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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM ON MUSLIMS, NORTHERN NIGERIA A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper shade light on the negative impact of religious extremism in leading Islamists to justify terrorism. Results show that the factors leading Islamists to justify terrorism contextually vary. Where Muslims dominants are educated Islamically, this probability decreases with the application of good respondents to the religion of Islam, while increases where Muslims dominants are not educated Islamically, especially those who are lacking background teachers at home. There is no evidence in support that Islamist propaganda causes ordinary Muslims radicals. Yet, in northern Nigeria affected by homegrown terrorism, it is observed that justifying terrorism is strongly associated with an increase in political agenda through religious extremism, providing support that Islamist groups are attracting Islam radical individuals. Our framework helps to develop an understanding of negative impact of extremism that goes beyond a focus on violence, and suggest optimistic majors to be taken.

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Introduction:-

In the name of Allah, the gracious the merciful, all praise due to Allah, the load. May the peace and blessings be upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his family.

Islam is the divine religion and fasted growing in the world and the Qur'an is the light of it, if one read it and remain the same definitely he reads without sincerity and carefulness. The Qur'an says:

" كتاب أنزلناه إليك مبارك ليدبّروا آياته وليتذكر أولوا الألباب" سورة ص الآية 29

"This is a book, which we send down to you, full of blessing, so that they (all conscious, responsible beings) may ponder its verses, and that the people of discernment may reflect on it and be mindful"

[Surat Saad, verse 29]

Any incorrect assumptions held by Muslims or non-Muslims, imagery in the media, emotive stereotyping, that associate fear-evoking characters and acts with Islamic religiosity, the publication of anti-Islamic writings, depends on faulty or biased sources of information, reactionary statements and behaviors of Muslims, injustice, extremism(الغلو في الدين)as clearly describe by the Qur'an:

"يا أهل الكتاب لا تغلوا في دينكم ولا تقولوا على الله إلا الحق"

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“O people of the book! Don’t go beyond the bounds in your religion, and do not say anything of God but the truth.” [Surat Al-Nisa verse 171]

The understanding of religious extremism as political has been elaborated by many scholars. For example, religious extremists have been characterized by Sageman (2008) as seeking martyrdom, and fueled by anger regarding perceived injustice.

Similarly, there is a proposal of four-stage model of extremism culminating in violence: first, a cognitive openness to new people or new ideas followed by the experiences of personal or group grievance (e.g., discrimination and oppression). Second, the individual takes up activism, and the openness can lead to an acceptance of the group’s extreme norms (e.g., for violence). Belief in the group’s claims and willingness to act based on the group’s norms can overcome the actor’s rational choice perspectives. Thus, when the group’s norm allows the use of non-normative tactics such as violence to gain their objectives, the individuals will intentionally commit violence on behalf of the group. (Wiktorowicz, 2005)

Since 9/11 attack known as 11 September in the year 2001 CE, it is observed that Islamic political violence used by Islamist groups mobilizing Islamic rhetoric to define their political agenda become consequential in causes terrorism patterns In the Glob. (C. F. 2017)

Concept of Religious Extremism:

Extremism as motivation for terrorism base on the current analyses is comprises different ideological beliefs about an obligation to bring back the systematic way of politics suggested by religious norms through political violence. (Arena, 2005).

The religious extremism is not a unified phenomenon; rather, religious extremists has a number of dimensions in how they expressed their religion, consequently, how some particular group aim to achieve their goals, using the context of Islam to explore their ideas. Religiosity in Muslims can be moderate on one dimension and radical/extreme on another. It is important to be both mindful of the group’s extreme position when considering theological and ritual dimensions, but also their comparatively moderate stand politically. In a similar vein, some groups are extreme in their stance on the political dimension, as they aims to revive the Islamic empire by overthrowing the concept of the nation state.

In fact different dimensions of religion of Islam are relevant to understanding religious extremism, and we are to accept the fact that the dimensions provide clarity in distinguishing a diversity of extreme vs moderate presentations in the Nigerian Muslim context.

With the fact of identifying religious extremism as multidimensional go beyond labeling Muslims simply as moderate, extreme, liberal, progressive, or radical. These labels fail to capture the various religious groups’ similarities and differences across different dimensions. And therefore, it is considerable and conceptual to present extremism in relation to individual and group positions on theological, ritual, social, and political dimensions, and to expect a diversity of contestations within a faith that do not always co-vary. (Haslam, 2016)

Foundation of Extremist Groups:

The current ideological foundation of contemporary Islamist groups related to four inspirational figures who are as follows:

1. Hassan Al Banna
2. Sayyid Qutb in Egypt
3. Sayyid Maududi in Pakistan
4. Ayatullah Khomeini in Iran. (Kepel 2003)

In fact the teachings of these four figures differ from one founder to another, though all of them played a role in turning Islamic religion into an ideology for political struggle. According to Hassan El Banna the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Islam is a comprehensive political system of life and the Holy Quran is the only acceptable constitution for Muslims. El Banna’s doctrine really focused on the creation of an Islamic economic system through progressive taxation than on the development of a specific political model. (Pluriel, 2011)

Initially, El Banna did not accept idea of political violence instead adopted pragmatic approach to politics, Jihad of the spirit was a central way of furthering the Islamization of all Muslim societies, and the fight against Western imperialism as well as improving the living conditions of Muslim people.(Wickham 2013)

Although Muslim Brotherhood considered one of the most influential contemporary Islamist movements, El Banna's writings have been less influential than that of Qutb in shaping the radical beliefs of contemporary Islamists on the members. For example, in his book titled, "MILESTONES" Qutb condemned the Western modernity and claimed that Muslim communities are living in a state of Godless ignorance (JAHILIYYA) needed to be reverted or re-conquered for Islam. Sayyid Qutb refused quietism and advocated for TAKFEER (excommunication) through violent means to achieve his objective, and to kill corrupted and lawless leaders.

The influence of Sayyid Qutb explicit in movements such as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. However, Maudidi and Qutb shared a lot of stances, Maudidi was in forefront of the thinkers of advocate for the creation of an Islamic state which will be governed by Sharia law.(Calvert, 2010)

The relevance of Khomeini to the contemporary Islamic political violence rests on his FATWA of the death sentence in the year 1989 CE of Salman Rushdie, author of "The Satanic Verses". Issuance of the fatwa expanded the authority of Muslim's communities to cover everywhere and turned the world a place for Jihad.

Religious Crises in Northern Nigeria and Emergence of Extremist Group:

Until recently, the northern part of Nigeria had not seen any sustained terrorist attacks which could be characterized as approaching insurgency. However, there were violent conflicts in the late 1970s and 1980s. In fact these were violent of intra-religious campaigns between different sects of Islam which resulted in the death of thousands of people.

Maitatsine sect which was founded by Sheik Muhammadu Maruwa fought mainstream Muslims who refused to accept its extremism ideology of political violence. Coincidentally, there were in the north frequent violent and bloody intra-religious clashes between members of Izalatu bidi'at wa Ikamatul Sunna (Izala) and the Tijaniyya Tariqa.

Izala group which was founded by Shiekh Abubakar Muhammadu Gummi, regarded the Tariqah activities as un-Islamic and therefore, prevented them from leading Juma'at prayers. This prevention led to violence that erupted.(Malik, 2012)

The latest crises in the north is that of Boko Haram which has the character of an insurgency without a doubt. Boko Haram meaning "Western education is sinful" has brought about heightened tension, anxiety and a sense of insecurity hitherto which was ever unknown in any part of the country.

In the early 2010s, the Jihadist armed group of Boko Haram has wielded power and influence in north-eastern part of Nigeria and some parts of adjoining states in the Lake Chad basin. The group clawed its way back from a failed uprising in July 2009 against the Nigerian government that left more than 1,000 dead people, plus the founder of group, Mohammed Yusuf, to re-emerge as a full-fledged insurgency under the command of one of Yusuf's lieutenants, known as Abubakar Shekau, a year later. Over the next five years, and at a particularly rapid pace between 2013 and 2015, the armed group seized control of much part of Borno state, and started operation in border areas of neighboring countries, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. The organization plundered many villages bombed markets and churches, as well as mosques.

In 2014 Boko haram staged the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok local government of Borno state. With this mass abduction, the armed group earned its global condemnation, was only one in a long series of violent incidents of striking brutality ever happened.

In 2015, Boko Haram was overcome by the Nigerian military and its regional allies, which resulted to its internal divisions, causing it to shrink in power. Consequently, Boko Haram lost its self-proclaimed capital, Gwoza In March of that year, to Nigerian troops, and over time, notable towns had overrun in Borno state fell back into government's power, forcing the armed group back into safe havens on the periphery of Lake Chad, in Sambisa Forest, hills and mountains in eastern part of Gwoza local government.

Lastly, Boko Haram's retreat exacerbated longstanding personality clashes and doctrinal differences within members of the organization. The group retain its power till March 2015 when Shekau pledged allegiance to ISIS leader in person of Abubakr Al-Baghdadi which acclaim the name (ISWAP) meaning Islamic State in West Africa Province. But a year later it divided in two. Following the lead of Muhammad Nur and Abu Musab al-Barnawi, a son of Mohammed Yusuf, also a number of senior leaders split off from Shekau's forces. The faction of Muhammad Nur and Al Barnawi retain the name (ISWAP), and make it gain recognition from ISIS and attracted a growing number of militants in the organization. (Lucena 2018)

Impact of Religious Extremism:

The religious extremism is not a unified phenomenon as it discussed above; still extremism nowadays has become a way of outlook in northern part of Nigeria which have been directly affected by acts of violent extremism but in other part that have not experienced the violence directly, extremism becomes an attitude of one's belief system when it is not checked out by the communities and condemned by the Scholars and leaders. Notwithstanding, the tendency of extremism permeates into institutions, organisations, families and the wider community has a devastating impact on the social harmony and unity of the society. This extremist tendency among educated young people is more dangerous than violence itself. It is an invisible outcome of living within an environment of violent extremism for years.

Impact of the societal attitude is the transformation of a tolerant, accommodative and society into an intolerant which impacts the socio-political sphere of the Citizens. Due to prevalent religious, ethnic and sectarian intolerance, some Muslims have less heterogeneous peer groups, they are more critical of others' behaviour and faith, and they do not feel free to express themselves because of the fear of negative consequences.

Nigerians that have been living together peacefully, sharing religious and cultural festivals and supporting each other in time of sorrow and joy, now live under the shadow of doubt and suspicion of each other. The mass religious, ethnic, and cultural intolerance in northern Nigeria has divided once united communities on the narrow lines of sectarianism, religion, ethnicity and language.

There is massive displacement of the northerners from their areas of origin to IDPS and other places, as a result of violence of extremism, is changing the fabric of society, not only in compounded places in Borno but elsewhere, and it is undermining traditional coexistence. However, it caused education crisis that is affecting millions of children and young people. In fact the entire generation is at risk of unemployment and social exclusion.

The economic impact of extremism is the stoppage of farming in areas of north and closure of many businesses in the affected areas, which results in an increase in poverty, unemployment and various types of crimes. Extremism devastated mobility, social protection and services in many part of north eastern Nigeria. Many women are left as heads of households and a significant number as widows, displacement has rendered many women and children homeless and more vulnerable to exploitation.

The most painful impact of extremism is at the psychological level. Northerners who have been living in an uncertain situation due to the regular occurrence of violent extremism, develop fear of everything. This lead to a mental decomposition and loss of confidence in oneself and others. In North-east, young students became so fearful after the attacks on the school that many of them stopped leaving their homes for sports and other social gatherings, which is currently started in the northwestern part of the country.

With all these negative impact as a result of extremism, there have been some positive changes. In northern Nigeria, some organizations and religious leaders have developed a strong resilience against the ideology of religious violence. They have formed effective community structures and mechanisms to create social cohesion, inter-faith and intra-faith harmony. Education institutions have introduced the Inclusive close through seminars and conferences.

Conclusion:-

In the conclusion of this discussion, it is important to be mindful of the fact that when people explore the relationship of religious extremism and its negative impact, the type (dimension) of extremism needs to be considered. For instance, as seen in the narratives of some extremist groups in Nigeria who highlight the "crisis of Islam" as a call to seek systemic change, we predict that perceived injustice toward the religion by outsiders can

enhance extremism on the political dimension, but may not affect extremism on the other dimensions as strongly. In this way, we can advance knowledge of religious extremism, allowing us to move toward a more complete understanding of what is not just one phenomenon, but a constellation of related phenomena in an evolving, complex religious system of beliefs and acts embedded in broader historical and cultural change and stability.

Recommendations:-

The research suggested some majors to be taken by responsible community leaders, Scholars, traditional rulers, and Institutions as a lasting solution for the Government to adopt for eradicating or minimizing the religious violence from our esteem societies.

1. There is need for a greater understanding of the invisible and unrecognised impact of extremism on individuals and communities, looking beyond physical violence.
2. Nigerian government should institutionalise inclusive peace education as a long-term remedy and integrate diversity into education.
3. Our young people should be oriented to consider the racial, religious, ethnic, sectarian and cultural diversity of their societies an important part of their national heritage.
4. Effective measures should be taken to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.
5. There should be an adoption and implementation of Legislation that protect the rights of all religious communities.
6. It is imperative for tertiary institutions in Nigeria to hold interfaith dialogue and forge alliances within and between religious groups of northern Nigeria that can become a formidable force in coping with existing persecution and preventing it in the future.
7. Religious Scholars should emphasize in their preaching on preventing violent extremism and encourage community peacebuilding.

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