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Addressing Factors for the Threat of Violent Extremism in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja—An Early Warning Perspective

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Abstract

Violent conflicts in Nigeria have been rife for the better part of the country's existence; especially the post-colonial period. The advent of the Boko Haram crises in the early part of 2000, saw not just a change in the dynamics, but also an exponential growth in the spate and occurrences of these conflicts. The most notable of these is extremism; violent extremism, which is fast taking over as the most formidable threat. The frequency of these occurrences is indicative of the overwhelming nature of the problem for states to address. Of particular concern is the risk of these activities of extremism to the Federal Capital Territory by virtue of its location and population dynamics. In light of these current security realities, it becomes imperative, for purposes of early warning, to interrogate the threat of violent extremism in the Federal Capital Territory and how the government can better respond to these challenges.

Keywords

Radicalization, Extremism, Violent Extremism, Violent Conflict, Ethnicity, Early Warning

1. Introduction

Violent extremism is not a new concept in Nigeria. However, it is an emerging concept in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Violent extremism is usually linked to ethnic aggressions and tensions as reflected by activities in the northeast states of Borno, Yobe and in the southern states of Bayelsa, and Rivers. The undercurrents in these states suggest and have pointed to the fact that the marginalization or neglect of any group of persons will ultimately lead to actions by such groups to challenge the status quo; to make their grievances known by whatever means

they deem appropriate.

The focus of this narrative is that while the indigenous people of the FCT are not overtly aggressive, as told by Onyeakagbu (2022), the invalidation of their demands and agitations could spur violent extremism. Violent extremism in this context refers to the use of force and violence, justified by political, religious or other radical ideologies, caused by real or perceived injustice, marginalization or discrimination.

Social complexities such as aspects of underdevelopment and its attendant impact on people's lives and potential future—level of education, access to services and livelihood opportunities, personal safety and security, trust in and influence of authorities, and so on—are a reflection of some of the issues that can lead to aggression. These aggressions, in turn, can shape the dynamics of conflicts. In singling out the variables of economy and education, it is imperative to note that these two factors are very indicative of power dynamics. Such power is key in influencing terrorism as the person who wields more power usually is more likely to recruit better and dictate the strategy for attacks. This is for the basic reason that such a person has the required resources available. Occurrences within the FCT have begun to manifest these signs and as such, are reason to articulate the concerns to mitigate the aggressions. Aggressions fuel mobilization and influence the social structure of the society.

From as recent as two years ago, from a personal observation as an Abuja resident, the FCT has experienced a steady, yet dangerous increase in activities that have been recorded as vicious and bold. These are activities that have made news in the media—print, television and social media. Some of the incidents that have illustrated this increase in the extremist activities include:

• The July 2022 Kuje prison break covered such media outlets as Arise News channel, TVC News, NTA News and major print media in the country and taken from the online reports of Vanguard Newspapers.

• The foiled attack on the military base in the Bwari area of the FCT on 26th July, 2022, where media reports, particularly Sahara reporters on the said date, state that a captain and two soldiers of the 7 Guards Brigade of the Nigerian Army were killed.

• The report covered by Akinwotu of the Guardian newspaper on the Abuja Kaduna train attack which occurred on 28th March, 2022, was one of the most traumatic for the passengers and Nigerians (Akinwotu, 2022). It was a clear reflection of the fact that extremist tendencies were looming closer to the FCT and could spell dire consequences for the safety and security.

Narratives are that external influences of insurgents are getting closer to the capital and what this portends is that continuously turning a blind eye to the situation, or a lack of lustre approach, as is observed, will only exacerbate the situation. The threat of violent extremism cannot be wished away, and neither can it be solved by paying lip service. It must be addressed with a fusion of strategic leadership, community cohesion and persistent advocacy to neutralise the

threat.

The discussions will be structured in three main categories: History of the FCT, Realities of the FCT and Future of the FCT. In between will be sub-topics that detail main headings. In addition, a concluding section will summarize discussions and proffer suggestions related to the focus of the paper.

2. Conflict Realities of the FCT

The FCT has never been associated with very significant cases of extremism. In a monograph on the history of Abuja, Central Nigeria, Emeagwali (1989) details these realities. Reports from the Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA, 2016) conflicts within the FCT were centered on violent confrontations between herdsmen and Gbagyi farmers. Onyeakagbu (2022) concurs on this. Conflicts in the area were predominantly on farmer-herder and indigene-settler agitations, especially in the Gwagwalada area. Other recorded conflicts were intercommunal and criminally induced. From 2016 however, the dynamics of the conflicts within the state have changed significantly and are more reflective of insurgency-type attacks and seems clearer that the spread of extremist tendencies may be closer to the FCT than previously considered.

2.1. Historical and Geographical Inclinations of Violent Extremism in the FCT

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), also known as Abuja, is the administrative capital of Nigeria, created in 1976 which is located north of the confluence of both rivers Niger and Benue. As depicted in Figure 1 below, the FCT is bordered by the states of Niger to the west and northwest, Kaduna to the northeast, Nasarawa to the east and south, and Kogi to the southwest. In addition to theses, there are unmapped and illegal pathways from other states into the capital.

Covering a total land area of 8000 square kilometers, the FCT, according to the World Population Review (2020) Languages of the Federal Capital Territoy, has a population of 3,652,029 (three million, six hundred and fifty-two thousand and twenty-nine) comprising the Gwari, Koro, Ganagana, Gwandara, Afo, and Bassa ethnic groups, who are predominantly crop and dairy farmers. Within the territory are also Hausas and Fulanis who are said to make up some percentage of this population figure. As depicted below in Figure 2, the FCT is divided into six administrative units known as area councils. The area councils are administered by elected Chairmen. The Area Councils are:

Abuja Municipal Area council;
Abaji Area council;
Gwagwalada Area council;
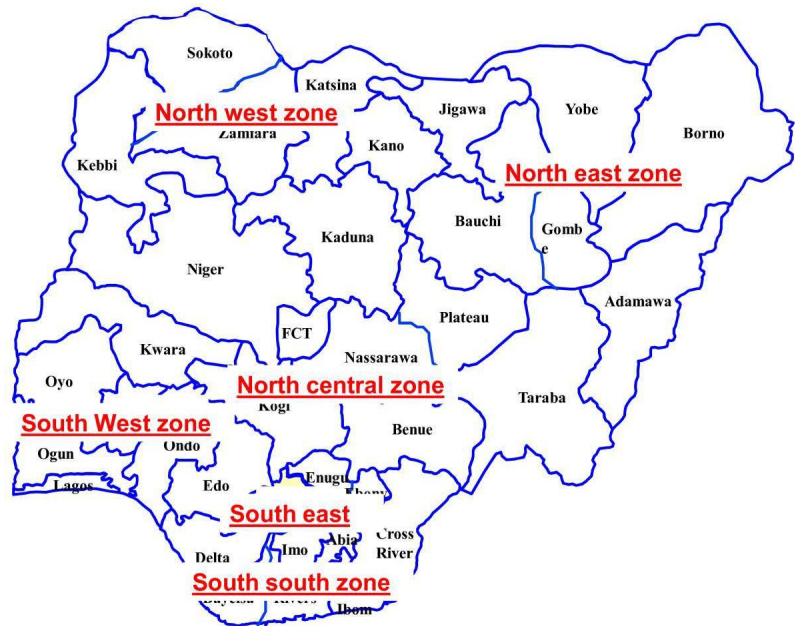Kuje Area council;
Bwari Area council;
Kwali Area council.

Figure 1. Geo-political zones in Nigeria. Source: Internet.

LGA	LANGUAGES
Abaji	Dibo, Gupa-Abawa
Abuja Municipal	Gade Gbagyi
Bwari	Gwandara, Ashe, Gbagyi
Gwagwalada	Gbari
Kuje	Gade, Gbagyi
Kwali	Gwandara, Gbagyi, Kami

Figure 2. Languages of the Federal Capital Territory listed by LGA.

These area councils are equivalents of local government areas in other states of the country.

In addition, the FCT is quite strategically located in terms of connectivity and ease of networking for trade and transportation purposes. Figure 3 shows this proximity with regard to the strategic positioning of the FCT.

This accessibility is a blessing and a curse for the area as the threat to the peace and security in the FCT from the Kaduna axis has been heightened since 2021 with targeted attacks in and around the boundaries of the capital. Since this period, the Abuja-Kaduna expressway has become notorious and a dreaded passageway for commuters and travelers. These incidents have claimed many lives and devastated communities. In 2022 alone, there were significant incidents in the capital that sought to undermine and threaten the peace and security of the people and the state:

In the past year however, the threat of extremism has been amplified within and around the immediate environs of the FCT. From the map depiction in Figure 3, the FCT is prone to these threats by virtue of its location. The presence of terrorist groups in states like Nasarawa, Niger, Kogi and Kaduna, elevates the

risks to the FCT, in terms of extremist activities. The likelihood of this occurring is high as there are straightforward access roads leading from these high risk states to the FCT (see Figure 4 below).

• The foiled attack on the military base in the Bwari area of the FCT on 26th July, 2022, where media reports state that A captain and two soldiers of the 7 Guards Brigade of the Nigerian Army were killed.

• The Abuja Kaduna train attack which occurred on 28th March, 2022 was one of the most traumatic for the passengers and Nigerians. Besides being a clear manifestation of a security threat as reported in the Guardian newspaper of the 29th of March, 2022, it was a clear reflection of the fact that extremist tendencies were looming closer to the FCT and could spell dire consequences for the safety and security.

Extremism by simple terms, connotes a situation extended beyond normal or acceptable parameters. It is a concept that has been widely researched and discussed within academic circles and beyond. When paired with the word "violent", the concept becomes one referring to physical expressions or reactions,
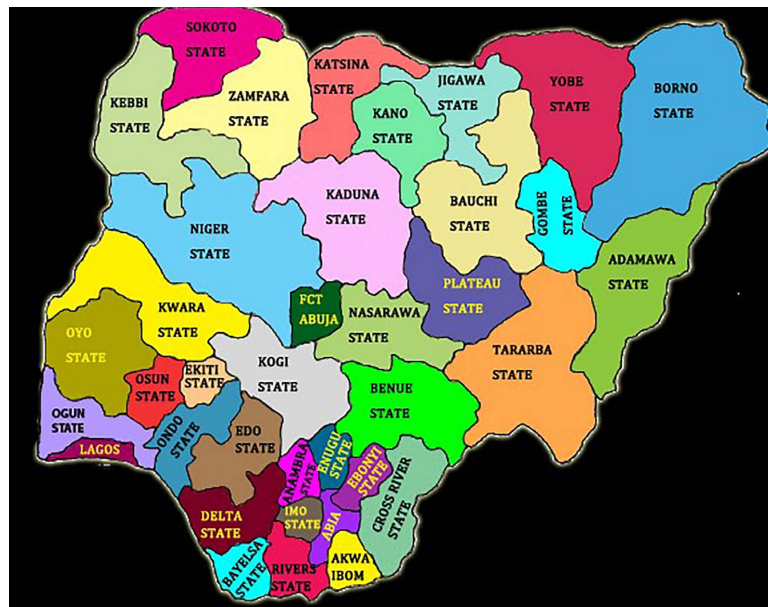
Figure 3. Map of Nigeria depicting states and proximity to the FCT. Source: News Express Nigeria.
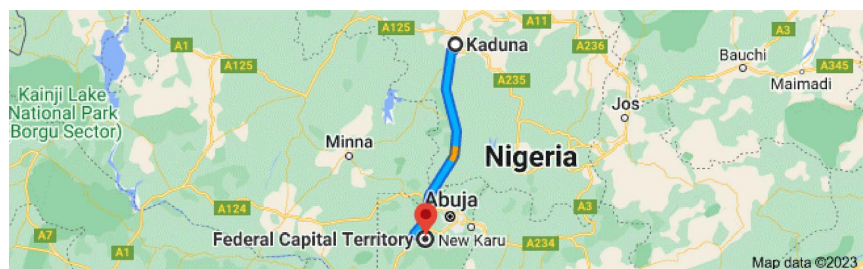
Figure 4. Map showing proximity of Kaduna state to Abuja, FCT. Distance covered in the map is about 213 km which is approx. 3 hrs 44 min. Source: Google map data 2023.

usually triggered or driven by situations that reflect inequity, injustice, exclusion, suppression and oppression, with no channels for redress. Ranstorp (2016) notes that "violent extremism can be best conceptualized as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite individual combinations". Although without a globally established definition, acts which largely accept, condone, encourage, justify or support the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological or religious goals, is violent extremism. Bötticher (2017) in his perspectives on terrorism, tried to generate a global thought consensus on what the definitions for the terms ought to be. By United Nations standard, the concept will do well to be defined by states in accordance with the peculiarities as they experience them. Where actions or activities reflect two or more of the key words in most of the accepted definitions, it could then be said to be violent extremism. While this is true, this paper appreciates the mélange of the definition proffered by Koselleck and Sartori as cited by Botticher as follows:

"Extremism characterizes an ideological position…and…exists at the periphery of societies and seeks to conquer its center by creating fear of enemies within and outside society. Extremism is, due to its dogmatism, intolerant and unwilling to compromise. Extremists glorify violence as a conflict resolution mechanism and are opposed to the constitutional state, majority-based democracy, the rule of law, and human rights for all."

It should be remembered that the concept of ideology refers to a set pattern of thoughts and ideas by and individual or a group, used as the basis for whatever political, economic or religious beliefs they may hold. Extremism is therefore born from the passion attached to such ideas and beliefs; whether positive or negative—in manifesting actions that reflect the beliefs. By so saying, extremism and ideology have a very intricate and convoluted relationship. From the perspective of Coleman and Bartoli (2014), extremism as […] activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a character far removed from the ordinary.

Pressman (2009) helps in clarifying the usually confusing terminology with reference to extremism. In a study carried out by Pressman in assessing risk of extremism in individuals in Canada, she distinguishes very clearly between the terms. Pressman's perspective identifies the fact that extremism is not an isolated segment; it is the key part of a sequence which must be considered holistically to make sense of the concept in total. For terrorism to occur, radicalization must first take place, as illustrated by the author in Figure 4. Radicalization refers to the procedure of having a distorted thought process; usually towards accepting an extremist belief. A 2007 study by the New York Police Department, identified and classified radicalism as having four distinct phases:

- A pre-radicalization phase;
- The Self-identification phase;
- Indoctrination phase;
- The attack or terrorist phase.

Emphasized by the study is the fact that there are sometimes, certain traits ex-

hibited in the transition process from radicalization to the terrorism. These traits include but are not limited to alienation and empathy towards terrorists, elevated sense of morality, and a clash of identity and high levels of frustration. They take time to inculcate and manifest before feeding into the next phase. Extremism therefore suggests, as shown by the author in **Figure 5**, that having accepted the ideology and the change in thinking, persons who are inclined to such tendencies will hold views that are more often than not, inconsistent with normal values and laws in the communities they are in.

This observation is suggestive of the reality that some of the incidences of extremism around the FCT may demonstrate that the people and the state are at risk of being invaded, by such nefarious activities taking into consideration the looming factor of frustration and aggression of the original inhabitants of the FCT. An example of such agitation was demonstrated by the residents as reported by Ndege in a news expose covering the Gbagyi fight for compensation over Abuja land in 2012 (Ndege, 2012). It must be understood that this aggression could be taken advantage of by extremists to lure willing minds. Hence, the need to situate in the narrative of the paper, the place of aggression and frustration as active drivers of violent extremism in the FCT.

The frustration-aggression dynamics provides that a group's frustrations could lead, invariably to aggression that could mutate into violence if left unattended. From the perspective of Akahalu (2014), "this theory explains that frustration is a huge conflict driver which enables the frustration-dynamics to convert distressed but powerful energies into aggression and violent conflict". Such violent conflict as defined by Frère and Wilen (2015). For Gandu (2016), Strategic Conflict Assessment of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) Report 2016 "…frustration and resentment… usually lead to aggressive attacks…". These frustrations are country-wide and situating the theory with **Figure 6** seems most plausible to the levels of threat from violent extremism in the country and the more imminent danger it poses to the security of the FCT.
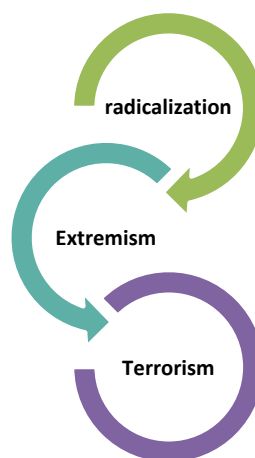
Figure 5. Author's representation of sequence of events leading to terrorism.
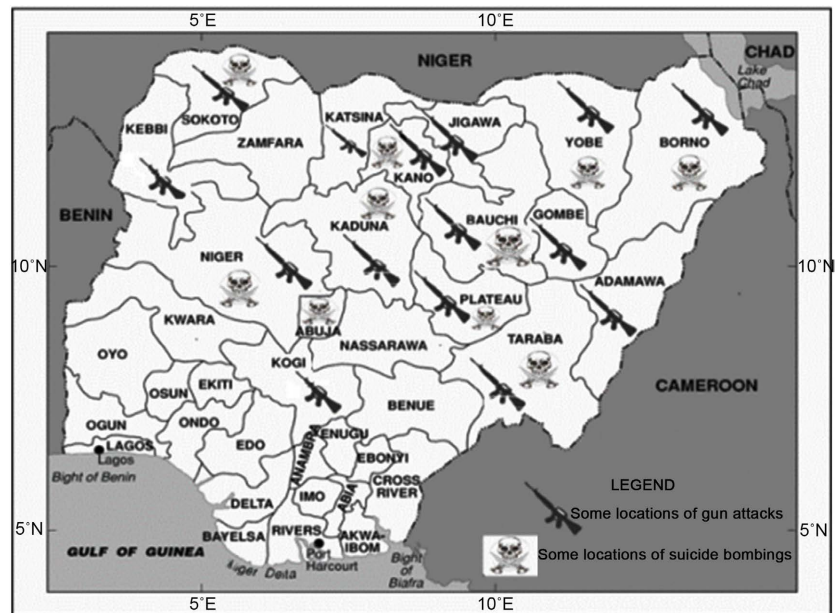
Figure 6. Nexus of extremist activities to the FCT. Onuoha, F. Boko Haram and the evolving Salafi Jihadist threat in Nigeria. Chapter 8, IFRA-Nigeria.

Within the context of the Federal Capital Territory, this theory is applicable because residents of the capital have made their grievances known in the media consistently. Reports are that the people are aggrieved mainly by what they perceive as government exploitation and appropriation of their lands, disregard of their traditional institutions and exclusion from governance (Premium Times Nigeria, 2017). Additionally in a newspaper report by the News Agency of Nigeria and the Whistler in 2021 (News Agency of Nigeria, 2021), the FCT residents made their dissatisfaction known to the National Assembly on matters related to indigenes with particular regard to converting the FCT/Abuja, to a state.

Given these perspectives, the basis for the application of the theory to the current situation in the FCT does not seem far-fetched. This becomes more worrisome considering that the radicalization process begins by using "local grievances to recruit young citizens in vulnerable life situations, suffering for instance from varying degrees of unemployment, low education and literacy levels". (United Nations Institute for Training and Research UNITAR report,) The indigenes of the FCT have made their grievances known on several occasions. As reported by Udo and Ekott in the Premium Times Newspapers (2013), residents made their concerns known to the media who started an investigation and unraveled that lands given to certain indigenes had been allocated to other non-indigenes. Adamu in a 2017 Premium Times newspaper column also highlights this concern where it was reported that the indigenes organized a protest over the invasion of their land, with complaints about Injustice breeds anger and aggression, which are bye-products of violent extremism. Previous academic narratives provided that violent extremism was tied only to religion and ideology as the push factors. In the present context however, we observe a different dynamic emerge; anger and aggression as the factors propelling incidences of

violent extremism within the area.

In its Zonal Intervention Reports (2019) from an IPCR coordinated field exercise for the Project, 2019 conducted in the Garki Chiefdom in the FCT, a town hall exercise, revealed that part of the dissatisfaction of the people was channeled at the government for imposing traditional rulers on the people against their will, forceful acquisition of their lands and generally, not responding to their challenges as a people. Along the same lines, a Human Rights Watch report (Human Rights Watch, 1995) from a field exercise on communal violence explicitly stated that "communal tensions per se are not the immediate cause of many violent and persistent communal conflicts". While they agree that they may be a key ingredient for such violence, "…they alone are not sufficient to unleash widespread violence. Rather, time after time, the proximate cause of communal violence is governmental exploitation of communal differences". While at one end of the spectrum is the issue of imposed governance cum traditional representation, the other end shows issues relating to exclusion and marginalization of the indigenes from the affairs of the state. The newspaper excerpt of Ezeh in The Sun newspaper clearly illustrates and provides a deeper understanding of this (Ezeh, 2018). The report stated that the Gbagyi indigenes approached the FCT authorities to complain of this problem with the expectation that their plight will be recognized and consideration given.

This is in sync with Dollard et al. (1939) who stated that aggression is always a consequence of frustration, whereby such frustration can be a precursor for, or to radicalization. This debate ignites research like Schmid (2014) where he questions where to draw the line between violent and non-violent extremism and the most appropriate strategies to counter the problem. Although studies such as that undertaken by Pressman (2009) provide that there is no set or collectively significant traits that define a terrorist, "high levels of frustration" still remains a valid prerequisite to radicalization and extremism.

The statistics and data available at the time of this study present as seen in Figure 7 (author's representation), that ethnic spread in the FCT has the Gbagyis as the highest spoken language within the FCT. Being that they are the original inhabitants of the FCT, it is their aggression that is mostly reported. According to the 2016 SCA report of the IPCR, the languages spoken in the FCT are Dibo, Gupa-Abawa, Gade, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Ashe, Gbari, and Kimi.

The FCT is prone to influence of violent extremism by virtue of its geographical location, the nature of the conflicts that have characterized it within the last 2 years and also by religious, rather than ethnic spread. Daily tracking of conflicts within the FCT within the period as stated above reveal that in 2022, there was twice the level of terror related conflict and violence recorded as opposed to that recorded in 2020. From its observations of the aforementioned threats, ACLED, by way of illustration in Figure 8, has highlighted the combined threats to security in Nigeria. What this shows for the purposes of the specific context of this paper is that, the threats are real and of serious worry and concern especially for the FCT as dynamics are getting more widespread.
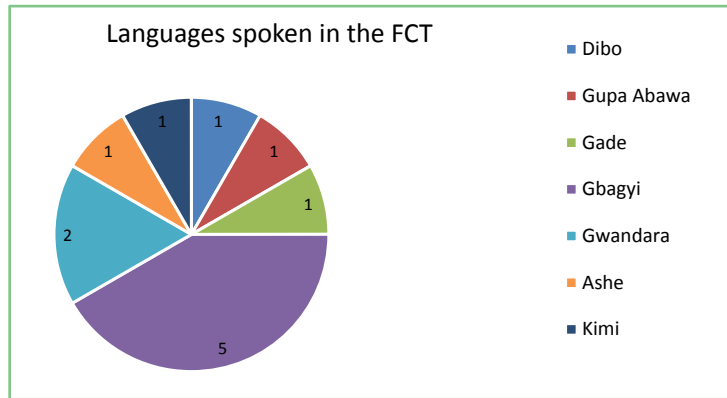
Figure 7. Author representation of ethnic spread (by languages) in the FCT.
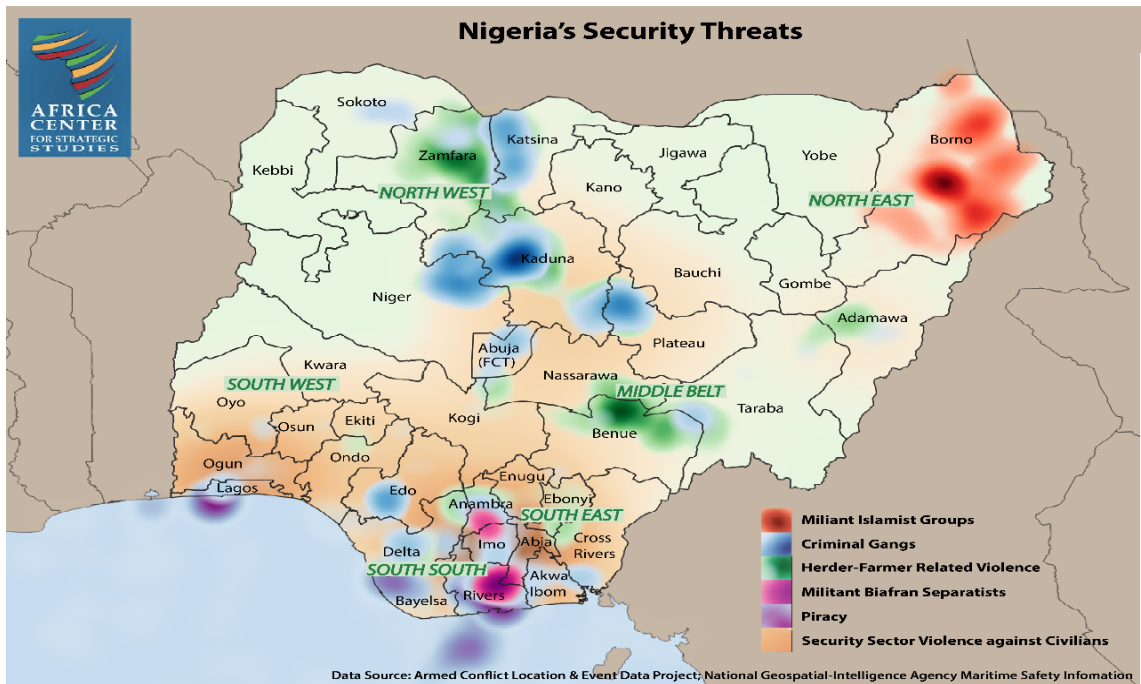

Figure 8. Nigeria's security threats by geographical location. Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED).

According to reports from ACLED in the first quarter of 2022, the most known and identified terror groups in the country, Boko Haram and ISWAP, have decentralized their activities and moved from the epicenter of the northeast, to set up various camps "in areas closer to the Federal Capital Territory". States such as Katsina, Kaduna, Plateau and Niger have and are witnessing increased banditry activities and increasingly, some of these militias are finding their way into the FCT. A published study on Terrorism and Banditry in Nigeria by Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Foundation in 2021, revealed that although bandits operate "in independent clusters" their membership is not restricted to any ethnic groups; membership spans all the major ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria and non-Nigerians.

Assessing threats involves a good understanding from the perspectives of in-

tention and capability. Further, to determine the possibility, probability and level of risk is to be aware, and limit dimensions to ethnicity and religion, because its location in the North Central zone exposes the FCT to the multi-faceted and usually complex conflict dynamics present in the area; fierce competition over land and resources, made even more delicate by religion and ethnicity. This is largely due to the fact that the herding community are mainly of the Islamic faith and of Fulani extraction while the farmers are more often than not, Christian and of a different ethnicity; usually, Gbagyi.

Quite unfortunate to this discourse is the lack of adequate data required and specific for in-depth analysis and explanation. To this end, Figure 9 is the author's representation of the data information as researched. However, the core concern here remains of consequence to the academic and research world as it exposes the gaps associated with the topic and the area in general.

2.2. Ethnic and Religious Dimensions of Extremism in the FCT

As previously discussed in the earlier part of the paper, demographic statistics reveal the Gbagyis are the predominant ethnic group within the FCT. Despite their grievances towards the perceived ill treatment from the government, there are no known or identified ethnic militia groups operating within the area. However, the threat remains because the incidences of such groups are operating dangerously close to the FCT and fears are haboured that there could be instances of "imported" violence as being witnessed in states like Niger.

As established by a study on Terrorism and Banditry in Nigeria: The Nexus, conducted by the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Foundation revealed "the origin of banditry in Niger state is not directly traceable to farmers-pastoralists conflict but rather the state invasion by dislodged bandits from the Kaduna side… Essentially, banditry was imported into the state and has since spread to various communities in the state".

The risks associated with violent extremism from an ethnic dimension in the FCT presents as low so far. Study of literature and current research validate that insurgents are usually of the Hausa/Fulani/Kanuri (Goodluck Jonathan Foundation, 2021) tribe; bearing in mind that ethnic affiliations are not necessarily a
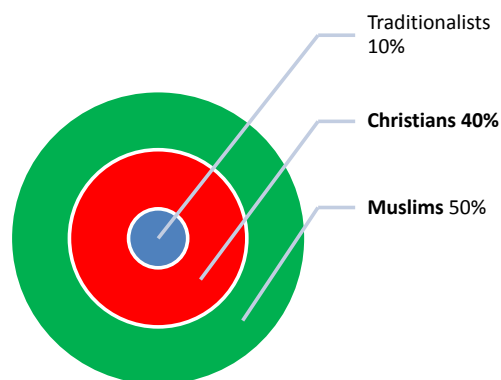
Figure 9. Religions in the FCT. Source: Author.

strong factor for extremism. More so, there have been no situations that reflect otherwise as yet in the FCT. The FCT has a diluted ethnic population spread that reduces the risk of extremism from an ethnic perspective. However, the threat tilts more towards the fear that there may be pockets of extremist cells that operate by radicalizing groups; fact that the people may be influenced by extremists due to their economic situation; presenting an outlet for expressing their grievances with the government.

Other factors that could allow for this influence are poverty and illiteracy. As expressed in the outcome of the New York study and explained above, extremism is the second stage after radicalization. This is the most unpredictable phase in the cycle, where economic situations may give access to radicalism and propel extremist tendencies. Studies have proven that social situations where people feel disenfranchised or marginalized have contributed as factors that may compel individuals to be extreme.

Taking this into consideration therefore, the current ethnic distribution in the FCT as explained previously, none have been shown to demonstrate strongly either intention or capability to be extreme so far. With this being said however, it must be reiterated that the concept is quite fluid and elusive. Succinctly put by Bamidele (2016) profiling premised on such general assumptions as ethnicity, race, religion, sex or socio-economic statuses are discriminatory and ineffective. What the FCT is still suffering is occasions of violence that are more associated with banditry than with extremism although there are now established studies that reflect a pattern and nexus between both activities.

Despite the fact that there is no single profile or pathway for radicalization or even speed at which it happens, there is the concern as relates to vulnerability. This is a more psychological perspective whereby behavior is observed to identify signs of radicalization which include but are not limited to sudden behavioral changes associated with drastic decisions on family relationships, sudden withdrawals from food or education and other introverted or isolative patterns.

From a religious perspective, the threat could be said to be slightly different. The FCT is located in the north central which is reported to have more Muslims than persons of other religions, as represented by the author in Figure 9). Recruitment tactics in the past were targeted at Muslims who were on a quest for higher spiritual enlightenment, and who at the same time, felt oppressed and abandoned by the government. Presently, strategies for recruitment are primarily through taking advantage of persons who feel marginalized or disenfranchised in any way.

A clear representation of this fact is in the outcome of the study by the UNDP (UNDP, 2017) on investigating violent extremism in Africa, where it has been discovered that religion has ceased to be a "key driver" for recruitment as extremists. It is reported that as opposed to 40% from the initial study, the 2023 publication puts the statistic at a 17% range. Even with these figures, the likelihood of success is tied to the level of threat attached to the religion. That is "when

religion operates as a powerful expression of individual and group identity and offers a way to channel existing grievances and perceived threats, the likelihood of recruitment increases".

Bakut and Ochogwu (2021) note expressly that: "Radicalization is not a threat to society if it is not connected to violence or other unlawful acts, such as incitement to hatred, as legally defined in compliance with international human rights law".

Initially, radicalization that led to extremist activities were premised on ethnicity—individuals predominantly of Hausa-Fulani extraction and of Islamic religion. This trend has changed; there are no particular ethnic groups targeted to be initiated into extremist groups. What is needed is a marginalized set of people who exhibit in any form, vulnerability with intent and capability for organized crime and extreme violence.

Recent studies conducted by the IPCR on the incidence and fatality of violent conflict in Northcentral (1997-2020, Figure 10), reveal that the FCT recorded one of the lowest numbers for the studied variables within the period, compared to the neighboring states. In spite of the recent activities in and around the FCT such as the train attack, the ambush of the military formation in Bwari and other pockets of violence, the FCT has remained just beneath the radar of being a hotspot for violent extremism.

This is largely due to the formidable security presence and a largely diverse religious population. In addition, is the fact that the conditions conducive to such violent extremism are still infertile and insufficient to coalesce into factors that can allow for extremist mobilization, as has been explained in the preceding paragraphs.

3. Government's Response to Threats of Extremism

Many of the dynamics discussed are not unknown to the government of the FCT; the cries of injustice from the people with regard to access to resources and
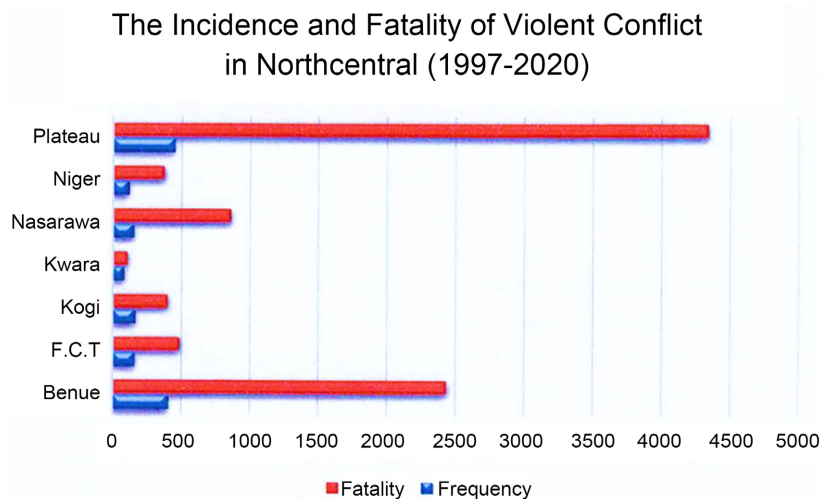
Figure 10. Incidence and fatality of violent conflict in Northcentral Nigeria (1997-2020).

addressing their most pressing needs, especially at the community level. A key informant interview revealed that providing indigene communities with basic infrastructure needs, such as potable water, motorable roads, medical facilities and schools has helped in mitigating the pressure from external influences that could have taken advantage of these lapses to intensify extremist recruitments. In addition, state government efforts have intensified from the security point of view. Since accepting the reality of terrorist activities in Nigeria, the government enacted the Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act (2013), in a bid to have statutory backing for the trial and prosecution of all those who are associated with any acts of terrorism.

Response from the government in the past was hard power driven; deployment of the military and other security forces to subdue incidences of violent extremism. More recently however, the government experimented with the notion of amnesty which came into effect in June 2009. The program was directed to the Niger Delta region to address youth restiveness and the problems of insecurity in the region. While the mechanism recorded a measure of success for the agitations in the Niger Delta, it was more challenging when applied to insurgency.

As part of its response, also, the government articulated its ideas with regard to the issues in a document, the Nigeria National Security Strategy (2019); a policy document that provides a general outline of the country's security concerns and at the same time, proffers solutions and suggestions to address the concerns. It broadly identifies the strong link between security and other sectors of the economy and therefore positions security plans round these sectors for a more effective implementation. Prior to this however, in 2014 (revised in 2016) was the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), which was a deliberate and elaborate strategy document with a focus on the root causes of the threat of terrorism in the country.

The greatest challenge to the strategy was that the root problems of insurgency failed to be properly and appropriately addressed by the government. Poverty remained high, illiteracy and distrust of the government by a large majority of the people, characterized the general concerns that caused the strategy to continually experience setbacks in achieving its goals.

Even with this gap identified, the people of the FCT cooperate with the security agencies in their bid to reduce the number of incidences of extremist activities in the state. Local vigilante groups have been commended for their efforts and collaboration with security agencies to combat the problem as identified by the report of the Punch newspapers by Odeniyi in 2021, December (Odeniyi, 2021). Some of these efforts have as reported by the press at various times within the past year and a half. One of the highlights of this synergy was reported by Premium Times Newspaper on 7th May, 2023, where the cooperation between local security operatives and the Police resulted in the rescue of 58 kidnap victims in the FCT. In August 2022, the Abuja Inquirer reported Abuja reaching out to local vigilantes to assist in addressing the insecurity with the FCT.

4. Conclusion

Violent extremism is real. It is a global threat that has found footing locally and the FCT is not immune from attacks associated with the notion. It must be understood that violent extremism is intricately linked with radicalization, terrorism and criminal violence. However, extremism has a higher likelihood of success where there is a clear and present danger that encourages marginalization, injustice, abuse or persistent violation of rights and disrespect for ethnicity and religious beliefs.

With the present situation in the country, the escalation of banditry and other violent criminalities, it will be irresponsible and terribly naïve to think that the FCT cannot be overrun or overwhelmed by extremism. There are early warning signs with strong indicators that are suggestive of the fact that extremist groups are trying to get into FCT, not daunted by the fact that it is the seat of government. The bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja in August, 2011 is a clear indication of this as are other attacks that have been experienced and recorded in the FCT such as the July 2022 Kuje prison break that had about 400 inmates freed including (allegedly), suspected Boko Haram members. Other locations such as Gwagwalada, Abaji and Kwali have been victims of attacks within the past three years and have not only heightened the concerns as have been raised and discussed previously, but also reduced the level of confidence and trust the people have for the government.

Presently, with the recent removal of the petroleum subsidy and its attendant hardship on Nigerian citizens, the concerns surrounding insecurity are heightened. This is with regard to the fact that the increment in fuel prices, transportation and food costs as well as other incidental costs, came with no palliatives. This government decision seems to have thrown the citizens under the bus as there are no palliatives or other options as yet given, to ease the burden. This is tightening the proverbial noose on the already choking situation Nigerians find themselves, especially with regard to the almost non-existent social safety nets the people have to contend with.

Even with this revelation, if the threat or risk of extremism in the FCT is to be subjected to numeric scaling, it will be put at four, considering the fact that the preconditions for violent extremism to thrive are non-existent, as yet, in the FCT. Conditions such as:

• An imbalance in the distribution of religious demographics: having an Islam-heavy population suggests a higher level of risk for violent extremism;

• A well-organized and secured environment with high intelligence and vigilance among the people and the security sector;

• Improved state efforts at repairing the fractured relationship between the people and the government.

Despite these conditions however, it is important that the FCT remains on high alert and at the same time, boosts its efforts at maintaining the safety of the area and the people.

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Conflicts of Interest

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