

# РЕЛІГІЇ СХОДУ В СИСТЕМІ ДЕРЖАВНО-КОНФЕСІЙНИХ ВІДНОСИН

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## AL-SHABAAB AND BOKO HARAM BEYOND FACE VALUE POLITICAL RHETORIC AND WHY THE GOVERNMENTS OF SOMALIA AND NIGERIA HAVE FAILED TO TAME THEM

The activities of terrorist nature by the Al-Shabaab militants of Somalia and Boko Haram insurgency group of Nigeria have – in the past decade – drawn centre-stage security attention in the Greater Horn of Africa and the Sahel region. The mayhem they have caused in terms of human loss, damage to infrastructure, and stoking fear in the minds of the populations arguably makes these two groups – whose ideologies are similar – the most ferocious militant groups on the continent. This study aims to trace the underlying causal factors that facilitated the emergence of these two groups on the political scene and why they have become so operationally effective that the governments of Somalia and Nigeria have failed to tame them. Data for this study were collected and evaluated from latent literature obtained through academic journals and books, online publications, and reports from international institutions that focus on African security. The study finds that the militant's existence has adversely impacted the economic growth prospects of both countries. Thus far, there is no sign on the political horizon that suggests that their operations will cease anytime soon, – in part – because successive governments of Somalia and Nigeria have lamentably failed to resolve the national question, that is, the absence of equitable distribution of national resources, marginalization, and the lack of a genuine desire for inclusive governance. The study notes that regime ineptitude, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and impunity have become the currency of local politics – practices that work at cross-purposes with the foundational building blocks for a stable and economically viable polity. This status quo means that checks and balances are grossly ineffective, – a consequential recipe for state failure. The study concludes that contrary to widely held notions in the political realm that ethnic and radical religious ideologies are the key driving forces behind the establishment of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, the real causal factors lie in the economic mismanagement by successive regimes in Nigeria and Somalia. This study advances the argument that while religion and ethnicity might play a role in the existence of the two militant groups, religious divisions are expediently used as a *low hanging fruit* by incompetent African regimes to cover the real reasons that lie mainly in bad governance practices. This study's exposé is vital for both the policy makers as well as for the ordinary citizens to see through this façade and focus on the root causes rather than on the effects, which is what the penchant has seemed to be.

**Keywords:** Al-Shabaab; Boko Haram; economic deprivation; human rights abuses; marginalisation; militants; Nigeria; Somalia

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## Introduction

For the populations that live in the regions of the Greater Horn of Africa and the Sahel, the mention of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab sends a chilling reminder in their minds due to the carnage that the two militant groups have carried out in the past decade or so. This study chose these two groups owing to their similarities in ideological orientation, and the fact that they – arguably – represent the most entrenched and ferocious militant groups on the continent. Over time, however, factions have emerged from both groups. While there are comparative similarities in the formational motivations of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, there are also dissimilarities. It is argued, for instance, that Al-Shabaab fights the Somali government to reclaim what they feel they were deprived of, while Boko Haram fights against the Nigerian state and its people to acquire what was never theirs, citing poor governance as justification. Put differently, Al-Shabaab fights to regain *de jure* authority, claiming that they are supported by the population of Somalia while Boko Haram fights to impose some *de facto* authority in areas where they dominate within the Nigerian land space.

Broadly, successive governments of Nigeria and Somalia have often concealed their ineptitude and inertia by playing to the political gallery by way of chest-thumping and seeming to present Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab as *misguided, senseless, blood thirsty religious fanatics*. The idea of such labelling is purposely designed to downplay the groups' otherwise *genuine* grievances and destroy their image in the eyes of the international community. Such has been the furore surrounding these two militant groups. The research questions for this study are: (1) What are the underlying causal factors that enabled the emergence of these two groups, (2) What conditions have, over time, facilitated the consolidation of their militancy to an extent that they have become so lethal that the governments of Nigeria and Somalia have failed to tame them?

This study contributes to existing literature on this subject by debunking the long-held façade that the two militant groups are primarily motivated by secession-related ambitions along religious lines. This study categorically identifies poor governance by successive regimes – especially marginalization of certain groups – as the key causal factor for the emergence of these militant groups. This exposé helps to explain why Africa is awash with civil strife. The notion of bad governance as the main cause is firmly supported by a survey carried out by Adelaja et al., who show (from the universe sampled) that public perception in Nigeria indicates that 72 % of the people believe that poverty and economic challenges are the key drivers behind the recruitment of insurgency fighters, compared to only 27 % who believe that militants are recruited along religious/ethnic lines [Adelaja et al. 2018]. Prior to that 2018 survey, research conducted in 2013 by the CLEEN Foundation in six federal states in Nigeria found that on average, 90 % of respondents believe that ignorance of the full teaching of their religions is a factor that influences the adoption of extreme religious views. More recently, a UN survey report of the United Nations Development Program, which was conducted to establish the motivations of militants, dubbed *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathway to Recruitment and Disengagement* found that 71 % of active militants in eight African states surveyed suggest that human rights violations by government security forces (i.e., bad governance practices) are a trigger for militant recruitment. The same survey also found that only 17 % of respondents attributed their militancy to religion [United Nations Development Program 2023]. These exposés effectively entail that religion and ethnicity on their own, – and properly analyzed, – provide no worthwhile lead to qualify as the main causal factors for the emergence of insurgencies. These survey results are instructive, as they reveal that the ineptitude of governments and their failure to create viable economies is often covered up so that the ensuing problems are camouflaged as *radical religious troubles* [Onuoha 2014]. Significantly, the findings of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2002; and the findings of the Africa/Blair Commission of 2005 all suggest that the greatest bottlenecks to Africa's political, social, and economic viability are embedded in bad governance practices such as exclusion of certain groups in governance, cronyism, lack

of accountability, lack of transparency and impunity among the political elite [Africa Confidential 2005]. Specifically, the Sierra Leone Truth Commission which was tasked with probing the causal factors for civil conflicts in Sierra Leone produced damning revelations that reflected the events in most war-ravaged African states. The Commission's primary findings could not be starker: the Commission did not list ethnicity and religion as primary factors, but instead found that:

...the central cause of the war was endemic greed, corruption, and nepotism that deprived the nation of its dignity and reduced most people to a state of poverty. Successive political elites plundered national assets, including the mineral riches, at the expense of the national good. Government accountability was non-existent, and institutions meant to uphold human rights, such as courts and civil society, were thoroughly co-opted by the executive. This context provided ripe breeding grounds for opportunists who unleashed a wave of violence and mayhem to sweep through the country. Many Sierra Leoneans, particularly the youth, have lost all senses of hope in the future. Youths became an easy prey for unscrupulous forces who exploited their disenchantment to wreak vengeance against the ruling elite. The Commission holds the political elite of successive regimes in the post-independence period responsible for creating the conditions for the conflict [United States Institute of Peace 2002].

The Commission also found that, contrary to prevalent belief, the exploitation of precious minerals (diamonds) in Sierra Leone in fact did not cause the conflict. Nevertheless, different warring factions targeted mining areas to finance their war errands. These findings are significant as they mirror regime behaviors in most African states where conflicts are rife. In addition to those findings, studies by Majeed, Siamabele & Kondowe, and Simuziya indicate that ethnicity and religion on their own have no direct bearing on the causal factors of civil wars [Majeed 2013; Siamabele and Kondowe 2021; Simuziya 2021]. To the contrary, those studies show that in fact, having different ethnicities and religions within a polity can be productive due to *cross-pollination* of ideas, cultures, innovation, and ingenuity that diversity brings to the table. Further, research by Majeed also indicates that in most economically weak states, religious and ethnic identity serves as a relevant political tool; that is, religion is exploited by the political elite to mobilize the populations for Machiavellian ends [Majeed 2013]. For youths who are unable to join militant groups, an alternative is to emigrate overseas in search of greener pastures, hence the current influx of African migrants to Europe.

### **Overview of African Violent Extremism: Countering and Prevention Approaches**

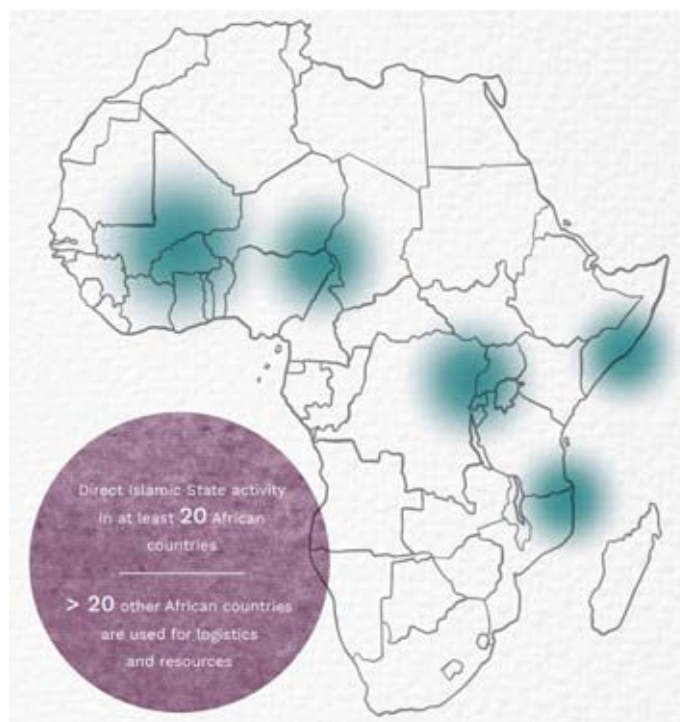
Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon and is on the rise in Africa owing – in part – to the effects of globalization such as structural unemployment, human trafficking, and transnational illicit financing. Also, fragmentations within militia groups have exacerbated the problem. For this study, the extremism under discussion is one that aligns itself with the ideological inspiration from Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda. The fragmented groups operate across state borders and often aspire to have a global reach. However, their primary focus is mainly confined to their geographical jurisdiction [United Nations Development Program 2023]. The report of the Institute for Security Studies suggests that after the international coalition deflated IS in Iraq and Syria, the group set its eyes on Africa where there was no effective global alliance to curb extremism [Institute for Security Studies 2022]. Often, the African conflict ecosystems are reflected in regime ineptitudes, which sometimes leads to coup d'états. Particularly, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in major conflict zones such as in the Sahel and the Greater Horn of Africa is simultaneously a cause and effect of the prevailing violent extremism and insecurity. Remarkably, the seeds of instability are a culmination of years of systematic bad governance practices where leaders paid little or no attention to the basic needs of the ordinary citizen. Over time, such ineptitude leads to a deterioration of human rights protection mechanisms where corruption, cronyism, disenfranchisement, stifling of media freedoms,

electoral skullduggery, and state sponsored violence reigns. Under these conditions, rebel groups begin to form and seek autonomy in their preferred territory hide-outs within the state to facilitate – among other violent criminal activities – the ransom kidnappings that provide them with an immediate lifeline [United Nations Development Program 2023].

Many African conflict dynamics have become complex, and as such, the evolution of militias occurs in a wider political context; some dating back to the colonial times, while others arise from infighting between elite and low-level community strata. These infightings culminate into elite divisions of spoils in which rival cartels control fiscal inflows to the rentier state. Notably, elite bargaining over the conditions of political settlements of spoils is the key factor for the government's habitual paralysis and intermittent instabilities. Furthermore, a residual post-colonial relic of marginalization has been a catalyst for poor governance. Violent extremist groups often intentionally target remote, under-developed countryside areas for recruitment as these spaces are more prone to high levels of unemployment and social exclusion, hence vulnerable to be preyed upon [Institute for Security Studies 2022]. In assessing factors pertaining to organised violent syndicates, no analysis of insurgency extremism can afford not to factor into the equation, the aspect of gender: militia groups – apart from sexual exploitation of women – also use them as recruitment agents. Additionally, women are also used as suicide bombers as it is much easier for women to disguise themselves as “innocent souls” – on face value – thereby duping many unsuspecting victims. So, by disempowering those whose voices (such as women) might mitigate the lure of political violence, insurgencies effectively lower the bar of extremist violence which then allows them to engage in arbitrary acts that perpetuate wanton abuse of human rights and impunity. Further, there is also a concatenating relationship between violent extremism and illegal gold/diamond/coltan mining, cattle rustling and oil smuggling. However, this linkage should be comprehended from the context of those criminal activities being the effects of bad governance rather than as the causes.

The diagram below shows the status and magnitude of violent extremism in Africa as of 2022.

**Figure 1**  
The magnitude of violent extremism in Africa



Source: Institute for Strategic Studies 2022

The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon aptly summarised this extreme violence conundrum when he said:

...many years of experience have proven that shortsighted policies, failed leadership, heavy-handed approaches, a single-minded focus only on security measures and an utter disregard for human rights have often made things worse. The international community has every right to defend against this threat using lawful means, but we must pay particular attention to addressing the causes of violent extremism if this problem is to be resolved in the long run. There is no single pathway to violent extremism. But we know that extremism flourishes when human rights are violated, political space is shrunk, aspirations for inclusion are ignored, and too many people – especially young people – lack prospects and meaning in their lives [United Nations Development Report 2023].

### ***Hard Power Approaches***

Despite the funding that comes from foreign entities such as from the US and Europe, intervention efforts to combat terrorist groups in Africa have largely been miserable. For instance, both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram have continued to operate despite their veteran and feared jihadist leaders having been killed/assassinated at some point using hard securitisation approaches, i.e., Boko Haram's Mohammed Yusuf was brutally killed in 2009 by Nigerian forces while Al-Shabaab's Ahmed Godane was assassinated through a US drone in 2014. In many instances – heavy handedness – far from quelling violent extremism, has in fact been counterproductive in that this approach tends to “harden” militias and give them increased “appetite” to show case their fighting capabilities using the most heinous and cruel retaliatory techniques [Simuziya 2021].

### ***Soft Power Approaches***

Soft securitisation approaches include, for instance, the US employing small-scale teams of special forces who are armed, but only armed for personal protection (more like UN peacekeepers). They do not engage in real combat because their operations are mainly intended for airborne surveillance and reconnaissance [Mayer 2015]. The South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), a policy think tank that promotes good governance practices (especially through the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)) observed through its 2023/2 report that most African governments have made little strides in good governance.

Some crucial governance areas where SAIIA specifically focuses on are the promotion of the cultivation of political cultures that are cognisant of the importance of intersections of political ecology and conflict ecosystems. The report also notes that while citizens in some African countries feel that their concerns are being heard, their contributions are not translating into improved governance systems. This disjuncture threatens the continents' long term lofty ambitions of achieving growth. This revelation correlates with the situations in most conflict-ridden countries of Africa and underscores the importance of implementing soft power strategies to improve social inclusion to reduce conflicts [South African Institute for International Affairs 2023/2]. Other soft power approaches include the establishment of transitional justice policies as a mechanism to bring stability. For instance, in the Lake Chad Basin, the local population is torn between restorative justice and retributive justice. Here, a balance is needed that facilitates the reintegration into society, of militants who choose to lay down their arms [Institute for Security Studies 2022].

### **Theory of Insurgency & the Social Contract**

According to Jenkins, the primary inspiration of the conflict theory tradition of Karl Marx and Max Weber is embedded in resource mobilization and social change, that is, the transformation of the structures of economic and political power [Jenkins 1985]. Key explanations for insurgency are cast in the social power structures of dominance. Often,

opposing interests and methods of change in political power might offer conditions for collective action to bring about institutional reforms. Thus, the theory of insurgency assumes that rebellion is a form of political action with a set of rational collective actions performed by marginalized groups to further their interests in the context of a restrictive society. This means that insurgencies' chances of succeeding or failing rest in the changes in the structures of social power.

Further, Akani posits that the Marxist conflict theory opines that conflict is caused by competition for resources and that the basis for social order seems to be *domination and power* rather than *agreement and harmony* [Akani 2019]. The political elite perpetuate themselves in power by impoverishing the masses. This concentration of the nations' wealth in the hands of a few cabals, coupled with social exclusion, becomes a source of conflict. Murshed and Mohammad assert that civil strife can also be explained through a rational choice hypothesis consisting of two theories: greed and grievance [Murshed and Mohammad 2009]. The greed concept represents elite competition over resource rents, while the grievance concept reflects the relative deprivation of economic gains, mainly by marginalized groups. Lee offers a contradictory and rather controversial view of this position by arguing that terrorism or insurgency is unrelated to poverty because most rebel leaders are relatively wealthy and often knowledgeable compared to an average citizen [Lee 2011]. Managing insurgencies is a costly undertaking that can only be pursued by those with large operational resources. While it is generally correct to suggest that rebel leaders already have resources, the irony is that the foot soldiers they recruit are mainly poor, uneducated, and often vulnerable individuals who have lost faith in the central government's ability to deliver tangible goods. The fact that most recruits are poor, underscores that poverty remains a major factor in the theory of insurgency formation. Sigmund Freud argued that frustration aggression theory holds that human beings have a distinctive desire and ego to destroy their fellow human beings when frustrated. This anger, – arising from deprivation, – is often directed at opponents who are accused of creating a gap between aspirations and actual accomplishments [Akani 2019].

O'Connor opines that armed rebel groups are dependent on popular support and therefore, strive to maintain that support, i.e., the concept of "constituency" is a critical factor as a relational framework, demonstrating an active relationship between rebels and their supporters [O'Connor 2021].

This relationship leads to the following social contract equation: under the social contract theory, the state is a product of a pact that offers a rational framework for reconciling the essentials and commitments expected from state authorities with the rights of the governed. For instance, the constitution of the state, which is the basis upon which state officials should govern, should ordinarily originate from people. This means that the state should be governed based on shared principles of social justice [Nbeta 2012]. The social contract theory was introduced by early European philosophers such as Locke, Grotius, Hobbes, and Rousseau as a tool that legitimizes sovereign power. The logic behind this theory is that the fundamental freedom and equality of all those entering a political arrangement needs to be grounded in the idea that free and equal human beings have no right to exercise power over one another, except in accordance with the principle of mutual consent; in this case, the social contract [Neidleman 2012]. This concept of government commitment which is expounded in social contract covenants seems elusive in both Nigeria and Somalia.

Data for this study were collected and analysed from latent literature built from a combination of correlational and descriptive research approaches that relate to the two militant groups with information gathered from academic journals, books, and online publications. Other vital sources of data that supported the inferences in this study were obtained from reports and commissions of Inquiries compiled by reputable international institutions who are specialised in African security studies.

### **Study Limitations**

The limitations of this study are three: (1) The first limitation lies in the fact that it has only two comparative cases on militant groups in Africa. However, this limitation is compensated for in the sense that the selected cases represent the most dominant and influential insurgencies in their respective regions, i.e., the Sahel region (Boko Haram) and the Greater Horn of Africa (Al-Shabaab), (2) An inherent limitation of this study lies in the individualized nature of radicalization and recruitment within the context of violent extremism in Africa. The practical constraints of studying every individual who joins a violent extremist group and mark it as a driver of such affiliations is a challenging task. As a result, making definitive assertions regarding the motivating factors for an individual to join such groups becomes somewhat less plausible, (3) Another noteworthy constraint is the reliance on reports as the primary data source for the formulation of inferences. In this context, the absence of direct access to human subjects for in-depth study serves as a limitation.

### **Boko Haram (Background)**

In this section, not all militant activities of Boko Haram will be discussed. The selected cases were picked merely to provide the reader with a glimpse of the scale of carnage that the group can carry out. Nigeria has long suffered from instability from various groups within the country over issues mainly centred on marginalisation, notably, the insurgency in the Niger Delta region over oil exploitation, the pastoral land conflicts with the Fulani ethnic herdsmen and several abductions across the country for ransom. Boko Haram is a product of this long-standing instability of the state. Boko Haram, also known by other names, such as, “Jama’atu Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da’wati wa-l-Jihad” (JASDJ), which means “*Community of the People of Sunna Committed to the Propagation [of the prophets’ teachings] and Jihad*”, is a Nigerian extremist Islamic sect that is believed to have been founded around 2001/2002 in the Sambisa Forest in Maiduguri town in Borno State headed by Mohammed Yusuf [Alimba and Salihu 2020].

Boko Haram claims that it is against Western civilization models that have been imposed in Africa by imperialists, including the educational system, arguing that Western infiltration of the governance system and their propaganda in Africa has robbed the continent of its authentic ways of life by copycatting European systems. Therefore, the group aims to overthrow the current political order and establish an Islamic state in the country’s predominantly Muslim north, in which they believe that their conditions of social justice will be properly addressed. Simply put, the logic of Boko Haram’s argument is that the current “Western” political and social order that the Nigerian state adopted has failed to deliver, hence, it is necessary to replace it with another governance system. It is believed that apart from securing funding from kidnappings and ransoms, Boko Haram may also have strong support connections with Al-Qaeda.

Adibe inferred that the group may, in fact, have been formed much earlier around 1995, led by Lawan Abubakar [Adibe 2012]. However, much of the information regarding their organizational operations from 1995 to 2001 remains scanty, as Lawan Abubakar is believed to have relocated to Saudi Arabia in pursuit of further studies. Thus, in its formative years, Boko Haram was relatively unknown and conducted its business without much fanfare until around 2009, when it became more prominent. Since then, it has wreaked havoc, especially in the northern part of Nigeria and, the capital city, Abuja. Strategically, Abuja is often targeted to constantly remind the authorities of the groups’ unfaded presence, and that their grievances remain unresolved. Thurston opines that since its formation, Boko Haram has killed more than twenty thousand people and left hundreds of thousands displaced [Thurston 2017].

Adibe asserts that the trigger of their aggressive militancy began mainly in 2009 when the government clamped down on the organization’s operations with immense force that



left over 700 people dead [Adibe 2012]. Mohammed Yusuf, a brazen Salafi militant, and group's leader was captured and brutally killed during the government crackdown. The bullet-ridden corpse of Yusuf was displayed to the public by security forces, apparently as a deterrent showpiece to other militants. The mosque believed to have been used by this group for underhand operations was also destroyed. These brutal actions by security forces would later backfire as they seemed to have provided a tipping point of radicalization of the group. After Yusuf's demise, the organization embarked upon several deadly retaliatory terrorist-related attacks against the government and the population at large. The group's new leader, Abubakar Shekau – a former deputy to slain Yusuf – did not officially emerge until January 2012, – probably as a decoy, – for strategic reasons.

The map below shows the main operational areas of Boko Haram in Nigeria.

**Figure 2**  
Main locations of Boko Haram operations as of 2013 arguably at the height of their international prominence



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 2013

A numerous number of attacks carried out by Boko Haram from 2009 onwards, started initially in Borno State, in which four people were killed. In 2010, a mass prison break in Bauchi town appeared to have provided effervescence to Boko Haram to amplify their mayhem crusade. In June 2011, Boko Haram claimed the suicide bombing of the Nigerian Police Headquarters in the capital city of Abuja. In August 2011, another suicide attacker bombed the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Abuja, which left an estimated 23 people dead. The massacres continued: in 2012, an estimated 185 people were reported dead after the organization attacked Kano State. In April 2014, the Boko Haram militants abducted – from a government school – 276 schoolgirls (mainly of Christian faith) from their dormitory in Chibok, in Borno State [Ijaseun 2022].



Of these, 57 girls managed to escape. Abubakar Shekau justified the kidnappings then and callously said:

...Allah instructed me to sell them...I will carry out his instructions...and slavery is permissible in my religion, and I shall capture people and make them slaves. Girls should not have been in school; instead, they should have been married. Girls as young as nine are suitable for marriage [Ijaseun 2022].

However, these utterances were denounced by Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh, who argued that Boko Haram was a misguided sect determined to bring the name of Islam in disrepute [Ijaseun 2022]. Nigeria may be at risk of destabilization because of violent attacks that target government infrastructure, civilian populations, and sometimes churches/mosques. On isolated occasions, government security forces have located areas where the kidnapped victims are held by militants but are reluctant to engage in full throttle rescue attempts for fear of collateral damage. Although some Chibok girls were released over time, through negotiations, and payments of ransoms, some were reportedly dead, while others had been married off by the militants. Between 2016 and 2017, a ransom of USD 3.7 million was paid in exchange for the release of approximately 107 girls. As of 2022, about 112 schoolgirls remain unaccounted for [Temitayo 2022].

The diagram below shows that the country is facing unabated and on-going killings and instabilities that have the potential to disrupt economic growth; undermining the very imperative needed to curb insurgency formations.

**Figure 3**  
Areas affected by instabilities as of 2022



Source: ACLED 2022

### Al-Shabaab (Background)

This section of the paper does not aim to discuss all the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab, and as such, the cases that were picked were only for purposes of providing the reader with an idea of the capabilities that the group possesses. Somalia's current instabilities began with the regime of President Siad Barre (1969–1991) which was generally characterised by poor economic performance and authoritarian rule inclined on tribal politics. Following the Ogaden war (1977–1978) in which Somalia lost to Ethiopia, public dissatisfaction from that loss eroded Barre's authority and he resorted to clan politics using the divide and rule *colonial style* of governance anchored on high handedness to enforce order. This further polarized Somalia and made Barre increasingly unpopular which triggered the formation of clan/ethnic militia groups who finally ousted him in 1991. Unfortunately, none of the militia groups that deposed him had widespread authority to govern Somalia. Notably, the southern part of the country has remained in conflict to date. Since 1991, the country has faced numerous security challenges due to state implosion. Over time, several militia groups have emerged and caused untold mayhem in the country. Al-Shabaab is one such militia group – a product of state failure in Somalia.

Al-Shabaab, also means “the youth”, is a jihadist dissident group formed around 2000 and active in Somalia but had remained low-key until 2006. The current leader of the group is Ahmed Diriye, who was recognized in 2014 after his predecessor, Ahmed Godane, a feared and hardline militant was assassinated in a US drone attack. Al-Shabaab currently has over 5000 fighters, mainly located in the countryside areas of the country [Joseph and Maruf 2018; Chigudu 2021]. Al-Shabaab appears to be increasingly employing an *outbidding* strategy, in which rival factions compete to carry out the most heinous, most detrimental, and high-profile attacks to attract both international attention for their grievances and recruitment of more members. Al-Shabaab can carry out deadly attacks across the Horn of Africa, and the celebration of violence for its own sake seems to have been spiraling out of control. It is believed that the forerunner to Al-Shabaab was an organization called al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) or “Islamic Unity”, which emerged in the aftermath of the fall of President Siad Barre's regime in 1991 [Council on Foreign Relations 2022].

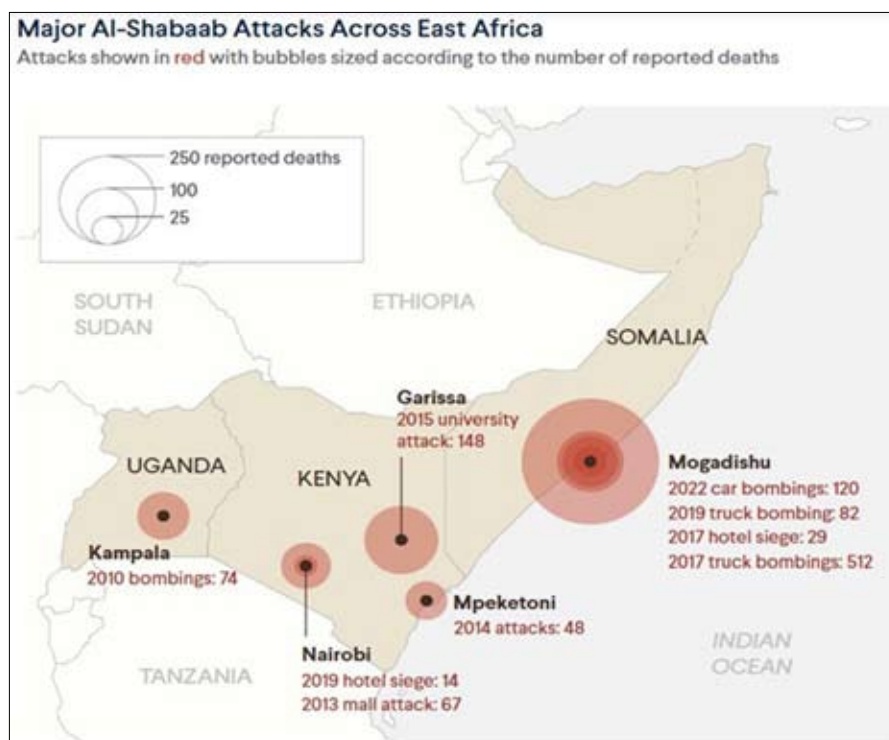
After 1991, Barre's down fall created a long-standing power vacuum in which several militia groups headed by influential warlords emerged. This power vacuum was only temporarily filled in 1994 when the Islamic Court Union (ICU) took over as a caretaker. In its initial years, the ICU was credited for combating the lawlessness that had become rampant. However, as a caretaker administration, the ICU still could not sufficiently garner the support of the entire state. Its failure seemed to lie in the fact that it was widely perceived as a radical Islamic fundamentalist movement, and therefore, intolerant of other groups. As the power void continued, Mohamed Farrah Aidid – one of the most powerful warlords – declared himself president in 1995 but failed to gain international recognition. As the power void persisted, the Transitional National Government (TNG) was ushered into office in 2000 until its mandate expired in 2003. In 2004, another interim administration, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), took over. However, the failure of these successive interim administrations rejuvenated the influence of the ICU which won the hearts of many citizens including Al-Shabaab given ICU's previous record of curbing lawlessness as an interim administration way back in 1994 [Simuziya 2021].

From 1991 to 2006, many Somali people lost faith in any form of government and became inclined to consider Islam as an alternative to their seemingly perpetual troubles. In mid-2006, the ICU took over the government again but hardly lasted in office, as Ethiopia, a long-time adversary of Somalia, dislodged the ICU from office in December of the same year, with the backing of the United States (US) government. Simuziya (2021) asserts that Ethiopia intervened because it feared that the radical influence of the ICU would jeopardize regional security in the Horn of Africa. The ouster of the ICU by a

foreign power that was predominantly Christian angered many Islamic radical followers, and as a result, Al-Shabaab – a seemingly obscure yet integral radical wing of the ICU – invoked jihad against Ethiopia and its sponsors (the US). During this period, Al-Shabaab increased attacks on foreign occupier troops. It is argued that Ethiopia’s intervention was responsible for the rise of Al-Shabaab. Like Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab aims to overthrow the current political order that they accuse of leadership inertia, and for allegedly being puppets of the West, hence the need to create an Islamic state that is free from Western domination. To gain traction amongst the Somali population, Al-Shabaab provides social welfare services and assistance to vulnerable people – a feat that many successive central administrations in Somalia have long failed to adequately perform. In 2012, Al-Shabaab declared an allegiance to al Qaeda, a group that is more financially and operationally viable. Other than support from this strong partnership, Al-Shabaab funds its operations mainly from racketeering, piracy, kidnappings, and extortion [Council on Foreign Relations 2022].

A catalogue of notable attacks that Al-Shabaab carried out outside Somalia includes the 2010 attack in Kampala, Uganda, which left 74 people dead, apparently as punishment for Uganda’s involvement in the African Union (AU) peace-keeping efforts in Somalia. In 2013, it attacked a shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, resulting in the death of 67 people. In 2014, it attacked Mpeketoni town in Kenya, and killed 48 people. The carnage continued: in 2015, it attacked a university in Garissa, Kenya, and 148 people died. In 2019, it attacked a hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, leaving 14 people dead. Other attacks within Somalia included the 2017 hotel siege in Mogadishu, which killed 29 people. In the same year of 2017, a truck bomb left 512 deaths. In 2019, a truck bombing killed 82 people. In 2022, a car bombing resulted in the death of 120 people [Council on Foreign Relations 2022]. The map below shows the main operational areas of Al-Shabaab in Somalia with attacks that took place between 2010 and 2022.

**Figure 4**  
Main areas affected by Al-Shabaab attacks

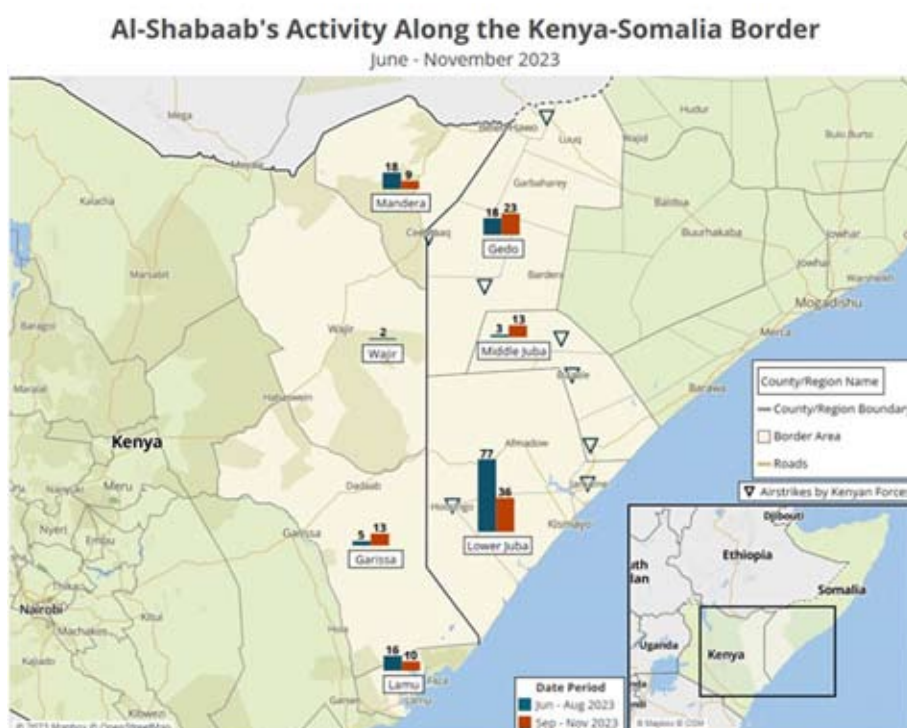


Source: Council on Foreign Relations Research 2022

Wider implications for regional security include reduced or ineffective trade cooperation/links with neighbouring states due to insecurity and porous borders thereby increasing the already existing economic challenges facing ordinary people across the borders. This insecurity issue has further created a problem of ungoverned spaces whereby large portions of state territories remain unsupervised. Those spaces have become havens for terror and other criminal activities. For instance, in the last quarter of 2023, there were at least 104 violent activities carried out by Al-Shabaab in the cross-border areas between Somalia and Kenya [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) 2023].

The map below provides a stark reminder of unabated and on-going Al-Shabaab attacks in the region where 104 violent attacks occurred recently within a period of only 2 months (September 2023 to November 2023).

**Figure 5**  
Attack areas along the Kenyan/Somalia border



Source: ACLED/Mapbox@OpenStreetMap 2023

### Ideological Similarities Between Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab

Wahhabism, a movement founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by a prominent radical Sunni Muslim scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab from Najd region of present-day central Arabia, seems to be at the heart of both Boko Haram's and Al-Shabaab's ideologies. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was a skilled orator and Islamic preacher who promoted strict adherence to traditional Islamic law and the Quran. Critics argue that his doctrines were engrossed in extreme versions of Islamic teachings whereby all aspects of religious life were arguably only seen in black and white versions. In other words, Wahhabism calls for the purification of Islam and rejects contemporary Islamic theology; instead insists on the strict adherence to the letter of the Quran [Radlicki 2015a]. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab aimed to restore Islam to its supposedly *original state* by opposing theological innovation and polytheism. Wahhabism is derived from the Arabic al-salaf al-salih (pious ancestors), which emphasizes that there are two types of people: Wahhabis – the *chosen ones* who go to *heaven* because of their obedience to God and preaching according to

strict rules of Allah, – and the rest, who are *condemned*, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam began to lose its tolerance as Wahhabism became increasingly radical, and it eventually became the core philosophy of militant groups like Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab. In addition, the ideology of Salafism – a revival movement within Sunni Islam which was formed around the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a social religious resistance group – is especially opposed to Western imperialism and its associated artefacts. One of the notable differences between Wahhabism and Salafism is that whereas all those who subscribe to Wahhabism are Salafis, not all Salafis are Wahhabis [Radlicki 2015b].

Each group's religious extremism allows them to legitimize harsh actions by invoking the Wahhabist ideology. Arguably, these organizations function like mafia organizations. For example, they generate income through subversive means and other self-declared appropriation methods. They drink wine, use narcotics, rape girls, raid villages, and destroy property – all actions that the Quran considers unethical [Radlicki 2015a]. This implies that religion is exploited to achieve Machiavellian ends. These manipulative ploys succeed in environments laden with poverty, illiteracy, and marginalization. Al-Shabaab's religious ideology often advocates the excommunication of so-called defectors and non-believers. Despite having stated other goals in the past, the groups' primary objective was to establish fundamentalist Islamic states in Somalia and Nigeria. Islamism and Salafism are used to express commonality and form coalitions against mutual foes, such as the US and its allies. Evidence suggests that both organizations have been relatively successful in recruiting, organizing, and maintaining their fight against the governments of Nigeria and Somalia by relying on Islamic radical theology [Uzodike and Maiangwa 2012]. Different forms of attempting to return to the *original form* of practicing Islam have given rise to Wahhabi jihadis, who believe in using violence as a justified method of achieving their goals, even against other Muslims. Wahhabi purists and activists who oppose violence and support participation in political processes are among the victims of this strategy [Radlicki 2015a]. Another critical aspect to note is the idea that both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have tended to be fracturing thereby spreading the creation of more militia groups.

### **Operational Strategies Employed by the Two Groups**

Militias and terrorist organizations thrive using a strategic combination of both low-tech and high-tech ideas. This might explain, for instance, the increase in the number of suicide bombers. Despite the use of basic or otherwise improvised methods and machinery, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have caused considerable carnage in their respective areas. In fact, much of the territories under their control are off limits for government forces and the public due to the notoriety of those crime ridden areas. Terrorists have *underground factories* where they produce weapons such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) [Mayer 2015]. For instance, Boko Haram can attack from its base in the Sambisa Forest in Borno State, and given the thickness of the forest, ambushes are easy to execute [Alimba and Salihu 2020].

Terrorists are not easily defeated because of the limited reach that government surveillance forces have to their cells: terrorism is often used to make a colossal impact by the *weak* against the *powerful*. It can be argued that terrorists tend to avoid direct conflict with the enemy and devise methods such as assassinations of prominent political figures and abductions of unsuspecting civilians. They also cause massive damage to vital civilian infrastructure (such as the 2011 bombings at the UN building and the police headquarters in Abuja) that leave a lasting impression of how lethal they can be; in part to provoke the authorities to rethink their policies [Freedman 2007]. A prime example of such infrastructure damage was the bombing by Boko Haram militants of the UN building in Abuja in 2011 [Ijaseun 2022]. Both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab adopt guerrilla tactics, which explains why military technology, coalitions, legislation, and foreign interventions have been ineffective in taming them [Mayer 2015].

Studies by Ingiriis, and Sinko and Besenyo indicate, for instance, that the secret service of Al-Shabaab, the Amniyat, has better intelligence system mechanisms than that of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) [Ingiriis 2020; Sinkó, Besenyó 2021]. Those studies assert that comparatively, Al-Shabaab provides better security and predictability for the population that live under its jurisdictions than the government. This has resulted in the local population having confidence in the militant group's effectiveness in managing its forces and territory. Contrary to this *positive* picture of Al-Shabaab, the Federal Government of Somalia is largely viewed by the population as corrupt, incompetent, and disoriented. In the main, the operations of NISA are marred by bureaucracy which has hindered dynamism in its operations.

In addition, Hansen opines that Al-Shabaab has managed to gain advantages within its territorial jurisdictions and appeal to local population because its approaches are heavily influenced by local clan anatomies with a fervent streak of Somali nationalism [Hansen 2013]. Furthermore, as a self-proclaimed affiliate of Al-Qaeda with proclaimed commitments to jihadism – that strategy enables Al-Shabaab to *easily* attract foreign recruits to beef up its ranks.

However, on the flip side of the coin, it can be argued that this “local support” that Al-Shabaab claims is somewhat superficial because it comes with extreme force considering that the group imposes strict restrictions on a variety of lifestyle aspects which the people must follow, or risk being killed. This observation is aptly captured by Joseph and Maruf who argue that the perceived “cooperation” from the local population is mere window dressing and is only a result of fear of the unbearable consequences that follow those who dare to defy the militants' laid down lifestyle societal prescriptions [Joseph and Maruf 2018].

### **Group Orientation and Disposition**

Terrorist organizations are often well-organized and have well-defined command structures. The most famous and notorious terrorist groups in Africa have declared allegiance to either the Islamic State (IS) or Al-Qaeda, which are also linked to other terrorist groups. Al-Shabaab, for instance, is a well-known Al-Qaeda affiliate [Council on Foreign Relations 2022].

Boko Haram is believed to have ties with the IS militant group and adds to the number of Islamic State in Libya (ISIL)-affiliated groups that undertake insurgency activities in the Sahel region. This association forms a network of transnational attack systems. These connections ensure continued relevance and an adequate supply of logistics, intelligence exchanges, training, and combatants [United Nations Security Council... 2022]. Additionally, the interconnectivity of Al-Shabaab to other radical Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and Boko Haram provides the organization with a unique sense of purpose that aids in broadening its sphere of influence and appeal. For Boko Haram, although its actions have largely assumed a local focus within Nigeria, it also has an international base when one considers its reference to other groups [Olomjobi 2016].

In this way, transnational terrorism works well for terrorist organizations in a bid to spread terror with the hope of usurping political power. Social media have also been exploited by these groups to market their causes. For instance, Boko Haram has benefitted from the use of digital and online propaganda, and although the group argues that it despises Western civilizations, it uses the benefits of the same “Western education” when it best suits them. For instance, Al-Shabaab uses the internet and social media (especially Twitter) as essential components of its campaigns [Jones 2015].

Twitter is especially used to sway public opinion in locations of the Horn of Africa where there is opposition of its existence by demonstrating that it is a *better devil* while the African Union (AU), the Somali government, Ethiopia, and the Kenya Défense Forces



are projected as *violent oppressors and puppets* of the West. Al-Shabaab often proclaims its war victories and ensures that it gravely humiliates opponents to serve as a tactical scare-mongering ploy for the *enemy* [Jones 2015]. To prevent terror funding, the prevention and detection of terrorist finances is a tall order given the wide range of financial instruments available to fund terror activities. These include, but are not limited to, bank robberies, oil thefts, and kidnappings for ransom, extortion, and funding from private (secret) donors. These methods, including the use of the internet and social media, make it easy for them to engage in recruitment techniques and, in covert financing, and for international and local networks and for private financiers to continue sustaining the organizations [Ryder 2015].

### **Plausible Causal Factors for the Establishment of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab**

Studies on the machinations of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have offered various hypotheses on the causal factors for their formation. Adibe, Mantzikos, and Alimba and Salihu suggest that there is a combination of factors that have led to the formation of the two groups [Adibe 2012; Mantzikos 2012; Alimba and Salihu 2020]. That the factors consist of internal regime deficiencies, as well as external factors that can be traced back to colonialism. Uzodike and Maiangwa categorically assert that the causal factors are due to a cocktail of bad governance practices and that the emergence of these two groups to prominence is a symptom of ineptitude leadership by the regimes in Nigeria and Somalia [Uzodike and Maiangwa 2012]. Endemic corruption, cronyism, and nepotism have reduced both states' economic status to basket cases. Consequently, the desperate population now see their governments as mere self-serving racketeering schemes purporting to serve citizens when, in fact, not [Tilly 2010]. Illiteracy and poverty have significantly contributed to youth being vulnerable to recruitment into extremist organizations. Most notably, the high rates of corruption and vulnerable citizens feed the extremist narrative. Thus, charismatic, yet radical preachers exploit this vulnerability and despair among citizens and ensure that radicalization gains traction, for instance, by diverting and preaching extreme versions of religious scripts. Those scripts convey the narrative that governments have never been capable of addressing the plight of ordinary citizens [Onuoha 2014]. Adibe argues that because of the central government's failure to mobilize the population towards a common goal, various ethnicities and religious affiliations have now tended to prefer to retreat into primordial groupings where they believe they will (re)construct their identities and meaning [Adibe 2012].

### ***The Effects of Corruption, Cronyism, Marginalization & Impunity due to Regime Incompetence***

Bulging youth populations in Nigeria and Somalia have no meaningful hope for opportunities in the form of either employment or training, where they can fully exploit their talent and skills to fulfil their dreams of a better life. Worse still, governments do not offer any social welfare safety nets to youth [Onuoha 2014]. It is argued that at the embryonic stage of their operations, both militant groups believed that they were simply leading an armed struggle against oppression and suppression of government security forces, such as incessant arrests, unlawful detentions, impunity, pervasive corruption, and dispelling religious tensions between Muslims and Christians [Bello 2021a].

In Somalia, for instance, social and political strife has rendered it a failed state across all governance thresholds. Nigeria, arguably, is, – except for designation, – also a candidate for failed state status. According to Mills, African states are poverty stricken because they are poorly governed, i.e., misallocation, misuse, and inability to prioritize resources into ventures that have a higher economic multiplier effect. Insecurity has been a major cause of declining industrial operational excellence which has stunted economic growth [Mills 2010]. In some instances, economic malaise has come about because of



state officials, working as bagmen, connive with foreign capitalist interests to wantonly syphon natural resources. Insecurity, therefore, becomes a convenient lever by which the looting of precious minerals and oil is facilitated. How does one measure a failed state? While there might be many parameters to consider before arriving at that categorization, two key elements seem to stand out and are traceable in both countries:

1. The economies of both countries are, – in all practical senses, – on a deathbed, and both states rank among the poorest countries of the world. Furthermore, the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index report (CPI) indicates that both countries – out of 54 African states – rank among the 15 most corrupt states on the continent [Transparency International Report 2022]. Studies by Peters, indicate that the most corrupt countries are at the same time also those where human rights abuses are rife [Peters 2019]. The wanton human rights violations, for instance, by state organs such as the army and police in Nigeria, testify to this [Burke 2023].

2. According to the Weberian model of a state – a model that is generally acknowledged as a basic starting point in terms of government legitimacy – the regime should, *inter alia*, have a monopoly on the use of armed force, yet that monopoly of control of armed force is woefully absent in both Nigeria and Somalia.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has exposed the incompetence of the government to tame insurgencies, while in Somalia, the Al-Shabaab and various other militias that mainly control the outlying countryside areas have proven to be a menace to the government and have shown that they are a force to be reckoned with [Lottholz and Lemay-Hebert 2016]. The report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies suggests that both Nigeria and Somalia are among the top 10 countries most impacted by terrorism and its subsequent effects [International Institute for Strategic Studies 2022]. Furthermore, a survey report conducted in 2014 by the CLEEN Foundation in Nigeria found that:

...widespread corruption has not only deprived communities of needed amenities and infrastructure but has also created an environment conducive for recruitment and radicalization. Pervasive malfeasance provides a key referent around which extremists can frame anti-secular ideologies and radicalization. Children's alienation from home and society provides the cognitive opening that extremist ideologues exploit in the process of recruitment and radicalization. Boko Haram draws its members mainly from disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children... young followers who previously used local weapons in attacks, have become highly radicalized individuals willing to carry out suicide bombings in pursuit of martyrdom [Onuoha 2014].

Loimeier opine that if basic structural conditions such as social injustice, entrenched graft, lack of transparency and accountability, and long-standing economic malaise are not addressed, insurgencies will persist and become more difficult to dislodge [Loimeier 2012]. Such prevailing conditions will continue to attract membership into the Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram ranks.

Olusegun Obasanjo, the former president and one of the leading figures in Nigerian politics laments that among the factors that have negatively affected all-round country development is the lack of peace and security; that peace cannot be achieved without justice, equity, and inclusive society. Obasanjo bemoans the lack of sound political leadership as a critical factor in development arguing that over the past 63 years, Nigeria has not lived up to expectations due to the level of emptiness, cluelessness, incompetence, greed, and arrogance of many successive leaders<sup>1</sup>. Obasanjo lays bare this leadership gap which has caused turmoil, instability, and lack of growth when he bemoaned that:

...we need to admit our failures...we need to tell ourselves the truth that we have not done well on this course (of providing effective leadership especially) in the recent past. We have disappointed ourselves, we have disappointed Africa, we have disappointed the Black race, and disappointed the world. If (for instance) we look at the issue of education where over 20 million (Nigerian) children that should be in school are not in school... you

do not need an oracle to tell you the consequences of that (situation) for tomorrow. Skill acquisition, empowerment and employment of youth who seem to be ignored (is a looming disaster). We do not need to look far for the remote causes of banditry, Boko Haram, kidnappings, and other organised crimes. We are living dangerously on the edge of gunpowder by driving more people into poverty through “good policies” that are poorly implemented, and from (sheer) bad policies, and from no policies at all<sup>2</sup>.

### ***The Effects of Colonialism on Local Polity Governance***

While African governments have had their own fair share of blame on governance gaps facing the continent, colonialism has left an enduring negative effect on the continent, such as the destruction of the foundational fabrics of the traditional African ways of life that were effective in conflict resolution as well as in economic sustenance [Coe et al. 2013]. During independence, most African governments inherited and adopted the colonial governance system in a wholesale manner. The colonial system – a state system – was an alien governance system for the local population, whose traditional lifestyles had long been based on smaller communities built around kin and kith value systems that were now at variance with the colonial state system [Kanu 2012]. The hallmarks of colonial rule can be summarized as follows:

1. The divide-and-rule policy which pitted African ethnicities against each other, and therefore, amplified the construction of Othering.
2. The arbitrary drawing of state borders forced people to live with non-kin, and people whose value systems were different, if not altogether, conflicting.
3. The governance rule of conscription forced locals to adapt to arbitrary and otherwise brutal methods of polity governance, which translated into intolerance, corruption, and disregard for indigenous systems.

Therefore, it can be argued that the new African leaders that emerged at independence in the 1960s were essentially victims of the diabolical choreography imposed on them by European colonizers. The design of the African state was done to ensure that it did not advance the cause of the local people. As Louis Farrakhan put it, colonial machinations were put in place to ensure that, “a Whiteman’s heaven was a Blackman’s hell”<sup>3</sup>. More damagingly, the colonial educational system which was designed, and still largely used in Africa today, was – at best – meant to corrupt the African mind to assume that only European systems are worthy of being pursued, and at worst, to permanently capture the African mind to hate anything about African culture, traditional African teaching systems, and to only glorify European systems. In many instances, the educational system does not address local African constellational realities and needs [Kanu 2012; Gellman 2020; Snapp 2022]. This concern – of blindly copycatting European models by African leaders – has especially been raised by Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Boko Haram’s denunciation of Western education and civilization is framed in this broader context.

Thus, by adopting Western, or otherwise colonial governance systems in a sweeping manner, African leaders inherited all artifacts of colonial rule; top among them being a tendency to glorify Western ideologies without due reflective reasoning [Kanu 2012].

In this way, most African leaders have been captured to think the *European way* at the expense of thinking the *African way*, even when they are now fully aware that such imposed colonial systems are incompatible with local constellations over which they preside. Thus, many African leaders are themselves seen by their populations as traitors and surrogates who have sold out to European imperialists, because as leaders, they are in a better position to correct those long-standing Western copy-cat anomalies. This frustration about African leaders sheepishly accepting dysfunctional, borrowed, and corrupt educational systems that do not advance the aspirations of African polities, is aptly explained by Farrakhan (2023), who argued that:

...I do not want to go to school to learn about Dick and Jane... I do not want to go to school where you can (only) show me all that the Western man/woman has done, but you do not show me what the native people have contributed to human civilization ... you do not want to show me what the Mayans gave; you do not want to show me what the Africans gave...you do not want to tell me what China gave, but only what Europe gave ...I do not want such education ...do not feed me with crap and tell me that I am being educated... give me a balanced diet (balanced education) so that I can look at all human beings (across the globe) with respect and honor<sup>4</sup>.

Such sentiments of frustration; of manipulative and redundant educational systems on the continent run deep in the African psyche because the decimal economic performance of Africa today is directly tied to poor governance, itself – in part – a product of the “borrowed” educational systems with poor educational goals and hence yield poor outputs that do not reflect Africa’s needs [Gellman 2020]. It is this alienation in economic relations, and governance that explains why militants such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab came into being. Governments’ tendency to dismiss their grievances as *empty rhetoric* does not change the fact that their establishment itself is indicative of state failure, bad governance, bad educational systems, and marginalization. This calls for a comprehension of the militants’ grievances beyond face value political rhetoric from the regimes’ face-saving political schemes.

The colonial legacy argument remains as valid as ever, and if there is any doubt about its cogency, those doubts are easily trashed aside when one comprehends the findings of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2002, which revealed in no uncertain terms that:

...the Commission finds that the seeds of discontent in the late 1980s and the early 1990s can be traced to the colonial strategies of divide and rule and the subversion of the traditional systems by colonial powers and successive governments. The colonial government manipulated the chieftaincy system and, in doing so, undermined its legitimacy. The chiefs became surrogates for the colonial government. They were loyal to the colonial masters rather than to the people they were meant to serve [United States Institute of Peace 2002].

Based upon the foregoing inferences on poor governance – especially the lamentations by former president Obasanjo – it can be asserted that when Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab posit that they aim to overthrow the current political order due to failure of leadership, they certainly do have a point because successive governments have indeed failed to honour their social contract obligations with the population. These demands by militants are crucial aspects that need to be comprehended beyond face value political rhetoric.

### **Deficient Government Counter-Insurgency Interventions**

Government security force strategies against insurgencies have been violent, yet ineffective. Adibe and Burke argue that government security forces dependence on extrajudicial killings and brutality as a technique of handling any problem associated with insurgencies in Nigeria not only aided the creation of Boko Haram, but also continued to nurture its chances of growth [Adibe 2012; Burke 2023]. These non-conformities to human rights protection mechanisms are counter-productive, as those abuses are used by Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab as justification for digging-in. For instance, in August 2016, the Nigerian military claimed to have launched an air strike at the headquarters of Boko Haram in the Sambisa Forest, where several militants were killed and reportedly left their leader Shekau injured. The attack is also reported to have killed at least 10 Chibok school girls (who had been held in captivity) and injured around 30 other girls.

Other tactics that have failed to tame the militants include the brokered interventions involving the Nigerian government, the Red Cross, and the Swiss government, in which

USD 3.7 million was paid as ransom for the release of around 107 schoolgirls. Colossal sums are spent annually on otherwise fruitless ventures (fighting the effects) at the expense of funding the educational, health, and social welfare sectors (which are the root causes of the troubles). It is clear from this example that the problem is not a lack of resources, but the misallocation of resources, which is the central cause of instabilities. If huge sums of money to pay ransoms can be mobilized, it should follow then – logically – that money for revamping the much-needed educational sectors and vocational training centres for thousands of desperate youths can certainly be sourced. This governance gap can only be read as a lack of political will on the part of the government authorities.

The key point here is that if there are good governance practices in place, people would not feel marginalised and tempted to form sectarian groups, and hence there would be no cause, in the first instance, to pay ransoms to any group. The very idea of paying a ransom indicates that the government intends to pacify a certain group that feels socially excluded [Ijaseun 2022].

It is also clear that the Nigerian military and Somali government forces are ill-equipped and under-motivated to defend against insurgency attacks [Roth 2015]. Another poor tactic by government security forces is that people suspected of having links with militants are detained and held in deplorable conditions, often subjected to torture, and sometimes murdered while in detention. Such brutal and unlawful tactics are pathetically unproductive in the campaign of winning hearts and minds. This illustrates the ineffective counterterrorism approaches of the Nigerian and Somali governments. In retaliatory attacks, militants have used a combination of bombing campaigns and other guerrilla tactics, to which government forces have failed to respond sufficiently [Bello 2021b]. This provides insurgents with an upper hand, particularly that both armies (Nigeria and Somalia) have been in considerable disarray with institutional corruption, which has contributed to the corrosion of what was once formidable state organs. Good governance practices by regimes would make it possible to address the root causes of insurgencies. Studies by Uzodike and Maiangwa show that those who join terrorist groups in Nigeria, Somalia, and other war-torn states mainly come from poverty-stricken families [Uzodike and Maiangwa 2012]. Good governance is essential for preventing terrorist financing and limiting the flow of arms across borders. Analysts opine that in both countries, endemic corruption continues to stifle peace-making efforts. Therefore, it can be argued that one of the major reasons why these two groups have not been dislodged is the incompetence of the respective governments, particularly in Somalia, where the regime still has no control over vast areas of the state. This factor alone – government failure to tame the insurgencies – validates the pronouncements of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, which insist that the current political order is not fit for purpose.

In the fight against terror, a strong presence of infantry soldiers to deal with insurgencies is paramount. There has been little effort to deploy sufficient force to combat terror cells. Terrorism incidences are only addressed by governments after incidents have already occurred. Although there are long-term government and AU initiatives to combat Africa's two deadly terrorist groups those plans have not produced effective results. Furthermore, the international community can only provide limited support, which means that unless the local governments themselves are dedicated to ending terrorism, external support remains largely a futile solution to rely upon. To tame terrorist groups and obliterate their cells, a combination of both international efforts and local communities is necessary. Comprehensive initiatives have been proposed, such as promoting education, achieving social justice, inclusion, and improving government accountability and transparency, which show that military operations alone cannot resolve Africa's security challenges unless significant aspects of systemic violence are genuinely addressed through inclusive governance [Chigudu 2021]. Governments seem detached from these realities, but instead are only focused on regime face-saving schemes. For instance, while there is

no proven direct link between Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, the government of Nigeria finds it appropriate to present Boko Haram as having close links with Al-Qaeda. This face-saving scheme was aptly explained by Adibe, who argued that:

...the linkage to Al-Qaeda is for the government to attract international sympathy and technical assistance from European countries and from the US, which since 9/11 has been especially paranoid about any group rumored to be linked to Al-Qaeda. Therefore, linking Boko Haram to Al-Qaeda makes it easier for the government to rationalize its inability to contain the groups' activities, – after all – if the US and European countries have not been able to defeat Al-Qaeda, why will anyone see it as a sign of weakness that an African government has not been able to defeat an organization it sponsors? Furthermore, by linking Boko Haram to Al-Qaeda, the government may hope to use innuendos and name-dropping of the US involvement to frighten the sects and pressure them to the negotiating table [Adibe 2012].

Ironically, this tactic or threat does not go far enough to change the mindset of Boko Haram because it is also in Boko Haram's interest to be seen as being associated with a feared group such as Al-Qaeda. Whether that association is real or merely a perception, it nevertheless increases Boko Haram's appeal, especially in recruiting new members.

Deducing from the analyses of Hansen, Radlicki, and Aondona the US and its European allies are reluctant to get involved in quelling the militants directly, as such an action could pause considerable odds against Western interests in Africa [Hansen 2013; Radlicki (2015b); Aondona 2020]. Direct confrontation could increase anti-Western sentiments in favor of the militants. In particular, the US has not forgotten the devastating events of the 1993 Mogadishu fiasco, in which 18 of its special forces were massacred by Somali militants due to US intervention in Somalia.

Another aspect of securing peace and security that has not been sufficiently explored in both Nigeria and Somalia are the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programs (DDR) that are usually sponsored by international organisations with the aim of supporting and funding the processes of persuading combatants to lay down their arms so that they can be incentivized and go back to civilian life. The DDR programs are crucial because they focus on both the minimalist theory (i.e., security concerns) as well as the maximalist theory (i.e., developmental concerns). This means that apart from simply working on disarmament and demobilization (security concerns), the programs also provide empowerment ventures and other social-economic reintegration initiatives for former armed militias (developmental concerns). This is especially so because the long-term success of such programs lies in addressing the root causes of the conflict such as poverty, inequality, and marginalization [Ekyamba 2020].

### **Counterterrorism Efforts & Challenges in Nigeria – Period From President Umaru Y. Musa, President Goodluck Jonathan to President Muhammadu Buhari**

In the *formative years* of Boko Haram up to 2007, the Nigerian government under President Umaru Y. Musa was persuaded by some Islamic leaders to release the Boko Haram radicals that had been detained under the previous government of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

In the initial stages on how the government handled issues of Boko Haram, it seemed – on the face of it – that the decisions were laced with religious grudge connotations, i.e., Christians vs Muslims: the militants were detained by President Obasanjo (a Christian) and released by President Umaru Y. Musa (a Muslim). After their release, the Boko Haram radicals remained *mute* for nearly two years without raising major security concerns. After the death of Umaru Y. Musa in 2010, his vice president Goodluck Jonathan (a Christian) took over. In the meantime, Boko Haram had been recruiting and training members, and much of their militant attacks began towards the end of 2009 [Aondona 2020]. The activities of Boko Haram cut across the borders of four states (Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad); an area commonly referred to as the Lake Chad Basin. The

snags of collaborating across governments and navigating through other influential commercial stake holders have made the conflict extremely confounding to Nigeria. The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) for the four states has faced several collaborating challenges that have weakened their governments' legitimacy. A prime example of these confronts which is driven by elite commercial interests is elaborated by the Report of the United States Institute of Peace (2018) which notes that:

...through the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the four countries are trying to cooperate on competitive resource issues related to Lake Chad which has been drying rapidly and losing surface area. They also face a range of challenges to their democratic order and state legitimacy; powerful business groups frequently shift their alliances between the state and the insurgents based on who they think can best protect trade and provide stability. This influential merchant class is too often overlooked in assessing conditions and the insurgency in the north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Boko Haram's affiliation with the self-styled Islamic State extremist movement adds the dimension of the international terrorism and connections with violence in other countries of West Africa. Groups such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb which originally operated mainly in Algeria but has extended its tentacles into sub-Sahara Africa, contribute to tensions as weapons and extremist ideology spread across the region [United States Institute of Peace 2018].

The picture below shows the location of the Lake Chad Basin area.

**Figure 6**  
Lake Chad Basin



Areas of the Lake Chad Basin adversely affected by the Boko Haram crisis include communities in northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North, western Chad, and southeast Niger. Map adapted from artwork by Peter Hermes Furian and taras79/Shutterstock.

Source: United States Institute of Peace 2018

In 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan offered amnesty to Boko Haram in exchange for them to lay down their arms. In response, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau dismissed the offer, arguing that his group had done no wrong, and, as such, an amnesty would not be applicable to them. Instead, he boasted that it was the government that needed to be offered amnesty [BBC News, April 11, 2013]. Such brazenness from a militia brings into question the legitimacy of the government, and lays bare the feebleness of the regime.

In 2015, the government of President Muhammadu Buhari increased its military operations against Boko Haram to cripple the militant's power in hopes of reclaiming territory to achieve lasting security and peace. Those operations – a follow up on similar operations started under the government of President Jonathan – were often conducted in joint efforts with the LCBC member states, and although some progress was achieved, the militants remained largely unsubdued. In 2016, the government attempted to further weaken the influence of Boko Haram by implementing a far-reaching humanitarian relief and social assistance program in the most vulnerable areas. Those efforts – however well intended – still achieved very little [United States Institute of Peace 2018]. The recent barbaric killings (in December 2023) of hundreds of people in Plateau State by bandits (allegedly, Fulani militias/herdsmen killing farmers) further demonstrate the general weak capacity of the Nigerian government to tame insurgencies. This woeful failure of the government to protect the population is now a *living norm*. Unless decisive action is urgently taken, such attacks will become more routine [The Christian Post, December 30, 2023].

### **Results & Discussion: Social and Political Ramifications on Polity Sustainability**

Religion and ethnicity are often exploited by incompetent governments which they project to the population as causes of insurgencies. The affected governments and the (Western) media conveniently conceal the central causes for civil discords and instead begin to label the insurgents as *religious fanatics* who are bent on dividing the state along religious and ethnic inclinations. Classifying them as *fanatics* is strategically designed to shift the populations' attention from the incompetence, ineptitude and inertia that are often characteristics of government policies. This study has shown that religion and ethnicity on their own have no potent bearing on the causes of insurgencies. Two crucial sources of primary information on the root causes of civil strife; the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2002), and the Africa/Blair Commission (2005) indicate that bad governance practices are the central causes of insurgencies [United States Institute of Peace 2002; Africa Confidential 2005]. This revelation effectively pours cold water on governments' ploys to exploit religion and ethnicity as causes of conflicts and instabilities. Studies by Collier, Mueller and Tobias, and Barrett suggest that conflicts impose immense economic costs on governments [Collier 1999; Mueller and Tobias 2016; Barrett 2018]. These studies estimate that in countries that experience intense conflicts, around 2.5 % of their annual GDP growth is lost, and the cumulative impact increases as conflicts persist. Ironically, while conflicts significantly lower the economic benefits for ordinary citizens, government spending on military operations increases, further exacerbating the already existing economic malaise of the state. Over time, healthcare services, and education, both of which are critical for cultivating citizens' minds to contribute positively to societal growth, suffer enormously.

For instance, a recent UNDP survey conducted in eight African states [Burke 2023], revealed that currently, 70 % of the UN counterterrorism budget is spent on building capacity to combat terror in the form of purchasing military equipment compared to only 24 %, which is spent to address poverty, economic, and social welfare programs – imperatives that ordinarily form a major chunk of the root causes of conflicts. This contradiction cannot be a starker.

Furthermore, the same surveys revealed that quality education and exposure to different cultures are key preventative components for reducing conflict [Burke 2023].



The challenges brought about by institutional and state failures have a domino effect beyond the state borders. Frazer argues that the *cancerous* effects of state failure commence with state implosion, – and as anarchy spreads and corrupt non-state armed actors take control of certain regions, the state becomes a harbor for criminal mobs as well as a variety of threats of global scope, such as terrorism [Frazer 2008]. Furthermore, human trafficking, refugee crises, and the spread of diseases become the order of the day. Accusations by governments of human rights abuses committed by the two militant groups are a frail argument to present because government security forces themselves are equally culpable of such violations due to heavy handedness – an aspect that has been widely condemned even by ordinary citizens. For instance, extrajudicial killings of civilians by government forces are rampant during counterinsurgency. During these operations, blatant human rights abuses such as enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and torture of detainees, are committed. All these violations – put together – arguably make the government authorities potential candidates to stand trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Survey reports by the UNDP suggest that sub-Saharan Africa seems to be the new epicenter of aggressive extremism, with 48 % of global terror deaths in 2021 [Burke 2023].

The root causes of civil strife, which in part, attract dozens of youths for recruitment into militant organizations, have not been sufficiently addressed – key among them being elitist politics, rampant corruption, cronyism, nepotism, and marginalization. If these remain unaddressed, they will continue to be the potential causes of protracted conflicts. Due to government ineptitude, militant groups are unable to be tamed because they have far more authority over territories (mainly in the forests and ungoverned spaces) where governments have less or no control and influence. The use of social media has also assisted militias in remaining relevant, and hence might aid their survival for a foreseeable future [Ingiriis 2020]. For terror groups to have an impact, they often resort to ambushes and assassinations of the most influential political and community leaders; in this way, they remind the authorities about their unresolved grievances. The survival of terror groups depends largely on the numbers they recruit. Those recruited are drawn mainly from a cadre of poor and vulnerable people which makes it easy for these organizations to garner more members as they prey on disenchanting youths [Onuoha 2014].

The study also notes that the payment of ransoms is a double-edged sword; while the original intention of ransoms is to ensure that peace prevails, the offer of colossal sums inadvertently works as an incentive for criminal elements who are now enticed to pursue the insurgency route for perceived future payoffs. In this way, ransoms reinforce the idea that violence, – after all, – pays [Simuziya 2021]. More worryingly is the tendency by insurgency groups to fracture into smaller groups, which translate into an upsurge of terror cells, thereby increasing both state insecurity and investment unpredictability. Throughout the turbulent years of the conflict, the disintegrated groups continue to survive by milking from the war chaos and sharing the spoils. This situation then sets the economy up for gradual yet considerable declining operational excellence of industrial capacity across the board [United States Institute of Peace 2018].

The study finds that the periods preceding the conflicts in the two states represent the most reprehensible years of post-independence Nigeria and Somalia. These periods reflect an extraordinary failure of leadership on the part of all those involved in the government, public institutions, and civil society organizations. Thus, bad governance practices especially marginalization and economic deprivation, account for the main causal factors that led to the emergence of the two militant groups. Militants have exploited a situation of continued bad governance practices that has created a fertile space for them to remain notable in the political sphere. It is this basic factor (of continued bad governance practices) that has made the governments of Nigeria and Somalia to lack political and diplomatic leverage, and hence have failed to tame Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. These crucial governance aspects must be comprehended beyond face-value political rhetoric.

## Conclusion

Nigeria and Somalia's development has been hampered by insecurity and instability as these conditions work at cross purposes with prospects for economic development. Both governments have failed to answer the national question, which is to ensure genuine inclusive governance for all stake holders to feel that they have a stake in state affairs. A cursory look across Africa reveals that competent and diligent governments do not experience insurgency groups on their soil; only inept regimes suffer from such infiltrations. The main thrust being that at the core of unskilled and irresponsible governments is endemic corruption, economic mismanagement, cronyism, nepotism, exclusion, tribalism, heavy handedness, and impunity – all these vices create an opportune environment for militias to emerge and flourish. Both Nigeria and Somalia are in an instability quagmire mainly because – over time – they have been swamped by the run-of-the-mill political leaders who seemingly only possess one *skill*: an insatiable appetite of active engagement in pork-barrel politics. Clearly, political leaders in both countries are at sea on how to resolve the insecurity and economic turbulences; the frantic way in which leaders tackle these challenges resemble a Physical Education (PE) teacher trying to solve mathematical problems. A much more realistic assumption is that leaders have become errand boys of foreign capitalist interests who profit from Africa's protracted conflicts, paving the way for continued looting of natural resources.

In the case of Nigeria, several skirmishes ranging from the long-running militant group in the Niger Delta region, the Igbo secessionist movements, the farmer-herder clashes, cattle rustling, kidnappings, and now Boko Haram and its perceived association with Al-Qaeda and IS militants have reduced Nigeria to a near failed state. Also, the payment of ransoms to militias can be read as government acknowledgement of their grievances which are embedded in marginalisation, otherwise it makes little sense, if at all, to pay ransoms and then turn round and claim that the group you have paid those colossal sums has no legitimate grievances. Furthermore, ransoms distort prudent fiscal spending as those sums could, for instance, be spent on construction of a bridge or improving medical services at one or two health centres in a particular district. So, due to accountability and transparency challenges, ransoms themselves entrench bad governance practices. Regarding Somalia, the perpetual state power vacuum that ensued after the Barre regime was deposed in 1991 still haunts the country to date due to insecurity, hence the rise of militant groups such as Al-Shabaab. The economic ranking of Somalia today is that of a basket case. In conceptualising the strategies to end civil strife in Nigeria and Somalia, the aims of those strategies cannot be confined simply to defeating Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab; those aims must also strive to win the peace. Efforts towards nation-building must necessarily be cultivated on the principle of creating an inclusive society – an approach that makes citizens have a sense of belonging and relevance. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are both a symptom of state failure, and the groups' continued existence exacerbates state vulnerability. The perpetual struggles to overcome social and economic challenges have exhausted the capacity of the governments of Nigeria and Somalia to provide basic services to their population. This implies that the social contract between the state and its citizens has fallen to pieces and as such, the legitimacy of the governments hangs on a thread. Factors such as marginalization of certain groups, resource competition among various elite actors, ethnic strife, and a youth bulge (youths with little hope for a bright future) pose considerable odds to the successful attainment of state security and economic stability. This scenario underscores the need for governments to prioritise youth-centred policies. Peace and security cannot be achieved without justice, equity, and inclusive society. By driving more people into poverty through perpetual bad governance practices, the governments are living dangerously on the keg of gunpowder. The international community (in particular, the United Nations) could also play an important role in this situation by focusing more on collaborations with the affected

governments on training and sufficiently funding the processes of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Channels Television (2023), *Nigeria Has Failed to Meet Expectations Since Independence-Obasanjo*, July 25, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUP38OWL3DA&t=672s> (accessed April 30, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Channels Television (2023), *Nigeria Has Failed to Meet Expectations Since Independence-Obasanjo*, July 25, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUP38OWL3DA&t=672s> (accessed April 30, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Farrakhan L. (2023), *Farrakhan Speaks to Popular Rappers About Changing Their Lyrics*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXJISPSBijk> (accessed April 30, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Farrakhan L. (2023), *Farrakhan Speaks to Popular Rappers About Changing Their Lyrics*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXJISPSBijk> (accessed April 30, 2024).

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### **“Аш-Шабаб” і “Боко Харам” поза номінальною політичною риторикою та чому урядам Сомалі й Нігерії не вдалося їх приборкати**

Терористична діяльність сомалійських бойовиків “Аш-Шабаб” та повстанського угруповання “Боко Харам” з Нігерії протягом останнього десятиліття привернула увагу служб безпеки на Великому Африканському Розі та в регіоні Сахель. Їхні насильницькі дії, що спричиняють людські втрати, руйнування інфраструктури та сіють страх серед населення, роблять ці дві групи зі схожою ідеологією, можливо, найжорстокішими воєвничими групами на континенті. Це дослідження має на меті виявити основні фактори, що сприяли появі на політичній сцені цих двох груп, і з’ясувати причину їхньої настільки високої оперативної ефективності, що урядам Сомалі та Нігерії не вдалося їх приборкати. Дослідження показує, що ці збройні формування негативно вплинули на перспективи економічного зростання обох країн. Поки що на політичному горизонті немає жодних ознак припинення їхньої діяльності найближчим часом – зокрема, через те, що жоден уряд Сомалі й Нігерії, на жаль, не зміг вирішити такі національні проблеми, як несправедливий розподіл національних ресурсів, маргіналізація та брак справжнього бажання запровадити інклюзивне управління. У дослідженні зазначається, що характерними для місцевого політикуму стали бездарність режиму, корупція, клановість, кумівство та безкарність – практики, протилежні складникам вибудовування стабільної та економічно життєздатної держави. Такий status quo означає, що система стримувань і противаг є вкрай неефективною, і наслідком цього може бути поразка держави. У дослідженні зроблено висновок, що, всупереч поширеним у політичному світі уявленням про етнічні та радикальні релігійні ідеології як ключові руйнівні сили заснування угруповань “Аш-Шабаб” і “Боко Харам”, справжнім причинним фактором є незадовільна економічна політика низки політичних режимів Нігерії і Сомалі. Зазначається, що, хоча релігія та етнічна належність можуть відігравати певну роль в існуванні двох воєвничих груп, наголос на релігійних розбіжностях робиться некомпетентними африканськими режимами навмисно, щоб приховати справжні причини, насамперед – незадовільні методи управління. Дослідження має важливе значення як для політиків, так і для простих громадян, даючи змогу проникнути поглядом за фасад і зосередитися на першопричинах, а не на тих наслідках, які, схоже, висувуються на передній план.

**Ключові слова:** Аш-Шабаб; Боко Харам; бойовики; економічні втрати; маргіналізація; порушення прав людини; Нігерія; Сомалі

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