in 2009. The group's transformation was marked by increasingly brutal tactics aimed at destabilizing the Nigerian state and establishing an Islamic caliphate (Ogunleye & Ojo, 2021). The group's name translates to "Western education is forbidden," reflecting its anti-Western sentiment and rejection of secular governance. The spread of Boko Haram's ideology was facilitated by several factors including poverty, unemployment, and a lack of educational opportunities among youth in northern Nigeria. According to (Mackenzie, Williams & Smith, 2019), these socio-economic conditions have made young people particularly vulnerable to recruitment by extremist organizations promising financial incentives or ideological fulfillment. Furthermore, the porous borders between Nigeria and neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger, and Cameroon have allowed Boko Haram to expand its operations across regional boundaries (International Crisis Group [ICG] 2017) quoted in (Ogunleye & Ojo, 2021). As Boko Haram gained notoriety for its violent campaigns including mass abductions like that of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 the group attracted attention from other jihadist factions operating within West Africa. This led to the formation of alliances with groups such as Ansaru a splinter faction that emerged from Boko Haram further complicating the security landscape (Zenn & Fandrich, 2019). These alliances underscore how local grievances can intersect with global jihadist movements. The regional implications of Boko Haram's activities prompted responses not only from affected states but also from international actors.

In 2015, Nigeria launched a multinational joint task force involving troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger aimed at combating Boko Haram's insurgency (United Nations Office for West Africa [UNOWA] 2016) quoted in El-Khishin & Al-Mamoudi (2021). However, despite these efforts, challenges remain due to issues such as inadequate funding for military operations and human rights abuses committed by security forces against civilians suspected of collusion with terrorists (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2021) quoted in Okafor (2022). In addition to Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria's northeast region, other terrorist threats have emerged across West Africa. Groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda or ISIS have sought footholds in countries like Mali and Burkina Faso where instability has been exacerbated by inter-ethnic conflicts and weak governance structures (Taiwo & Ogundipe, 2021). The Sahel region has become increasingly volatile due to a combination of factors including climate change-induced resource scarcity that fuels competition among communities. The historical context also reveals how terrorism intersects with broader geopolitical dynamics. For example, Western

interventions in Libya following Gaddafi's ousting created a power vacuum that allowed arms trafficking networks to flourish across North Africa into sub-Saharan regions (Taiwo & Ogundipe, 2021).

This influx of weapons has empowered non-state actors including terrorist organizations operating within West African territories. Furthermore, narratives surrounding terrorism often overlook local perspectives on conflict resolution or community resilience strategies employed by affected populations. Abdulrahman & Olufemi (2021) emphasize that understanding local contexts is crucial for developing effective counter-terrorism policies that do not exacerbate existing tensions or alienate communities further.

Consequently, examining the historical context of terrorism in West Africa reveals an intricate interplay between local grievances rooted in colonial legacies; socio-economic challenges; transnational influences; regional instability; geopolitical dynamics; and community responses. Addressing these issues requires nuanced approaches that consider both immediate security needs while fostering long-term stability through inclusive governance frameworks.

Socio-economic impact of terrorism

Terrorism has profound socio-economic impacts that extend beyond immediate violence and loss of life. The Islamic Province of West Africa, particularly through the activities of groups like Boko Haram, exemplifies how terrorism can disrupt social structures and economic stability in affected regions. This analysis explores the multifaceted socio-economic consequences of terrorism, drawing on various academic sources to highlight the depth and breadth of these impacts. One significant socio-economic impact of terrorism is the disruption of local economies. Terrorist activities often lead to the destruction of infrastructure, which is critical for economic activities. Roads, markets, schools, and health facilities are frequently targeted or rendered unusable due to violence. As a result, businesses may close or relocate, leading to job losses and decreased economic productivity (Abadie & Gardeazabal, 2008). The destruction of physical capital not only affects immediate employment but also discourages future investments in the region. Investors tend to avoid areas perceived as unstable or unsafe, further exacerbating economic decline (Bachmann & El-Masri, 2017).

Moreover, terrorism leads to increased government spending on security measures at the expense of social services. Governments facing terrorist threats often allocate substantial portions of their budgets to military and police forces to combat these threats. This re-allocation can detract from essential services such as education and healthcare (Murshed & Tadjoeeddin, 2018). In West Africa, countries like Nigeria have seen significant increases in military expenditure while public health systems remain underfunded. The prioritization of security over social welfare can create a vicious cycle where communities become increasingly vulnerable due to lack of access to basic services.

The psychological impact on communities affected by terrorism cannot be understated. Exposure to violence leads to trauma that affects individuals' mental health and overall community cohesion (Bachmann & El-Masri, 2017). Fear and anxiety can permeate daily life, leading to changes in behaviour that affect social interactions and community trust. Social capital, the networks and relationships that facilitate cooperation can erode in environments marked by fear and suspicion. This breakdown in social cohesion can hinder collective action necessary for community development and resilience against future threats.

Displacement is another critical socio-economic consequence associated with terrorism. Armed conflict often forces individuals and families to flee their homes in search of safety, resulting in large populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees (Aliyu, 2021). Displacement disrupts livelihoods as people lose access to their farms or businesses. Additionally, IDPs often face challenges accessing basic needs such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare in host communities that may already be struggling with limited resources (Ogwuche, 2022). The influx of displaced populations can strain local economies further exacerbating tensions between host communities and newcomers.

The impact on education is particularly concerning in regions plagued by terrorism. Schools are often targeted

for attacks or closed due to security concerns (Taiwo & Ogundipe, 2021). This disruption not only affects children's immediate learning opportunities but also has long-term implications for human capital development within affected societies. A generation deprived of education may struggle with unemployment later in life, perpetuating cycles of poverty and instability (Taiwo & Ogundipe, 2021). Furthermore, when children witness violence or are forced into armed groups themselves due to lack of alternatives or coercion by terrorist organizations like Boko Haram, it creates a lost generation that poses long-term risks for societal stability.

Economic inequality tends to widen as a result of terrorist activities. Vulnerable populations often those already marginalized are disproportionately affected by the socio-economic fallout from terrorism (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009). Wealthier individuals may have more resources available for protection or relocation while poorer communities bear the brunt of violence without adequate support systems in place. This disparity can lead to increased resentment towards governments perceived as ineffective at providing security or assistance during crises.

Consequently, the socio-economic impacts of terrorism are extensive and multifaceted. They encompass disruptions in local economies through infrastructure damage; shifts in government spending priorities away from social services; psychological trauma affecting community cohesion; displacement leading to strained resources; educational disruptions impacting future generations; and widening economic inequalities among populations (Ogwuche, 2022). Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies that address not only immediate security concerns but also foster long-term resilience within affected communities.

Counter-terrorism strategies

Counter-terrorism strategies are essential for addressing the complex and evolving threat posed by terrorist organizations globally. These strategies encompass a wide range of measures, including military action, intelligence gathering, law enforcement, diplomatic efforts, and community engagement. The effectiveness of these strategies often hinges on their adaptability to the specific contexts in which they are implemented. One primary approach to counter-terrorism is military intervention. This strategy has been employed by various nations in response to terrorist threats, particularly in regions where governments struggle to maintain control. For instance, the United States' military operations against Al-Qaeda and ISIS have aimed to dismantle these organizations' operational capabilities (Adeleke & Ojo, 2017). However, military interventions can lead to unintended consequences, such as civilian casualties and increased anti-Western sentiment, which may further fuel radicalization (Aliyu, 2021). Therefore, while military action can be effective in the short term, it must be part of a broader strategy that includes political solutions. In West Africa, a classic example of such military intervention is reflected in the activities of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) based in N'djamena, Chad.

Intelligence gathering is another critical component of counter-terrorism strategies. Effective intelligence operations enable governments to preemptively identify and disrupt terrorist plots before they materialize. (Bako & Ibrahim, 2021) emphasize the importance of robust intelligence-sharing mechanisms among nations to enhance collective security. The establishment of international partnerships for intelligence sharing has proven beneficial in thwarting potential attacks and dismantling terrorist networks. However, challenges remain regarding data privacy and civil liberties that must be addressed to maintain public trust. Law enforcement plays a vital role in counter-terrorism efforts at the domestic level. Police forces are often on the front lines of preventing terrorist activities through surveillance, community policing initiatives, and rapid response capabilities (Bakker, De Graag & Van der Heide, 2016). Community policing fosters relationships between law enforcement agencies and local communities, which can lead to increased reporting of suspicious activities. However, there is a delicate balance between ensuring security and respecting civil rights; excessive surveillance or profiling can alienate communities and drive individuals toward extremist ideologies. Diplomatic efforts are also crucial in addressing the root causes of terrorism. Some scholars argue that terrorism often arises from socio-political grievances such as poverty, lack of education, and political oppression (Bakker, De Graag & Van der Heide, 2016). Addressing these underlying issues through development aid and diplomatic engagement can mitigate the conditions that foster terrorism. For example, initiatives aimed at improving governance and

economic opportunities in regions susceptible to radicalization have shown promise in reducing recruitment into terrorist organizations (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009). Community engagement is increasingly recognized as an essential aspect of effective counter-terrorism strategies. Programs designed to promote social cohesion and resilience within communities can help prevent radicalization by providing alternative narratives to extremist ideologies (Bakker, De Graaf & Van der Heide, 2016). Initiatives that involve local leaders in counter-radicalization efforts have demonstrated success in various contexts by fostering dialogue and understanding among diverse groups. Moreover, counter-narrative campaigns utilizing social media platforms have emerged as innovative tools for combating extremist propaganda online. (Bako & Ibrahim, 2021) highlight how these campaigns aim to undermine the appeal of terrorist narratives by promoting positive messages that resonate with vulnerable populations. Engaging youth through creative content can effectively counteract extremist messaging while empowering communities. The integration of technology into counter-terrorism strategies has also transformed how governments respond to threats. Advanced surveillance technologies enable real-time monitoring of potential threats; however, this raises ethical concerns regarding privacy rights (Bakker, De Graaf & Van der Heide, 2016). Striking a balance between utilizing technology for security purposes and safeguarding individual freedoms remains a significant challenge for policymakers. Therefore, counter-terrorism strategies must be multifaceted and adaptable to address the complexities associated with modern terrorism effectively. Military action may provide immediate results but should be complemented by intelligence sharing, law enforcement collaboration, diplomatic engagement focused on root causes, community involvement initiatives aimed at resilience building, counter-narrative campaigns leveraging technology for outreach purposes, while maintaining respect for human rights. As scholars continue exploring these dynamics within academic research frameworks understanding both successes and failures will inform future approaches necessary for enhancing global security against terrorism.

Radicalization and recruitment into terrorist groups in West Africa

The phenomenon of radicalization and recruitment into terrorist groups in West Africa, particularly by organizations such as Boko Haram and its affiliates, has garnered significant academic attention. Understanding the pathways through which individuals become radicalized is crucial for developing effective counter-terrorism strategies. This paper explores the various factors contributing to radicalization in West Africa, drawing on existing literature.

One of the primary drivers of radicalization in West Africa is socio-economic disenfranchisement. Many individuals who join terrorist groups come from marginalized communities with limited access to education, employment opportunities, and basic services. According to scholars, economic deprivation creates a fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root (Boas & Torheim, 2018). The lack of legitimate avenues for social mobility can lead individuals to seek alternative means of asserting their identity and agency, often through violent extremism. Moreover, political instability and governance failures significantly contribute to the radicalization process. In regions where governments are perceived as corrupt or ineffective, citizens may lose faith in state institutions. This disillusionment can push individuals toward non-state actors who promise justice and order (Adeleke & Ojo, 2017). For instance, Boko Haram has capitalized on local grievances against government neglect and corruption by positioning itself as a defender of the oppressed. The group's narrative resonates with those who feel abandoned by their governments.

Religious factors also play a critical role in the radicalization pathways within West Africa. While Islam is predominantly a peaceful religion, extremist interpretations have emerged that exploit religious sentiments for recruitment purposes. Some schools of thought posit that certain preachers and religious leaders promote ideologies that justify violence against perceived enemies (Bøås & Torheim, 2018). These ideologies often find traction among young people seeking meaning and belonging within their faith communities. Social networks are another essential component of the recruitment process. Individuals are often introduced to extremist ideologies through family members or peers who are already involved in terrorist activities (Bachmann & Al-Masri, 2017). The influence of social ties cannot be underestimated; personal relationships can provide both ideological reinforcement and practical support for joining terrorist groups. This phenomenon highlights the importance of community dynamics in understanding radicalization pathways.

Furthermore, psychological factors contribute to individual susceptibility to radicalization. Some of the literature indicates that feelings of alienation, humiliation, or personal trauma can make individuals more receptive to extremist narratives (Bakker, De Graag & Van der Heide, 2016). For some recruits, joining a terrorist group offers a sense of purpose or belonging that they may not find elsewhere. This psychological dimension underscores the need for holistic approaches that address not only socio-economic conditions, but also mental health issues within vulnerable populations.

The role of technology and social media cannot be overlooked when examining recruitment into terrorist groups in West Africa. The internet provides platforms for disseminating extremist propaganda and facilitating connections between potential recruits and established terrorists (Ibrahim & Olatunji, 2024). Social media allows groups like Boko Haram to reach wider audiences quickly and effectively, making it easier for them to attract new members from diverse backgrounds.

Counter-radicalization efforts must consider these multifaceted pathways leading to recruitment into terrorism. Other literature emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying grievances through inclusive governance and socio-economic development initiatives (El-Khishin & Al-Mahmoudi, 2021). By improving access to education and employment opportunities while promoting good governance practices, states can mitigate some of the factors driving individuals toward extremism. Additionally, community engagement plays a vital role in preventing radicalization. Programs aimed at fostering dialogue between different communities and factions can help build trust in local institutions while countering extremist narratives (El-Khishin & Al-Mahmoudi, 2021). Engaging religious leaders in promoting moderate interpretations of Islam can also serve as an effective countermeasure against extremist ideologies.

Consequently, understanding the pathways leading to radicalization and recruitment into terrorist groups in West Africa requires a comprehensive approach that considers socio-economic conditions, political contexts, religious influences, social networks, psychological factors, and technological advancements. By addressing these interconnected elements holistically through targeted policies and community engagement initiatives, it is possible to reduce vulnerability to radicalization while fostering resilience against extremist ideologies.

A historical overview of the Islamic Province of West Africa

The Islamic Province of West Africa, primarily represented by groups such as Boko Haram and its offshoots, has emerged as a significant focal point in the discourse surrounding global terrorism and regional instability (Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020). This region, encompassing parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, has witnessed a surge in violent extremism since the early 2000s. The implications of this rise are profound, affecting not only local communities but also international security dynamics. Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in northeastern Nigeria. Initially it focused on opposing Western education and promoting a strict interpretation of Islam, the group transformed into a violent insurgency following Yusuf's death in police custody in 2009. Since then, Boko Haram has engaged in numerous attacks against military targets, civilians, and government institutions (Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020). The group's tactics have included bombings, mass kidnappings most notably the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014 and assaults on villages (Adeleke & Ojo, 2020).

The emergence of Boko Haram has been attributed to various socio-economic and political factors. High levels of poverty, unemployment, and corruption within Nigerian governance structures have created an environment conducive to radicalization (Adeleke & Ojo, 2020). Some scholars argue that these conditions have facilitated the recruitment of young men into extremist groups who are promised financial support and social belonging (Okafor, 2022). Furthermore, the failure of state institutions to provide basic services has led to widespread disillusionment among local populations. In response to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram, regional governments have implemented various counter-terrorism strategies. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), established in 2015 with contributions from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, aims to combat Boko Haram's influence across borders (Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020). However, despite these efforts, the

effectiveness of military interventions remains contentious. Critics argue that heavy-handed tactics often exacerbate grievances among local communities and can lead to further radicalization (Menkhaus & Moller, 2016).

Moreover, the humanitarian impact of terrorism in this region cannot be overstated. Millions have been displaced due to violence; according to UN estimates from late 2021, over two million people were internally displaced within Nigeria alone due to Boko Haram's activities (Umar & Adetunji, 2021). Displacement leads not only to immediate physical insecurity but also long-term socio-economic challenges as communities struggle with inadequate access to food security and healthcare. The ideological underpinnings of Boko Haram's actions are rooted in a broader Salafist-jihadist narrative that seeks to establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. This ideology resonates with certain segments of the population who feel marginalized by both their governments and Western influences (Zenn & Fandrich, 2019). The group's ability to frame its narrative around anti-colonial sentiments further complicates counter-terrorism efforts as it taps into historical grievances regarding foreign intervention.

In addition to Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria and its neighboring countries is the emergence of other extremist factions such as ISIS-West Africa Province (ISWAP), which split from Boko Haram around 2016. ISWAP has adopted a more strategic approach compared to its predecessor by focusing on establishing governance structures within territories it controls while maintaining ties with ISIS leadership abroad (Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020). This evolution signifies a worrying trend where terrorist organizations adapt their strategies based on lessons learned from previous engagements. International responses have also evolved over time. The United States has provided military assistance through training programs for Nigerian forces while emphasizing human rights considerations during operations against terrorist groups (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019). However, balancing effective counter-terrorism measures with respect for human rights remains a critical challenge for all involved parties.

Therefore, the Islamic Province of West Africa represents a complex interplay between local grievances and global terrorism trends. Understanding this dynamic is essential for developing effective counter-terrorism strategies that address not only immediate security concerns but also underlying socio-economic issues contributing to radicalization. Furthermore, focus on community-based approaches that foster resilience against extremist ideologies while promoting inclusive governance frameworks capable of addressing citizens' needs effectively would be very helpful.

The intersection between ISWAP and Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, emerged in Nigeria in the early 2000s as a radical Islamist group advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. The historical context of Boko Haram's evolution is crucial to understanding its rise, operational strategies, and implications for regional security (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019).

The origins of Boko Haram can be traced back to the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, characterized by deep-seated corruption, economic disparity, and religious tensions. The group was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State. Initially, Boko Haram operated as a religious movement focused on promoting Islamic education and opposing Western influence. Yusuf's charismatic leadership attracted many followers disillusioned with the Nigerian government's inability to address their grievances (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019). The turning point for Boko Haram came in 2009 when Nigerian security forces killed Yusuf during a crackdown on the group. This event marked a significant shift from a primarily ideological movement to a violent insurgency. Following Yusuf's death, His second-in-command, Abubakar Shekau assumed leadership and transformed Boko Haram into a militant organization that engaged in armed conflict against the Nigerian state. Under Shekau's command, Boko Haram adopted increasingly brutal tactics, including bombings, mass killings, and kidnappings (Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020). The group's infamous abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 garnered international attention and condemnation, highlighting the severity of its actions (Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020).

Boko Haram's evolution can also be understood through its ideological underpinnings. The group espouses a radical interpretation of Islam that rejects Western education and values hence the name "Boko Haram," which translates to "Western education is forbidden." This ideology resonates with segments of the population who feel marginalized by both the government and traditional societal structures (Diagne & Kauffmann, 2019). By framing its struggle as one against Western imperialism and corrupt governance, Boko Haram has been able to recruit individuals who are disillusioned with their socio-economic conditions.

The regional implications of Boko Haram's evolution extend beyond Nigeria's borders. As the group gained notoriety, it began to forge alliances with other extremist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, ISWAP and ISIS. These affiliations have enabled Boko Haram to expand its operational capabilities and adopt more sophisticated tactics (Zenn & Fandrich, 2019). The spillover effects have been felt across West Africa; countries like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon have experienced cross-border attacks attributed to Boko Haram militants. This regional instability has prompted multinational military coalitions aimed at countering the threat posed by Boko Haram. Boko Haram mutated essentially into ISWAP and by extension, an offshoot, of global Al Qaeda ((Fawole & Adeyemi, 2020).

In response to this evolving threat landscape, various counter-terrorism strategies have been implemented by both national governments and international organizations. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising troops from Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin, was established to combat Boko Haram's insurgency effectively. However, these military efforts have often been met with mixed results due to issues such as inadequate funding, lack of coordination among member states, and human rights abuses committed by security forces (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019).

Looking ahead into the future implications of Boko Haram's evolution reveals several critical challenges for regional security. First, while military operations may degrade the group's capabilities temporarily, they do not address underlying socio-economic issues that fuel recruitment into extremist groups. Poverty rates remain high in northeastern Nigeria where Boko Haram operates; thus addressing these root causes is essential for long-term stability (Umar & Adetunji, 2021).

Second, there is an urgent need for comprehensive de-radicalization programs aimed at reintegrating former militants into society. Without effective rehabilitation strategies that provide alternative livelihoods and education opportunities for ex-combatants and their communities affected by violence will likely perpetuate cycles of more violence (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019).

Finally, as global terrorism continues to evolve with technological advancements such as social media facilitating recruitment, Boko Haram may adapt its strategies accordingly. This necessitates continuous monitoring and innovative responses from governments both regionally and internationally. Ultimately, understanding the historical context surrounding Boko Haram's evolution into an offshoot of ISWAP provides valuable insights into its operational dynamics and future implications for international security. While military interventions are necessary components of counter-terrorism efforts against such groups; addressing socio-economic disparities through inclusive governance remains paramount for achieving lasting peace in affected regions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study of terrorism and its implications for international security is complex and multifaceted, necessitating a robust theoretical framework to analyze the various dimensions of this phenomenon. This section expands on two primary theoretical perspectives: Realism and Constructivism. Each theory offers unique insights into the motivations behind terrorism, the responses of states, and the broader implications for international security.

Realism

Realism is one of the oldest theories in international relations, emphasizing the anarchic nature of the

international system, where states are primarily concerned with their survival and power best propounded by Hans Morgenthau (1948), Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer (Elaskar, 2020). According to realist scholars, states operate in a self-help system where military capability is paramount. The rise of global terrorism poses significant challenges to this paradigm as it disrupts traditional notions of state sovereignty and security. In realism, the international system is characterized by anarchy, meaning there is no overarching authority to enforce rules or norms (Waltz, 1979) quoted by Forde (1995). This creates a competitive environment where states must prioritize their security. Realists argue that power is the central currency in international relations. States engage in power politics to deter threats and enhance their security (Mearsheimer, 2001) quoted by Elaskar (2020). The emergence of non-state actors like terrorist groups complicates this dynamic as they can challenge state authority without conventional military capabilities. The security dilemma refers to a situation where measures taken by one state to enhance its security lead other states to respond with similar measures, creating an arms race or escalating tensions (Bachmann & El-Masri, 2017). In the context of terrorism, states may increase military spending or adopt aggressive counter-terrorism strategies that can exacerbate regional instability.

Realist scholars argue that terrorism represents a direct challenge to state sovereignty and territorial integrity. For instance, Bjorgo & Hoffman (2009) posit that terrorist organizations exploit weak states and ungoverned spaces to establish operational bases. This perspective highlights how terrorism can destabilize regions and compel neighbouring states to intervene militarily or politically. Moreover, realists emphasize that counter-terrorism efforts often reflect national interests rather than humanitarian concerns. For example, U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq post-9/11 were framed as necessary actions for national security but also served geopolitical interests (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019). Constructivism emerged as a response to the limitations of realism by focusing on how social constructs shape international relations (Bachmann & El-Masri, 2017). Unlike realists who view power dynamics as fixed, constructivists argue that identities, norms, and beliefs play crucial roles in shaping state behaviour. Constructivist scholars such as Alexander Wendt in his seminal work *Social Theory of International Politics*, John Ruggie, Martha Finemore and Michael Barnett (*BA Notes.Org*) highlight how narratives surrounding terrorism influence both domestic policies and international cooperation against terrorist threats. For instance, (Bachmann & El-Masri, 2017) argues that transnational networks play a vital role in shaping collective identities among states facing common threats like terrorism.

Furthermore, constructivists emphasize the importance of understanding local contexts when analyzing terrorist motivations. As noted by (Gana & Nwankwo, 2019), grievances such as political oppression or socio-economic disparities can fuel radicalization processes within communities. While realism provides valuable insights into power dynamics and state behavior concerning terrorism, constructivism enriches our understanding by highlighting the significance of identity and social constructs. Policymakers must consider both material capabilities (realist perspective) and ideological narratives (constructivist perspective) when crafting counter-terrorism strategies. Addressing global terrorism requires collaborative efforts among nations; thus understanding shared identities or norms can facilitate cooperation beyond mere military alliances.

Finally, employing both realism and constructivism offers a nuanced framework for analyzing the impact of global terrorism on international security from 2015 to 2025 particularly concerning regions like West Africa where non-state actors have gained prominence. By recognizing both material realities and social constructs at play within this context, researchers can better understand not only why terrorist organizations thrive but also how effective responses can be formulated.

METHODOLOGY

The method adopted a qualitative analysis of secondary data based on a historical descriptive design.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that the Islamic Province of West Africa (ISWAP) poses a significant threat to international security. The group's activities have resulted in significant human suffering and destabilization in West Africa, with thousands of deaths and displacements reported in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon,

and Niger. The findings of this paper reveal that ISWAP's affiliation with the Islamic State (IS) has enhanced its capabilities and global reach, enabling it to access funding, training, and logistical support from international terrorist networks.

The study's results have important implications for policymakers and stakeholders. To effectively counter the threat posed by ISWAP, governments in West Africa must enhance cooperation with international partners to share intelligence, coordinate efforts, and develop comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies. Furthermore, addressing the root causes of radicalization and extremism is crucial to preventing the spread of terrorism in the region.

In light of these findings, it is clear that a multifaceted approach is required to mitigate the threat posed by ISWAP. This includes not only military action but also addressing the socio-economic and political factors that contribute to radicalization. By understanding the complexities of ISWAP's threat and developing effective counter-terrorism strategies, governments and stakeholders can work towards reducing the group's influence and promoting regional stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments in West Africa should enhance cooperation with international partners to counter ISWAP's threat. Counter-terrorism strategies should focus on addressing the root causes of radicalization and extremism. Regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should develop a comprehensive strategy to counter ISWAP. Intelligence agencies should improve information sharing to track ISWAP's movements and plans. Military operations against ISWAP should be accompanied by efforts to win the hearts and minds of local communities through non-kinetic strategies and programmes. Humanitarian assistance should be provided to victims of ISWAP's attacks and their families. Online communication counter-narratives should be developed to counter ISWAP's propaganda.

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