

# Factors that Predisposes Youth to join Boko Haram Insurgency

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## **Abstract**

*Boko Haram is considered to be a major terrorist threat affecting Nigeria's internal security. Studies have shown that most of the perpetrators of the activities of Boko Haram are youth. Therefore, this study is carried out to investigate the factors that predispose youth to join the Boko Haram insurgency. The general objective of the study is to identify the predisposing factors that led the youth to participate in the violent extremist activities in Borno State. Three local Government Areas were purposively selected for the study, these are Maiduguri, Bama and Gwoza. The total sample used for the study consisted of 384 respondents. The data was generated through primary source using structured questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussion. Relevant literatures were reviewed and R,K. Merton's Strain theory was adopted as a model for analysis. The analysis showed that low level of education among youth in the study area predisposes them to Boko Haram and what actually motivate them to join Boko Haram is the desire to get money. This shows that the key factor that members of Boko Haram used to draw the youth into their group is financial inducement. Therefore, it is concluded that youth in Borno State join Boko Haram as a result of low level of education and poverty. Based on the result it is recommended that government should enhance provision of free education to youth at all level. The government should also support youth achieve their ambitions by giving them opportunities to access financial and business services. Supporting youth to become successful entrepreneurs in their aspirations could help fill the gap that Boko Haram has exploited effectively.*

**Keyword:** Boko Haram, insurgents, youths and predispose

## **Introduction**

The emergence and deadly activities of Boko Haram insurgents has introduced a new terrorist dimension, previously unknown in the criminal history of Nigeria. The turn of events since 2009 has been deeply disturbing. The level, scope and magnitude of violence have gone well beyond people's expectations or experience. Series of bomb attacks were carried out by the sect, as well as taken hostage of innocent citizens. The activities of Boko Haram harmfully touched all spheres of life, especially in the Northeast. As a consequence, many were displaced from their towns and villages and made destitute; many families were broken, many lost loved ones and wives have become widows and children made orphans. Many youths have been denied education as their schools are constantly targeted and destroyed and they are psychologically traumatized. Police stations and the Police out post have been rendered almost non-functional; and arms and ammunition were carted away from most attacks. Jails were broken and prisoners were often set free. Even the academia felt the brunt of the senseless killings and abductions.

A weekly tracking of the security situation in Nigeria conducted by a U.S-based Council on Foreign Relations (2014) shows that Borno State is the most insecure of all the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria with a record of over 2,400 deaths in only two years. Most of these casualties were attributed to Boko Haram attacks (Monguno, 2016). Consequently, Borno State has been rated as the most dangerous place in Nigeria, while Maiduguri its capital is the second most dangerous local government after Damaturu in Yobe State (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme 2014).

(Onuoha 2014, Mercy Corps, 2016) showed that majority of the sect members consists predominantly of youths who are ready to fight and die for the new cause they have been made to believe in. The young followers of the sect, who previously used local weapons in attacks, become highly radicalized and carried out suicide attacks. This is seen as a great threat to a nation's peace and security. Youth all over the world are vital and important segments of the society in which they live. A disciplined, focused and law abiding youth can create a bright future for his nation. Conversely, a lawless, indulgent and violent youth is a great threat to a nation's peace and security. Therefore, to counter violent extremism and create a safe environment for all youths to become peaceful and productive adults, this study is set to investigate the factors that predisposed youths to join Boko in Borno state.

### **Objective of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to identify the factors that predispose youth to join and participate in Boko Haram activities in Northeast Nigeria, selecting Borno State for the field study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this research would be significant to the Government and the security agencies for policy formulation and implementation. The findings of the study would also enable the Government to provide solutions to the identified predisposing factors to youth involvement in Boko Haram activities. The study shed some light on this subject and provide a more detailed explanation of the phenomenon of insurgency. The study is also vital as it would expand academic endeavour and serve as a background literature for researchers who want to write on insurgency. The research is also sure to contribute to the existing knowledge on Boko Haram insurgency.

### **Scope and Limitation of the study**

This research covered three local government areas in Borno State that are most affected by the insurgency; these are Maiduguri metropolitan, Bama and Gwoza local governments. These areas were chosen because of the following reasons: (i) Maiduguri was the epicenter of the insurgency, (ii) Bama was one of the local government worst hit by the insurgency because of the level of atrocity committed was very high compared to other communities and (iii) Gwoza was the first local government where the insurgents hoisted their flag and declared the area occupied as their caliphate. Bama and Gwoza are not accessible because of the insecurity therefore the respondents were drawn from the IDP camps. This was done in order to have a wider representation.

### **Model for analysis**

#### **Merton's Anomie and strain Theory**

Merton (1968) modified the concept of anomie first used by Durkheim to refer to the strain put on an individual's behavior when accepted norms conflict with social reality. He argues that deviance arises in certain groups because they are responding normally to the social situation in which they find themselves. For Merton, the social situation is the product of a

disjunction between culture and social structure. He further argues that some individuals and groups within a society are subject to special pressure for crime while everyone is urged to strive for success, lower class individuals are frequently prevented from achieving such success through legitimate channels. As a result, they are under considerable strain or pressure. They may adapt to their strain in any one of the five modes of adaptation (Merton, 1968).

	<b>Modes of Adaptation</b>	<b>Cultural Goals</b>	<b>Institutionalized Means</b>
I.	Conformity	+	+
II.	Innovation	+	-
III.	Ritualism	-	+
IV.	Retreatism	-	-
V.	Rebellion	±	±

Where (+) signifies acceptance, (-) signifies rejection, and (±) signifies rejection of prevailing values and substitution of new values.

The first response according to Merton is conformity. Conformists accept both the success goal (values) and the normative means of realizing them. They strive for success by means of accepted channel.

The second response is innovation. Innovators reject normative means of achieving success and retain success aspiration; therefore, they use illegitimate or illegal means to get success in other words they turn to deviant means in particular crime e.g arm robbery.

The third response is ritualism. The ritualists conform to socially accepted standard although they have lost sight of the values behind these standards. The rules are followed for their sake without a wider end in view, in a compulsive way. Ritualists are people who dedicate themselves to boring jobs even though the jobs have no carrier prospects and provide few rewards. According to Merton those who select this alternative are deviant because they have largely abandoned the commonly-held success goals. (This group of people have been strongly socialized to conform to social norms; this prevents them from turning to crime, unable to innovate; with jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement, their only solution is to scale down or abandon their success goals.

The fourth possible response according to Merton is retreatism. The retreats have strongly internalized both the cultural goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them, yet they are unable to achieve success. They therefore resolve the conflict of their situation by abandoning both the cultural goals and means of reaching them. They are unable to cope and drop out of society, defeated and resigned to their failure, Examples of such group of people are psychotics, chronic drunkards and drug addicts, pariahs, vagrants, vagabonds e.t.c.

The fifth and the final response is rebellion. Rebels reject both the existing values (goals) and the means but wish actively to substitute new ones and reconstruct the social system. This adaptation according to Merton leads men outside the envioning social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new and modified social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards. When the institutionalized system is regarded as the barrier to the satisfaction of legitimized goals, the stage is set for rebellion as an adaptive response. To pass into organized political action, allegiance must not only be withdrawn from the prevailing social structure but must be transferred to new groups possessed of new myth. The dual function of the myth is locating the source of large scale frustration in the social

structure and to portray an alternative structure which would not, presumably, give rise to frustration of the deserving. It is a charter for action.

Drawing from the Merton's typology, members of Boko Haram felt alienated and regarded the existing social structure as barrier, therefore they rejected both the existing values (goals) and the means of achieving them, that is, western education, and wished actively to substitute the social structure by reconstructing the social system. They therefore, moved out of Maiduguri the stronghold of Boko Haram to the *Sambisa* forest and environs, from where they captured some local government areas hoisted their flags and declared one the local government areas with Gwoza as the capital of their caliphate. The captured local government areas served as their new social system operating with new laws and orders that they felt would suit them, without regards to the Nigerian constitution.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted cross-sectional research design. Using survey method, the data for the study was sourced through the primary source of data collection using interview schedule, questionnaire and focus group discussions, both qualitative method and quantitative method were adopted to collect the data.

The target population for this study is comprised of household heads living in the research locations that were affected by the Boko Haram activities. The research locations were Maiduguri Metropolitan, Bama and Gwoza Local Government Areas. In Borno State there are 27 LGA, but the above 3 LGA were purposively selected by the researcher because they are the most affected by the insurgency. Maiduguri was the epicenter of the insurgency, Bama was one of the local government areas worst hit by the insurgency because the level of atrocity committed was very high compared to other communities and Gwoza was the first local government area where the insurgents hoisted their flag and declared as their caliphate. Based on the population census of 2006, the population of Maiduguri was 540,016, while those of Bama and Gwoza were 270,119 and 276,568 respectively.

The sample population size for this study consists of three hundred and eighty-four (384) respondents. The sample was arrived at by using Cochran's (1963) formula for determining sample size. Three (3) LGA were purposively selected for the study. In Maiduguri Metropolitan 164 respondents were selected. Multistage sampling technique was adopted to arrive at the sampling units. There are fifteen (15) wards in Maiduguri Metropolitan, and using simple random sampling through balloting, three wards were selected. The wards selected are Shehuri North, Gwange and Bolori. One session of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held with eight (8) respondents in the three selected wards. The participants for the FGD were also selected by purposive sampling. Two sessions of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) comprised of men and the other one with women. The total respondents for the FGD in Maiduguri is twenty-four (24) and one hundred and forty (140) questionnaires were administered.

As for Bama and Gwoza, because of the insecurity in the location, respondents were selected in the Internally Displaced Peoples Camps (IDP). One hundred (100) respondents were selected at Dalori IDP camp, where displaced people from Bama are camped. Two sessions of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with eight (8) participants was held, one with males and the other with females and eighty-four (84) questionnaires were administered. For Gwoza one hundred (100) subjects were also selected from Bakassi IDP camp where displaced people from Gwoza are camped. Here as well two sessions of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with eight (8) participants was held, one with males and the other with females and eighty-four (84) questionnaires were administered. With the assistance of the ward heads in the two

camps the respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Twenty (20) ex-Boko Haram militants were also interviewed for the study, and were appropriately sourced from Gombe rehabilitation centre.

In the three LGA seven sessions of FGD was conducted with fifty-six (56) participants, and three hundred and eight (308) questionnaires were administered. The analysis is based on three hundred (300) respondents as the remaining eight questionnaires were not properly filled. For the data collected through qualitative method, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used for analysis, and the data from FGD was transcribed by the researcher so as to support the quantitative analysis. SPSS software was used to process the quantitative data and then a frequency distribution was used for analysis.

## Presentation of results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
15 -24	10	3.3
25 -34	113	37.7
35 -44	119	39.7
45 -54	46	15.3
55 and above	12	4
Total	300	100%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	193	64.3
Female	107	35.7
Total	300	100%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	157	52.3
Divorced	39	13
Widowed	60	20
Others	44	14.7
Total	300	100%
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	51	17
Muslim	241	80.3
Others	8	2.7
Total	300	100%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Primary	54	18
Secondary	146	48.7
University	38	12.7
Qur'anic	62	20.7
Total	300	100%

Table .1 shows the age distribution of the respondents. It shows that majority of the respondents are between the age ranges of 25 - 34 years and 35 – 44 years which constitute 37.7% and 39.7% respectively of the total respondents. This shows that the respondents are adult enough to understand the issues pertaining to Boko Haram. Item two on the table shows the gender distribution of the respondents. The male respondents constitute 64.3% of the total respondents while 35.7% were females. This shows the patriarchal nature of the community

under study whereby most of the household heads are males. Item three shows that the marital status of the respondents. From the table it can be seen that 52.3% of the total respondents were married, 13% are divorced, 20% are widowed while others constitute 14.7%. This shows that majority of the respondents are married. Item four presents the religion of the respondents. The table shows that 80.3% of the respondents are Muslim while the Christians constitute 17%. This shows that Islam is the major religion in the study area; this also attests to the fact that Borno is often reputed to be the gateway to Islam in Nigeria as Islam was declared a state religion in Kanem Borno as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The table also shows the educational qualification of the respondents. It shows that the highest level of education most of the respondents attained is secondary school constituting 48.7% of the total respondents, while only 12.7% of them attained university level; additionally, 20.7% received Quranic education. This shows that majority of the people in the study area attained secondary school as their highest educational qualification.

Out of the twenty (20) ex-Boko Haram members that were interviewed, thirteen (13) were men and seven (7) were women. Their ages ranged between seventeen (17) to thirty-two (32) years. The youngest member interviewed was 17years old while the oldest person was 32 years old. Majority of the members interviewed were married. All the respondents interviewed practiced Islam as their religion. The respondents came from a variety of economic, educational and ethnic backgrounds. Majority of them were not formally employed; they were mostly petty traders. Half of the respondents claimed that they attended Quranic education and the remaining half were mostly school drop-outs. Majority of the respondents are Kanuri by tribe, the major ethnic group in the Boko Haram affected area. Majority of them claimed that they were born and brought up either in Maiduguri or Bama.

The participants of the FGD were made up of thirty-two (32) men ad twenty-four (24) women. Their ages ranged between fifty (50) to sixty-five (65) years. They are the elderly members of the community. Majority of the participants were married while others are widowed. All the respondents practiced Islam as their religion. Majority of them were not formally employed, some of them were petty traders, while majority of the women were fulltime housewives. Half of the respondents claimed that they attended Quranic education and the remaining half have attended western education up to secondary school level. All the participants in Maiduguri and Bama are Kanuri by tribe while those from Gwoza were of Gwoza tribe.

**Respondents’ Perception of Predisposing Factors to Insurgency.**

Table 2: Respondent’s Perception of Boko Haram

<b>Perception</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Terrorist group	194	64
Cultism	34	11.3
Religious extremist	31	10.3
way to reduce population in the North	31	10.3
Business	10	3.3
Total	300	100

Table 2. shows the Respondents’ perception of Boko Haram. Majority of the respondent (64.7%) perceived Boko Haram as a terrorist group. Ten point three percent realized that they were religious extremists but 3.3% of the respondents saw it as a way of doing business. Results from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) revealed that people’s perceptions about Boko Haram were diverse. Some of the respondents described them as a terrorist group,

dreaded insurgent group which is bent on fighting against western education, radical Islamic sect, ignorant people while others perceived them as a disaster that had befallen them, as reported by a respondent in group five

*“it is a disaster because members of Boko Haram are none other than our brothers and children who decided to take up arms against us”. (FGD Male participant, 2019)*

This points to the fact that ignorance among people pertaining to what Boko Haram actually is predisposed the youths to join them.

Table 3 : Respondent’s perception on the education and educational attainment of youths

Perception	Frequency	Percent
Very important	167	55.7
Necessary to be successful	65	21.7
Only way out of poverty	38	12.6
Not necessary/important	30	10
Total	300	100
Educational Attainment		
Primary school	91	30.3
Secondary school	110	36.7
University	24	8
Quranic school	74	25
Total	300	100

Table 3: presents the respondents’ opinion on the education and educational attainment of youths in the society. Majority of the respondents constituting 55.7% opined that education is very important to the youths while 10% of the respondents thought otherwise. This shows that the people in the research location are aware of the importance of education; they know that education is necessary to be successful in life and it is a way out of poverty. The respondents’ opinion on the attendance of school by youths shows that majority of the youth in the study area attended school which constituted 68.3% while 31.7% did not.

The table also shows the educational level that youths mostly attain. It shows that the highest level of education attained by the youths in the study area is secondary school which constitutes 36.7% of the respondents’ opinion, while 25% attained Qur’anic schools only. Even though the respondents’ opinion earlier showed that 68.3% of the youths went to school, the highest level they attained was secondary level. This shows majority of the youth in the study community did not further their education after secondary school. Education plays a crucial role in preparing the individual for employment and independent life; it also facilitates interaction with new cultures, people as well as insights and information. Lack of education leads to idleness. Therefore, when the youths do not proceed to the next level after secondary school, they are left idle which makes them vulnerable to Boko Haram solicitation for recruitment into the extremist ideology of their group.

A respondent also decried that

*“our youths of nowadays are not vast in both Islamic and western education, that is why they are easily convince by extremist such as Boko Haram, if they are highly educated no such things can influence them”.* (FGD: Female Respondent,2019)

Table 4: Respondents’ opinion on the availability of opportunities for young people.

Opinion	Frequency	Percent
Available	35	11.7
Not Available	265	88.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 4, presents whether there are opportunities for the young people in the community/state or not. The table shows that 88.3% of the respondents acknowledged that there were no opportunities for the youth development in the community. This shows that youth in this community do not have enough opportunity. Some of the respondents (11.7%) opined that there were opportunities for the youths in the community, when asked to state some of the opportunities, they could not name any. This shows that lack of opportunities for the youths to progress in the community may likely predispose them to join Boko Haram.

Table .5: Respondents’ perception of adequacy livelihood

Perception	Frequency	Percent
Inadequate	180	60
Adequate	120	40
Total	300	100.0

Table 5, explains the respondents’ perception on whether lack of livelihood could be a possibility for making young people to join Boko Haram. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents subscribed to the view while 40% held a contrary view. The respondents who subscribed to the view; when asked for the reasons for their opinion, majority of them reported that Boko Haram offer money to the young people to start up business activities. This opinion is also supported by a result from FGD group six (6) whereby a respondent reported that

*“Boko Haram offers any youth willing to join them a new motorcycle to source for their livelihood”. During that period, you would see a lot of youth riding new motorcycles jubilating and their wives hailed them because of their braveness (FGD:Male participant, 2019)*

This shows that lack of means of sustenance can easily predispose youth to join Boko Haram. Similarly interview results from ex- Boko Haram members revealed that some youths joined the group to get a source of livelihood, because Boko Haram members were given new motor cycles and financial assistance in order to start business. One of the interviewee reported that

*“Iam not doing anything meaningful in the community because I don’t have means, so one day a friend convinced me that if you join Boko Haram you are going to have a source of livelihood, true to his words when I joined them I was given a motorcycle and some money to start a trading, but now I realized it is ignorance that made me joined, I have regretted my actions” (IDI; Male Respondent, 2019)*

### Discussion of findings

The objective of the study was to identify the factors that predisposed youth to joined and participated in Boko Haram. The findings from the survey data revealed that the factors that predisposed youths to Boko Haram included low level of education, as shown on table 2 where majority of the respondents opined that the highest level of education attained by youths in those communities was secondary school and primary school qualifications as their highest educational level. Similarly, the interview result with the ex-Boko Haram also indicates that most of them are either school dropouts or attained an informal Quranic school.

This view is also supported by the FGD result from group six, where a respondent reported that “our children lack both western and religious education; if they are properly educated nothing can have influence on them”. This finding is in line with Merton’s theory. According to Merton, Opportunities are motivated by one’s ability to acquire basic education and become socialized; since the society failed to give adequate socialization to its members those who were denied looked for a remedy and resorted to adopting a crime-based philosophy such as that of the Boko Haram, and the gullible younger ones were easily deceived into engaging in delinquent behavior.

In line with this result, Public Safety (2018) report suggests that lack of educational potentials Is one of the risk factors in youth gang involvement, in addition, Abdu & Okoro (2016) stresses that historical resistance to formal education and the failure of government to provide creative solution to the challenge had created a huge army of uneducated and illiterate youth population in the north eastern region. Other factors that predisposed youths to join Boko Haram were lack of opportunities for progress and inadequate means of livelihood as shown on Tables 4 and 5 respectively

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in recent times has been an issue of concern to all including researchers in their academic endeavours. The sectarian violence has caused an enormous damage to Nigeria, particularly in the North Eastern part of the country. Hence this study is carried out to investigate the factors that predispose youths in the study area to join Boko Haram, in order to find out what actually motivated them to join the group. Based on the analysis of the data collected for the study, the following conclusions were arrived at:

The main factor that predisposed youths in the study area to join Boko Haram is lack of adequate education and poverty, and what actually motivated the youths to join the sect is the desire to get money and unemployment. The high rate of poverty and unemployment in the north eastern region was evidenced by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2012, 2013). This pointed to the fact that poverty and unemployment made the youth to yearn for money in order to make ends meet. This also pointed to the fact that youth in the study area joined Boko Haram because of low level of education and poverty. Therefore, it can be concluded that youths in this community could not achieve success because of low level of education; and they are discontented with the welfare the society provided, hence they turned to violence.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the research the following measures are suggested to effectively curb the insurgency.

1. The government should enhance provision of free education to youth at all level. High level of illiteracy in Nigeria contributes to young people becoming more easily susceptible to manipulation and recruitment into extremist groups. The Government can do this in collaboration with traditional rulers particularly at the grass-root level to ensure that parents send their children to school
2. The government should support youths to achieve their ambitions by giving them opportunities to access financial and business services. Supporting youths to become successful entrepreneurs of their aspirations could help fill a gap that Boko Haram has exploited effectively. This can be done by giving loans to the youth in the community.

3. The government should monitor and regulate religious preaching in order to prevent religious ideologues from misleading young people with false doctrines or distorted preaching

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