

## National Strategic Mechanism and Prevention of Violent Extremism: A Perspective from Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Some recalcitrant Twenty-first Century Nation-States and Non-State actors alike have been accused of designing the modus operandi to unleash mayhem on enemy Nation-States. Some have been accused of funding terrorism in the form of bioterrorism and combatant attacks on unsuspecting targets. In recent time this form of unwarranted attacks have been orchestrated by Islamic extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Taliban, etc., and their affiliate and splinter groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Boko Haram and Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) with chains of networks in some nations of the world. This study therefore seeks to examine the methods adopted to counter their modes of operation in order to have relative peace in Nigeria. Consequently, the study argued that it is imperative that the Nigeria society must endeavour to maintain its socio-political and economic wellbeing in general and in the North-Eastern part which is the most affected to ensure relative peace and stability. To achieve these, the study adopted qualitative and explorative research design as its methodological component glean secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, official documents and internet materials. Considering the extent to which these terrorist groups have perpetrated public harm to the nation, the study proffers strategic mechanisms, though not a unilateral approach but all inclusive approach such that the United Nation articulated master plan should be prioritize as a take-off point to handle this perturbing evil.*

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**Keywords:** *Violent Extremism, Radicalization, Terrorism, Prevention, National Strategy, Mechanism, Nigeria.*

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### **1.1 Introduction**

Violent extremism is now recognized as a growing global threat to peace and security. Attempts to counter violent extremism began in Europe in the 1980s with the advent of programmes to dissuade and disengage right-wing extremists in Norway, Sweden and Germany (Heydemann, 2014). Although no common definition exists since that time but countering violent extremism has come to be associated with a range of measures designed to prevent and reverse the radicalization of individuals and groups and to forestall the participation of these groups and lone wolves in act of terrorism. Given that counter violent extremism is preventative and reactive, different counter strategies are necessary for different stages of the radicalization

continuum, including for individuals and communities with no exposure to extremist networks, those with some exposure, and those already radicalized (Heydemann, 2014). The latter is often associated with attempts to shift extremists towards acceptance of more moderate ideologies and is known as radicalization.

Undeniably, extremist views can be exhibited along a range of issues including politics, religion and gender relative. No society, religion, community or worldview is immune to violent extremism. To prevent violent extremism can be through the use of a community-policing approach by engaging communities on broader security and safety issues that are of concern to them, not necessarily in relation to preventing violent extremism. Violent extremism, therefore, is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon requiring a sophisticated and multidisciplinary response. There is therefore no panacea, and countries are faced with the risk that an individual might be radicalized to, and recruited for, terrorism which is the consequence of Islamic extremism, and that which can never be entirely eliminated. In view of the broad range of factors that can be possibly combined to drive violent extremism, policy measure has been identified as one of the most preventive countermeasures to the threats of violent extremism. Intelligence, research and consultation drawing on different sources of knowledge and expertise can contribute to the development of an evidence-based, context-specific and dynamic understanding of the threat of violent extremism (Brett et al., 2015).

The danger with the threats of violent extremism to national security is that a militant or extremist group may volatized a society already exposed and dominated by radical Islamic teachings and thus making it a *safe haven* from which the group operates. Such is the case with most of the places exploited by international or transnational terrorist groups such as the Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Taliban and ISIS on the one hand, and those exploited by domestic or internal terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Ansaru, Kala Kato, Izala and Movement for the Islamic Revival (MIR) on the other hand. Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); Niger Delta Avengers (NDA); Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF); Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF); and Niger Delta Revolutionary Crusaders (NDRC), all in the Southern part of Nigeria sometime in the past posed threats to the country's internal security (Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, GCERF, 2017: Oluka, 2019:16). As such the situation Nigeria finds itself in recent time is a direct reflection of the actions of Islamic radicals or extremists. This is evident in the actions of Boko Haram, a domestic insurgent or a home-grown terrorist group and by extension its splitter group such as Islamic States West Africa Province (ISWAP), though not very visible compared to the former. This group like the others in other parts of the world adopts the jihadist belief which spread the fundamentalist ideology (Henrik, 2014; Club de Madrid National Workshop Report, 2017).

However, it is obvious that Islamic extremists, to a great extent, used radical jihad ideology to justify criminality and commit atrocities against infidels (*non-believers*), Boko Haram inclusive. The volatile nature of the northeast region of the country made it easy for Boko Haram to penetrate and indoctrinate the teaming youth, who are the most vulnerable or susceptible, in believing in the jihadist movement. This prompted Nigerian government, over the few years, to adopt strategies and the tools needed to prevent radicalization of the civil society, and to foster measures through the various media links to prevent the individuals from accepting the contradictory jihad narratives.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The core objective of this study is to identify and examine the effects of violent extremism in Nigeria. While the specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the fundamental causes of violent extremism and its manifest form in Nigeria,
- ii. Examine the extent to which extreme form of terrorism affected Nigeria's national security,
- iii. Examine the extent to which Nigerian government has prevented violent extremism in the country, and
- iv. To obtain strategies on how to counter violent extremism and its manifest forms in the country, and
- v. Determine the best strategic options that can be implemented to effectively mitigate violent extremism and its manifest forms.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The following questions are raised to provide direction to this study:

- i. What are the fundamental causes of violent extremism and its radicalized form, terrorism?
- ii. To what extent have attacks from violent extremism and its manifest form affected Nigeria's national security?
- iii. To what extent has Nigerian government prevented or countered violent extremism in the country?
- iv. What are the strategies adopted in the country to counter violent extremism and its manifest form?
- v. What are the best strategies to be adopted to mitigate violent extremism in the form of terrorism in the country?

### **1.4 Method of the Study**

The study adopted qualitative and explorative research design to examine the Nigeria's national strategic mechanic in preventing violent extremism and its manifest form, "terrorism". The qualitative method adopted in this study is relevant because it helps the researchers in the following areas: first gathering of relevant data from already existing literature, and secondly assists the researchers in gathering data in the interest area. This means that secondary source of data was reliably used to collect relevant materials for the study. Second sources of data collection refer to materials which were not originally from the researcher but from already existing literatures in the research area. The secondary data were gathered from textbooks, scholarly written journal publications, government official documents, newspapers, and internet materials.

## **2.1 Review of Related Literature:**

### **2.1.1 Violent Extremism (VE): Conceptual Explanation**

In spite of the recent propagation of violent extremist ideologies and its manifest form, "terrorism" and its threats to national security, it has not being easy for the nation states of the world to address the environment conducive for religious extremism. The spread of this evil ideology cum the recruitment of supporters in their domains and across the world has also made it difficult for nation states to prevent its spread across the world. Despite the challenges created by the propagation of this evil, the concept is yet to have a generally accepted definition. According to De Silva (2017), despite the adoption of education as one of the fundamental means of tackling violent extremism (VE) and as a broader reflective international measure towards prevention of terrorism, and toward efforts to address the environment conducive for extremists to spread their ideologies and to radicalize young people, as well as the increasing governments 'efforts in financing measures to counter violent extremism as part of education programme, the term "violent extremism" defies generally accepted definition, therefore making it difficult to carry out research, policy dialogue and programming.

In other words, it will be difficult to provide a generally accepted definition of the concept. But considering the threat it poses to global peace and security it becomes necessary to view it as that which exhibits a long range of issues including politics, religion and gender relations; and that which no society, religious community or world view is immune to its threat. Radicalization, although, a contested term to some scholars, has been used to define the process through which an individual or a group considers violence as a legitimate and desirable means of action. Radical thought that does not condone the exercise of violence to further political goals may be seen as normal and acceptable, and promoted by groups working within the boundaries of the law; and often used as a code name for Islamic terrorism (Heydemann, 2014:1).

In a general perspective, violent extremism is used to refer to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical religious or political views or ideologies. According to Andrew & Martins (2016) cited in Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe (2019: 23) the term “violent extremism” is defined as the act of violence that are justified by or associated with an extremist religious, social, or political ideology. Furthermore, the Organization sees the concept as broader as, and more expansive than terrorism because it accommodates all strands of violence as long as its motivation is deemed extremist. The UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism sees the concept as “that which encompasses a wider category of manifestations and there is also a risk that a conflation of the term (*Violent extremism and Terrorism*) may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism act” (Andrew & Martins, 20116).

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) (2016) conceptual framework for preventing violent extremism conceptualized the concept by looking at the potential drivers of radicalization and those that can lead to violent extremism. By implication the term “radicalization” is not necessarily the problem but it has been solely associated with an anti-liberal, anti-democratic and religiously fundamentalist agenda and the links to violence. In other words, the danger that arises from radical movement that inflict or induce fear, violence and orchestrate terrorist attack in achieving its ideological, political, economic or social aims is termed to be *violent extremist* (UNDP, 2016). In this same manner, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2016) conceives the term as an “act that undermines the peace and security, human rights and sustainable development of citizens or individuals”. From the plethora of definitions above, it is obvious that no nation is immune from the impact of violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism. We therefore see the term as an anti-social act orchestrated by an extreme religiously indoctrinated group of individuals against the state.

### **2.1.2 Extremism, Radicalism and Terrorism**

In an attempt to distinguish between the concepts, *extremism, radicalism and terrorism*, Delphine & Camille (n.d) see radicalism as an action that challenges the legitimacy of established norms and policies of any given state but does not in itself lead to violence. It involves individuals that reject the values of a society but adhere to the law of the society as well as attempt to bring about change through political violence. On the other hands, they argued that extremism is quite different from radicalism since it accepts violence act as a legitimate means for obtaining political goals without necessarily exercising violence. Terrorism often regarded as violent extremism, on the other hand, encompasses violent acts or behaviours that originate from ideological standpoint and indoctrination shared by a limited group of individuals, they argued (Delphine & Camille, (n.d)).

A critical observation of the above arguments shows no clear distinction between these acts (extremism, radicalism and terrorism) since all involve the individuals or group of individuals

fighting for a particular purpose in order to achieve their goals or objectives. In essence, approving of the use of violence as a last resort to achieve a needed goal, either against the government or against a people can have destructive effect not only to the government but also to unsuspecting civilian population. Furthermore, if violent extremism encompasses the willingness as well as the training, preparation and the actual conduct of violent acts against civilian population, what is the difference between these orchestrated acts since all are targeted against the government to achieve selfish political gains. Much as it is also not possible for all the individuals who share sense of injustice from the government or from the larger society to become radicals or radicalize the pursuit of their grievances either political, social or religious, a few may resort to extreme violence and some to outright act of terrorism. In short, this makes violent extremism, radicalism and terrorism unpredictable. In a broad sense, terrorism involves the use of violence, often times intentionally either political or religious purposes attached to it. It is also primarily used to refer to violence act against non-combatant civilian population or against neutral military personnel (Wisniewski, 2008; Fortna, 2015).

Contrary to their initial standpoint, Delphine & Camille (n.d) argued that certain motivating factors lead to violent extremism, and that the consequence of these factors is violent actions against a targeted source of grievances which brings the individual closer to extremism through a process of indoctrination. For example, radical political leader or radical religious preachers in often cases incite hate and intolerable belief or ideology to targeted individuals or group of individuals. The consequence of this action is the orchestrated suicide terrorism experienced in recent time. In short, this event has in no small measures encouraged the weaker victims of such indoctrination to take the final step towards violent extremism, the consequence of which is the act of terrorism (see Delphine & Camille, (n.d)).

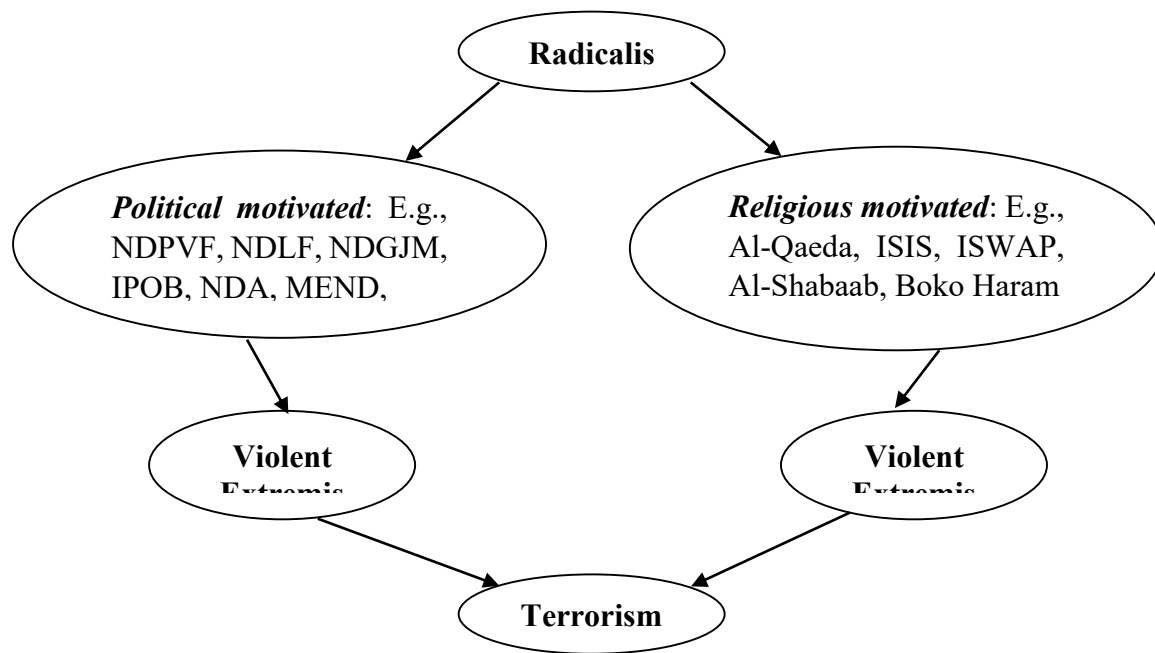
In line with this standpoint Eckert & Sjoberg (2007:39) while citing Islamic Center of Beverly Hills (2007) and Wright (2006:180) argued that:

*“The idea of Muslim unity is very important. Instead of being limited by Western ideas of delineated states and citizens, national ... origin should not become a source for division. Islamic unity dictates that Muslims should not be divided according to race, sects or national of origin. Along with this, radical Islam’s interpretation of the Prophet’s dying words, ‘Let there be no two religions in Arabia’ as the struggle of all Muslims to rid the Middle East of non-Muslims, implies that the al-Qaeda leadership sees the fight against the apostatic tyrants and Western usurpation as inclusive of all who ‘truly’ believe in Allah and not limited by state citizenship. Thus, mass support must be raised within the Middle East to fight against the governments there, but also to fight against the threat of Western domination globally”*(Eckert & Sjoberg, 2007:39).

In a related manner, Wright (2006: 149) argued that:

*“The main goal behind the creation of Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda, a radicalized and extremist Islamic group and the solid base behind international terrorism, based in the Middle East is to Islamize and establish Islamic Caliphates in the Middle East and beyond. Its original intention was to undermine the Soviet empire’s presence in Afghanistan and forcing the United States out of the Middle East, unfortunately, this has expanded beyond the remover of Muslim apostates from Arab countries to full blown international terrorism with splitter and affiliate groups all over the world”*(Wright, 2006).

**Diagram 1:**



### **Violent Extremism linkage and motivating factors leading to terrorism**

Suffice therefore to state that the driving force behind jihadist terrorism is religious indoctrination by radical Islamic scholars on the weaker group of individuals of the same Islamic faith. The consequence of this is modern terrorism ravaging the entire world in this Twenty-first century. We opine therefore that there is no clear distinction between these terms since one breeds the other and the other leads to other. The same factors unite those that embraced radicalism, violent extremism and terrorism; and the faith follows the consequence. According to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (2019:24) the term *radicalization* is the process by which an individual increasingly espouses or supports extremist ideas. By implication radicalism is typically caused not by a single influence, but by a complex mix of factors and dynamics. It also suggests that there is an implicit link between radical ideas and extreme violence.

The above propounded link by the authors is supported by Barzegar (2005) conception of the terms as having a relationship or link with one another. He argued that “new terrorism stems from radicalism which originates in the political, economic, socio-cultural and religious dissatisfaction with the policies of national government, and global trends in governance. In other words, new terrorism like the Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Al-Shabaab, and as in the case of Boko Haram and ISWAP in West African sub-region particularly in Nigeria adopt tactics supported by a worldwide network”. In a similar manner, UNODC (2016) opines that radicalization to violence is the process by which people adopt or acquire radical or extremist beliefs and attitudes involving the use of violent measures in achieving their objectives. It is therefore pertinent to note that violent extremism and radicalism can lead to terrorism, hence, the Nigerian government efforts to adopt holistic approach or mechanism to prevent or counter violent extremism in and beyond the borders of the country.

### 3.1 Empirical Review

#### 3.1.1 Fundamental Causes of Violent Extremism

The fundamental causes of violent extremism, radicalism and terrorism alike can be externally or internally induced. The external influence is associated with external factors that is, factors aside the boundary of any of the affected nation. The chief factor in recent time is religious indoctrination of the weaker population by Islamic radical preachers. The Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Al-Shabaab Islamic terrorist networks and the likes of ISWAP and Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Sahel region are pertinent example religious influenced terrorism. Internal factors of violent extremism on the other hands can be traced to political and socio-economic factors within the national boundaries of a nation-state. This is evident in the case of Nigeria's Niger Delta Avengers whose grievances was the marginalization and underdevelopment of the region by the federal government despite the fact that region is the host of the rich crude oil resource endowment and the main source of the country's foreign exchange earnings or revenue. There is also the case of the MASSOB and IPOB in the South-Eastern region of the country fighting for secession due to ethnic Igbo marginalization; underdevelopment and the domination of the Nigerian polity by the Hausa-Fulani extraction (Council on Foreign Relations, CFR, 2016). However, there is no single profile or pathway for radicalization. It is established that there are socio-economic, psychological and institutional factors that leads to violent extremism. Specialists group these factors into three categories to include; push factors, pull factors and contextual factors (Alliance for Peace building, AfP, 2016; UNDP 2016). The question now is what is the cause of community tension? What are the processes that create conducive environment for terrorism and violent extremism? The best answer to the questions above are issues relating to porous borders, weak law enforcement, judicial institutions, corruption, and in some cases state complicity in terrorist activities, lack of central authority, as well as grievances stemming from social, economic and political injustices. The main factor that led to the emergence of Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and other violent extremist groups is religious radicalism. Structural factors also disenfranchise communities from their rights; and perpetuate poverty, unemployment and vulnerability. Extremist groups exploit this kind of environment and can fill a void for those vulnerable groups most impacted by these circumstance especially youth and adolescents. These factors underlie community tensions necessary for violence extremism to thrive (Henrik, 2014:18).

On a general perspective are the following factors: first is *push factors* which drive individuals to violent extremism such as; marginalization, inequality, discrimination, persecution or the perception thereof, limited access to quality and relevant education, the denial of rights and civil liberty and other environmental, historical and socio-economic grievances. Secondly is *pull factors* which consequentially nurture the appeal of violent extremism. For instance, the existence of well-organized violent extremist groups such as the Boko Haram, ISWAP and their affiliates with compelling discourses and effective programme that are providing services, revenue or employment in exchange in membership groups can also lure new members by providing outlets for grievances; and promise of adventure as well as freedom. Lastly, is *contextual factors*, i.e. that which provide a favourable terrain to the emergence of violent extremist groups. For example, fragile states, lack of rule of law, corruption and criminality (AfP, 2016; UNDP 2016).

It therefore means that there is no single profile or pathway for radicalization, it is however established that there are socio-economic, psychological and institutional factors that lead to violent extremism. What causes community tensions and in the process creates conducive environment for violent radicalization cannot be differentiated from what causes violent extremism and terrorism. Scholars and experts of peace-building have identified perceptions

of injustice, human rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption, nepotism, tribalism, or sustained mistreatment of certain groups (marginalization) as factors that can lead to violent extremism (*push factors*). All of these are associated in the case of Nigeria; hence the need for preventive measures to violent extremism, radicalism and terrorism by the government and social organizations in the country.

### **3.1.2 Extent to which Violent Extremism impacted on Nigeria's National Security**

It is imperative to note that Nigeria is a nation blessed with huge human and resources. Undeniably, Nigeria has a large population, economy and political influence all of which it uses to impact not only on its immediate neighbourhood, but also to the nations of the Sub Saharan region and the world at large. Nigeria is also the second largest economy in Africa, but despite these peculiarities it enjoys as a nation, it has continually bedevilled by all forms of challenges including political and socio-economic problems. The consequences of these challenges are internal crisis or conflict of resource control as well as true federalism synonymous with the marginalized oil rich people of the Niger-Delta region. Also of note is the self-inflicted inequality in power sharing, poverty, nepotism, tribalism, ethnic consciousness and corrupt practices, all of which in one way or the other pose challenges to peace and security in the country. The most perturbing national issue in recent time apart from the other issues mentioned above is militant Islamic insecurity facing the nation (Henrik, 2014:11).

Extant literatures on the effects of violent extremism, radicalism and terrorism in Nigeria revealed that these anti-social vices have impacted negatively on national peace and security such that terrorism, in particular, has reduced investment and drastically led to mass displacement of indigenes of the affected communities to other parts of the state and beyond. This has also undermined agricultural and other economic activities with potential for famine; creating refugee population and other form of inhuman conditions. Also of note is the destruction of infrastructures, enabling crime and instability; and community tension and increase of violence. Thus, some scholars have theorised the impact of violent extremism or terrorism to include obstacles to development and national security. Some have argued that it has caused diversion of resources that would have been used for development. Over the years, violent extremist groups and terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram and ISWAP have breed insecurity by creating widespread violence, criminality and outright insurgency. Illegal transnational trade, movements and spread of small and light weapons is substantial due to poor border control especially along the Nigerian border and its encompassing neighbours (Niger, Chad and Cameroon)(Nte, (2011).

In a related manner Abiodun (2018) argued that at least there are about 875 million firearms in the hands of public and private hands (citizens). This has also strengthened the sophistication of criminal gangs and terrorist groups in the country as well continued to create several internal insecurity problems. The porous nature of the nations' borders made smuggling of weapons and other goods relatively easy. In this context, it is suspected that Libyan weapons have ended up, via Niger and neighbouring countries with Boko Haram, ISWA and other criminal gangs as beneficiaries. Nigeria's security apparatus which consists most importantly of the Nigeria Police Force, the State Security Service (SSS) and the military, all of which are federal institutions have been collectively involved in the fight against terrorism and maintenance of public order and safety (Ebohon & Ifeadi, 2012; WARN, 2013 and IISS, 2013). Overall, the fight against insurgency which has taken a more military approach to the task of maintaining public security has equally resulted in a lot of casualties on the side of the military and the insurgent groups. There are also incidents where the security forces have been accused of



supporting the insurgents and involved in extrajudicial killings of detained members of the terrorist groups and some innocent individuals. Undeniably, these factors have created another dimension to the challenges to national security.

### **3.1.3 Nigerian Government and Prevention of Violent Extremism**

The harsh realities the activities of violent extremists or terrorist organizations have inflicted on unsuspecting civilian population in Nigeria have prompted the Federal government to strengthen its resolves to the fight against all forms of violent extremism in the country. Significantly, the government has over the years adopted several preventive and counter mechanisms to curbing the threats posed by the leading recalcitrant group of Islamic terrorist organization, the Boko Haram and ISWA terrorist groups. The threat posed by these groups, no doubt, has been met with government's effort to counter the insurgency and other violent extremist alike, through a broad and proactive *Policy Framework and National Action Plan* aim at providing the government, security and other relevant agencies directions and co-ordinations towards government efforts to counter all forms of insurgency. This was followed by the government signing into law the **Presidential Directive Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism** on the 24 August, 2017. Also of pertinence was the launching of a **Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)** by the Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin governments in January 2015 (UN High Level Conference on Counter Terrorism, 2018; Buchanan-Clark & Lekaleke, 2016).

In 2005, the MNJTF had the support of the United States to establish the **Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP)** in Africa with the sole objective of enhancing military capacity, law enforcement, and to conduct effective counterterrorism operation in North and West Africa Sub regions. This was targeted at reducing the appeal of radicalization and recruitment of violent Islamic fighters in the West Africa Sub region (Country Reports on Terrorism, 2016). Nigeria was also one of the major beneficiaries of the West Africa Sub region partnership with the UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Executive Directorate (CTE), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), African Union (AU), European Union (EU), and US Technical and Counterterrorism Capacity Building to mitigate terrorists' threat and violent extremism in the sub region. In short, virtually all member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) benefited from these projects (Jason et al., 2010).

Notably also is the applauding recent effort by the Federal Government led by President Muhammadu Buhari through the sponsoring and the subsequent passage of the 2017 Not-Too-Young-To-Run Bill into law. This law is aimed at removing the age restrictions on aspiring persons' participation in politics in order to reduce vulnerability to all forms of anti-social behaviour including violent extremism and to enable young people partake in the leadership and control of their affairs (see Oromaregahake & Oluka, 2019:883). According to the UN High Level Conference on Counter Terrorism (2018) the aim of the Federal government through the bill was to support and promote the inclusion of youth in peace and development programmes and for them to flourish in other creative ventures.

Other significant efforts of the Nigerian government to prevent violent extremism and other forms of threats posed by Boko Haram and ISIS affiliate "the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA)" that was launching assaults in the North East and North Central regions of the country, expanded its Strategies towards preventing and countering the insurgent groups by embracing the opportunities provided by the **Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)** programme which was officially launched in Geneva, Switzerland in 2014. The Organization's operating nexus was extended to its commitment to security and

development across African continent, particularly in Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Kosovo since 2015 and 2016 through its Core Funding Mechanism (CFM) respectively (GCERF, 2017). The effort of the GCERF was confronted by the emergence of violence primarily rooted in ethnic and cultural differences, economic inequalities, resource constraints and corruption. Notwithstanding, the all-embracing **GCERF Preventive and Counter violent Extremism (P/CVE) Programme** with a focus in the North Central states of Kogi, Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa was able to invest a total of USD 1.4million over three years of her engagement in the country. Working with the Communities, religious groups, traditional leaders, farmers and herders, local government authorities, youths and women, the agency (i.e. GCERF) in conjunction with the government was able to raise awareness on radicalization and effective responses; promote community engagement; and provide positive social and economic alternatives to what terrorists claimed to have offered (GCEFR, 2017:4).

Further development to this regards, was also observed on the GCEFR Re-investment Plan in Nigeria. Through the Plan Nigeria was able to address the priorities laid out in her Policy Framework and National Action Plan, specifically in her four priority strategies which include: strengthening institutions and coordination of P/CVE programming; strengthening the rule of law, access to justice and human rights; engaging of communities and building resilience; and integrating strategic communication in P/CVE programming. In essence, the inspired GCERF's Strategy to Engage Communities and Address the Drivers of Violent Extremism (2017-2020) (**often regarded as GCERF-Strategy**) in conjunction with the Federal Government of Nigeria's "Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Partnering for Safer and Resilience Communities", the government was able to make an impact in preventing and countering violent extremism in the country (see GCERF, 2017:5).

As parts of her commitment to address fragility in African volatile states, the **Center for Sustainable Development and Education in Africa (CSDEA)** through her progress study on **Youth, Peace and Security (YPS)** mandated by **UN Security Council Resolution 2250** of December 2015 launched a campaign in the Lake Chad Basin countries of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria constantly marred by violence since the advent and rise of violent extremist groups: the Boko Haram, Ansar Dine, and Mujao, and continued existence of threats to security of lives and properties, as well as the negative effects these groups have on young people who are the most vulnerable to terrorist recruitment ( Ekpon, 2017: 6).

According to Ekpon (2017) the constant involvement of some youth as perpetrators of violence becomes the priority of the CSDEA. However, the aim of CSDEA in the Lake Chad Basin was to mitigate the influence of the local drivers of violent extremism on youth in the region. The only means of achieving the stated aim and objectives of the CSDEA is through technical and financial support; improving the livelihoods of at-risk youths and other vulnerable populations through a greater focus on "*hot spot*"; and improved access to jobs, skills-building programmes and education, as well as strengthening and scaling up existing programmes; enhancing the capacity and levels of trust in the judicial system and rule of law in order to prevent or mitigate radicalism and violent extremism in the sub region. The organization was also advised to prioritize acts that can discredit violent acts and capable of exposing the youth to danger, through the efforts of journalists skilled in ethical reporting with a greater focus on the voice of victims, survivors and returnees; media engagement by religious leaders; and youth who are empowered to be leaders, on-and-off-line. Also of pertinence was the need to prioritize lowering of intra-and inter-religious tensions and heightened resilience of religious institutions, etc. (Ekpon, 2017).

Most importantly, the government efforts in recent years saw the launching of various joint military and other security agencies in the fight against insurgency such as the launching of Joint Task Force popularly known as *Operation Restore Order* by the 21 Armoured Brigade marking the start of counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in the year 2011. With efforts of The British Royal Air Force in 2014 there was the launching of *Operation Turus* in response to Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping by Boko Haram members. There was also *Operation Safe Corridor* launched in 2015 to address extremist ideology and provides them with trauma counselling. In the year 2016 there was also *Operation Lafiya Dole* (which is in Hausa language means **Peace by All Means**) launched to replace *Operation Zaman Lafiya*. There was also the introduction of *Operation Positive Identification* which was provided to track down fleeing insurgents in 2019. In 2020 the Chadian Defence Minister, Mahamat Abali Salah specifically on March 31 launched *Operation Boma's Wrath* against Boko Haram with contingent armies of the neighbouring countries including Nigeria. In spite of all these efforts to prevent violent extremism and counterinsurgency, the country is yet to defeat or counter violent extremism and terrorism, hence the following recommendations.

#### **4.1 Best Strategies to be adopted to Mitigates Violent Extremism and its Radicalized Form**

Following the global campaign against all forms of violent extremism and its radicalized forms championed by the **United Nations under her Global Counter Terrorism Mechanism UN-GCTM**), best practices were adopted collectively and domestically by the most affected nation states of the world, particularly by the states of the Middle East and Africa to fight international terrorism. Some police services have sought to apply community policing in their efforts to prevent terrorism. UN- GCTM with a focus on establishing police-public partnerships between the police, public authorities and communities adopted tangible and durable contribution from other stakeholders from the regions to broaden strategic efforts to prevent violent extremism and for proactive problem solving (IACP, 2014). However, policymakers and police leaders should have realistic expectations about the results that community policing can deliver in response to what is often a low-incidence, highly complex and multidimensional problem. From all indication, it is clear that community policing cannot function as a stand-alone tool to prevent violent extremism. It should be embedded in a comprehensive, coherent and human rights-compliant strategy to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and tackle conditions that are conducive to it. Such was the reason case of Nigerian government's effort to fight insurgency in her domain.

In recent time, there have been agitations across the federation for restructuring of the security apparatus in order to curb the spread of violent extremism and counter its radicalized form (Boko Haram and ISWA) and attacks orchestrated by the self-styled Fulani herdsmen against sedentary farmers and unsuspecting citizens of the host communities across the country on the one hand and those orchestrated by bandits, arm robbers, kidnappers, and other self-styled criminal gangs on the other hand. This has manifested in the establishment of the controversial security outfit, *Amotekun*, in the South Western part of Nigeria by the Government of the six states of the region. There was also a national propagation of *Vigilante Groups* across the states, local government areas and communities of the federal republic. This was supported by the emergence of similar security networks locally organized by communities and local government areas but recognized by law of the state such as the uniformed vigilant and Anti-curt groups in some states of the federation, particularly in the South-South, South-East, North-East and North Central regions of the country. All of these were treated as efforts of the government to fight insurgency and all forms of criminality within her territory. The

researchers therefore adopt and recommend the following global strategies as the best strategies for the country;

- 1. Community-Policing in Preventing Terrorism:** Many of the benefits of community policing to combat violent extremism will arise as a by-product when community policing is implemented in its own right in keeping with the principles of democratic policing. These potential benefits that includes: anchoring policing strategy into respect for human rights and the rule of law; improving public perceptions of, and interaction with, the police; improving communication with the public on counterterrorism; increasing public vigilance and resilience; enhancing police understanding of communities as a basis to better engage and co-operate with them; helping to identify and address community safety issues and grievances; facilitating timely identification and referral of critical situations; and improving relations between the police and individuals and groups that have been hard to reach or not yet engaged with. The manner in and degree to which community policing could incidentally benefit countering violent extremism depend on the level of trust and co-operation that already exists between the police and the public. Significant time and police effort may be required to rebuild public confidence, explain the stakes in engaging with the police, and provide evidence of the tangible benefits of such engagement for the community. This is best achieved thus, should be adopted by the government of Nigeria at all levels to complement the security agencies (IACP, 2014).
- 2. Tackling the many conditions conducive to violent extremism or terrorism:** Addressing negative socio-economic factors, such as corruption and lack of good governance, as well as high unemployment, especially among youth; strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, including democratic policing, promoting dialogue between the state and society, and ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; combating intolerance and discrimination, as well as promoting mutual respect, coexistence and harmonious relations between ethnic, religious, linguistic and other groups; and preventing violent conflicts, as well as promoting peaceful settlement of disputes and resolution of existing conflicts are best practices to mitigate violent extremism or terrorism.
- 3. Re-Equipping and Retraining of Security Agencies:** It has been alleged that security agencies in Nigeria are not well equipped to fight Boko Haram insurgency. Also alleged is lack of trained personnel and professionals as well as motivation to those already engaged in the fight against Boko Haram insurgent to meet up to the task of countering violent extremism and terrorism. It was alleged that most of the groups responsible for violent extremism or terrorism are more equipped than the intelligence community in Nigeria, which is supposed to be equipped with gadgets that can help in intelligence gathering and operations. This situation is attributed to the high rate of corruption and also the support of the elite who provide them with arms and obsolete ones given to the terrorists in the country. Without reequipping the intelligence agencies, we are at the detriment of failing to counter violent extremism which leads to terrorism (UNODC, 2016). Therefore these vices should be eliminated in the system to enable the relevant agencies to effectively counterinsurgency or terrorism in the country.
- 4. Creation of Job Opportunities for the Youths:** Indisputably, lack of job opportunities for the youth is likely to expose them to influence of violent extremist recruiters. It is said that “*the idle mind is the devils workshop*”. When the youth are rendered jobless and hopeless couple with the present situation of the country, they are likely to embrace violent extremism as a lesser risk than to suffer in poverty and starvation. The rate at which youths are jobless in Nigeria is high, our

roads are not safe anymore, and the people involved in these crimes can grow and result to violent extremist groups. Therefore the government should make way for employment opportunities for the youths, which will be helpful to national security (UNODC, 2016, OSCE, 2019).

5. **Intelligence led Policing:** This is a management philosophy targeted at achieving crime reduction and prevention and to disrupt offender's activity through a top-down management approach; uses crime intelligence to objectively direct police resource decisions; and focuses enforcement activities on prolific and serious offenders. This approach can be achieved through data analysis since crime-related intelligence are pivotal to informing objective decision-making, both at a tactical level in individual cases (e.g., to identify and target suspected offenders on the basis of evidence) and more broadly in establishing strategic police priorities and allocating resources (e.g., to prioritize police action against a particular type of crime). Intelligence gathering and analysis; law enforcement investigation and prosecution; judicial capacities; border security; and public participation are also necessary tools to prevent violent crimes. This initiative is regarded as one of the best strategies since it seeks to build a bridge between the classical coercive approaches to counter terror attacks (Hinds, 2013). In a view to successfully prevent and combat violent crimes, Nigeria government should as a matter of urgency adopt this strategy to prevent violent extremism.
6. Another important approach to countering violent extremism is to institutionalize Community Tension Monitoring and dialogue which is a framework for understanding those community tensions that predetermine opportunities for extreme violent activities like radicalization and terrorism. The benefit of this method in the prevention of terrorism and the promotion of positive community relations and regional cooperation cannot be neglected. Another of its kind is the establishment of registration portals for preachers which will be extremely useful in this endeavour. The government is advice to adopt this strategy to complement her efforts in the fight against insurgency in the country.
7. The government should also design efficient preventive violent extremism strategy with a focus on international interaction in order obstruct recruitment channels used by extremist groups to recruit fighter in the country. Face-to-face encounters have proven to be the most effective way of engaging with people to connect to a personal level and work towards building a relationship of trust. The government of Nigeria should as matter of urgency adopt this strategy.
8. The government should also as a matter of urgency reform the security entities charged with counter-violent extremism (CVE): organize training program that focus on enhancing the security services within the frameworks of democratic governance; and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.
9. In the past women have been overlooked in CVE policy and planning. Since women have been proactive in other human endeavour and played significant and unique role in their homes, schools, communities and governments, their services should also adopted to help the government in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism.
10. The government should also target extremist logistics such as source of water, weapons, food, mobility and finances in order to deny them access to these sources. When this is achieved there is the likelihood that violent extremism will be eliminated to a bearable minimum.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation:**

This paper has examined violent extremism and its manifest forms and impacts, as well as the preventive measures needed to prevent its threats to national security in Nigeria. However,

preventing violent extremism in Nigeria is not quite easy due to the nature of the country's language, politics, religious and ethnic sentiments among leaders appointed to lead the populace; everyone is seeking for his own selfish gain rather than for the success of the nation (*unpatriotic nature*). In fact this has been detrimental to the spirit of *Nigerianism (unity and oneness)*. Issues concerning extremism and its attendance effects on the society are a matter of urgent national concern. This study also reiterates the methodology and contemporary strategic mechanisms needed to solve issues relating to violent extremism and terrorism, suggesting that the best bet is to imbibe the culture that entails *Nigerianism*.

Factors such as youth empowerment, bridging of the gap of gender inequality, relative education, as well as ascertaining the source and medium through which people are influenced or indoctrinated into extremism have been identified as the main stay to curtail this monster. It could, however, argued that there is nothing inherently wrong with the intentions to counter violent extremism whether it is merely changing terminology to make it more inclusive and mitigate misperceptions or the attempt to address new dimensions. The researchers, thus, assert that the role of counter violent extremism, in spite of all the challenges, would contribute to remedying the negative perceptions, if and only if it is implemented properly. At a higher level of expectation, counter violent extremism can also play a significant role in countering terrorism through soft measures, if it is designed in a context specific manner, ensures real ownership among actors and ultimately if governments (both donors and recipients) are committed to the core values. Otherwise, it will only amount to a semantic shift instead of a change in content. However, counter violent extremism should be defined in a clearer and comprehensive way or manner at the national level and if possible at the regional or sub-regional levels. Intergovernmental arrangements should develop a regional policy framework and a platform to share their experiences, information and exert mutual assistance in counter violent extremism. Most importantly, Nigeria should join the United Nations pet projects such as the specifically designed UNESCO programme to truncate the act of extremism in the nations of the world.

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