al-Shabaab and Boko Haram: Recruitment Strategies

J. Tochukwu Omenma
Department of Politics & International Relations, University of Johannesburg; Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, tochukwu.omenma@unn.edu.ng

Cheryl Hendricks
Department of Politics & International Relations, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, chendricks@hsrc.ac.za

Nnamdi C. Ajaebili
Department of History & International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, nnamdi.ajaebili@unn.edu.ng

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Abstract

This paper is an examination of the membership recruitment strategies of two violent extremist organizations (VEOs), namely al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. The majority of the literature on VEOs concentrates on the conceptualization of terrorism, motivations for terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies, as well as a focus on the frequency of VEO attacks, number of fatalities and funding sources. The literature tends to portray poverty as the main driver of recruitment. The focus on recruitment strategies has been relatively recent. There is therefore still a lack of in-depth analyses on the processes of recruitment of specific extremist groups, and this impacts on the development of effective counter-insurgency policies and practices. We conclude that there is a need for more nuanced studies of recruitment practices, including radicalization strategies, of specific VEOs in Africa. This understanding of recruitment practices, particularly by VEOs such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, will enable more context specific counter-insurgency programmes that target the ability of these organizations to recruit and expand. There can be no one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with the challenge of violent extremism in Africa.

Author Bio(s)

Dr. J. Tochukwu **Omenma** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg, South Africa; and Senior Lecturer/Senior Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His primary area of research is conflict and counterterrorism, with bias on local defense forces, state responses to violent extremism, and the dynamics of violent extremism development in the Lake Chad region. Currently, he is researching on the link between international relations and security, as well as counter-insurgency approach from the below in Nigeria. He has published several articles in referred journals among which are *Career Development International*, *Security Journal, Politics & Religious Journal, Palgrave Communications*, Africa Insight, *India Quarterly, International Journal of Euro-Mediterranean Studies* et cetera and also, he has consulted for United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the *Nigeria's land tenure policy on peasant farmers: A case of human rights violation,* from July, 2005-2007. He is a recipient of Federal Government of Nigeria scholarship award for his Master's Degree studies.

Cheryl M. **Hendricks** is a Professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg. Currently, she is the Executive Director, Africa Institute of South Africa, Human Science Research Council. She has also worked at the Institute for Security Studies, Centre for Conflict Resolution and the University of the Western Cape. She holds a Doctorate in Government and International Relations from the University of South Carolina and a Master's in Southern African studies from the University of York. Her substantive knowledge areas include African Politics; Conflict Management and Peacebuilding; Gender, Peace and Security; Security Sector Reform; Human Security; Regional Security Architectures and South African Foreign Policy

Dr. Nnamdi **C. Ajaebili** is a lecturer at the Department of History & International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nigeria. He specializes in African History and International Relations. He is the author of *Hegemonic Legacies: Imperialism and Dependency in Nigeria* (2013), and has published on the areas of

African economic and political history, foreign policy, and diaspora studies. He earned his Doctorate from the University of Calaber, Nigeria, and was a visiting scholar at the Ebonyi State University, Nigeria, between 2014-2016.

al-Shabaab and Boko Haram: Recruitment Strategies

J. Tochukwu Omenma, Cheryl Hendricks, and Nnamdi C. Ajaebili

This article provides an analysis of the recruitment patterns and strategies of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in Africa, focusing on Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. Studies on terrorism have paid insufficient attention to membership recruitment of these organizations, even though these groups have developed meticulous methods to grow their organizations. Recruitment strategies have been carefully scripted to keep attracting new fighters and to maintain existing ones. *Violent extremism* is a major threat to peace and security in Africa. The term is often used interchangeably with *terrorist organization*—although it is broader. Violent extremism refers to violence by organizations that are ideologically motivated but that do not necessarily commit terrorist acts (Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, 2017, p. 15; United Nations General Assembly (2015, December 24). There is often a close association between the goals, context and recruitment strategies of most VEOs. Violent extremist organizations such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, for example, promote Sharia law and Jihad in contexts dominated by a particular faith, which they can use to attract members.

Radicalization is a key component of the recruitment strategies of VEOs. Radicalization refers to the process of transforming the psyche of individuals to think and act in accordance with the goals and objectives of an extremist group. When analyzing recruitment strategies one needs to be context-specific about the targets, the vehicles of recruitment, the messaging, funding sources, and the setting—for these differ. Several VEOs have developed from the trajectory of religion; however, they are often an expression of local and transnational politics. Veldhuis and Staun (2009) explained that: "terrorism is above all a political tool that, irrespective of its success rate, is used in an attempt to bring about political or societal change" (p. 6). Hoffman (2006) asserted that religion was an inseparable component of many VEOs in the past, but presently the dominant motivation for their actions is political. Religion is instead used as an effective ideology guiding in-group morality and informing out-group hatred (Thomson, 2003).

Boko Haram has been labelled a VEO. Many of the group's activities are those typically associated with terrorism, including suicide bombings, kidnappings, and destruction of property—particularly schools. It first emerged in the 1990s as a non-violent religious group

under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf. In 2007, the group was constituted as a militant political wing in Borno State during the governorship elections that year. In 2009, after violent clashes between Boko Haram and the police, which resulted to the death of hundreds of its followers, including its leader, Boko Haram began to grow into a regional VEO.

[A]l-Shabaab is a VEO whose members are predominantly local Somalian youth, Somalis from neighboring Kenya, and Somalis in the diaspora (Mercy Corps, 2016). The organization was formed in the 1990s as the militant wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) to enforce Sharia Islamic rule. The environments in which Boko Haram and al-Shabaab operate are predominantly Islamic communities. However, the two VEOs' recruitment targets vary. Boko Haram relies on recruits from the local population, whom they attract through face-to-face social and family networks. In addition to the local population, al-Shabaab seeks to attract foreign fighters both from Somalis in neighbouring countries and in countries such as Sweden, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States through the use of Internet facilities.

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) shows that Nigeria and Somalia are among the ten countries most affected by terrorism in the last five years, due to the incidence of attacks, deaths, injuries and property damages by Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. The high-impact level of terrorism in both countries indicates a sustained recruitment of fighters, supporters, and sympathizers. Also, both countries have not ratified the African Union's (AU) Anti-terrorism Protocol, adopted in 2004, which emphasizes non-combatant approaches, such as the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (PCVE). In addition, there are no clear domestic legal instruments to outlaw radicalization and recruitment of groups into violent organizations in Nigeria and Somalia (UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED), 2016, p. 39).

The research for this paper was primarily qualitative, drawing on secondary literature (documented and undocumented) about recruitment strategies. Secondary literature was obtained from open-source materials such as press articles, newspapers and magazines, journal papers, textbooks, government documents, Internet sources, websites of some of the terrorist groups and their released leaflets, as well as online video material. Data for the case study analyses was drawn from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), START database, RAND Corporation database, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), United Nations (UN) documents, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), and US Homeland Security Institute (HSI).

The paper argues that more nuanced attention needs to be paid to the specific recruitment strategies of the respective VEOs—for example, social and family networking in Nigeria and the anti-Ethiopia and anti-Western factor in Somalia—as these create opportunities for youth recruitment into extremist organizations. We also need to take account of what these VEOs, in the absence of the state's delivery of services, provide that enhance the appeal of membership. Recruitment strategies will therefore have both ideological and resource motives.

Situating Boko Haram and al-Shabaab

This section outlines the historical development of Boko Haram and al-Shabaab to contextualize the recruitment patterns. Boko Haram's real name is "*Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad,*" interpreted as "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad" (Johnson, 2011). Boko Haram literally means "Western education is forbidden." The group emerged from the radical Islamist youth who worshipped at the Al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri. They transformed into a militant group in 2007 under the leadership of Mohammad Yusuf (Walker, 2012). Its ideology is drawn from the broad context of Wahhabism and Salafism that has grown in northern Nigeria since the 1980s. The group has five broad objectives, namely a rejection of democracy and politics; the replacement of Western democracy with an Islamic State based on Sharia law in Nigeria; rejection of Western education (various subjects of modern education are regarded as contradicting Salafi doctrines of Islam); rejection of working for the un-Islamic government; and revenge in response to the atrocities carried out by the state security forces (Omenma & Hendricks, 2018). Boko Haram is also inspired by the global jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS).

The organization operates a highly centralized organizational structure, and Abubakar Shekau sits at the apex of the organogram. Next to Shekau is the *Shura* Council of 30 members, which is the highest decision-making structure of the group (Bodansky, 2015; Stratfor, 2014; Walker, 2012). The Boko Haram council oversees and directs various cells. Each member of the *Shura* Council is responsible for a cell, and each cell has a specific but different task within a geographical area. Most of the group's actions are agreed upon at council level, but Abubakar Shekau also makes decisions without referring to the council (Walker, 2012). There are different departments that are known by their specific responsibility and tactical specialization. The eleven departments include: combat troops to engage security forces, suicide bombings, kidnappings, welfare of members and surviving family members, intelligence gathering and surveillance,

recruitment and training, constructing explosive devices, medical committee, plant explosives, public enlightenment, and stealing cars for use in attacks (Strafor, 2014).

[A]l-Shabaab's name is *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*. al-Shabaab means "the youth" or "youngsters." The progenitors of al-Shabaab were the Islamic Union (*Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya*, (AIAI)) and the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) that had been in existence since the early 1990s (Vermeulen, 2014, p. 134), where the youth served as the armed militia group and enforced the Sharia penal codes. In 2006, al-Shabaab linked with the ICU and re-established itself as a VEO with the following aims: to make Somalia an Islamic state based on Islamic law; to eliminate all foreign "infidel" influence; and to participate in the global jihad. Its ideology is a Saudi-inspired Wahhabi version of Islam, seeking to render a "pure" religious society.

[A]l-Shabaab is a hierarchical organization, characterized by multiple chains of command. Ahmad Umar (also called Abu Ubaidah), a successor to the late Ahmed Abdi Godane, is the current *Amir*. The leadership comprises several layers of power points: *Amir,* deputy *Amir (*regional commanders*)*, *Shura* Council, sub-emirs, and a military branch (known as *Jaysh Al-'Usr*), the branch that maintains law and order (the army of morality), and a Sharia Court (Shuriye, 2012). Each layer operates independently under the supreme central commander, known as an *Amir* ("prince" or "commander") and supported by deputy *Amirs*. The deputy *Amirs* manage the group's presence in the four Somalian regions (Shuriye, 2012). The *Amir* is assisted by a ten-member council, known as *Shura majlis* or body of cabinet, and the council members oversee the regional commanders (Shuriye, 2012). The *Shura majlis* council makes the major decisions for the group. Next to the *Shura majlis* are the junior *Amirs* who are in charge of subunits like politics, media, and daily military operations. The next chain of command, under the military unit, are two subunits: *Jaysh Al-'Usr* (the army of hardship and suffering) and the *Jaysh Al-Hisbah* (the judicial, social and economic branch). The media unit, *al-Kataib* (The Brigade), is in charge of generating information for recruitment and propaganda content. The next section looks at these recruitment processes.

Determining Violent Extremists' Recruitment Processes

The majority of the literature on VEOs dwells on three themes: the conceptualization of terrorism (Evangelista, 2008; Hoffman, 2013; Sayigh, 2010; Schmid, 2004; US Department of State, 2012; Walzer, 2006), the epistemology and motivations for terrorism (Arreguin-Toft, 2001; Crenshaw, 2007; Kassimeris, 2011), and counterterrorism strategies (Forest, 2012; Guiora,

2011; Hertzberger, 2007; Howard & Sawyer, 2006). The aspect of understanding the recruitment strategies of the VEOs is relatively recent. In 2009, the U.S. Homeland Security Institute (HSI) noted that studies on recruitment strategy "[do] not appear to be the subject of a significant body of research" (US HSI, 2009, p. 5), even when studies linked the sustained attacks to the ability to recruit fighters continuously (Bjørgo, 2005; Shapiro, 2005; Sparago & Klarevas, 2007).

Recruitment, in combat parlance, refers to the process whereby civilians temporarily—or indefinitely—leave their everyday lives to join an armed group (Guichaoua, 2011; Weinstein, 2005, as cited in Knutas, 2016, p. 8). The U.S. HSI (2009) defined recruitment as "the act of getting recruits or enlisting people for an army or a cause" (p. 7). The Centre for the Study of Democracy (2016) stated that recruitment is "one of the ways of bringing a radical into the orbit of organized terrorist activities" (p. 24), while Neumann (2013) noted that recruitment is "the process whereby people become extremists" (p. 874). As a process, it "can either occur in formal and informal settings such as bars, schools, music shows, neighbourhoods, online or between peers" (Simi, Windisch, & Sporer, 2016, p. 58). In some cases, recruitment strategies target a definite group of people (for example, youth, ex-military), and at other times these strategies are more general, intending to promote the group's ideological position to a relatively broad audience (Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Zald, 1996). In this context, we conceptualize recruitment as the process and strategy employed to enlist fighters, supporters, sympathizers and financiers into an extremist organization. Radicalization is part of recruitment and can be viewed as a process through which individuals are increasingly motivated to join small, clandestine groups, and use violence, or the threat of violence, to achieve their goals.

Most authors infer that membership of VEOs does not happen overnight, rather, it progresses through multiple stages (Zimbardo & Hartley, 1985) that occur at "the interaction of individual vulnerabilities with an encouraging environment" (CSD, 2016, p. 7). Yilmaz (as cited in Ozeren, Sever, Yilmaz, & Sozer, 2014) identified five phases or processes of individual entry into extremism: (1) individual life experiences during childhood and adolescence; (2) experiences in education and schooling; (3) political socialization; (4) radicalization; and (5) entry into VEOs. He argued that "the transitions from one phase to another occur as a result of cumulative experiences obtained in the aforementioned phases and individual self-reflection, and they are marked by different turning points" (Yilmaz, as cited in Ozeren et al., 2014, p. 325). Yilmaz cautioned that none of these processes should be deemed more important than the other,

because personal characteristics play an important role in triggering an individual intention to join VEO.

RAND Corporation identified three broad issues to consider when discussing recruitment. The first is the "availability" of environmental factors, which makes certain individuals susceptible to appeals from VEOs. The "availability" of environmental factors includes individuals influenced by family background that articulate a violent Salafi worldview, frustration with local government policies, peer group influences, or frustration with foreign policies. Second, is the "recruitment and indoctrination" phase that focuses on "nodes" or "gateways," such as prayer groups, sports clubs, charitable organizations, or even criminal gangs and prisons through which individuals come into contact with recruiters, members, or leaders. The third phase is "a commitment to action" of the recruited individual (as cited in Cragin, 2009, p. 3-4). The RAND Corporation's report emphasizes that the recruitment process should not be mixed up with motivation, because an individual can be motivated yet may not be recruited. Recruitment is therefore a complex process that is neither absolute nor linear.

The emphasis by social psychology theorists is less on the individual characteristics and mechanisms and more on how the environment influences individual recruitment, that is, "the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory" (European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization, 2008, p. 9). The environmental factors are individual vulnerabilities, intrinsic motivations, grievances or predispositions (push factors), on the one hand, and a favorable environment (exposure to ideologies, recruiters—or pull factors), on the other. Social psychology theorists recognize the importance of background and individual disposition, and how these factors might accelerate the radicalization process for individuals (Schmid, 2011).

Simi, Windisch, and Sporer (2016) argued that youth constitute the highest proportion of VEO fighters for three different reasons: (1) frustrated and angry youth looking for solutions to their problems; (2) individuals looking for intimate relationships outside of their families; and (3) younger adolescents who typically lack maturity and may be unable to comprehend the ramifications of a group's radical ideology. These individuals are especially vulnerable because they often experience low levels of social support at home and many of them do not have positive role models to emulate. This is what Snow and Benford (1988) referred to as a "diagnostic framing" strategy (p. 198), which connotes a process of VEOs identifying a social

injustice, assigning blame, and urging others to act together in order to effect change. Overall, diagnostic frames aid in the recruitment process by identifying perceived social problems and offering solutions to individuals with social grievances. In other words, there is a strong relation between youth vulnerability and recruitment into all forms of violent extremism. Studies have shown that jihadists are not necessarily religious zealots. Indeed, they may be rather ignorant about Islam (Snow & Benford, 2005) or recently converted.

Ranstrop (2010) stated that social networking is one ingredient of mobilization, while Sageman (2004, 2008) discussed a model of Islamist radicalization based on friendship and kinship ("bunch-of-guys"). Frisch (2011) defined networking of VEOs as loose and flexible, which depicts their internal structure and ways of interaction among members within the organizations. A Military Guide to Terrorism by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (2007) stated that the use of social networks is increasing among extremist organizations because networks have less "need for a hierarchical structure to coordinate plans and actions" and they are not dependent on modern information technology to reach members in order to avoid detection while operating effectively (pp. 3-6). As a mechanism of recruitment, social networking is fostered through family and friends.

The Internet is also increasingly used as a medium through which to radicalize and recruit youth into extremist organizations. Since the 9/11 bombing, the Internet has been "the single-most important and dangerous innovation in terrorist" recruitment platforms (Neumann, 2012, p. 9). It facilitates self-radicalization without input or encouragement from individuals in an offline setting—the so-called "lone wolves" (Briggs, 2014; Hegghammer, 2012; Torok, 2011). More evidence suggests that Internet chat rooms are the rendezvous for like-minds to meet, coalesce, become radicalized, and get recruited into terrorism (Keene, 2011). With the Internet revolution, Weimann (2014) asserted that "terrorist organizations go looking for recruits rather than waiting for them to present themselves" (p. 6), because it is appealing to "seekers" to seek out "home-grown" self-starter groups.

There is limited literature on the recruitment of women into VEOs. The literature predominantly discusses women being abducted by VEOs, that is, women as victims. However, there are women who voluntarily join VEOs, and those who are conscripted (Matfess, 2017). Women therefore exert agency in aligning themselves with VEOs. They may join because of ideological affinity, improved living conditions, familial connections, and direct payment of

bride price to them. Many are fairly skilled and play the roles of logisticians, couriers, spies, educators, fighters and/or suicide bombers, as well as the more traditionally associated roles of "wives" and cooks. They are recruited and also act as recruiters for, and supporters of, VEOs. The Institute for National Security Studies (ISSN) has reported that the number of female suicide bombers is growing. For instance, "in 2017, 137 women took part in 61 suicide attacks in 6 countries, compared to 77 women the previous year and 118 women in 2015. About 333 people were killed during these attacks. About 126 of the women (some 92 percent) who operated in Africa were in the service of the Boko Haram organization" (Mendelboim & Schweitzer, 2018, p. 4). All indications are that the number of women being recruited is growing. This would then also imply that the reproductive capacity of the organizations is expanding.

There is new burgeoning literature on VEO recruitment. As the above indicates, it highlights, among others, ideology, aspects of social injustice, youth vulnerability, poverty, environment, relationships (both kinship, friendship, and those outside of their families), social networking, and abduction. The next section looks specifically at the recruitment strategies of Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. Boko Haram represents an ethnic insurgency articulating grievances toward the Nigerian state and Hausa-Fulani establishment, while al-Shabaab's articulation of an anti-irredentist policy of Ethiopia and anti-Mogadishu government sentiments, helps to attract membership. Knowing the particularity of the politics within the areas in which these VEOs operate is key as they provide important additional radicalization inputs. These VEOs are therefore able to mobilize both nationally and across borders as well as conjure up sentiments of injustice and belonging. They use many of the conventional methods of recruitment outlined in the literature. However, the ways in which they will use the strategies may differ from context to context, making in-depth analysis of specific VEOs an important factor. The existing literature tends to be more generalized in discussions of VEOs, rather than the in-depth case study approach that is necessary for effective counterterrorism strategies.

How Do Boko Haram and al-Shabaab Recruit?

There is no uniform recruitment process for all extremist organizations. The process is equally not an abrupt event, but a process that occurs over time (Borum, 2011). It can be voluntary or non-voluntary, but it is a structured process. Recruitment occurs in a variety of social spaces, such as music shows, mosques, schools, parties, family networks, neighborhoods,

and online. There are definite, though non-linear, *processes* associated with recruitment. These include the following.

Radicalization Process

Ideology, religion or politics are all tools of radicalization. Boko Haram and al-Shabaab identify with Wahhabism and Salafism ideologies, which instruct Muslims to practice the norms and values of Islam in their "pure" forms. Both VEOs remind Muslims of *jihad,* seen as *fard 'ayn* (a personal religious duty), which every true Muslim is obliged to complete, such as *zakat* (almsgiving), *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca), *salat* (daily prayers), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan), and the *shahada* (accepting Muhammad as God's messenger). Boko Haram takes advantage of the high poverty rates to mobilize recruits based on religious ideology (Agbiboa, 2015, p. 8). The development of Boko Haram and its declaration of a caliphate in Borno State expanded its range of mobilization among northern Muslims. Radicalization, in this context, is the process of transforming the psyche of potential recruits to think and act in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Boko Haram and al-Shabaab groups. Boko Haram and al-Shabaab adherents want the implementation of Sharia policy, which will invariably cede political power to the Islamic leaders as represented by their respective leaders. These adherents, therefore, are lured into Boko Haram and al-Shabaab membership with the intent to enthrone a theocratic political system. When Boko Haram capture a town, according to Amnesty International (2015b, p. 15), they install an *Amir* who commands the Boko Haram members and oversees the town and neighboring villages. The pattern of administration attempted by Boko Haram seems to differ by location; they appear to look after their fighters without much thought for civilians in some locales, while in others *Amirs* settle disputes, enforce rules, and allocate supplies among civilians.

Identification Process

Identification of potential recruits usually takes place in schools, prisons, mosques, prayer groups, football fields, sports clubs, dormitories, playing grounds, and equally online. Boko Haram uses intimate relations like friends, immediate family members, and the imams in the identification process (Botha & Abdile, 2014), while al-Shabaab uses the clan leadership and online chatrooms (Solomon, 2014, p. 354). Taarnby and Hallundbaek (2010, p. 37) note that Zakaria Maruf was once an active al-Shabaab recruiter in the United States of America, who identified individuals through emails, phone calls and conversations in chat rooms and pressured

them to join al-Shabaab. The Nigerian Police reported the arrest of a firewood driver, Modu Mustapha of Jumptilo, in Borno State, who confessed to be buying fuel, food, and recruiting youths for Boko Haram group (News Agency of Nigeria, (NAN), 2017, April 30). Modu named fifteen other firewood vehicle drivers that were engaged in buying supplies for the insurgents.

Persuasion Process

Both groups, Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, use persuasion and propaganda in their recruitment process. al-Shabaab uses public sermons and DVDs to label, for example, Ethiopian troops or AMISOM as "crusaders," "infidels," and "Zio-Crusade" (Mantzikos, 2011), and to refer to the Somali government (TFG) as *kooxda ridada* (the apostate group), or *daba dhilif* (government set up for a foreign purpose) (Harper 2012; International Crisis Group (ICG) 2010). These messages portray Muslim Somalis as being under threat from Jews, Christians, and government representing foreign interests. For instance, Maxamed Osman Baroore, an elder of the Gaaljecel clan, met with al-Shabaab in Nasruddin village of Hiraan on July 1, 2012, where he pledged to send weapons and fighters to al-Shabaab (Solomon, 2014, p. 354). The clan leader argued that the Gaaljecel clan needed to inform the world that the clan is a member of al-Qaeda and has "made a clear decision to take part in the ongoing jihad to drive out infidels who have invaded the country and the religion" (Somalia Newsroom, July 5, 2012, as cited in Solomon 2014, p. 354). Boko Haram conducts several public executions or beheadings of captives, or those considered as "apostates (who) have left the fold of Islam" (*The Guardian* (Nigeria), July 11, 2017). Amnesty International (2015a) reported that Boko Haram has used torture to enforce its rules, forced women and girls into marriage with its members, and recruited and used child soldiers. Boko Haram sometimes gives civilians a choice: to be killed or join the group. More frequently, fighters simply shoot civilians or cut their throats. This is "propaganda by the deed," that is, "violent acts that in their brutality or audaciousness are intended to demonstrate the movement's intensity and might," thereby arousing consciousness of the masses (Rabasa et al., 2006, p. 15). This instills fear in the minds of individuals who may be forced to join to avoid the ordeal of beheading or be branded as apostates. Boko Haram's substantial control of territories in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States further enables its recruitment drives. Recruitment in these occupied territories is motivated by the need for camaraderie, survival, security, status, power, control, achievement, and religion.

Recruitment often occurs through family and kinship networks or social institutions in schools, religious training centres, or sometimes prisons (Borum, 2011; Helmus, 2009; Sageman, 2004). The family or kinship bond serves as a layer of screening and security to cautious groups who may be engaged in subversion (Borum, 2011, p. 45). Highly skilled individuals are placed in control of sensitive positions like *Shura* Council, in charge of cells and departments, handling army divisions, and even as fighters, suicide bombers, and financiers. Recruitment into Boko Haram and al-Shabaab groups is not a haphazard exercise; they consider a plethora of factors, ranging from religious beliefs, intelligence, and the ability to endure hardship and conceal information.

Recruitment Strategies

There are multiple tactics extremist groups adopt to attract members. These tactics are referred to as "enabler," "driver," "strategy," or "pull factor." They come in the form of tangible or intangible reward systems: marriage, personal empowerment, financial benefits, or protections that are contextualized within the individual's economic and social capital needs. Four aspects of *recruitment strategies* are associated with Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, which form part of the challenges to defeat them.

The Promise of Martyrdom

Evidence has shown a strong relationship between the presence of jihad and martyr culture, and its use in recruitment by Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. Mohammed Yusuf, in a series of sermons and lectures between the years 2004 and 2009, had preached and trained his followers towards "spirituality, preparation for jihad, and the virtues of martyrdom" (Kassim, 2018, p. 12). More than 280,000 Muslims joined Boko Haram from northeast Nigeria within the first few years of its emergence, and they were partly attracted by the promise of martyrdom (Umar, 2011, as cited in Agbiboa, 2015, p. 8). Abubakar Shekau shares the martyrdom video of the driver of the car that bombed the UN Office in Abuja (Walker, 2012, p. 6). Other videos by Boko Haram invite Muslims, sympathizers, and would-be recruits to realize that "the martyrs will be chosen from you. In the end, Allah does not love pretenders" (Shekau, *You Tube*, April 12, 2012, as cited in Ori, 2013, p. 51). *The Economist* (2017, October 23) reported that Boko Haram has used more female suicide bombers than any other terrorist group in history. Of the 434 bombers the group deployed between April 2011 and June 2017, 244 have been identified as

female. [A]l-Shabaab's strength is estimated between 6,000 and 9,000—among them volunteers from the diaspora and non-Somali Muslims (BBC News Africa, 2013; Taarnby & Hallundbaek, 2010, p. 31). Suicide bombings and explosions were the most common type of attack by al-Shabaab in 2016. Suicide bombers believe in the greater glories in heaven, while the Muslim faithful see them as martyrs.

Financial/business incentive is a common reward system used for attracting members. Boko Haram lures youths with free Islamic education, informal jobs, interest-free loans, employment schemes, wheelbarrow gifts, sewing machines, motorbikes (achaba), free wives, and a monthly salary (Abrak, 2016; Pieri & Zenn, 2016; Agbiboa, 2015, p. 8; Onuoha, 2014). Boko Haram offers (as converted roughly at $1 to ₦379.9 in May 2017, U.S. Dollars.): US$2,631.58 for crop and cattle farmers (Ifijeh, 2016), gives US$263.15 as an interest-free loan (Abrak, 2016), and "pays between $30 and $312 per mission for women weapons carriers" (UN Counter-terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UN CTED), 2016, p. 14). Most of the arrested members of Boko Haram report they were enticed by financial benefits: "they either accepted loans prior to joining or joined with the hope of receiving loans or direct support to their business" (Mercy Corps, 2016, p. 13). Boko Haram's core targets are the "poor and alienated northern population," the roadside fruit sellers and *al-majiri* boys (street beggars) hired to scout for security forces and to burn down churches and schools (Zenn, 2014, p. 6). In Kenya, young men describe al-Shabaab as a "business," and local Somalians see al-Shabaab membership as a source of income. Between US$1 000 (£640) to US$650 is offered to individuals to join al-Shabaab (Taarnby & Hallundbaek, 2010, p. 33; BBC News, 2017, December 22). To attract members, al-Shabaab pays members a monthly salary. In 2012, this was estimated as being between US$50 and $150 depending on the work (Hassan, 2012, p. 18). It also provides financial benefits for its veterans and the families of its "martyrs" (ICG, 2014, p. 15), while offering US$1,500 to the families of recruited members (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) 2016, p. 13). A young Somalian summarized the benefits of joining al-Shabaab thus: "all one had to do was carry around a gun and patrol the streets. It was an easy job compared to other jobs such as construction work" (Hassan, 2012, p. 18). The belief is that with a gun, they can provide for themselves and their families. Both Boko Haram and al-Shabaab use the incentive of "wives" to attract male recruits because of the financial obligations, which are normally associated with marriage in these contexts.

A significant number of al-Shabaab recruits are children as young as fourteen years (Danish Immigration Service, 2017, p. 21; Kriel & Duggan, 2016; West, 2016, p. 7;), while 70 percent of their members are under the age of 24 years (Mercy Corps, 2016, p. 5), and an estimated 21 percent are between 25 and 29 years old, while only 9 percent are said to have joined after their 30th birthday (Botha & Abdile, 2014, p. 2). The socio-economic profiles of al-Shabaab suggest that the recruits have tended to be those who had lost at least one of their parents during their childhood; were unemployed or existing on low-income jobs; and those who were relatively uneducated (Mercy Corps, 2016, p. 5). [A]l-Shabaab therefore is able to use youth unemployment, poverty, and marginalization to mobilize its members. It also uses perceived imperialism by Ethiopia and the growing reach of jihadist terrorism to recruit. Boko Haram and al-Shabaab purposefully target vulnerable youth and women.

Conscription forms the third strategy of recruitment by both Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. Both groups frequently fight to capture and seize geographical areas and use such areas to force recruitment of a conquered population. It is estimated that 40 percent of Boko Haram fighters are conscripted members (Botha, Ewi, Salifu, & Abdile, 2017, p. 51). On April 12, 2014, over 250 schoolgirls, in Chibok, Borno State, were kidnapped, and another set of 110 girls kidnapped at Dapchi, Yobe State, on February 22, 2018. Prior to the kidnapping of the Chibok girls, Boko Haram had conscripted an unaccounted number of girls from a college in Dikwa, Borno State. Zenn (2014, p. 6) reported that "internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled Borno estimate that Boko Haram may have abducted between 500 and 2,000 women since 2013," and in 2016, at least 2,000 were forcefully conscripted by Boko Haram (UNICEF, 2017). As Boko Haram's ideological popularity began to wane, it increasingly relied on forced recruitment of young men, and freeing criminals out of jail to conduct attacks and fill its ranks (Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015; ICG, 2014). [A]l-Shabaab, like Boko Haram, engages in forced recruitment (Amnesty International, 2016). Abdile (n.d) estimated that 13 percent of al-Shabaab recruits are forced to join. Refusing to join al-Shabaab may likely lead to forced payment of compensation, or being killed, or being forced to relocate from the community (Botha & Abdile, 2014; Danish Immigration Service, 2015). [A]l-Shabaab is notorious in the use of child fighters (Danish Immigration Service, 2015; 2017). The number of child fighters in al-Shabaab camp in 2014 was estimated at 437, in the year 2015 it increased to 903 and within the first nine months of 2016, the number was 1,560 cases (Danish Immigration Service, 2017, p. 21). Forced recruitment is

not as obvious with al-Shabaab with its use of "propaganda by deed." Actions of beheading and stoning to death stimulate fear in the individual's psyche.

 Internet strategy. [A]l-Shabaab relies heavily on the Internet platforms to reach out to the youth outside their immediate proximity (Vermeulen, 2014). Their media group, called "al-Kataeb," uses the Twitter handle @HSMPress to present "the group's version of events, motivate recruits, and establish an alternative narrative; where the mainstream media might report losses, al-Shabaab records victories" (Vermeulen, 2014, p. 150). [A]l-Shabaab online magazine is known as the *Millat Ibrahim* and is used to propagate the al-Tawhid wal-Jihad doctrine (Taarnby & Hallundbaek, 2010, p. 9). The al-Shabaab website spreads jihadist sermons, photos and videos of attacks, chat rooms, discussion boards, and in some cases manuals on tactics or bombing practices. Through the online medium, al-Shabaab has recruited hundreds of foreign fighters from Sweden, Australia, the United Kingdom, United States, South Asia, and the Middle East (Anti-Defamation League, 2014, as cited in Vermeulen, 2014, p. 150-153). [A]l-Shabaab released an online video entitled "At Your Service, oh Osama," targeted at recruiting members and sympathizers of al-Qaeda. As a result of al-Shabaab's online visibility, about 43 out of the 85-member executive council of al-Shabaab were foreigners (Elliott, 2009; Shinn, 2010). Online recruitment by Boko Haram is not as strong as with other terrorist groups, such as ISIS and al-Shabaab (Botha et al., 2017, p. 35). The use of online video, by Boko Haram, is more a source of information sharing and to "increase the group's legitimacy among the jihadi community" (Connell, 2012, p. 89). Overall, the most common recruitment strategies by Boko Haram and al-Shabaab are family and social networks, ideological preaching towards martyrdom, financial incentives, conscription, Internet, and face-to-face recruitments.

Conclusion

 Boko Haram and al-Shabaab owe their operational success to their recruitment strategies. Boko Haram's stated objective is to "Islamize Nigeria based on Sharia law," while al-Shabaab aims at "establishing an Islamic state in Somalia, based on Islamic law" and to "eliminate all foreign 'infidel' influence." The members of these two extremist groups believe they are engaged in a "just" and "holy" war for the vision of the "Islamic State" or "caliphate." The vision of an Islamic State creates a sense of group identity and awareness. Boko Haram and al-Shabaab place themselves alongside al-Qaeda and ISIS by identifying with al-Qaeda and ISIS

ideologies. Both groups' preaching of, and commitment to, the Islamic State objectives influence many adherents to join the VEOs in Nigeria and Somalia.

Financial inducement plays a role in the successful recruitment of fighters by both extremist groups. As elaborated upon, Boko Haram and al-Shabaab members receive financial and non-financial benefits before recruitment, which is a major incentive. These incentives enable both groups to mobilize a broad array of recruits. Their "members" include women and men, children and adolescents deployed to perform various assignments like intelligence gathering, couriers, recruiters, cooks, "wives," and so forth. Boko Haram makes more use of women as suicide bombers than al-Shabaab, but both organizations rely on children and youth. A simple analysis of the age of al-Shabaab members indicates that significant members are adolescents. This agrees with studies that show the age bracket of typical violent extremists is between 15 and 24 years old (LaFree & Dugan, 2004; Laqueur, 1977; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Ozeren et al., 2014; Russell & Miller, 1983; Simi, Windisch, & Sporer, 2016).

There are differences between al-Shabaab and Boko Haram's recruitment processes and strategies. Firstly, there is a remarkable disparity in *who* and *where* both extremist groups recruit. Boko Haram is predominantly a north-eastern Nigerian extremist group, but primarily draws its memberships from the Kanuri ethnic group living in north-east Nigeria and the neighboring villages in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (Forest, 2012; Ploch, 2012; RAND Corporation, 2017; Thurston, 2016). It is on this basis that Boko Haram's emergence is seen as part of ethnic struggle within the configuration of Nigerian politics. This is in contrast to the al-Shabaab group that draws its membership from all citizens in Somalia, as well as a significant number of foreign nationalities from Sweden, Australia, the United Kingdom, United States, South Asia, and the Middle East (Vermeulen, 2014, p. 150-153). [A]l-Shabaab has more of a global outreach than Boko Haram, and this has helped it to sustain and enhance its global jihad objective, whereas Boko Haram activities are largely limited to northern Nigeria and some neighboring communities in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon—used equally as safe havens.

Secondly, al-Shabaab has recruited members using multiple Internet platforms. The sect is more active in the Internet forums than Boko Haram. Boko Haram uses the "traditionalist" methods that work with and through family, and ethnic and local religious networks. Family associations, teacher-learner connections, or formations of brotherhoods were particularly cardinal in the enlistment method by Boko Haram. These large family clusters, which are the

equivalent to hubs, are founded on loyalty to family. The emphasis on social and family networks creates exceptionally strong and long-lasting ties that make infiltrating or influencing the group extremely difficult. This equally serves as an identifying and a screening process that forms an important variable in most terrorist recruitment processes. This supports the evidence in the literature that radicalization is a social process.

Thirdly, Boko Haram relies also on recruitment through conscription and abduction, while al-Shabaab deploys a successful public relations campaign to recruit voluntarily from all over the world, relying on persuasion rather than coercion to encourage members into the organization. [A]l-Shabaab appeals to Somali national pride, anti-irredentist policy of Ethiopia and anti-Mogadishu government sentiments, which attract volunteers. [A]l-Qaeda has openly declared its presence in Somalia, Yemen, and in some parts of Pakistan (Johnson, 2017, p. 4), and al-Shabaab considers recognition as a plus to its crusade. [A]l-Shabaab does recruit by coercion, but it "happens either subtly, often based on financial incentives or threats, or far more explicitly" (IJR, 2016, p. 21), unlike Boko Haram, which keeps attracting international attention for its continuous conscriptions and kidnapping of defenceless civilians.

The differences between the two groups are due to the nature of political configuration in both countries. Somalia has been involved in political conflict since the overthrow/death of President Said (Shuriye, 2012), which led to the contestations for power by violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic Union (*Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya)*, Islamic Courts Union and al-Shabaab, and the interventions by America, Western powers, and some neighbouring East African countries, while Boko Haram is considered as a subtle reactionary force by the Kanuri ethnic group against the Sokoto Caliphate, and by extension, the leadership of central power by the southern part of Nigeria since 1999.

The findings of this study show that the recruitment strategies of Boko Haram and al-Shabaab are contextually specific and therefore need more nuanced analyses and tailored preventive strategies. Cookie-cutter approaches to countering violent extremism will not yield many positive results. In Nigeria, it is important to break the recruitment cycle by using community-based groups who are located in the areas where recruitment is taking place. We have already seen that the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is able to have an impact on reducing the number of attacks in areas such as Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba, and partly in Yobe and Borno states (Omenma & Hendricks, 2018). This was achieved because the military

partnered with the civilians who understood the local culture, the environment, and the language, which are critical for military operations. The CJTF can similarly play a role in preventing recruitment into Boko Haram. For al-Shabaab, finance obtained from taxes and diaspora donations is an ancillary factor in their recruitment strategy. In the short term, it may be about blocking their sources of funding, but the longer-term solution must deal with the political (internal and external) issues that fuel resentment.

Counterterrorism should begin with limiting the recruitment into violent extremism. Military counterterrorism actions alone cannot solve the challenge posed by violent extremism; rather they may exacerbate violent extremism given the violation of human rights that often accompanies these actions. Nigeria and Somalia need to address the underlying factors that enable VEOs to recruit members successfully and retain existing ones. They must also begin to engage these extremists in dialogue to find common ways in which the future of state-society relations can be forged. The belief that extremists can be wiped out through military means is not a sustainable solution. More community engagements in preventive actions are also needed. Communities are the source of recruitment and the source for prevention. In Nigeria and Somalia, the violent extremist groups largely define themselves in religious terms, especially the willingness to be recruited and die for the Islamic objective. Local actors understand that religion drives recruitment, therefore, local religious leaders need to be leveraged to raise awareness, mobilize action, and offer positive alternatives to the distorted interpretations of Islam. Terrorists aim to inspire fear through attacks, propaganda, and framing of the government. Such attacks and negative narratives usually have a very divisive impact on society. In these divided circumstances, the counter-recruitment approach should include mobilizing the capacity of local leaders to encourage social cohesion and solidarity, to reaffirm common goals and shared interests, as well as to give voice to peace and belonging. A comprehensive and inclusive context-specific counterterrorism recruitment strategy is therefore a key component for effectively combatting violent extremism in Africa.

A peacebuilding approach that deals with the main drivers of violent extremism remains cardinal for sustainable counterterrorism interventions in both countries. Although there may not be one universal factor driving violent extremism as well as a single counter-narrative, relevant government and non-governmental institutions should respond by paying equal attention to governance, economic development, and the social dimensions of these societies. To change

behaviour, greater emphasis should be placed on the social networks and families to promote and support the messages of peace, tolerance, and non-violence. Building common sets of norms, values, and understanding within the society will be more effective at regulating behavior than the use of the means of coercion and compliance. Creating choice and opportunity and upholding dignity within these societies so that the human potential can flourish is the counter strategy to the recruitment narratives of extremist groups. Putting in place the support mechanisms that will reduce the number of grievances, and providing the opportunity to negotiate or renegotiate the social contract will lead to non-violent resolution of perceived injustices. These are a few of the peacebuilding approaches, tailored to context, that we need to begin to employ to have sustainable impact in "silencing the guns" in Nigeria and Somalia and in other countries affected by violent extremism on the continent.

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