



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Influence of gender and religion on public perception of counter-terrorism efforts in Northeast Nigeria

LAWANSON Henry Olusesan \*

*Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.*

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### Abstract

This study examines the influence of gender and religion on public perception of counter-terrorism efforts in Northeast Nigeria, a region grappling with persistent terrorism and its devastating impact on communities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates whether gender and religious affiliations shape public opinions on counter-terrorism strategies. Finding from the study revealed that there is no significant difference between males and females in their perception on the influence of terrorism in the North Eastern Nigeria. The study also submitted that there is a statistically significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their perception on the influence of terrorism in the North Eastern Nigeria. Based on the finding the study therefore recommended that Northeastern government should address socioeconomic issues of poverty, unemployment, and lack of education that both genders identify as root causes of terrorism, to reduce vulnerability to radicalization, while ensuring trauma and rehabilitation programs for victims of terrorism are accessible to both men and women without bias. The study also opines that government and faith-based institutions should highlight common socioeconomic challenges; poverty, displacement, and unemployment faced by both Christians and Muslims as a unifying factor, as such will counter extremist narratives, and advocate for cooperation with security agencies.

**Keywords:** Gender Perception; Psychological theory of terrorism; Public Perception; Religion Perception

### 1. Introduction

Terrorism and insurgency are globally a household word as there is no nation that is completely an exception from its devastating effect. Rourke (2008) observed that war, terrorism, and other forms of transnational political violence are in many ways more threatening today than ever before as casualties have been on increase. Terrorism is both a tactic and strategy; a crime and a holy duty; a justified reaction to oppression and inexcusable abomination since it is a function of whose point of view is being represented (Awake, 2006). Indeed, the worldwide manifestation of terrorism and insurgency has been evident not only in Africa, but also in Nigeria. It has found expression in the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency since the year 2001 (Awake, 2006).

Before the advent of the Boko Haram menace, Islamic radicalism is not strange to the Nigeria's public space, having experienced the activities of the extremist Maitatsine sect movement that became violent in the early 1980s, under Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine, a Muslim scholar from Marwa town in northern Cameroon who migrated to Kano in Nigeria (Danjibo, 2010). This quasi-Muslim fringe group preached Islamic doctrines that were contrary to the teachings of the orthodox Islamic and societal leadership. The Islamic State of West Africa Province also emerged as a splinter group of BH, while the emerging Lukarawa group as seen in Kebbi and Sokoto state evolves as radical Islamic terror group in Nigeria.

\* Corresponding author: LAWANSON Henry Olugbesan.

Gender differences in public perception play a significant role in shaping societal responses to terrorism in Northeast Nigeria. Recognizing and addressing these differences is crucial for crafting policies and interventions that are not only equitable but also more effective in combating terrorism. In the Northeast, terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have targeted men and women in distinct ways. Men are often victims of killings, forced recruitment, or displacement. Women and girls face abduction, sexual violence, forced marriages, and exploitation as suicide bombers. These experiences shape how each gender perceives the threat and impact of terrorism, which influences attitudes toward counter-terrorism measures, while men Women may prioritize the impact of terrorism on family stability, access to food, and healthcare, and traditional roles in caregiving, Men may focus on issues of loss of livelihood, displacement, and the erosion of traditional leadership structures.

Furthermore, in many terrorist attacks, bread winners of some families are killed or sources of livelihood destroyed, leaving only the males to continue school while the females are mostly withdrawn due to insufficient fund. Ensuring that children have safe, secure environment in which to grow, learn and develop healthy brains and bodies is not only good for the children themselves, but also builds a strong foundation for thriving prosperous society. Science shows that exposure to circumstance that produce persistent fear and chronic anxiety can have lifelong consequences. Fear has potential to affect how children learn, solve problems and relate to others (Oladele, 2014).

Religion has been serving and is still serving as a double-edged sword of sustainable peace, social harmony, so also as a purveyor for violence and terrorism in many developing and developed countries (Meregenere, 2011). Over many decades, religion has fueled either violence or act of terrorism in the name of God. Contemporary acts of extreme terrorism are always justified as holy "warfare". For a very long period of time now, religion has been the cause of violence and conflict around the world, thereby posing more security threats to many nations (Abu-Nimer, 2000).

Religious differences significantly shape public perception of terrorism in Northeast Nigeria, influencing attitudes toward its causes, consequences, and solutions. Recognizing these differences is critical for designing effective and equitable counter-terrorism strategies that unify rather than divide communities. The Northeast is predominantly divided between Islam (majority) and Christianity (minority), with a history of peaceful coexistence punctuated by periodic tensions. Terrorist groups like Boko Haram claim religious motivations, targeting both Muslims (accused of being "non-compliant") and Christians (viewed as ideological adversaries).

Differences in experiences of terrorism abounds, Muslim Communities may perceive terrorism as a distortion of Islamic teachings, particularly since BH has targeted Muslims who reject their ideology. Some Muslim communities may face societal stigma, being wrongly associated with terrorist ideologies. While Christian Communities tend to view terrorism as a direct attack on their faith, given targeted church bombings and abductions, such as the infamous Chibok schoolgirls incident and may perceive government responses as biased toward protecting Muslim-majority areas. As Muslim communities may emphasize the need for religious education and deradicalization programs to combat extremist narratives. Some may feel that counter-terrorism efforts unfairly target their communities, leading to distrust of security forces. Christians may prioritize physical security, such as increased military presence around churches and schools and also advocate for international advocacy against terrorism framed as religious persecution.

Government efforts at arresting the alarming socio-economic and political consequence of terrorism could be seen in the huge budgetary allocation to security, and the passage of the anti-terrorism act in 2011 (Ewatan, 2013), the purchase of more equipment for the military, worth \$1 billion (Premium Times, 2019), request for foreign assistance from advanced economies to combat the rising waves of terrorism and insurgency. Amidst the deteriorating security situation in the country, Nigeria is also confronted with daunting social, economic and political developmental challenges (Ewatan, 2013).

### 1.1. Hypotheses

- H01: Gender difference of public perception has influence on terrorism in Northeast, Nigeria.
- H02: Religion difference of public perception has influence on terrorism in Northeast, Nigeria.

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Gender Perception

The differences in perception affect how communities assess the effectiveness of government and security agency responses. Men and women may differ in their willingness to support specific counter-terrorism strategies, such as military interventions versus community engagement. For instance, women in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps

may be more vocal about the need for humanitarian aid and protection, while men might emphasize the restoration of economic opportunities.

## 2.2. Empirical Review of Literature

In the same vein, Krueger and Maleckova (2003) conducted a study with regard to the causes and negative consequences of terrorism on the socio-economic and political development and found that terrorism is attributed to high rate of religion. In the study 73.4% of religion accounted for terrorism. The 73.4 level of religious problems accounted for 50% negative influence on social development, 49% negative influence on economic development, and 55% negative influence on political development.

Nwankwo (2015) interrogated the rhetoric and realities of managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria with an emphasis on the nature of the conflicts, the protagonists and the management mechanisms employed in that country. The study engaged survey primary and secondary sources of literature relevant to the study. In essence, it has contextualised the study based on religion. The sources of data include a survey of the Nigeria Watch database which maps the trends of violent deaths in Nigeria, articles on religious and ethnic violence; newspapers; and, pertinent books, alongside content analysis of the qualitative data. The study submitted that one of the abatement measures is that every group must discourage the primordial sentiments in communities expressed by religious groups.

Lama and Paul (2024) focused on modes of operation, nature, affiliation, and association of terror groups have not been static since their inception. The causal factors of terrorism, ranging from political to religious, as well as the goals of the terror groups that have been facilitating violent acts at local, national, and international levels, are intensely debated by policymakers as they devise new and often controversial counterterrorism policies to contain terrorism. New forms of terrorism, its repercussions, and growing support among the deprived sections of society are further factored in by modernity, social change, and the adaptation of technology for its dissemination, support, and operations today on the fault lines of clashes of civilisation, demarcating new frontiers on the basis of religion and culture.

## 2.3. Theoretical Framework

### 2.3.1. Psychological theory of terrorism

Psychological approaches to the study of terrorism are concerned with the study of terrorists' profiles; personalities, their recruitment into terrorist groups, beliefs, motivations, and career as terrorists. This will answer questions like: who are terrorists? Why are they involved in terrorism? What are the common characteristics of these individuals (if any)? There are two approaches within psychological explanations; the first approach describes terrorists as mentally ill individuals as people who commit such horrible crimes are labeled 'abnormal'. By producing explanation about the mindset of terrorist, this approach achieved its own hypothesis about terrorism.

It is argued that political terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and that their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalize acts they are psychologically compelled to commit thus the principle argument of this essay is that individuals are drawn to the patch of terrorism in order to commit acts of violence, and their special logic, which is grounded in their psychology and reflected in their rhetoric, becomes the justification for their violent acts (Jerrod, 2008). There might be some insights to this approach. For example, terrorist may have personalities more derided to violence. This approach excludes the political, ideological, economic, and sociological factors that lead people to become terrorists. It is assumed that all terrorists display the same personalities.

The second approach characterized terrorists as fanatics. This approach emphasizes the terrorist's rational qualities and views the terrorist as a cool, logical planning individual whose rewards are ideological and political, rather than financial. This approach characterized terrorists as well-educated and sophisticated people who are capable of using advanced rhetoric and political analysis. As this theory suggests there are two main types of fanatics. First are religious fanatics. Some religious groups employ terrorism for their political purposes, specifically to overthrow 'evil' regimes and replace them with religious ones. On the other hands, single-issues fanatics are characterized as an obsessive group of people who want a certain policy to be changed, like on abortion or animal rights. This line of literature does not profile terrorist behaviour as pathological, but rather suggests that a terrorist's mindset is obsessed with a particular perspective about the world that is so powerful that it can produce such violent acts.

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## 3. Methodology

This research adopted descriptive survey research approach, as this study attempted a survey and description of the public perception driven by gender and religion perception as an influence of terrorism in North-eastern Nigeria.

Questionnaires were administered to gender and religion bracket Nigerians who are between group design. A total number of 180 participants were drawn from three LGAs of Borno State that Boko Haram is much prevalent. Out of the 180, 162 questionnaires were valid. The participants consisted of 77 males and 85 females. Out of which, 62 participants were drawn from Maiduguri LGA, consisting of 27 males and 35 females. 50 participants were drawn from Gambaru - Ngala LGA, consisting of 25 males and 25 females. Similarly, 50 participants were drawn from Bama LGA, consisting of 25 males and 25 females. The participants also included different ethnic groups and the two major religions; Christianity and Islam.

**Table 1** Frequency distribution of the gender public perception on the influence of terrorism

Specific items	Response options	Freq	Per
Security agencies are doing enough to protect individuals regardless of gender in the fight against terrorism.	Strongly agree/agree	140	86
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	22	14
	Total	162	100%
Women's perspectives are adequately considered in planning and implementing counter-terrorism initiatives.	Strongly agree/agree	152	94
	Disagree/strongly disagree	10	6
	Total	162	100%
Men and women have equal access to information and support from security agencies regarding counter-terrorism efforts.	Strongly agree/agree	150	93
	Disagree/strongly disagree	12	7
	Total	162	100%
Both men and women in my community are actively involved in discussions and programs related to counter-terrorism.	Strongly agree/agree	148	91
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	14	9
	Total	162	100%
Community-based counter-terrorism initiatives adequately address gender-specific concerns and priorities.	Strongly agree/agree	154	95
	Disagree/strongly disagree	8	5
	Total	162	100%

### 3.1. Field Survey (2012)

Table one reveals strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree responses (perception) and percentage of 162 participants with regard to the public perception on terrorism in the North East of Nigeria and five (5) selected relevant questions. In the first question, 140 participants (86%) chose strongly agree/agree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East of Nigeria, while 22 participants (14%) choose strongly disagree/disagree, which indicate that public perception on terrorism has no influence in the North East of Nigeria. In the second question, 152 participants (94%) choose strongly agree/agree which indicates that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East, while 10 participants (6%) choose strongly disagree/disagree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East of Nigeria.

In the third question, 150 participants (93%) choose strongly agree/agree which indicates that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East, while 12 participants (7%) choose strongly disagree/disagree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has no influence in the North East of Nigeria. In the fourth question, 148 participants (91%) choose strongly agree/agree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East of Nigeria, while 14 participants (9%) choose strongly disagree/disagree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has no influence in the North East of Nigeria.

In the last question, 145 participants (95%) choose strongly agree/agree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East while 8 participants (5%) choose strongly disagree/disagree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East of Nigeria. The analysis reveals that (92%) as against (8%) choose strongly agree/agree which indicate that public perception on terrorism has influence in the North East of Nigeria.

### 3.2. Hypothesis One Testing

Hypothesis one stated that there is a significant difference between males and females in their public perception on the influence of terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using Independent-sample t-test in Table 2

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation scores between male and female perception of terrorism in the north-east Nigeria, where male (M= 62.81, SD= 14.623) and female (M= 59.47, SD= 14.107). The results further indicated that males and females did not statistically significantly differ in their perception on the influence of terrorism in the north-east Nigeria  $t(160) = 1.477, P > .05$ . In other words, the hypothesis was not confirmed in this study.

**Table 2** Mean Difference of Male and Female Perception of Influence of Terrorism in the North-east Nigeria

Variables	N	M	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.
Male	77	62.81	14.623	160	1.477	0.142
Female	85	59.47	14.107			

Sig. level = 0.05

#### 3.2.1. Hypothesis Two Testing

Hypothesis two stated that there is a significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their public perception on the influence of terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using Independent-sample t-test in Table 3

**Table 3** Mean Difference of Christians and Muslims Perception of the Influence of Terrorism in the North-East of Nigeria

Variables	N	M	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.
Christian	94	65.11	15.124	160	4.446	0.000
Muslim	68	55.46	11.244			

Sig. level = 0.05

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation scores between Christians and Muslims perception on the influence of terrorism in the north-east of Nigeria; where Christian (M= 65.11, SD= 15.124) and Muslim (M= 55.46, SD= 11.244). Further analysis revealed that, Christians and Muslims indicated a statistically significant difference in their perception on the influence of terrorism in the north-east Nigeria  $t(160) = 4.446, P < .05$ . In other words, the hypothesis was confirmed in this study.

The results in this study revealed that the first hypothesis was not confirmed as statistically significant; thus we concluded that there is no significant difference between males and females in their perception on the influence of terrorism in the North Eastern Nigeria. The second hypothesis was confirmed as statistically significant; thus, we concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their perception on the influence of terrorism in the North Eastern Nigeria

## 4. Discussion of Findings

### 4.1. Gender and the public perception on the influence of terrorism in the North East of Nigeria

The first hypothesis in this study did not receive confirmation as it showed statistically insignificant result between males and females in their perception of the influence of terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. The finding of this study supports the earlier finding of Oladele (2014) who opined that, terrorism is like two-edged sword, and as such, does not spare any gender in any way. Therefore, the effect may be felt in almost the same way.

### 4.2. Religion and the public perception on the influence of terrorism in the North Eastern Nigeria

The second hypothesis showed a statistically significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their perception of the influence of terrorism in north eastern Nigerian. The finding of this study supports the earlier study of Meregenere, 2011; Obasi, 2009 which submitted that religion has been serves as both instrument of sustainable peace

and social harmony and equally as a motivation for violence and terrorism. Likewise, the earlier study of Reynat-Quero (2002) who submitted that nations that are divided along religious lines are often more prone to intense and prolonged terrorism than the nations that are divided by political territorial and ethnic differences. However, the result of this present study has not contradicted any earlier study.

**Table 4** Frequency Table

	Gender	Age	Religion	Education Qual	Occupation	Marital Status	Length of stay in North-east Nigeria
Valid N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	1.52	32.40	1.50	3.19	2.06	1.69	3.33
Std. Deviation	.501	7.840	.502	1.159	1.257	.516	.848

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	77	47.5	47.5	47.5
	Female	85	52.5	52.5	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	
<b>Religion</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Christianity	81	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Islam	81	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	
<b>Occupation</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Civil Servant	81	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Private Servant	33	20.4	20.4	70.4
	Business	6	3.7	3.7	74.1
	Student	42	25.9	25.9	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	
<b>Marital Status</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	55	34.0	34.0	34.0
	Married	103	63.6	63.6	97.5
	Divorced	4	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	
<b>Length of stay in North-east Nigeria</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2-3 years	7	4.3	4.3	4.3

	3-5 years	19	11.7	11.7	16.0
	6-10 years	50	30.9	30.9	46.9
	Above 10 years	86	53.1	53.1	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	

*T-Test*

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Male	77	62.81	14.623	1.666
	Female	85	59.47	14.107	1.530

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Equal variances assumed	0.035	0.852	1.477	160	0.142	3.335	2.258	-1.125	7.795
	Equal variances not assumed			1.474	157.123	0.143	3.335	2.262	-1.134	7.803

Group Statistics					
	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Christianity	94	65.11	15.124	1.560
	Islam	68	55.46	11.244	1.364

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Equal variances assumed	8.663	0.004	4.446	160	0.000	9.651	2.171	5.364	13.937
	Equal variances not assumed			4.658	159.864	0.000	9.651	2.072	5.559	13.742

Group Statistics					
	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Young	95	59.38	14.539	1.492
	Old	67	63.43	13.982	1.708

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Equal variances assumed	0.049	0.825	-1.775	160	0.078	-4.054	2.283	-8.563	0.455
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.788	145.596	0.076	-4.054	2.268	-8.536	0.428

Group Statistics					
	Education Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Low Educational status	53	53.74	9.948	1.366
	High Educational Status	109	64.61	14.923	1.429



Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Terrorism in North East Nigeria	Equal variances assumed	7.690	.006	-4.809	160	.000	-10.879	2.262	-15.346	-6.411
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.501	144.661	.000	-10.879	1.977	-14.787	-6.970

## 5. Conclusion

The results of this study show that there is a negative relationship between terrorism and public perception on the influence of terrorism. Gender perception did not receive confirmation while religion perception received confirmation

### *Recommendations*

That Northeastern government should address socioeconomic issues of poverty, unemployment, and lack of education that both genders identify as root causes of terrorism, so as to reduce vulnerability to radicalization, and ensure that trauma and rehabilitation programs for victims of terrorism are accessible to both men and women without bias.

Government and faith-based institutions should highlight common socioeconomic challenges; poverty, displacement, and unemployment faced by both Christians and Muslims as a unifying factor. This will assist in mobilising religion clerics to educate their followers on government efforts, encourage participation in community security initiatives, counter extremist narratives, and advocate for cooperation with security agencies.

## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

There is no conflict of interest to be disclosed. This research work does not receive any funds from any quarters

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