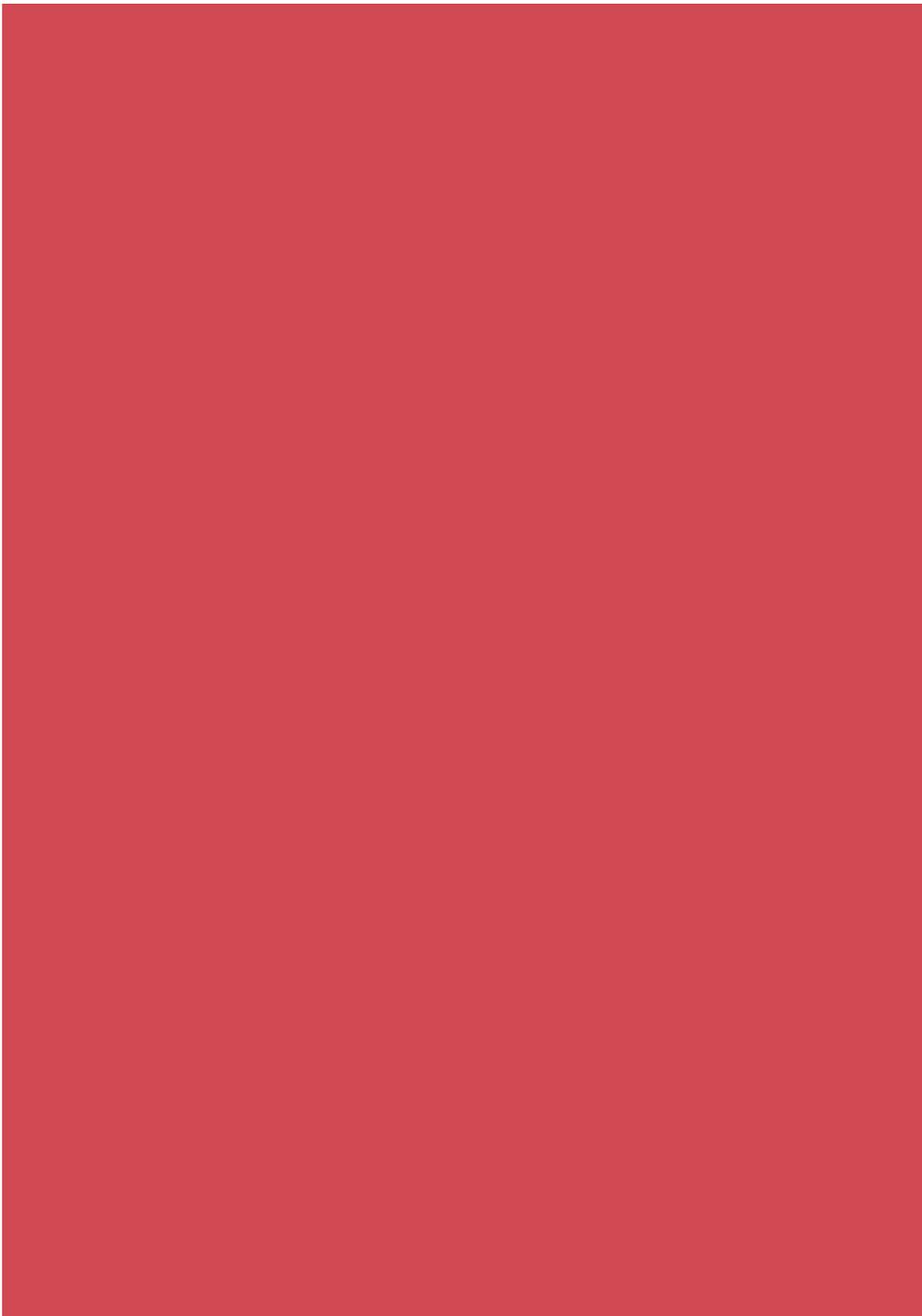




Understanding Boko Haram in Nigeria – Reality and Perceptions

Anneli Botha and Mahdi Abdile



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About the report

This report derives from interviews with 1607 ordinary Nigerian citizens, 60 individuals representing civil society working in areas affected by Boko Haram, and 130 former Boko Haram members in the states of Adamawa and Borno interviewed in December 2015. The report explores people's perception on who, why and how individuals get involved in Boko Haram and contrasts these perceptions

with empirical evidence. The report also highlights and analyzes the differences between male and female Boko Haram members. The research was funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Finn Church Aid (FCA), the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

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Summary

- Peacebuilders interviewed mistakenly identified religion (82,0%) and political reasons (44,0%) as the most prominent reasons for individuals to join Boko Haram
- Boko Haram respondents rather referred to the need to be respected and feared (23,5%), the need to belong (16,8%) and poverty or economic motives (15,1%) as primary reasons for joining the organization
- Peacebuilders considered poverty (26,0%) and the need to belong (26,0%) as the third most prominent reason for joining the organization
- Most Boko Haram members interviewed were introduced to the organization through neighbors (17,7%), at mosques (14,3%) and at madrassas (12,6%)
- Although peacebuilders correctly identified neighbors (18,0%) as the second most prominent recruitment facilitators, the perception of peacebuilders was that most Boko Haram members were recruited online (22,0%). None of the Boko Haram members interviewed had been recruited online.
- While female Boko Haram members interviewed were predominately recruited through neighbors (22,2%), most male Boko Haram members were recruited at mosques (16,1%)
- Family (12,5%) and friends (10,7%) played a more prominent role in the recruitment of male Boko Haram than female respondents. Resembling their male counterparts, 11,1% of female respondents were recruited through family, while only 4,8% were recruited by friends

Introduction

Although this study is not the first consisting of interviews with Boko Haram members, the study is the first that contrasts and analyses the responses of former members with the perceptions of both ordinary Nigeria citizens and civil society actors. From this onset, it is therefore important to note that the objective of this paper is not to discuss Boko Haram as an organisation, its operations within the region or its tactics, but rather to capture a snapshot of its members, their motivations and the recruitment process.

Secondly, considering the growing interest of civil society and foreign donors to address and find lasting solutions for the increased negative impact of Boko Haram in the region, the study will also present the differences between reality (as captured by those interviewed) and the perceptions of civil society actors (referred here to as peacebuilders) and ordinary Nigerian citizens. The perceptions of the former are directly used to plan the countering activities in areas affected by Boko Haram. The challenge faced on the ground is, that if these perceptions do not address the practical realities,

the efforts will not be effective. To achieve its objective of capturing the motivations to join Boko Haram and to analyse the recruitment process, this study chose to focus on primary research.

When inquiring into the reasons for joining Boko Haram, the study utilized all the research tools available, including social media analysis, citizen surveys, and qualitative and quantitative interviews with both peacebuilders and former Boko Haram fighters. Particular attention was paid to the potential role of religion in the radicalization and recruitment process. As will be discussed in the paper, the perception that individuals are drawn to Boko Haram by its religious ideology turned out to be incorrect. In spite of this, peacebuilders overwhelmingly considered religion as the main factor facilitating recruitment. Qualitative interviews with peacebuilders showed a more nuanced understanding of how Boko Haram managed to secure recruitment. Unemployment, lack of education, gender, and perceived religious and ethnic exclusion were also considered as factors deserving attention.

Research methodology

A structured questionnaire was used to conduct quantitative and qualitative interviews that included both open-ended and multiple choice questions, enabling both statistical and qualitative analy-

ses of the data. The interviews were conducted by interviewers with knowledge of the region, the local languages and the local customs.

Citizen Survey

The citizen survey included 1607 respondents (all Nigerian citizens) interviewed between October 20 and 28, 2015 with the use of electronic questionnaires. The interviewees consisted of residents of five cities: Lagos (316), Abuja (359), Gombe (319), Kano (313) and Yobe (300). Lagos and Abuja constituted 'control' cities while Gombe, Kano and Yobe States are in the epicentre of Boko Haram activities.

Respondents were divided into two age brackets: 751 of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29, and 856 were age of 30 or older. The respondents included 798 females and 809 males, 682 of the respondents identified with Islam and 912 identified with Christianity, and 1119 of the respondents indicated that they were employed and 488 unemployed.

Peacebuilders

Fifty quantitative interviews were conducted with individuals working with civil society organizations involved in community outreach and dialogue, human rights, humanitarian assistance, skills development, women and youth outreach, and in religious and research institutions based in areas affected by Boko Haram. These individuals will be referred to as "peacebuilders"¹. In addition to these quantitative interviews, an additional ten qualitative interviews were conducted with prominent peacebuilders in northern Nigeria with the following objectives in mind:

1. Understanding why and how these individuals got involved in working towards peace.
2. To get a better understanding of the perceptions of why and how individuals get involved in Boko Haram.

It is to be expected that these perceptions will directly impact on the peacebuilders' decision to implement specific counter and preventive measures and other intervention programs. The success of these initiatives will, however, depend on whether those most vulnerable are being reached. The real test will therefore be to find out whether there is a positive correlation between perceived and real motivations and profiles of those joining Boko Haram. The analysis aims to indicate the reasons for joining, as well as where and how Boko Haram members were recruited.

Assessing the Boko Haram sample

Age and Boko Haram membership

The common perception is that most Boko Haram members are adolescents or young adults. Adolescence is a crucial period when it comes to vulnerability for radicalization. Although different interpretations exist of the exact age 'adolescence' refers to, the period between puberty (ages 12 to 17) and early adulthood (ages 18 to 22) are considered especially formative for an individual's personal development. It is at this stage that a person is at his or her most impressionable and most open to outside influence, as at this age youth become increasingly aware of the social and political world, and at the same time begin the establishment of their identity and political 'self'.²

Despite this perception, the largest part of the Boko Haram sample represented the age group 41 to 50 years of age (30,0%) that included 32,0% of male and 29,0% of female respondents; followed by the age group 30 to 34 years of age (24,0%) comprised of 28,0% of male and 19,0% of female respondents. The youngest Boko Haram respondent interviewed was a female 19-years of age. It should however be noted that younger children also form a part of the organization's rank.³

Gender roles in Boko Haram

Of the 119 quantitative Boko Haram respondents, 63 were women and 56 were male. Thus the sample provided a valuable opportunity for creating a thorough understanding of why and how women get involved in Boko Haram.

When the former members of Boko Haram were asked, in which capacity women served in the group, the following perceptions

Boko Haram sample

FACTS International – Vibrand's local Partner in Nigeria – and the Strength in Diversity Development Centre (SDDC) – a local NGO – were identified as organisations able to facilitate access to former Boko Haram fighters. It was not until towards the end of 2015 that the team managed to identify areas where former Boko Haram members were being held.

In mid-2015 attempts to gain access to interview former Boko Haram fighters led the team to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in north-eastern Nigeria. Subsequently access to former Boko Haram fighters was secured by the efforts of the project partners in collaboration with the Chairman of Adamawa State Emergency Management Agency (ADSEMA), the IDP Camp Co-ordinator, Markoi Military Cantonment Camp, the Civilian Joint Task Force, and the Camp Co-ordinator of Maiduguri.

The first interviews were conducted in Yola (Adamawa State) between 21st and 22nd of December 2015 and included 50 quantitative and five qualitative interviews. The second set of interviews took place in Maiduguri (Borno State) on January 23rd, 2016, where 70 quantitative and five qualitative interviews were conducted. The fieldwork was conducted by a bi-organisational team consisting of experienced interviewers from FACTS International as well as social workers and counsellors from the SDDC.

Both FACTS International as well as SDDC were aware that the interviews were conducted with vulnerable persons. This knowledge resulted in additional safety and confidentiality measures. It was decided that FACTS would conduct the interviews, as per Vibrand's contract with them, and the SDDC would facilitate access, offer counselling to interviewees and set up broader rehabilitation programmes with people in the IDP camps.

The categories of respondents included: captives of Boko Haram who were released in military operations and kept at the IDP camps for protection from further attacks by Boko Haram and for preventing them from re-joining the group, and former Boko Haram members who were forcibly coerced into joining the group, but who fled upon the invasion of the military and took cover at the IDP camps.

Individuals who claimed to be innocent when captured by the military were released through the intervention of the state government and remained at the camps for rehabilitation. Women who had been abducted by Boko Haram, upon the invasion of their communities and villages, were also taken to the camps upon release by the military.

emerged. The perception according to the majority of Boko Haram respondents was that although women were largely responsible for domestic services (estimated at 57,0%); a further 26,9% of women are thought to serve as foot soldiers; 5,0% providing spiritual guidance and 1,7% are regarded as serving in leadership roles (see Figure 2). Though not reflected in this sample, women are also being used as suicide bombers and explosives experts (3,2%), intelligence (12,7%), trainers (1,6%) and recruiters (19,1%).

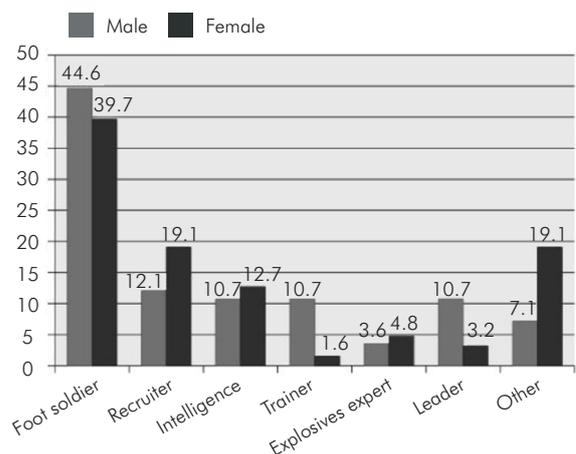


Figure 1: Roles of Boko Haram respondents

This sample therefore refutes the common perception that women predominately serve as wives, or that only women provide domestic support services, namely cooking and cleaning, as both male and female members apparently provide these services. Instead, within

the sample, women almost equalled men as foot soldiers, outnumbered their male counterparts as recruiters (twelve female versus seven male respondents) and intelligence operatives (eight female versus six male respondents).

Reasons for joining Boko Haram

The study of the reasons why individuals join a violent extremist organisation has been one of the most contentious topics in the study of radicalisation. This section starts by first describing the perceptions of non-former members as to why they believe an individual might be vulnerable to recruitment, followed by the actual reasons as described by former Boko Haram respondents. Lastly, the different reasons of male and female Boko Haram members will be analysed.

Religion

In addition to the religious divide between the Christian south and Muslim north, periodic violence has had a tendency to break out along ethnic, religious and communal fault lines, particularly in response to deep underlying fear of domination by another group.⁴ The overall perception is that Muslims in northern Nigeria feel economically and politically marginalized – especially when the country is headed by a Christian president, for example former president Goodluck Jonathan – and that ethnically-associated religious fervor offers an outlet to these frustrations. With this in mind, respondents were asked to specifically indicate why they believe people are drawn to Boko Haram.

Peacebuilders in particular considered religion to be the most prominent reason (82,0%) why individuals were initially attracted to the ideology that Boko Haram presents. In contrast 8,1% of citizens participating in the citizen survey recognised a link between religion and a person's decision to join Boko Haram.

In contrast to the perception amongst peacebuilders and citizens participating in the citizen survey, only 9,2% of Boko Haram respondents identified religion as a reason for joining Boko Haram. Moreover from the interviewed citizens only (5,0%) considered religion as playing a role in other people's decision to join Boko Haram.

In other words, while religion provides an obvious backdrop to the activities of Boko Haram, neither citizens nor Boko Haram members themselves cite it as a pre-eminent or even a dominant reason for joining Boko Haram. For example, 54,0% of citizens said religion had little or no influence on people's decision to join Boko Haram. According to the regression analysis on the citizen survey data, those who received some form of education are far less likely to cite religion as an important determining factor in whether or not someone will join Boko Haram.

Secondly, Christians are more likely to refer to religion as the only influence (11,2%) when compared to Muslim respondents (8,2%). However both Christians (39,1%) and Muslims (40,6%) recognized that religion had a strong influence in people's decision to join the organization. While this may be a defensive position, it is likely to be because Muslims appreciate the nuanced nature of the decision.

This being said, peacebuilders that were interviewed felt that the incorrect interpretation of Islam was a key factor. It does, however, suffice to say that peacebuilders themselves tend to operate in a paradigm that emphasises the role of religion out of proportion to its actual level of influence. For example, according to Maryam Ibrahim (one of the peacebuilders that were interviewed):

"[We] need to ensure that religious leaders preach the correct message; those who spread a message of hate and radicalization are wrong and do not help our cause. Islam is a religion of peace."

The questionnaire also required respondents to specifically rate the role religion plays in Boko Haram. Although religion did not play a decisive role in people's decision to join the organization, it influenced the inner workings of the organization as 43,0% of former Boko Haram fighters indicated that religion had a strong influence – the most telling in this part of the results.

In contrast herewith, although 82,0% of peacebuilders indicated that religion played a role in people's decision to join Boko Haram,

only 46,0% considered religion to be a factor in the organization's activities. Individuals participating in the citizen survey were the least convinced that religion played a perceptible role in the organization (54,1%).

Identifying religion as the most prominent factor facilitating recruitment amongst civil society was emphasised in a study commissioned by The United States Institute of Peace (SIP) in 2013. The study noted that 'in all the states surveyed, there is unanimity that initial ignorance of religious teaching is the leading factor influencing the adoption of extreme religious views, especially among youth.'⁵

Likewise, in its study Mercy Corps stated that 'Religion was a thread that ran through many stories of youth choosing to join. Many recruits spoke about wanting to become more devout, or being drawn to a promise of paradise'.⁶ Former male Boko Haram respondents regarded religion to have been a strong influence (50,0%), while in comparison, only around 36,5% of former female Boko Haram respondents held similar views. At the other end of the spectrum, 33,3% of female and 23,2% of male respondents indicated that religion played little or no role in the organization.

On the topic of religious indoctrination, both Muslim and Christian peacebuilders agreed that Boko Haram does not follow the true teaching of Islam, and that many Boko Haram members are indoctrinated to believe they are fighting for Islam, as those vulnerable to such indoctrination are not familiar enough with the teachings of the Qur'an to know better. For example, according to Dr. Arthur Martins (one of the peacebuilders)

"They [Boko Haram] join for a religious aim, yes, but only because they do not know the teaching of peace and have been indoctrinated by bad ideology."

The interviews with the Boko Haram fighters supported this narrative as one respondent highlighted:

"First of all, we were carried away by the name of Islam, we were told to go and do Jihad (holy war) after that we came to discover that it was a deceitful way of introducing us into another part of the world. Poverty, lack of money is what induces us to join Boko Haram."

Another respondent explained:

"Like I told you, we were thinking we will embark on the true Muslim Jihad (Holy War) but later on came to discover that, even your father or mother was not safe from it. My own view was to do Jihad (Holy War) but some other people may have their own view, different from mine. Some persons' may be because of poverty, some may be because of idleness or unemployment."

Despite being disillusioned, the fact that recruiters managed to sell Boko Haram to their recruits as an organization representing Islam and thus justify the killing of fellow Nigerians, provides reason for concern. However, at the same time it would be a mistake not to consider decades of inter-communal conflict based on religious and ethnic affiliation as something that forms a central component in the Nigerian psyche.

It is especially this lack of religious understanding that motivated many religious leaders identified as peacebuilders to take their responsibilities seriously. As another peacebuilder, Imam Nura Imam explained in an interview:

“If there is no peace then there will be no progress. And my religion teaches that peace empowers people. It is the responsibility of every Imam to see that people live in peace.”

Economic circumstances as a reason for joining Boko Haram

Poverty, the employment opportunities presented by Boko Haram, being frustrated with life and the lack of education were categorized as important factors contributing to people’s decision to join Boko Haram. Figure 2 summarizes the perceptions of peacebuilders, citizens participating in the citizen survey and Boko Haram members about the role of economic factors in comparison to the reasons Boko Haram respondents identified as factors originally motivating them to join the organization. Especially peacebuilders referred to this category – following religion – as explaining why Boko Haram attracts recruits.

For example, for the peacebuilders poverty was identified as the most prominent reason (26,0%) driving individuals to join Boko Haram. This was followed by a lack of education (20,0%) and employment opportunities Boko Haram offered (16,0%). These perceptions are supported by Aghedo and Osumah, who noted in the 2010 census that Yobe State, the headquarters of Boko Haram has the highest unemployment rate (33,2%) in the country.⁷ For example, Farida Yusuf summarized the role that lack of education and unemployment plays in the radicalization process of Boko Haram members:

“They are frustrated; they either have no education and no job or they have a degree but cannot find a job. They see the successful and rich people and resent them. They want to kill them.”

Similarly, in a study conducted by USIP amongst civil society in Borno and Kaduna states in 2013, a high incidence of unemployment and poverty was highlighted as the second most important reason why youth engaged in religious-based violence; ‘In Kaduna state, 83,0% of respondents reported that unemployment and poverty are important factors. In Kano, 92,0% cited them as important.’⁸

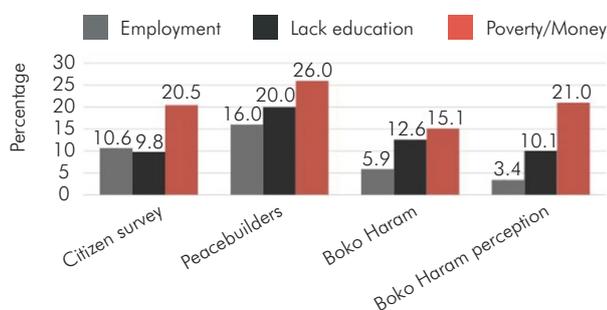


Figure 2: Financial reasons in joining Boko Haram

In contrast to above perceptions only 15,1% of Boko Haram respondents indicated that they had joined the organization because of poverty and the need of a salary, whereas only 5,9% of former members referred to the employment opportunities the group presented.

In contrast to above perception, 1,7% of former Boko Haram members considered being frustrated with life as a factor influencing others to join Boko Haram, while 5,9% of Boko Haram respondents were themselves drawn to the organization for this reason.

The perception amongst 16,0% of peacebuilders and almost 10,6% of ordinary citizens was, that individuals join Boko Haram due to the need to be employed. This perception was refuted, as only 5,9% of Boko Haram respondents expressed that they joined Boko Haram for the employment opportunities the organization offered. Instead 61 Boko Haram respondents were employed and 58 respondents indicated that they were unemployed at the time of joining Boko Haram.

On the matter of education, 20,0% of peacebuilders and 9,7% of citizens identified a lack of education as a contributing factor. Accordingly, for 12,6% of Boko Haram respondents a lack in education served as a reason for joining the organization. This highlighted the

Employment status	Female	Male	TOTAL
Unemployed	19	17	36
Student	4	1	5
Conduct odd jobs (working when the need or opportunity arises)	3	1	4
Professional seeking employment	1	2	3
Just finished tertiary education and seeking employment	1	0	1
Am a house wife	7	0	7
Self-employment	7	16	23
Agriculture (Farming)	14	9	23
Private sector	2	4	6
Government (public service)	1	6	7
Civil society	0	1	1

Table 1: Employment status of Boko Haram respondents at the time of joining

importance of education in securing a better life with multiple opportunities, while developing the ability to question the education level of the Boko Haram sample became an important indicator.

Of the 119 Boko Haram respondents, the majority (56,0%) had not finished secondary school, while 10,0% did not receive any form of education. Amongst the remaining 44,0% only 2,0% completed secondary school, vocational training (29,0%) and fewer had university degrees (2,0%). Breaking these figures down, comparing former male and female Boko Haram members, most female respondents were better educated than their male counter parts (table 2).

Education level	Male	Female
Primary school	16	19
Secondary school	10	10
Finish secondary school	0	2
College / Polytechnic	6	7
University	2	0
Vocational training	15	20
No formal education	7	5

Table 2: Boko Haram education levels based on gender

Personal needs

For 16,8% respondents participating in the citizen survey, the need to belong, as well as the need to be respected (23,5%) were identified as reasons explaining why people were drawn to Boko Haram. Overall, for 26,0% of peacebuilders interviewed, expressed that the need to belong was the third most prominent reason (after religion and political reasons), but equal to poverty and monetary benefit, in explaining why individuals join Boko Haram. This was followed by the need to be respected, feared and a need for prestige (24,0%).

The feeling of belonging to society contributes to a person’s identity, but it also serves as a platform to associate with others, contributing to self-respect or self-esteem. It is interesting that both ordinary citizens and peacebuilders were close in their assessment of the role personal desires played in the vulnerability of individuals towards Boko Haram compared to the actual figures; as 23,5% of Boko Haram respondents interviewed joined the organization to be respected, while a further 16,8% joined due to a need to belong.

It is however interesting to note that Boko Haram respondents’ perception of why individuals might be drawn to Boko Haram are the furthest removed from what they themselves identified; the need to be respected was placed at a higher rate of 28,6% (in contrast to respondents’ own experience at 23,5%), whereas a need to belong at a lower 12,6% (in contrast to the actual 16,8%).

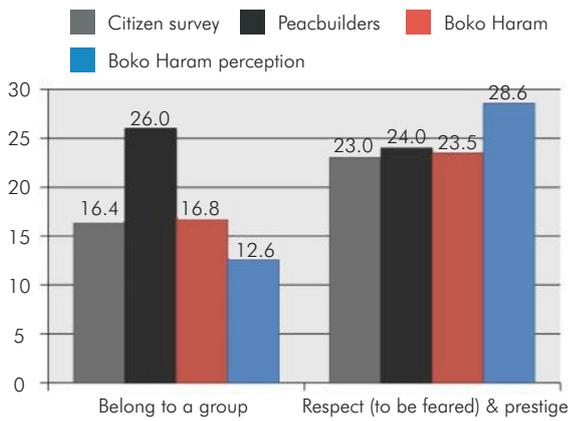


Figure 3: Personal motivations

The potential role an individual’s close circle of friends, neighbors and family might play in drawing people to the organization was also assessed. For 22,0% of peacbuilders, peer pressure explained why people joined Boko Haram. In contrast to this perception, only 0,8% of Boko Haram respondents identified either – pressure originating from the family or peers – as a reason for joining Boko Haram.

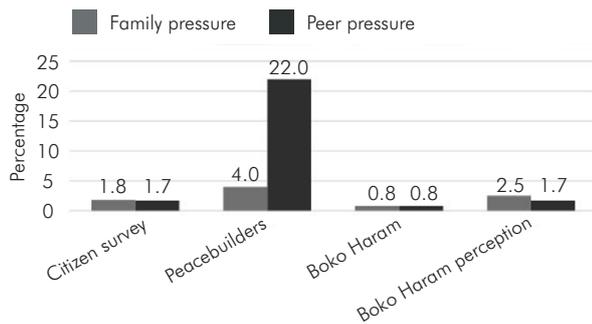


Figure 4: Peer and family pressure as reasons for joining Boko Haram

Although only a very small percentage of Boko Haram members refer to pressure from the family and peers as reasons for joining Boko Haram, the role of both, but especially of friends, will again be referred to in the recruitment process.

In addition to family and friends, the organization itself can also provide a sense of meaning and belonging. Consequently, friendships formed while being a member of the organization in some cases facilitated an increase in the sense of belonging after an individual had joined the organization. For example, according to one Boko Haram respondent:

“I was introduced to Boko Haram when its members attacked and invaded our village. We were kept under their custody for a very long time and as a result of that, they established an Islamic school, which we were forced to attend. As a result of that we became very close to them and that is how they initiated people by force to join them.”

In addition to the need to be respected or belong, other less prominent personal reasons included fear, and joining a violent extremist organization with the hope of it leading up to marriage. The expectation of getting married was however not cited as a prominent reason for joining by Boko Haram members interviewed, with only 1,7% of respondents referring to marriage as a reason for joining (see Figure 5).

Keeping in mind that most Boko Haram respondents were women, it is interesting to note that 3,4% of Boko Haram respondents

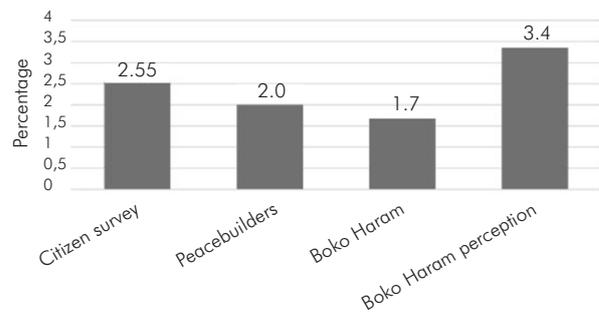


Figure 5: Marriage as a reason for joining Boko Haram

believed individuals joined the organization for the possibility of getting married. On the other hand, Boko Haram is known to have a strategy of kidnapping young girls to be married off to Boko Haram members.

The findings of this study are in line with a similar study conducted by The Mercy Corps which noted, that although Boko Haram has become notorious for abducting children and forcing captives to fight or carry out suicide attacks, not all recruits join against their will.⁹

Although recruitment involves the use of force or intimidation, fear leading to an individual pro-actively joining Boko Haram was rare as 2,5% within the Boko Haram sample referred to fear as the reason why they joined the organization (see Figure 6). Although fear did not explain recruitment, Boko Haram’s strategy to fill its ranks through intimidation and kidnapping has been referred to in a few earlier reports.¹⁰

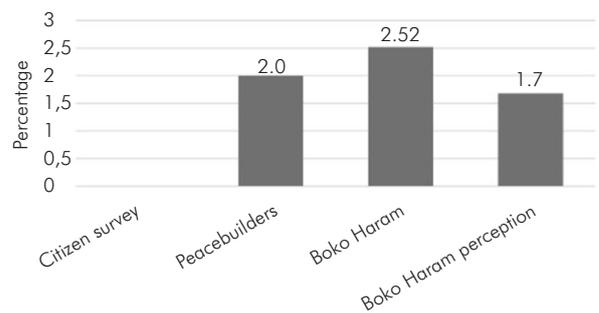


Figure 6: Fear as reason for joining Boko Haram

Although fear of Boko Haram might not have played a prominent role in motivating the sample to join Boko Haram, fear of government security forces – to be addressed under the next heading – played a prominent role in the recruitment process.

Political reasons and revenge

Peacbuilders identified political reasons as the second most prominent reason (44,0%) – after religion – for individuals to join Boko Haram. However, only 2,5% of Boko Haram respondents recalled political reasons motivating their decision to join Boko Haram, while

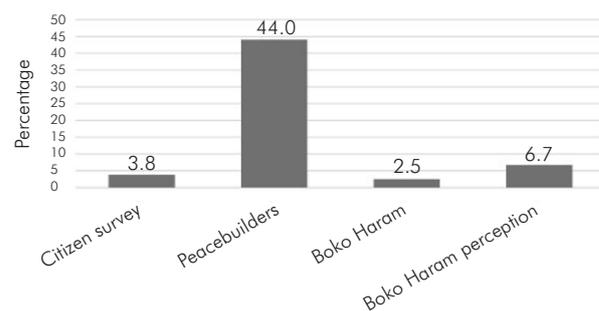


Figure 7: Political reasons for joining Boko Haram

6,7% of the same sample identified political reasons as contributing to the radicalization process of others. This result created an impression that although political reasons might not have played a central role in the radicalization of the Boko Haram sample interviewed, it still could be considered.

Therefore, political reasons did not turn out to play as prominent a role as perceived by peacebuilders.

Political interests are however only one factor. Other factors include trust in political leaders and the political process and also the relationship and level of trust between security forces and the populace.

1. Participating and trust in the political process

One of the most surprising results of this study was the degree to which Boko Haram respondents participated in the political process. Although peacebuilders were the most politically active group, with 72,0% voting in the 2015 elections, followed by almost 71,0% of the individuals from the citizen survey, yet 48,0% of Boko Haram respondents participated in elections. This is significant since members of a violent extremist organization, such as Boko Haram, are considered to fall outside the norms of conventional political participation and joining violent group is traditionally regarded as a manifestation of individuals losing trust in the political process. Yet, this assumption was not reflected in this sample.

In addition to the percentage of respondents who participated in elections, it is equally important to analyse the reasons why respondents did not participate, as reflected in Figure 8. Whereas the largest percentage (45,2%) of the Boko Haram sample did not have time to register, respondents to the other surveys expressed more severe reasons for not participating.

For example, 27,5% of ordinary citizens participating in the citizen survey believed that their vote would not have any impact, 21,8% felt that none of the political parties represented their opinions, a further 11,9% did not recognise the political process, and 9,8% did not trust the political process. These results are particularly surprising when one compares them with the reasons for non-participation expressed by the Boko Haram sample. The impressions that one's vote would not have any impact or that none of the political parties represent one's opinions as well as not recognising the political process and not trusting politicians are reasons more commonly associated with justifications for resorting to violence or other unconventional expression of political opinions.

In comparison to the citizen survey, only 12,9% of Boko Haram respondents felt that their vote would not have any impact, 1,6% deemed that none of the political parties represented their opinions, 6,5% did not recognise the political process and 11,3 % did not trust politicians. Although Boko Haram respondents appeared to mistrust politicians (with specific reference to the Senate and National Assembly) more than any other surveyed group, their overall trust in the political process is beyond the norm when compared to the opinions of ordinary citizens and weighed up against other extremist organizations¹¹.

When focusing on the gender dimension of political participation, a few interesting trends were identified when the answers of the individuals participating in the citizen survey were compared to the responses from the Boko Haram sample. Although women par-

ticipating in the citizen survey were less likely to have voted – 32,3 % did not vote in comparison to 26,5% of their male counterparts – female Boko Haram respondents were more likely to have voted (49,2 %) than their males counterparts (46,4 %).

For non-voting males participating in the citizen survey, the most prominent reasons for non-participation were that they did not feel their vote would have any impact or that they did not have time to register or go to the polls.

Voter apathy was also apparent amongst female respondents participating in the citizen survey, whose primary justification for non-participation was that they did not feel that any of the parties represented their opinions (26,0%) or, secondly, that they did not think their vote would have any impact (25,6%).

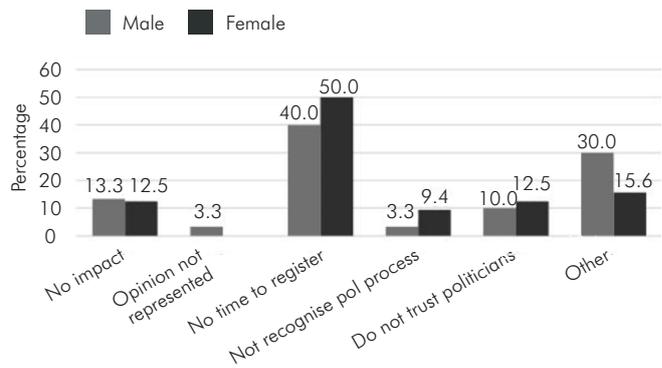


Figure 9: Male and female Boko Haram respondents' reasons for not participating in elections

It is noteworthy to bear in mind, that this study was conducted immediately after a presidential election, and the study found high levels of trust in the president, both amongst the citizens surveyed (35,0%) and former Boko Haram members (50,0%). Former female Boko Haram members were also more likely to trust the president (57,0%) than their male counterparts (43,0%). Trust in the state seems to be embodied in the president as a figure rather than in organs of state, with local government, National Assembly and the Senate all mentioned specifically (see Figure 10).

This highlights the strength of president Buhari's mandate, as well as the level of mistrust or distrust in government itself. In contrast to the norm in failed states, Nigerians are still participating in the political processes and still have expectations from the government. One of the most prominent issues raised for the government to attend to was corruption. While Nigerian nationals are disappointed in their government, President Buhari has provided a sense of a new start, of new hope – which needs to be capitalised through addressing the most prominent threat to security. By implication, the mandate of the president to deal with corruption and Boko Haram decisively is strong.

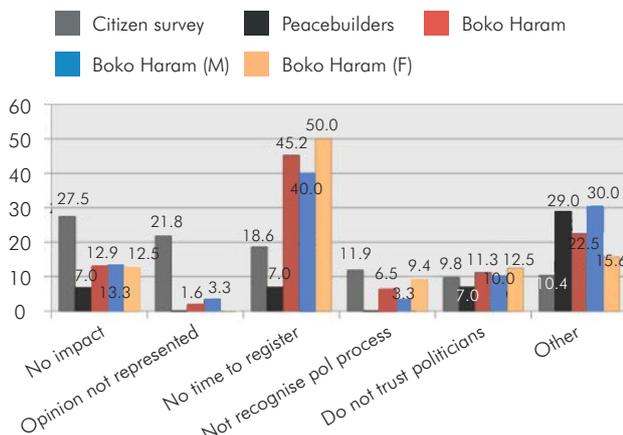


Figure 8: Reasons for not participation in elections

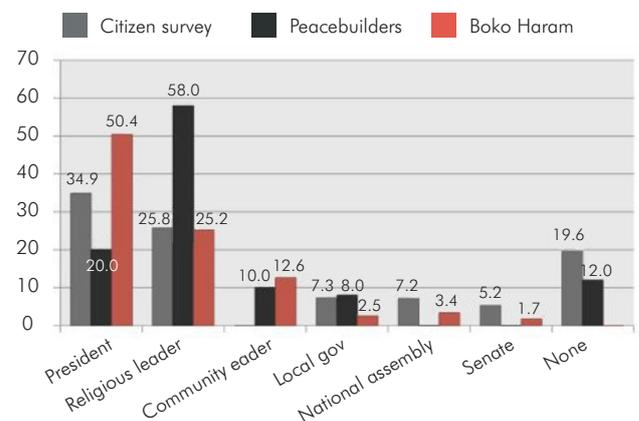


Figure 10: Level of trust in institutions

Trust in religious leaders is high (25,0%) and consistent throughout all segments of the citizen survey sample and former Boko Haram members. However a significantly higher percentage (58,0%) of peacebuilders expressed trust in religious leaders. As expected, the fact that many peacebuilders represent religious institutions most definitely impacts on this figure. Furthermore 12,6% of former Boko Haram members expressed trust in community leaders (higher than the 10,0% of peacebuilders) which emphasises that both religious and community leaders can play a positive role when working towards change.

2. Trust in security forces

A very large percentage (62,0%) of peacebuilders expressed trust in the police in contrast to only 20,2% of former Boko Haram respondents. It was interesting to note that 37,8% of former Boko Haram respondents, in contrast to only 2,0% of peacebuilders, would call the military when in danger. The reason for this might be because at the time of the interview, respondents were being accommodated at IDPs overseen by the Nigerian military against a backdrop of Boko Haram threat to retaliate against deserters.

Overall, around 42,7% of citizens would call on the police and 20,7% on the military when in danger. In the case of Boko Haram respondents, a high level of interaction were recorded with both the police and the military. These results however need to be analysed in context, as interviews were conducted with former fighters at rehabilitation camps, providing these individuals an opportunity to change their perception of Boko Haram.

Nothing distinguished whether males or females were more likely to call the police (see Figure 12). Female respondents were slightly less likely to call the military than their male counterparts; almost 22,5% of men indicated that they would call the military if faced with danger, compared to 18,8% of women.

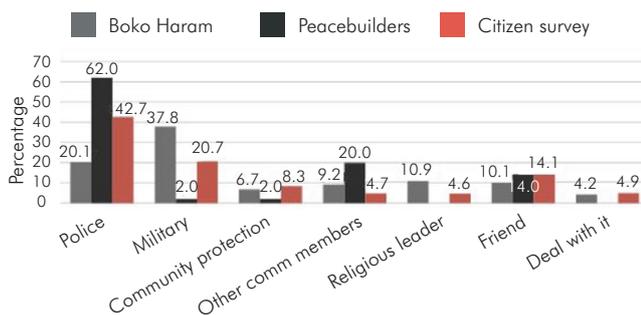


Figure 11: When in danger

Possibly in relation to the increased levels of militarisation in the North, respondents from that region, with the exception of Boko Haram respondents expressed more trust in the military than in the police. In contrast, amongst former Boko Haram members, 37,8% would have called on the military and 20,2% on the police. Breaking this figure down based on gender (see Figure 12), female Boko Haram members were far more likely (47,6%) to go to the military

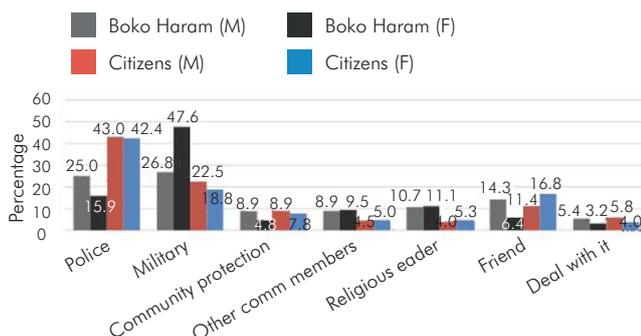


Figure 12: Gender dimension in Boko Haram and Citizens sample

than male (26,8%) respondents. Considering that religious figures normally fall outside the framework of being called when in danger, religious leaders played an understandably small role in the behaviour of respondents in this situation.

3. Revenge against military action and recruitment

The overall impressions amongst citizens in the citizen survey were relatively even in perceiving that military action had made joining Boko Haram less likely (35.6%), more likely (29.8%) and that it had no influence (34.6%). When looking at the answers from the citizen survey in further detail, regional differences were noteworthy. Respondents in the Northern cities were more likely to believe that military action has increased the likelihood of someone joining Boko Haram (36.9%) than respondents in Abuja and Lagos (20.0%). The perception among respondents in Abuja and Lagos was that military action had made joining significantly less likely (56.9%), compared to the perception of Northern respondents (20.2%).

Additionally, 40.3% of Muslim respondents versus 30.2% of Christian respondents believed that military action had no influence on people's decision to join Boko Haram.

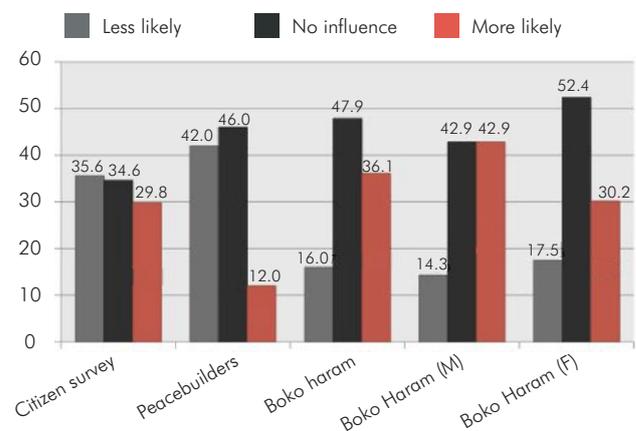


Figure 13: Possible role military action play in recruitment

Whereas citizens who participated in the survey believed that military action could precipitate a person's decision to join Boko Haram (29.8%), peacebuilders did not share the same perception. Only 12.0% of the peacebuilders identified a link between joining Boko Haram and military action, while 46.0% did not recognize any influence.

That being said, it was particularly interesting that the same sample indicated that a person's desire for revenge or retribution had a strong (48.0%) influence on their joining Boko Haram. In other words, respondents made a distinction in their frame of reference between military action and the wish for revenge as a consequence of a hard-handed response. Furthermore, only 14.0% indicated that military action had no influence and a further 6.0% indicated that it had little influence.

A positive correlation exists between a military or hard-handed response and a person's decision to join a violent extremist organization. Testing this theory 57.0% of former Boko Haram fighters identified revenge as having a strong or being the only influence in their decision to join Boko Haram. These findings are in line with findings in a study conducted by Mercy Corps noting that 'security abuses were a source of frustration in communities that Boko Haram exploited.'¹²

In a different question, respondents were asked to rate the possible role revenge plays in joining Boko Haram: the majority of respondents recalled revenge as the only (13.5%) or strongest (43.7%) influence upon their decision to join the organisation. In an open-ended question, former Boko Haram fighters indicated that the military is brutal, 'merciless', and 'pitiless'. In the words of one former Boko Haram member:

"They kill innocent people that are not members, mistaking so. I think they deliberately do so. So [people] join the group to fight the military."

According to another respondent:

“The military are very wicked, if Boko Haram kills a soldier, the military will kill more than 10-20 Boko Haram members.”

This position was even supported by peacebuilders who explained that:

“The military can kill indiscriminately; it makes people angry and they join to get back at government.”

Consequently, on the longer term, this potential effect of provoking people to seek revenge against the military should be avoided as only 6.7% within the Boko Haram sample indicated that revenge had no influence upon an individual’s decision to join Boko Haram.

Among former members, revenge directed at the state, and particularly at the Boko Haram security forces, influenced 50.0% of male Boko Haram respondents who refer to revenge as having a strong influence for them in joining Boko Haram. A further 12.5% of the Boko Haram respondents indicated revenge as the only factor influencing a person’s decision to join the organization. Female Boko Haram respondents provided the most reserved answer with 38.1% being of the opinion that it had a strong influence, while an additional 14.3% referred to revenge as the only influence facilitating radicalization and recruitment.

Placing revenge in context, 42.9% of male Boko Haram respondents versus 30.2% of female Boko Haram respondents considered military action to make recruitment ‘more likely’.

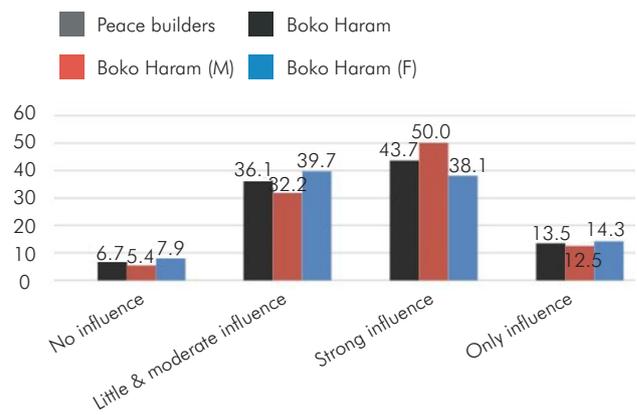


Figure 14: Influence of revenge in joining Boko Haram

An important conclusion to be drawn on the relationship between the type of response implemented by security agencies and radicalization is, that radicalization has less to do with military action per se and more to do with abuses by those agencies which contributed to a need to take revenge.

How Boko Haram members were recruited

The question of where and by whom Boko Haram members were introduced to the organization will be analysed under three subcategories: religious institutions, the individual’s immediate social circle, and the broader community.

Religious institutions

Religious institutions, especially madrassas or religious schools, are perceived – in particular by respondents participating in the citizen survey (21.8%) followed by Boko Haram members themselves (19.3%) – to be the venue where most individuals are being radicalized and recruited. Despite this perception only 12.6% of Boko Haram members (12.5% of male and 2.7% of female) were in reality recruited at madrassas.

Although mosques were identified by Boko Haram respondents as being the place where most of them were recruited (14.3%), it is important to note that more men (16.1%) than women (12.7%) were recruited at a mosque.

In contrast, neither individuals participating in the citizen survey nor peacebuilders recognised the vulnerability at these institutions. It is noteworthy that even Boko Haram respondents underestimated the importance of mosques in the recruitment process. Being a gath-

ering place, a strong possibility also exists that mosques are used to identify and approach individuals at risk without the knowledge and involvement of their religious leaders. Secondly, individual ‘fire-brand’ Imams, preaching on the side of Boko Haram, might play a role in facilitating recruitment, although their identity and examples are seldom available.

Other religious meetings were identified as the fifth most prominent venue and/or role player facilitating recruitment after mosques, neighbours, madrassas and the family as 10,1% of Boko Haram (12,7% female and 7,14% male) respondents were recruited at these events. Although 14,1% of citizens and 11,8% of Boko Haram respondents recognized their vulnerability, only 2,0% of peacebuilders expressed a similar concern.

Immediate social circle

In addition to above religious institutions, it is important to recognise the critical role personal interactions played in the recruitment process. Starting with neighbours as overall the second most important avenue for recruitment, it is particularly important to note that female Boko Haram members were most likely to be introduced to Boko Haram by neighbours (22,0%, this was overall the most critical

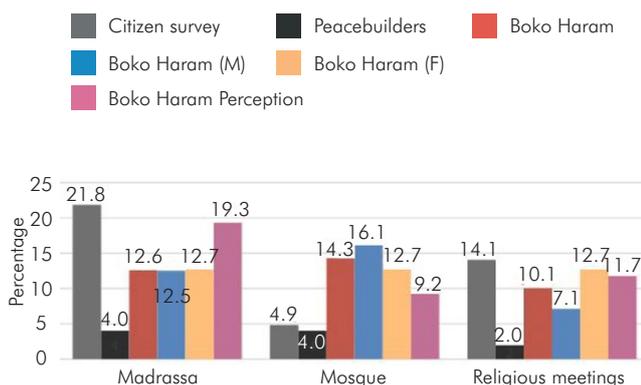


Figure 15: Religious institutions

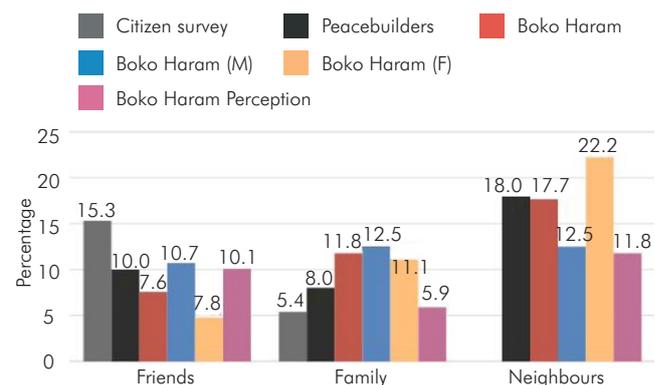


Figure 16: Immediate social circle

area where women were recruited) unlike their male counterparts (13,0%). Peacebuilders were the closest in estimating the role neighbours might play in recruitment (18,0%).

Neighbours were followed by the family, introducing 11.8% (12.5% male and 11.1% female) respondents to the organization. For example, in the words of another respondent:

“When I was in Bama town, I did not have any intention of joining this sect... There are few children that have decided to join, but for me I am not, until when my cousin brother invited me for a serious lecture one day, then from there I developed the interest of being a member of the group.”

Friendships facilitated the recruitment of 7,6% (10,7% male and 4,8% female) respondents. Although of greater importance in the recruitment of men, citizens overestimated (15,3%) the role friends might play in the recruitment process.

Broader community

In addition to being furthest off the mark on the role religious institutions play in the recruitment process, peacebuilders to a large degree overestimated the role the internet, including social media and schools, plays in the recruitment process. Whereas 22,0% of peacebuilders identified online activities as playing the most important role in the recruitment process, none of the Boko Haram respondents interviewed were recruited online. That being said, an additional 9,0% of ordinary citizens and even 5,9% of Boko Haram members were convinced that radicalisation occurs online.

Based on answers provided by Boko Haram respondents, schools were identified as sixth on the list of venues where recruitment takes place, seeing that 8.4% (8,9% male and 7,9% female) respondents were recruited at school. It is especially important to note that there is a particularly small margin between male and female Boko Haram respondents who were recruited at school.

Both community meetings and friends shared the seventh place as reflected in the recruitment profiles of Boko Haram members interviewed in this study with 7,6% being recruited at community meetings. It is however interesting to note that more female (9,5%) than

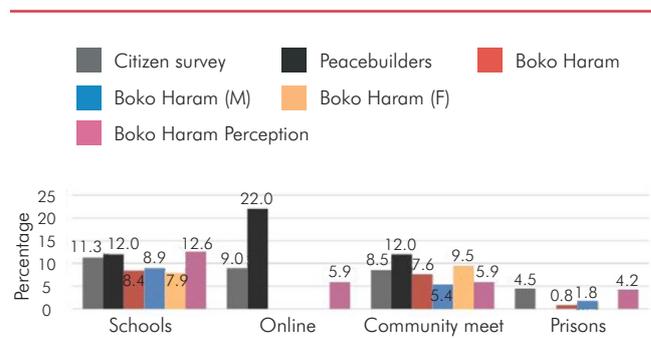


Figure 17: Broader community

male (5,4 %) respondents were recruited at community meetings. Although peacebuilders placed schools and community meetings on the same rating scale (12,0%), neither reached the same number of potential recruits as expected.

Although both Boko Haram and citizens expected prisons to play a more prominent role in the recruitment process, overall only 0,8% of Boko Haram respondents, and 1,8% of male respondents, were recruited in prison.

The results listed here illustrate a clear disconnect between what people think and what actually takes place. While a large proportion of citizens assumed the source of introduction to Boko Haram to be through madrassas, peacebuilders also identified the internet and social media as a medium through which recruitment and introduction take place.

In addition to where recruitment took place, as discussed above, it is equally important to briefly focus on how Boko Haram respondents were recruited: It was interesting to note that female Boko Haram members were far more likely to be introduced by force (17,0%) than males (5,0%). Furthermore, male Boko Haram members were more likely to report joining the organization as a personal decision (11,0%). Only 2,0% of females indicated that they joined the group out of free will.

Policy Recommendations

- **Engage and recognise the potential contribution** and added-value of religious actors. Religious institutions are trusted entities in Nigeria and hence have the potential to positively contribute to peace and security in the country. Since Boko Haram respondents in this study expressed trust in Muslim religious and community leaders (38,0%), these leaders should be engaged to help address some of the rootcauses and prevent young people from joining radical groups.
- **Provide assistance in the reintegration of former Boko Haram members.** Building on the fear former fighters had of Boko Haram itself, the successful reintegration of Boko Haram fighters could act as a bulwark against Boko Haram, and should be a priority. For there to be successful initiatives at the local community level, it is vital to consider strong local community and institutional involvement which could act to prevent against sympathy for and recruitment to Boko Haram.

Local communities' involvement also increases communities' resilience and identity. In other words, individuals see themselves as part of a strong community. By targeting these villages and/or communities, Boko Haram undermines this very sense of communal identity, and the void that it leaves draws people to it – even those that have been victimised. Proper protection and care for former Boko Haram members who are already in custody is critical for future reintegration programs, as many of those interviewed lived in fear of being hunted by Boko Haram and of the danger of Boko Haram revenge. Unless this problem is quickly addressed, it could be seen as a disincentive by those thinking of leaving Boko Haram.
- **Strengthen and establish trust in local governance.** Despite the long-held perception that Boko Haram is anti-establishment, there is strong evidence emerging from this study to show that some Boko Haram members might be persuaded to change course and participate in the political dialogue. As a result, good local governance and action at the local government level is crucial as it is an often-overlooked area of government and it is really where service delivery lies. Similarly, given the high rate of former Boko Haram (48,0%) political participation (especially in elections), it's advisable for the Nigerian government to consider entering into some sort of political dialogue with Boko Haram.
- **Reach out to former Boko Haram fighters.** Respondents explained that they were daily confronted with very difficult circumstances in not having access to basic needs such as food and hygiene. Even Boko Haram respondents, who were not forced into the organization, are disillusioned in explaining that there is a big difference between the messages preached by Boko Haram leadership that they are fighting for a religious cause and the reality while being members of the organization. In addition to threats directed at hardliners within the organization, emphasizing that the majority of Boko Haram members were victims, might sway those not feeling that they belong in the organization to reconsider their membership in Boko Haram.
- **Rehabilitation and reintegration strategies.** Disengagement from Boko Haram or being disillusioned about the organization should not be interpreted as the person being deradicalized. Even individuals who were kidnapped and forced into the organization (not initially radicalized and recruited into the organization) requires psychological assistance when returning to their families. Special initiatives should be developed to reintroduce former Boko Haram members to their families and the broader community, directed to address any suspicion and focusing on re-establishing trust.
- **Continuously assess recruitment strategies to identify changing recruitment and radicalization trends.** This study shows that most Boko Haram members were recruited in small, intimate groups of friends and family members – rather than by 'firebrand' religious leaders. It highlights constantly changing recruitment and radicalization trends, the fact that recruiters are adapting to the tightening security environment and that, more than ever, women and young girls are increasingly targeted by recruiters.
- **Gender sensitive counter initiatives.** There is a difference between the radicalization and recruitment process of men and women into Boko Haram. This was reflected in the different roles women portrayed while being part of the organization and how they were introduced into the organization. At the same time this study refuted the common perception that the majority of women were forcefully introduced into the organization. Even women who were initially forced into the organization might accept the organization at a later stage, similar to the Stockholm Syndrome. Consequently, both the Nigerian government, and especially peacebuilders, need to carefully consider gender specific PVE and CVE strategies.
- **Military action requires careful consideration with very clear rules of engagement, especially with non-combatants.** Too many former Boko Haram members interviewed referred to 'pitiless' military action and the need to take revenge for it as a factor that helped tip them over the edge and into joining the organization. Although ordinary and even former Boko Haram members welcome military action, the rules of engagement and overall conduct of the actions will determine the long-term success of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy. In other words, although the immediate strategy might be to re-establish security and stability threatened by Boko Haram, these initiatives should not be allowed to become counterproductive by provoking future radicalization and recruitment.

Notes

1. "Peacebuilders" refer to individuals, organizations, or entities who facilitate, moderate, prevent or mediate a process that seeks to resolve or prevent conflicts, political instability and assist in the formulation of just policies and practices that addresses the roots causes of past, present and future conflicts and political tension and instabilities.
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