Kidnapping for Recruitment: Unravelling Boko Haram's Unconventional Tactic

A Comparison of Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL Using a Most-Similar-Systems Design

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<tr>
<td>AMISOM</td>
<td>African Mission in Somalia</td>
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<td>CJTF</td>
<td>Civilian Joint Task Force</td>
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<td>GCPEA</td>
<td>Global Coalition to Prevent Education from Attack</td>
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<td>GTD</td>
<td>Global Terrorism Database</td>
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<td>GTI</td>
<td>Global Terrorism Index</td>
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<td>IEP</td>
<td>Institute for Economics &amp; Peace</td>
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<td>ISCAP</td>
<td>Islamic State Central Africa Province</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<td>ISS</td>
<td>Islamic State in Somalia Province</td>
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<td>ISWAP</td>
<td>Islamic State in West Africa Province</td>
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<td>KfR</td>
<td>Kidnapping for Ransom</td>
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<td>KfRec</td>
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<td>MSSD</td>
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<td>Psychological Operations</td>
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‘As far as you can, get into the habit of asking yourself in relation to any action taken by another: ‘What is his point of reference here?’ But begin with yourself: examine yourself first.’ — Marcus Aurelius, Meditations (161 to 180 AD)

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I am grateful for my Higher Power that allows me to be on this journey.
Abstract

This dissertation explains the reasons behind Boko Haram’s unconventional tactic of kidnapping for the recruitment of suicide attackers. To date, Boko Haram is the only terrorist organisation that uses abductees as ‘human bombs’ often without any form of consent.

The academic discourse has acknowledged Boko Haram’s unconventional Kidnapping for Recruitment (KfRec) tactic and suggested that Boko Haram’s martyrdom concept must have failed because of it. However, the academic discourse has fundamentally overlooked the underlying dynamics and motivations that can explain Boko Haram resort KfRec.

Using a Most-Similar-Systems Design (MSSD), this study fills this gap. It compares Boko Haram with Al-Shabaab, and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), three most similar terrorist organisations that only significantly differ with respect to the use of KfRec. This comparative method demonstrates that the existence of a martyrdom culture, the use of foreign fighters, and online recruitment and propaganda strategies are essential factors in explaining these differences. Overall, this dissertation concludes that Boko Haram’s Kidnapping for Recruitment (KfRec) tactic is the result of a shortage of potential martyrs, which, in turn, is caused by a failed martyrdom culture, an absence of foreign fighters, and a lack of advanced online recruitment and propaganda strategies.
1 Introduction

‘If heaven is so great, why don’t you become a martyr yourself?’

(Quote attributed to a Nigerian girl forced by Boko Haram to carry out a suicide mission, instead she turned herself in to Nigerian troops) – Author’s Interview with Abubakar Umar, Liaison Officer at Counter Terrorism Centre Nigeria, 7 April 2021

Terrorist organisations use kidnapping for a variety of reasons. The most common motivations are monetary gain (also known as kidnapping for ransom), the release of political prisoners, and publicity. Kidnapping for Recruitment (KfRec) is a less common phenomenon, especially when the abductions are deliberate attempts to supply an organisation’s suicide squad. To date, Boko Haram is the only (Salafi-Jihadi) terrorist organisation that employs this unconventional tactic; they kidnap women, children, and even disabled individuals and babies to force them to carry out their suicide missions (UNICEF, 2017; Warner and Chapin, 2018: 23). This goes against the Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups’ popular belief that their powerful ideology would ensure an endless supply of Muslims willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. As Islamic scholar and Boko Haram expert Abdulrazaq Kilani (2015: 106) notes: ‘Islam is not merely a vehicle; it has an engine that never runs out of fuel.’ Yet, such an “engine” requires maintenance. It needs a strong ideological narrative that can indoctrinate a society with the overarching belief that martyrdom is the ultimate privilege, supported by sophisticated propaganda and recruitment methods with global reach. Convincing a society that Martyrdom is virtuous and rewarded by social status, requires a culture that revolves around justifying the martyrdom operation starting with the indoctrination of its youngest members (Bloom, 2017: 184).

This raises the question of whether Boko Haram’s reliance on abducted human bombs ultimately means that the group has failed to propagate their jihad and convince Muslims that their death is worth more than their life. This dissertation goes beyond a mere acknowledgement of Boko Haram’s unconventional tactic. By comparing the methods of three similar terrorist organisations, namely Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) this dissertation aims to unearth the reasons behind Boko Haram’s KfRec tactic in explaining why Boko Haram uses it while other organisations do not.

The dissertation will approach the research question detailed below as follows: After the introductory chapter, Chapter two provides a of the relevant literature on the concept of Islamic martyrdom and Boko Haram’s unconventional tactic. Chapter 3 outlines the research design of
Chapter 4 will provide outlines and in-depth analyses of the three selected terrorist organisations. This will consist of a historical and socio-economic assessment of each organisation, as well as their attractive power and their recruitment and propaganda strategies. Chapter 5 will analyse the findings of Chapter 4 and will identify the explanatory factors through comparison to answer the research question. Chapter 6 will revisit the research question, and discuss the conclusions reached from the findings of the previous chapters.

1.1 Wider Relevance and Data

Boko Haram’s tactics have significantly changed since the death of its founder Muhammad Yusuf in 2009. Under Yusuf’s successor, Abubakar Shekau, the organisation adopted a more guerrilla style approach and increasingly started to use terrorism tactics aimed at soft targets. This new strategy of terror, intimidation, and death, also includes new tactics like kidnapping and suicide attacks (Onuoha, 2014: 2). It is a popular assumption that the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls on 14 April 2014 was the crucial turning point of Boko Haram’s strategy shift. The abduction of 267 students, some of whom are still missing today, caused severe public outrage but it also helped the group gain momentum. Michelle Obama’s hashtag campaign ‘#BringBackOurGirls’ arguably played into the hands of the terror group by gaining them worldwide notoriety (e.g., McKelvey 2016). Other authors place greater emphasis on the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and the Nigerian Senate’s declaration of a state of emergency in the three north-eastern states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe on 14 May 2013 (Mahmoud, 2018: 104).

However, these were more likely reactions to a campaign of Boko Haram violence that had been underway since early 2011 (Bello, 2013: 66; Onuoha, 2014: 4; GCPEA, 2018). However, there were other important incidents leading up to the Chibok incident which did not receive global attention and have been generally overlooked in the academic discourse. In early 2013, Boko Haram started a wave of attacks on state schools in Borno State, burning them to the ground and attacking, killing, or kidnapping its teachers and pupils (e.g., Hemba, 2014; GCPEA, 2018). This had the direct consequence that Islamic schools saw a significant upswing in enrolment rates and were able to raise their fees (The New Humanitarian, 2013). On 25 February 2014, Boko Haram members shot and burned to death 59 pupils and abducted an unknown number of children attending a boarding school in Damaturu, Yobe state. The exact reason behind these incidents
remains unclear but should probably be seen in relation to the increased presence of Nigerian security forces in Nigeria’s northern provinces, using schools for military purposes (GCPEA, 2018). These findings are important because they demonstrate that Boko Haram began their terror short after Shekau took control over the group.

There is a great deal of evidence that Boko Haram uses abductees for suicide missions, most of which comes from personal accounts of individuals that managed to escape (e.g., Dionne Searcey, 2020). The proof that other organisations (i.e., Al-Shabaab and ISIL) do not adhere to this tactic lies in the simple fact that there are no indications for it. There is, however, little specified empirical data on this. As mentioned before, kidnappings come in different shapes and forms and, more importantly, are driven by a variety of motivations. It is, thus, not of much interest if Boko Haram carries out more kidnappings than other organisations, but rather if their kidnap for recruitment purposes. To determine the primary objective of an attack or kidnapping is a difficult task. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) contains data on incidents of terrorism, including kidnapping. Each incident contains valuable information, such as the number of people kidnapped, whether ransom was paid, the number of casualties, and the target type (e.g., civilian, education institution, business, government, or military). These bits of information are important in distinguishing acts where the primary objective was to take control of people for recruitment purpose from acts where kidnapping is a mere by-catch. For example, if in an attack many people were killed and few abducted, it is unlikely that the main purpose of this attack would have been KfRec. Instead, an attack with KfRec as its primary objective would result in few casualties and a high number of abductees.

Figure 1. shows the average number of people that were kidnapped per incident in which at least one hostage was taken, from 2012 to August 2016. Kidnappings carried out by Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) is due to data collection restrictions attributed to Boko Haram (IEP, 2020: 16). Owing to ISWAP’s split from Boko Haram in August 2016, only the kidnappings between 2011 and August 2016 are taken into consideration.¹ For ISIL have been looked at kidnappings on the African continent from 2011 and 2019, and specific cases which have been explicitly attributed to ISWAP are also incorporated. ISIL’s kidnapping practices would not give

¹ Boko Haram became ISWAP in March 2015 when Shekau pledged allegiance with ISIL. Yet, Shekau was deemed too radical by ISIL which led to a split between Boko Haram and ISWAP in August 2016.
an accurate picture as their imprisonment of Yazidi civilians, sometimes with thousands at a time are also seen as kidnapping by the GTD.

![Figure 1. Average number of abducted people per kidnapping incident from Jan 2012 - August 2016](image)

It is also clear that the Boko Haram heavily contributes to the West African opioid epidemic; Boko Haram fighters are generally tanked on drugs and the suicide bombers are no exception (BBC, 1 June 2018). During various counter-terrorism campaigns in Boko Haram territory, the Nigerian government have seized large amounts of hallucinogens, dissociative drugs, and other types of drugs such as tramadol. Psychedelic drugs are allegedly used, sometimes administered through intravenous infusion, to befuddle their ‘human bombs’. An example of this was the case of a young Nigerian girl that approached a Borno state military checkpoint in 2017: ‘When they asked her to declare herself, she didn’t reply, instead she kept repeating this mantra: “you only die once, you only die once, you only die once”. As she kept coming closer it was obvious that something was very wrong. They shot her in the leg, she fell on the ground but continued crawling towards the officers repeating the same mantra, it was as if she was unaffected by the gunshot. They shot her again, she kept trying to come closer, until they opened fire and she exploded.’

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2 This author’s personal communication with Nigerian army official Abubakar Umar, 7 April 2021.
1.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

The observation is that Boko Haram uses kidnapping to recruit suicide attackers, often deploying them against their will or sedating them with drugs. In this sense then, Boko Haram differs from other, yet similar, terrorist organisations, and this, thus, begs the question as to why Boko Haram adheres to such a tactic while others do not. This dissertation aims to address the following research question:

What are the reasons behind the development of Boko Haram’s unconventional tactic of kidnapping to recruit human bombs?

Much of the academic literature acknowledges Boko Haram’s deviant tactic but largely ignores the possible reasons behind it. Scholars have argued that the organisation’s martyrdom concept is failing because of this unconventional tactic. This research project takes on a different approach and attempts to understand the group’s behaviour by comparing them with two similar organisations. This research question is, therefore, formulated according to an inductive logic – *What explains x?* – which denotes this dissertation’s ambition, namely, the discovering of the relevant contributing factor(s). This dissertation will investigate three topics: martyrdom culture, foreign fighters, and online recruitment and propaganda.

*A martyrdom culture* can be defined as the complete indoctrination of a society with powerful dogmatic frameworks which teach their citizens that an honourable self-sacrifice in the face of religious pursuit overrides all else, even life. Such a culture of complete submission is an essential component of Salafi-Jihadi organisations’ recruitment strategies.

*Foreign fighters* are another important constituent of a terrorist organisation’s suicide squad. The expansion of the target market, going beyond the local population and reaching out to a country’s diaspora and other foreign countries is also an essential component to draw new recruits.

*Online recruitment and propaganda*, particularly through social media, has become a powerful tool for terrorist organisations to disseminate and propagate their ideology. As radicalisation increasingly occurs on the internet it is therefore also important to investigate the organisations’ internet strategies. Investigation of these topics will lead to the following hypothesis:

In the context of a less prevalent martyrdom culture, the lower use of foreign fighters, and less sophisticated online recruitment and propaganda techniques, Boko Haram has, in comparison with Al-Shabaab and ISIL, a smaller influx of individuals willing
to become martyrs for the organisation and, as a result, has adhered to the unconventional KFRRec tactic.

As a corollary to this hypothesis, Boko Haram’s religious narrative is thought to be less prevalent than that of Al-Shabaab and ISIL, meaning that religious concerns are no longer paramount in Boko Haram’s struggle against incumbent forces and rival insurgent organisations.
2 Literature Review & Analytical Framework

This chapter presents a snapshot of the relevant literature which will form the groundwork for the empirical investigation. It will start with identifying the Islamic martyrdom concept, highlighting its origin and the existing controversy that ranges over the phenomenon (Section 2.1). This chapter will continue with outlining the existing literature on suicide terrorism and martyrdom culture, identifying three different levels of empirical investigation: the individual level, the organizational level, and the societal level (Section 2.2). From psychological profiling, group dynamics, and societal influences, section 2.3 will go into the existing literature on the KfRec tactic; it reviews Boko Haram’s practices and detects similar coercion strategies carried out by other organisations.

2.1 The Islamic martyrdom concept

Someone who dies virtuously in the face of religious pursuit is traditionally considered a martyr (Kitts, 2018a: 8; Cambridge Dictionary, 1995). Yet, the history of the word ‘martyr’ is much more complex. Despite an age-old fascination of the martyrdom concept, its deepest roots have been surprisingly overlooked within the academic discourse. The term ‘martyr’ is derived from the Greek word Martus (μάρτυς) which means witness. There is a general notion that Martus, in turn, comes from the Sanskrit word for ‘remember’ (Smarati), but a deeper etymological scrutiny raises strong phonetic concerns towards this point of view (Kitts, 2018a: 7). Robert Beekes (2009), an expert on the origin of the Indo-European lexicon and author of *Etymological dictionary of Greek*, claims that the term’s tu-s suffix does not have Indo-European derivation, and thus, cannot be originated from Sanskrit, but is rather a loan from Pre-Greek (cited in Kitts, 2018b: 268). The first reference of the term in Indo-European idiolect, Beekes argues, are Homeric Martys, reflected in the call for a celestial witness to oath-swearings, “wherein the gods are invoked as martyroi to punish oath violators” (Kitts, 2018a: 7).

Similar ambiguity is apparent in Islamic notions of martyrdom. Despite its fundamental purpose in the Islamic worldview, martyrdom (*Shahadah* or *istishhad*) in the Quran, especially in the military sense, is not the well-developed term as is commonly assumed. At best, it is an embryonic concept within the Quran, “not encapsulated by any single, specific term” (Afsaruddin, 2017: 162). It is widely assumed in the contemporary exegetical literature and customs that the term *shaheed* (شهيد) refers to the military martyr. However, Asma Afsaruddin (2017: 162) points out that *shaheed*
does not occur in the Quran in this capacity. This is to say that the Quranic Arabic meaning of *shaheed* is, like the original Greek meaning of the word *Martus*, a legal (eye) witness. Afsaruddin (2017: 162) goes to significant lengths explaining that the martyrdom concept was particularly “multivalent” during the formative stages of Islam. She claims that a Muslim who had died after a life devoted to Allah was to be considered a martyr, and the active pursuit of military martyrdom was essentially regarded as a deplorable act.

Nevertheless, modern jihadi terrorists have embraced the notion that the martyrdom pinnacle can only be achieved on the battlefield. More importantly, these militant Islamic movements do not just regard martyrdom operations as legitimate, but also highly commendable. This notion has also been voiced by contemporary Imams and Islamic scholars who argue that suicide bombings are permissible in jihad. Alike, Kilani (2015: 99) explains the Islamic martyrdom concept as ‘the highest form of *shahada*:’ the ultimate exteriorization of religious commitment one can make to Allah by choosing to die rather than to abandon the fight against the ‘hostile’ enemy. This fight symbolises the higher purpose of fearlessly propagating or establishing the teachings of the Holy Quran. As Arie W. Kruglanski (2009: 337) put it: ‘the motivations involved in suicidal and non-suicidal types of terrorism may differ in *degree* rather than in *kind.*’ This means that the main reward of suicide terrorism is the honorary status it bestows upon an operative, signifying the most propitious opportunity to receive ultimate veneration. In other words, the sacrifice of the self for the greater cause is perceived as the beginning of a journey not the end of it; the prospect of reaching the apex of cultural reverence can transcend all else.

In addition to this, Kilani (2015: 100) claims that some scholarship mistakenly portrays martyrdom operations as the equivalent of suicide (*intihar*). Unlike suicide, Kilani (2015: 100) argues, martyrdom is not a matter of death, but rather the fulfilment of the duty of obedience to the will of God. Kilani is not alone in making this plea: a wide variety of scholars have claimed that martyrdom operations do not fall into any category of suicide typology and ought to be regarded as a different type of behaviour (e.g., Abdel-Khalek, 2004; Townsend, 2007). In fact, suicide is strictly prohibited in Islamic laws. The Holy Quran unequivocally states: ‘Do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful’ (Quran 4:29); ‘whoever does that in aggression and injustice - then We will drive him into a Fire. And that, for Allah, is [always] easy’ (Quran 4:30); ‘Do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right’ (Quran 6:151). If the (Islamic) martyr ought to be placed outside the general scope of suicide,
how can the conscious decision to sacrifice oneself to kill others be explained? This question which has been subjected to extensive academic scrutiny in recent decades is addressed in the following paragraph.

2.2 From Suicide Terrorist Profiling to Establishing a Martyrdom Culture

Although suicide operations are an ancient practice, it has particularly gained momentum within the academic discourse since the 1980s/the modern suicide terrorist has commonly been traced back to the early 1980s. In 1983, Hezbollah carried out its notorious suicide attack against the US Embassy in Beirut and subsequent car bombings of US and French military barracks, leading to an estimated death count of around 371 people. These attacks formed the starting point of the burgeoning literature on suicide terrorism. Since these events, scholars have endeavoured to find explanations for the “suicide terrorism phenomenon”. More specifically, scholars have attempted to understand the motivations behind the suicide terrorist: who are these people willing to sacrifice their lives, and what are their reasons to come to such an act (e.g., Merari, 1990; Post, 1990; Pape, 2003; Pape 2005; Kurglanski, 2009; Bloom 2018)?

To this day there has been disagreement among political scientists and socialists about how to approach these questions. The academic debate on the drivers of suicide terrorism has manoeuvred between three distinct perspectives: motivations on the individual level, organizational-strategic level theories, and studies of the societal influence.

Early contributions predominantly inclined to explain the motivations of suicide terrorists on the individual level. Several scholars explored the possibility that suicide terrorists could suffer from psychiatric disorders. Jerald M. Post (1990: 27) proposed that psychological defence mechanisms (i.e., externalisation and splitting), often connected to borderline personality disorder, narcissism, and other personality disorders, would be frequently present among terrorist subjects. Post (1990: 27) assumed that suicide terrorists suffer from personality disorders because of “narcissistic wounds”, which he defined as childhood trauma that creates a damaged self-concept in which the “grandiose self” will be admired, and all the internal hate and limitations will be projected onto others. Relatedly, Ariel Merari (1990: 206) argues that suicide terrorism, like

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3 In Freudian psychology, externalization is an unconscious defence mechanism whereby an individual projects inner impulse onto the external world, and splitting is defence mechanism whereby an individual represses emotional conflict by viewing some people as all good and others as all bad.
any other form of suicide, is an individual affair and has little to do with group connotations. Merari (1990: 206) sees the terrorist framework as merely an excuse for individuals to legitimise the violent nature of their suicidal tendencies rather than the actual drivers.

Scholars fixated on individual-level motivations have also attempted to constitute a psychological profile of the suicide terrorist. In the early 1990s the suicide bomber was traditionally portrayed as an uneducated, unemployed, and socially isolated young male (Pape, 2003: 344). In a similar fashion, Bradley Thayer and Valerie Hudson argue in their article “Sex and the Shaheed: Insights from the Life Sciences on Islamic Suicide Terrorism (2010)” that especially young unmated males are prone to suicide terrorism in the Islamic context.

However, subsequent research has disregarded these initial explanations, demonstrating that there are no sufficient indicators for why individuals resort to suicide terrorism. Ehud Sprinzak contested the initial profiling and found that suicide bombers do not have a fixed set of identity traits or characteristics; in fact, they could be men or women, married or single, socially isolated, or integrated and aged anywhere between 17 to the age of 47. Robert A. Pape (2005: 17) supports this position, claiming that terrorists can be individuals with highly functioning social, individual, and professional lives – destitute is not a prerequisite for suicidal tendencies, and the success in these domains is also not a guarantee for the absence of the risk of developing suicidal tendencies among individuals (Pape, 2004: 344). In other words, suicide terrorists come from a vast array of lifestyles which makes it difficult to identify a fixed set of conditions in which suicide terrorists arise.

Other scholars heavily relied on Émile Durkheim’s typology of suicide behaviour to understand the motivations of the contemporary suicide bomber. In his 1897 book “Suicide: A Study in Sociology”, Durkheim identifies four types of suicide: Egoistic suicide (occurs when the individual feels excluded from society), altruistic suicide (occurs when the individual is excessively integrated in a social order and the pressure to succeed and satisfy the collective becomes overwhelming), anomic suicide (occurs when the individual experiences prompt agony when social regulation is disrupted, e.g., during an economic crisis), and fatalistic suicide (occurs when an individual feels suffocated by excessive overregulation). Building on Durkheim’s sociological framework, Ami Pedahzur, Arie Perliger, and Leonard Weinberg (2003) acknowledge that terrorists do not display the usual personality traits of the general suicidal population but propose that suicide terrorists can be categorised under a new category that combines Durkheim’s altruistic
and fatalistic classifications of suicide behaviour. Shaul Kimhi and Shemuel Even (2004) further explored the categorization of the suicide terrorist. Upon analysing Palestinian suicide bombers, they propose four different categories in which suicide terrorists can be identified: The religious fanatic, the exploited, the retaliator, and the nationalist. This theory suggests that each category differs in terms of prerequisite and supporting factors, but all have in common a highly motivated individual and a political system that condones and facilitates the attack.

Another group of studies observe suicide terrorism from the organisational-strategic perspective. In her 1987 article “Theories of terrorism: Instrumental and organizational approaches”, Martha Crenshaw suggested that terrorism is prompted by strategic premises. She offers a framework in which terrorism can be analysed according to two distinct perspectives on the organisational-strategic level: From one angle, terrorist organisations resort to violence to bring about political chance, and from another perspective, the organisation’s actions can be explained as a direct result of their ongoing fight for survival (Crenshaw, 1987). Building on Crenshaw’s analysis, various scholars have explored the rational and strategic motivations behind the suicide attacks of terrorist organisations. They highlighted strategic goals that terror organisations pursue, ranging from gaining new territory to attaining financial support. In his 2005 book “Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism” (notably an expansion of his cutting-edge 2003 article “Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism”), Robert A. Pape asserts that this “strategic logic” also applies to suicide terrorism because suicide missions are eminently a rational tactic in response to an asymmetric conflict. He points out that suicide attacks are usually no isolated events, but rather part of a larger operation that aims at materialising specific political and strategic objectives (Pape: 2010: 21, 81). According to Pape (2005: 10), suicide terrorism is the most aggressive form of terrorism and has as its core purpose to coerce the targeted government; the terrorist organisation employs an overwhelm-and-compel-tactic to force their adversary to change policies.

Furthermore, in his analysis Pape (2005: 11) identifies two important side-effects of martyrdom operations. On the one hand, the brutal character of suicide attacks can fuel reproval among the local population. This is important because research has repeatedly shown that civilian support is a vital factor for the survival of terrorist organisations. As Stathis Kalyvas (2006: 92) noted: ‘No movement can survive without civilian support’. On the other hand, suicide terrorism can also work as a catalyst for grass-rooting, gaining support among radical individuals; ergo terror organisations glorify the attack, disregarding any negative connotations with a “culture of
martyrdom” and heroism. In this regard, Julian Madsen (2004) points out that organisations often use propaganda posters and songs, whether through social media or other outlets, to inspire potential recruits and persuade them to contribute to the greater objective.

This culture of martyrdom epitomises another important perspective in which suicide terrorism is perceived, namely the societal level. Several academics have highlighted that organisational-strategic theories do not account for the fact that many terror organisations decide to abstain from suicide terrorism. A growing body of research has, therefore, proposed that the altruistic suicide terrorist might be a product of the society within which they grew up (e.g., Orbach, 2004). In this sense it has been argued that Islamic martyrs do not operate in a vacuum; they are induced by their social environment. However, this is not to say that martyrdom culture is exclusively found within the Islamic context. The LTTE suicide operations were heavily propagated and advertised as heroic acts and during the Second World War, thousands of young pilots voluntarily joined the Kamikaze unit as one of many voluntary death traditions in the Japanese society.

An important contribution to the study of Islamic martyrdom culture is Daphne Burdman’s (2003) analysis of the Palestinian educational system between 1980 and 2000. She found that the narrative in the Palestinian media and literature, and the educational faculty stimulated a heavy-duty campaign which was designed to inspire Palestinian offspring to become martyrs (Burdman, 2003). This practice wherein children in a society are infused with the appreciation of martyrdom has proven to be a crucial element of a culture wherein someone’s death can be deemed more valuable than that person’s life. There is ample scientific proving that exposure to this form of cultural marketing from an early age can solidify one’s perception in a way that it becomes part of their “cultural mentality”. As Mia Bloom (2010: 189) puts it eloquently: “It is within this paradigm that involvement in suicide terrorism make sense for a community willing to sacrifice its youth.” Furthermore, Burdman (2010: 2) also explains how societies can differ in terms of ‘susceptibility’: authoritarian societies are more prone to indoctrination because ‘obedience’ is both an obligation and a ‘quasi-Pavlovian response’. It has also been suggested that a society’s collective frustration, and poor economic condition breeds suicide terrorism. Although poverty has often been disregarded as a stressor, there are indications that an economic deprived society with high unemployment rates could allow terrorist organisations to recruit more and better educated people.
But what are the fundamental components on which an Islamic martyrdom culture is build? A combination of the relevant literature has identified the most salient components that form the foundation of the Islamic martyrdom culture:

- **Social, financial, and political support:** Various levels of support to martyrdom operations express a sense of solidarity and indicate the existence of a martyrdom culture. Examples of social support are public rallies in name of the martyr and their family, public assemblies, posters with pictures of the martyr and so on. Financial support is primarily aimed at the family of the martyr. Financial retribution is a widely used tactic to create harmony and support from the family. Political leaders can also contribute to the heroism of the martyrdom operation, there is ample evidence that political leaders and other authoritative figures would praise the actions of a suicide bomber (Burdman, 2003; Kimhi and Even, 2004: 830; Harmon et al., 2018).

- **Education for suicide terror:** The culture of martyrdom is to be entrenched in society. The penetration of martyrdom in the education faculty and in the media does not only generate support, but also breeds new volunteers. Martyrdom operations can be supported in school textbooks, through poetry in class, and even in television cartoons and bedtime stories (Kimhi and Even, 2004: 829; Vale, 2018: 26).

- **Media support and commemoration:** The media can encourage martyrdom operations by openly venerating the suicide terrorists and their attacks, solidifying their legitimacy in television broadcasts and through marketing at public gatherings. Furthermore, the “heroic” acts of suicide terrorists can also be honoured through commemoration e.g., building of memorials, naming schools after a suicide terrorist, or the distribution of tapes with the last words of suicide bombers (Kimhi and Even, 2004: 829). The commemoration of previous (historical) martyrs adds to the ‘historicity’ and cultural symbolism (Bloom, 2017: 184). The symbols can stimulate ‘emotional and historical resonance’, meaning that the aspiring martyrs can identify themselves with the suicide warriors that came before them (Bloom, 2017: 184).

- **Religious interpretations:** The construction of an Islamic martyrdom culture also needs to be supported by religion. This is to say that certain religious interpretations endorsing martyrdom operations, can not only make the act legitimate, but also an Islamic injunction (Kimhi and Even, 2004: 830; Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020).
2.3 Kidnapping Potential Martyrs

In a recent published book – entitled *Countering New(est) Terrorism* (2021) – Bruce Oliver Newsome et al., refer to ‘newest terrorism’ a terminology that has surfaced in recent years and is epitomised by the increase of kidnapping and hostage taking. The authors claim that contemporary terrorists ‘are more ideological, murderous, suicidal’ and drawn to kidnapping. Although kidnapping is an ancient tactic, it has increasingly become a highly effective terrorism tactic because it demands relatively little recourses on the side of the perpetrators, but it creates a major quandary for the targeted government. Furthermore, terrorist organisations have proven to be determined and original, establishing a martyrdom culture and utilizing refined recruitment tactics, to attract individuals willing to carry out suicide missions. A large volume of theoretical and quantitative research has highlighted the advanced selection processes in which terrorist organisations carefully screen and assess aspirants, picking only those most suitable for the act. (Benmelech, Berrebi, and Klor 2012; M. Hassan 2012; Bloom 2017; Warner and Chapin, 2018; Kruglanski, 2018). Previous work offered detailed accounts of how sizeable terrorist movements carefully select and train recruits before allowing them to carry out suicide missions. Upon private meetings with LTTE recruiters and Black Tiger Unit members, Kruglanski (2018) discovered that the LTTE would first interview potential suicide squad recruits and only pick the ones that were least aware of their surroundings (e.g., the objects and noises in the interview room). The idea behind it was that a suicide bomber was not to be distracted during the act (Kruglanski, 2018). Similarly, Jason Warner and Ellen Chapin conducted research on Al-Shabaab’s suicide bombers and concluded that the group essentially uses carefully selected and well-trained men to carry out suicide attacks (Warner and Chapin, 2018, 23-24). Previous academic work detected similar degrees of diligence and sophistication within Al-Shabaab, ISIL, and Al-Qaida’s recruitment systems (e.g., Winter, 2017; Warner and Chapin, 2018; Vale, 2018).

Boko Haram seems to be a dissident in this spectrum. In recent years, scholars have emphasised the increasing number of kidnappings and suicide attacks carried out by Boko Haram since early 2013. Initial broadcasting hinted at the prospect of a correlation between Boko Haram’s kidnapping practice and their suicide missions, meaning that Boko Haram would recruit suicide bombers by means of kidnapping. By now this prediction has been corroborated in various news reports and supported by academic research (e.g., Bloom and Matfess, 2016; Brakoniecka, 2020).
Recent studies (e.g., Bloom and Mattess, 2016; Pearson, 2018; Brakoniecka, 2020; Zenn, 2020; Pearson and Zenn, 2021) have given considerable attention to the organisation’s nonconformist modus operandi. Specifically, a key concern is the organisation’s “reliance on untrained, coerced, or unexpected bombers” (Warner and Chapin, 2018, 23). Boko Haram’s suicide bombers are generally coerced, sedated with opioids and other drugs, or suffering from severe psychological trauma after being abducted. Moreover, there have been incidents in which suicide bombers were unaware that they were partaking in a suicide mission (e.g., Warner and Chapin, 2018: 23; Brakoniecka: 157), and Boko Haram have even used physically and mentally disabled individuals as human bombs (Warner and Chapin, 2018: 23).

It is important to note that Boko Haram is not the only terror group using coercive tactics. The LTTE kidnapped children and adults and forced them to work for the organisation. Similarly, Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman (2010) found that the Uganda based Lord Resistance Army (LRA) executed mass abductions of children and women forcing them to serve as “fighters, servants, and wives”. There are also accounts of kidnapping followed by forced labour, notably the Kurdish YPG and Colombian armed groups have reportedly (e.g., UN Security Council, 2018; Acosta, 2020). Forcing individuals to execute suicide missions is also not new, even in the Islamic context. Bloom (2010: 189) proclaimed that such coercion “is on the rise” and that it comes in many forms or shapes. There have been incidents of Chechen and Iraqi based insurgent groups that endorsed rape of Muslim women to make them become lose their value, becoming unmarriageable or, worse, subjected to hate crimes. Alienated from their environment and desperate to save face, these “damaged goods” were compelled to become suicide bombers (Bloom, 2010: 189).

These accounts of coercion are helpful, yet inadequate for explaining the underlying dynamics of Boko Haram’s KrRec tactic in relation to the Islamic martyrdom paradigm. After all, Coercion by making the individual more receptive for suicide missions does not disregard the concept of martyrdom; in fact, quite the opposite is the case. Clearly, Boko Haram’s KfRec tactic do raise doubts about the typical idea that Islamic martyrdom and suicide missions are unconditionally equivalent (Brakoniecka, 2020). In the literature, it has been suggested that this tactic ultimately means that Boko Haram’s Islamic Martyrdom culture has failed. Elizabeth Pearson (2018) conducted research on Boko Haram’s female and child suicide bombers and discovered that they are purely used for strategic purposes. Their names were seldom revealed by the media, nor were
they venerated as black widows or promoted as ‘poster girls’ (Pearson, 2018: 42). It also
demonstrated that Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau did not uphold anything close to a
martyrdom culture: suicide attacks were not exploited as religious triumphs, nor were the suicide
attackers glorified as martyrs, and, perhaps most striking, many of the suicide attacks were not
even claimed. The foregoing evaluation begs the question as to how the kidnapping and coercion
of women and children to execute suicide mission for purely opportunistic reasons relates to the
glorified Islamic martyrdom concept.

Considering the willingness of those involved to sacrifice their life is an essential component
of martyrdom (Pape, 2005: 25-26), it has been argued that Boko Haram’s concept of martyrdom
lost its meaning and that most of their suicide missions do not even qualify as such (Brakoniecka,
2020: 157). Alike, Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess (2016: 111) claim that ‘suicide bomber’ is an
inaccurate description since the executors generally have not given consent.

Despite the recognition of Boko Haram’s departure from the Islamic martyrdom concept, very
little is known about why Boko Haram employs KfRec while other organisations refrain from such
tactic. This dissertation will address this gap by scrutinising the underlying group dynamics that
could explain these discrepancies.
3 Research Design

3.1 Methodology – Why A Most Similar Systems Design?

This dissertation is designed as a qualitative comparative analysis. This comparative method is aimed at the discovery of empirical relationships among specific variables, while all other variables are kept constant. A small-N comparison of three terrorist organisations (Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL) will be conducted, using a Most Similar System Design (MSSD). Based on John Stuart Mill’s method of difference (Mill, 1898), a MSSD is predicated on the idea that the most similar cases, sharing as many characteristics as possible, represent the optimal samples for comparative analysis. In essence, this type of design is what Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune (1970: 32) call “a ‘maximum’ strategy”. This means that when a dissimilarity is found between similar systems bringing about different outcomes, the number of characteristics attributable to this dissimilarity will be appropriately small allowing this dissimilarity to be easily explained (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 32). More simply put, the MSSD aims to isolate the factors that are different (key explanatory factors or independent variables) across the different cases, while controlling for the factors that are similar (basic factors or control variables). This allows for large variations in independent variables and, as a result, a more comprehensive analysis (e.g., Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Lijphart, 1975).

However, it is important to point out that the proposed design is not just an automatic or mechanical process. The variables that are worth investigating need to be understood in view of appropriate analytical propositions and, in this specific instance, profound historical, societal, and ideological awareness. The MSSD is thus a helpful, yet limited device “like an X ray in the ‘dialogue between theory and data’” (De Meur and Berg-Schlosser, 1996: 426).

Table 1 further illuminates the MSSD: All terrorist groups share the same basic features (A, B, C, and D), yet one of the groups (group 3) does not share the same key explanatory factors (X and Y) of the other groups (group 1 and 2), moreover, the group without these key factors also lack the outcome which is to be explained (Z).
Table 1. Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD)⁴

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Factors</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Key Explanatory Factors</th>
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<th>X</th>
<th>Not X</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Not Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Outcome to be Explained | Z | Z | Not Z |

3.2 Frame of Reference and Objectives

Trying to meet ideological and strategic objectives terrorist organisations seek ways to overwhelm and devastate their asymmetrical opponent. As noted, suicide attacks bring about these upshots/effects and can, to some degree, even force their adversary into acting. It is this awareness that induces terror groups to cultivate their martyrdom culture and adopt sophisticated and avant-garde like recruitment tactics, persuading new individuals to become a martyr.

Convincing individuals to self-sacrifice with only the promise of immortality can be a challenging undertaking, one that is approached by terrorist organisations through different ways. By comparing three in-depth cases of terrorist groups, using an MSSD, this dissertation aims to identify the variations and shifts in tactics that terror groups use to recruit suicide attackers, and the factors that explain the discrepancies between these approaches. The analytical framework directs this comparative investigation to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics that motivates some terrorist organisations to adopt alternative tactics. In doing so, this dissertation aims to explain why similar organisations adopt different recruitment tactics (i.e.,

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Boko Haram’s use of the KfRec tactic and alleged move away from the Islamic martyrdom concept.

Empirical data is acquired through content and discourse analysis. The three organisations have been of major interest to academics, widely reported by the international media, and the organisations themselves have distributed material containing ideological perspectives and strategies making relevant data available. Notably, this dissertation will make use of *The Boko Haram Reader* (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018), arguably the most comprehensive collection of original materials (i.e., videos, audio recordings, martial hymns, letters, treatise, and other essential texts). Moreover, this dissertation draws on secondary data from news reports, academic articles, public documents of governments and non-governmental organisations, existing focus group interviews, and statements of members and freed abductees. In doing so, it will make use of This research project also makes use of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) an open-sourced repository that is monitored by the University of Maryland (START, 2018).\(^5\) This database – the most reputable and ubiquitous in Terrorism Studies – provides terrorist events between 1970 and 2019.

### 3.3 Grounds for Comparison

As implied above, an important advantage of a MSSD is the intentional case selection. This deliberation enables more in-depth analysis which, in turn, makes hypothesis testing become easier. In this sense, the MSSD can be regarded as a valuable substitute for the experimental control in large N-studies. By selecting similar cases at the outset, it will be feasible to identify similarities that can act as control variables and avert unclear or irrelevant variables. Though, one question remains: *Why comparing Boko Haram with Al-Shabaab and ISIL?* The answer to this question is twofold.

The first justification for selecting these three organisations stems from the empirical data which reveals that Boko Haram employs the KfRec tactic and indicates that the group’s martyrdom culture has lost its meaning, while Al-Shabaab, ISIL, and other organisations are clearly avoiding this method. This verdict begs the question as to why one of these similar organisations produce a different outcome.

\(^5\) This includes the by Institute for Economics and Piece (IEP) produced Global Terrorism Index (GTI) which is based on the GTD
The second justification for selection, therefore, depends on the degree of equivalence between the selected organisations. A reasonable next step would be substantiating the notion that the selected organisations are the most similar systems and thus appropriate for comparison. Commenting on suicide terrorism, it is important to note that Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL are among the four deadliest terror organisations. Since 2012 these organisations together with the Taliban have been responsible for the most terrorist-related deaths, as is shown in figure 1 (IEP, 2020: 15). After peaking in 2015 with nearly 70 percent of total deaths, these four groups were still responsible for 55 percent (7,578 people) of all terrorism-related deaths in 2019.

![Figure 2. Deadliest terrorist organisations (Source: START GTD, IEP calculations)](image)

Furthermore, the three groups adhere to a similar interpretation of the Islam and share comparable ideological and strategic objectives. In more specific terms, the organisations’ Salafi Jihadist, Takfiri, ani-Western, and pro Sharia law philosophies are instigated by a mutual backdrop of economic deprivation and stagnation, uneven distribution of resources, weak governance, and ethnic and religious antagonisms. By proposing “an alternative to corrupt and oppressive regimes” (Cox et al, 2018b: 3) the groups were able to quickly develop into highly influential terrorist organisations.

Besides ideological similarities, the organisations also share considerable resemblances with respect to size, demographics, governance, and territorial aspects. This is also the reason why Al-
Qaida, an umbrella organisation which is not concentrated on one specific geographical area (see for example: Farrall, 2011), is not sampled in this dissertation. After all, ISIL initially derived from Al-Qaida and Al-Shabaab is considered a subsidiary of this overarching network of Islamic extremists and Salafist jihadists. All three organisations share the following basic features:

- Sizeable terrorist organisation with respect to members and regional influence.
- Dates of operation from early 2000s to the present time
- In control (now or in the recent past) of large territories in Africa.
- Worldwide notoriety due to terrorism tactics, including kidnapping and suicide attacks.
- Extremist Islamic, Salafi jihadism, and anti-Westernism ideologies.
- The establishment of an Islamist state in a specific region based on Sharia law and the elimination of secular and foreign influence as its principal objective.

3.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Although analytically robust, the comparative method comes with limitations, which Lijphart (1971: 685) aptly describes as “many variables, small number of cases”. Simply put, there are just not enough cases available to test each potential explanatory variable (e.g., Lijphart, 1971: 685; Meckstroth, 1975: 134). Given the limited number of terrorist organisations the small-N problem should be addressed here as well: It is practically impossible to select cases in which all basic variables are constant. In essence, the closely interrelated problems of “many variables, small N” would inevitably lead to what Przeworski and Teune (1970: 34) call “overdetermination of the dependent variable”. After all, any sets of variables that are different between systems can, in theory, have explanatory value. However, it is important to note that this causality problem would be triggered less by comparative inquiries that are based on an inductive logic not aiming to formulate general theory as is the case in this dissertation (e.g., Ragin, 1987; Skocpol 1979, p. 36).

According to Charles Ragin, a theoretical analysis is adequate if it is supported by at least some evidence and is not to be uncorroborated when confronted with contra observations (Ragin, 1987, p. 15). A small-N with few observations is problematic when the overarching objective is to develop and support general explanations.

Another shortcoming attributable to the MSSD is potential selection bias. Such bias is inherent to the intentional selection of cases but could lead to inference. This dissertation follows an
inductive logic meaning the groups are initially selected concentrating on the dependent variable. See section 3.3. for the reasons behind this dissertation’s selection process.

A somewhat related obstacle researchers could face applying an MSSD has to do with the classification of *similarities*. When is something considered similar enough? For example, similarities can be identical or roughly the same. This vacuum can lead to either a loose or stringent implementation of the MSSD. Though, as mentioned before, it is simply impossible to match the cases on all control variables and not necessary to conduct comparative analysis.

In conclusion it is important to point out that the purpose of cross-case analysis is different from statistical methodological logic. After all, the MSSD is not simply “an exercise of logical truth-table analysis”, but is, as noted earlier, an in-depth examination of carefully selected cases (Ebbinghaus, 2006: 4020). It is this dissertation’s aim to conduct a detailed within-case examination of the underlying historical, social, and geo-political factors that form the wider backdrop which Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL are set against.
4 Cases – Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL

This chapter provides a concentrated assessment of the three selected terrorist organisations, Boko Haram (section 4.1), Al-Shabaab (section 4.2), and ISIL (section 4.3). Each section starts off with background information on the respective organisation, followed by an historical perspective, highlighting the underlying factors of the organisations’ emergence and further development. Then, each section will provide an explanatory overview of the organisations’ attractive power; what are the pull and push factors and how does religion play into this. Subsequently, each section will go into the degree of sophistication in terms of recruitment and propaganda: how refined are the organisations’ recruitment techniques and propaganda methods (e.g., use of social media, foreign fighters, or coercion) that form the basis for a potential suicide squad.
4.1 The case of Boko Haram – Background information

Boko Haram (officially known as ‘Jamā‘at Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da‘wah wa-l-Jihād’), loosely translated ‘Western education is sinful’ (see for further elaboration section 4.1.1), is a Salafi Jihadi terrorist organisation that is predominantly based in the north-eastern parts of Nigeria. The group’s main areas of operation in Africa are presented in Figure 2 below. The scope of this dissertation is set on Nigeria – Boko Haram’s epicentre, country of origin, and the region where most of the kidnappings and suicide missions take place. Cameroon, Chad, and Niger will be mentioned as an aside. It is important to note that Boko Haram also have interests and activities in several other African countries. Boko Haram’s current goals are to re-establish the Islamic caliphate and overthrow the Nigerian government, going beyond the group’s initial objective of the establishment of a (small) state under Sharia law in North-East Nigeria.

Figure 3. Focus countries Boko Haram in Africa
The organisation has a de-centralised structure. The Shura Council is, after its leader, the highest-ranking body and consists of 30 members who are each responsible for a regional cell; every cell is assigned a different task (e.g., kidnapping, bomb making, suicide bombing and surveillance) or a different geographical sector. There are reportedly large motivational differences between the cells, while some are following strict Salafi doctrines, others are driven by non-religious motivations. The members of the organisation largely consists of Kanuri people, an ethnic group dominant in Nigeria’s Borno State and also living, albeit to a lesser extent, in south-eastern Niger, north-western Cameroon, and small parts of Sudan and Libya.

4.1.1 An historical perspective – the rise of Boko Haram

Disagreement still rages as to the exact time and conditions under which Boko Haram was first established. The popular notion within the academic literature is that Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by its original leader Ustaz (‘teacher’) Muhammad Yusuf. The group is often seen as a hybrid product spearheaded by Al-Qaida that adopts the doctrine of Islamic jihadis against Western imperialism. However, a growing body of literature challenges this standpoint and claim that Boko Haram is, to some extent, also derived from a deeper-rooted feud between Nigeria’s Islamic Northern tribes and the Christian establishment in the South of the country. Boko Haram is, according to some scholars, the resultant of ‘Nigeria’s conservative political rottenness and the putrefying corruption within the country’s collective society’ (Bello, 2013: 68).

There are several accounts of how Boko Haram came about. Isioma Madike (2011), a Nigerian reporter, claims that Boko Haram first originated as the youth movement Shabaab in 1995 under the leadership Lawan Abubakar, an Islamist scholar who later moved to Saudi Arabia for further studies. In Abubakar’s absence it was Yusuf, appointed by a group of Sheiks, who took over as leader of the conservative sect in the early 2000s. It is to be believed that the sect, that had remained non-violent under Abubakar, shifted its focus more towards overthrowing the secular Nigerian government under Yusuf’s control. The sect – who were then designated ‘Muharijun’, ‘Yusufiyyah’, and the ‘Nigerian Taliban’ – showed it first spate of violence in December 2003, when they attacked police stations and other public buildings and encouraged young people to drop out of school.

A different version of how Boko Haram originated is put forward by Andrew Walker (2012). According to Walker the roots of Boko Haram are to be found in a radical youth movement which
followed an extreme Islamic regime at and at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno state. The group’s leader Muhammed Ali, called on young Muslims to join his group and follow his anti-state ideology and moved from Maiduguri to Kanama, a small village in situated in Yobe State near the Nigerian-Niger border. Walker’s account of the December 2003 attacks is slightly different. He claims (2012: 3) that ‘following a community dispute regarding fishing rights in a local pond’ the police killed Ali and most of the group’s other members. Upon return to Maiduguri, the few survivors joined Mohammed Yusuf, who in turn, created a new movement that soon expanded to other states.

A final account claims that Yusuf established a movement in the early 1990s. Roman Loimeier (2012) claims that Yusuf had distanced himself from his former mentor Sheikh Jafar Mahmud Adam. This break is also seen as Yusuf’s divergence from the Islamic establishment in Northern Nigeria: Adam saw Western education as a tool to fight Western enemies in the long run and, in contrast to Yusuf, believed violence against the Nigerian state to be counterproductive. The enmity between Yusuf and the Islamic establishment deteriorated further when Yusuf allegedly ordered the assassination of Adam in 2007.

Despite the controversy about the derivation of Boko Haram, all accounts agree that the movement started to materialise under the leadership Yusuf from the year 2002 onwards. Yusuf created a religious compound in Maiduguri with an Islamic boarding school, a mosque, and the Islamic prayer group ‘Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati wal Jihad’, which in Arabic means ‘People of the Sunnah (the Prophet Muhammad's teachings) for Preaching and Jihad Group’.

It is also agreed upon that the Hausa name Boko Haram was created by Maiduguri’s local population and the media. As noted above, the name, Boko Haram, is loosely translated ‘Western education is a sin’, but both the academic literature and the group itself criticised this interpretation. After all, how could two words convey so much information? Little controversy exists around the interpretation of the word Haram, as it is adopted from Arabic and refers to ‘sinful’ behaviour. Though the word Boko actually means ‘inauthentic’ or ‘fake’ in Hausa language. During colonial times, ilimin boko (ilimi literally means education) was Hausa for the unauthentic education that was imposed by the Western colonisers (BBC, 2014). A corruption of the words brought the meaning of Western education to the word ‘boko’. It can thus be argued that ‘boko’ is the current pejorative for ‘unauthentic Western derived education’ (BBC, 2014).
However, that Boko Haram is often associated with Western education should come as no surprise, knowing that education has been an important bottleneck in the struggle between Nigeria’s Islamic north and the Christian elites in the southern parts of the country. A growing body of literature has been actively intermingling to understand the roots of this conflict. Nigeria knows a long history of Islamic violent rejectionism of externally imposed constraints and control, going back over 200 years, antedating the British colonial incursion. Nigerian academic and diplomat, Shehu Ahmad Said Galadanci (1993:100) argues that the divergence and grievance among the Muslim population augmented when the Brits forced their Western standards to the Muslim population in the Northern part of Nigeria. Since the 14th century, Arabic had been the official language in the region and the main languages such as Hausa and Fulfulde used the Arabic alphabet. However, in the 19th century, English together with the Roman alphabet replaced Arabic as the official language in legal courts, offices, and schools. Although education and literacy rates are currently lacking in Nigeria’s Northern provinces, their school system had been highly sophisticated before the British revision (Galadanci 1993: 100-103). There were abundant Qur’anic schools and illiteracy rates were much lower compared to other parts of the country—school attendance was mandatory for young people in the Northern part of Nigeria.

In subsequent years, the educational situation in Northern Nigeria became one of ultimate disparity. Hasan Bello (2013: 67) argues that Western education ‘was the only genuine passport to good living’. As a reaction, sheiks would give out fatwas (formal rulings) which prohibited Muslim children to attend Christian schools. This historical feud, Bello (2013: 66) argues, explains why Nigeria’s Muslim population ‘remains hostile to Western education’. Currently, there is a separate so-called almajiri (a child that migrated in pursuit of Islamic knowledge) programme outside of Nigeria’s formal schooling system. The children attending these forms of education are mainly taught the memorization of the Holy Qur’an. During the rest of the day, they are out on the streets begging for their daily food (Hansen, 2015) The almajiri are often young boys from poor families. The motivations for parents to send their young child (sometimes just four years old) away to be an amajiri is that they will receive credit from Allah and, as the family often finds itself unable to provide for their child, they believe that the child will be taken care of by Allah (Hansen, 2015: 83-84). In 2015, there were an estimated 13,2 million children formally out of school in Nigeria, forming a breeding ground for Boko Haram (NextierSPD, 2020).
4.1.2 *Boko Haram’s attractive power – push and pull factors*

Clearly, Yusuf was an inspiration for many young Muslims in the region. Scholars have often highlighted Yusuf’s charismatic character as a major pull factor: between 2002 and his death in 2009, Yusuf managed to attract thousands of members and many more supporters. However, there are more reasons besides a leaders’ charisma that could draw people to join the ranks of Boko Haram. James Adewunmi Falode (2016) points out that Boko Haram symbolised the Islamic opposition of a violent government in an extremely divided country. Boko Haram constituted a place in which young Muslims found a common denominator that could separate them from ordinary society. At this point, Yusuf merely intended to develop a Sharia government in Borno state and did so with relatively little violence; it occasionally used guerrilla tactics of hit-and-run predominantly against security forces in the Borno state region (Falode 2016: 43). Even though Boko Haram became significantly more volatile under the leadership of Yusuf’s successor Abubakar Shekau, the group initially primarily targeted security forces or so-called ‘hard targets’ (Falode 2016: 43). Although there were also civilian casualties, Boko Haram would often warn locals of an imminent attack; since their adversary, the Nigerian government, was already unpopular, this helped them gain public support in the region (Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo, 2017). In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the Nigerian security forces also executed violence and cruelties against civilians (e.g., schoolteachers and suspected Boko Haram sympathisers). To illustrate this, Human Rights Watch (2016) recorded the unlawful execution of five school staff members by government forces from 2012 and 2015.

However, personal grievances are not the only factor that make people join Boko Haram. So, what are the other factors? Explaining violent radicalisation is a difficult task. Yet, a growing body of literature has addressed this question and produced various “root-causes and profiling” frameworks. These frameworks try to unearth the complex reality of people living in the disadvantaged and religiously motivated parts of West Africa. These theories are commonly aiming for “generalizable and static explanatory variables”. For example, William W. Hansen (2017) suggests that Boko Haram recruits its members from the deprived “semi-urban underclass”. The people joining Boko Haram are better known as “Yan daba”: young unemployment men with criminal records and little prospects. Their economic deprivation “makes them easy targets for Boko Haram”.

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Although poverty is commonly seen as the main reason for young Nigerians to radicalize, David Ehrhardt and Sani Umar (2020) caution against overstating its importance, as various studies on radicalisation have revealed the limitations of the poverty premise. Alternatively, critics of root-cause and profiling theories interpret violent radicalisation as an individual ‘pathway process’.

John Horgan (2008) reformulates the root causes and profiling hypothesis, claiming that root causes and profiles are only useful when they are analyzed within a broader context, one “that reveals the interaction of causes to create paths into radicalization”. For this process-based analysis, Hogan identifies risk factors that change over time and during the different stages of the radicalisation process. Steps toward involvement in terrorism, Hogan argues, should be understood as an incremental process: ‘the risk factors can jointly but incrementally attract individuals to radicalisation, keep them involved, or push them away from violence and eventually lead them to deradicalization (Horgan, 2008: 82; Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020: 171) Hogan’s risk factor framework can explain why people who are exposed to similar conditions make different decisions. In doing so, it identifies ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. Besides the external forces that push individuals towards terrorism, there are also “supportive qualities” (pull factors) that should be considered (Horgan, 2008: 87). To put differently, the economic deprivation of a given individual can push people towards terrorism, but only when a terrorist organisation is able to lure this individual with rewards into joining the group. It is, therefore, crucial to understand combinations and sequences of risk factors rather than focus exclusively on one specific trigger.

Drawing upon Hogan’s pathways approaches, Ehrhardt and Umar argue that there is no such thing as a single (Boko Haram member) profile. In their interviews with the families of Boko Haram members they detected “different pathways towards membership at different stages of development”. They identified risk factors that push and pull vulnerable people in West Africa to radicalization, providing a large pool of potential recruits for Boko Haram.

**Push factors:**

- **Poverty and unemployment**: Especially the increase of poverty in Northern Nigeria is a popular explanation for the large pool of young potentials for Boko Haram. Nigeria’s poverty rates rose significantly despite the country’s economic growth: In 2011, more than 100 million Nigerians lived in destitution, mostly affecting young people in the north. In addition to this, the almajiri, who only receive specific Islamic education, often remain
unemployed after graduation because they lack the vocational training for specific jobs (Hansen et al., 2016: 87-88; Erhardt and Umar, 2020: 178).

- **High levels of illiteracy**: The high levels of illiteracy are commonly linked to violent extremism and youth radicalisation. It has been argued that the exacerbating levels of education deny these people the capacity and knowledge to critically assess the narratives and doctrines of extremist groups.

- **Weak family structures**: children who lack a protective social environment are more vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by extremist groups. The millions of almijiri children are separated from their family at an early age. They are often exposed to Islamic radicalism and easy targets for extremist groups like Boko Haram (Hansen et al., 2016; Erhardt and Umar, 2020: 179).

- **Corruption and excessive violence of incumbent forces**: The Nigerian government’s high rate of corruption and neglect of citizen welfare feeds the extremist narrative. Moreover, there are allegations of transgressive behaviour on the side of the security forces fighting Boko Haram. These include unlawful killings, dragnet arrests, extortion, and intimidation. Both the scholarly realm and the media have repeatedly highlighted the violence of the security forces as a crucial push factor in youth radicalisation (Erhardt and Umar, 2020: 179).

**Pull factors**:

- **Religion**: Religious motives have commonly been flagged as a pull factor into the Boko Haram. Research shows that Boko Haram mostly drew in people through religion before 2009. As mentioned before, Yusuf’s religious preaching had strong attractive power. It is also worth mentioning that Boko Haram was officially banned because of the 2009 violent crisis, which meant that the group was no longer able to publicly preach and recruit. In addition to this, the lack of religious alternatives is also seen as important (Erhardt and Umar, 2020: 179-181).

- **Opportunities**: After Boko Haram factionalized in 2009, pull factors into the movement “were increasingly influenced by an interest in the movement’s violent and criminal activities”. Although some people stayed loyal to Yusuf’s teachings (and his successor Mamman Nur) most others would follow Shekau. The ‘Yusufiyya’ who continued their
focus on the religious and political concerns, were opposed to the more criminal intent of the Shekau clique (Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020: 183). The latter permitted people to engage in violence and acquire wealth through criminal activities (e.g., kidnapping for ransom, smuggling, and extorsion). Other incentives to become a Boko Haram member were a ‘fearsome reputation’ and marital success through forced marriages. Ehrhardt and Umar (2020: 183) claim that these inducements lured specific groups to Boko Haram – in particular ‘political thugs, criminals, and other specialists in violence’.

- **Proximity and social ties:** Social pressure has been acknowledged as pull factor. Especially ties to family members and friends that are already a member seem to have a strong attractive power. Connections are also created through social interaction with Boko Haram members. Several members highlighted the proximity of Boko Haram’s base as a pull factor. People who resided or worked in Boko Haram controlled areas came into close contact with the movement which often led to active involvement (Erhardt and Umar, 2020:184)

- **Security:** Boko Haram has not only been seen as protection against the security forces, but also as a form of security from violence perpetrated by Boko Haram itself.

### 4.1.3 Boko Haram’s recruitment and propaganda strategies

Having identified the risk factors that push and pull individuals to joining the ranks of Boko Haram, a reasonable next step is to identify the group’s recruitment and propaganda tactics. After all, the risk factors ought to be materialised by the terrorist organisation; there is no uniform recruitment or propaganda strategy among terrorist organisations, yet a well-functioning recruitment and propaganda campaign of a Salafi-Jihadi terrorist organisation in principle consists of three important components which will be assessed: A martyrdom culture, the attraction and use of foreign fighters, and sophisticated online strategies.

#### 4.3.3.1 Martyrology: The Ideological Pathway

Boko Haram has used the promise of martyrdom method in their recruitment practices. However, this ideological pathway had been significantly more prevalent before the death of Yusuf in 2009 (Ehrhard and Umar, 2020: 186). In a series of lectures between 2003 and 2009, Yusuf had preached and the importance of martyrdom. (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 27-33, 49-57, 63-70). Moreover,
his interpretation of the Islamic martyrdom concept was erudite and well-developed (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 63). Yusuf’s martyrrology is two-fold: On the one hand Yusuf pinpoints the ‘special privileges’ the martyr awaits, from marrying any virgin of their choice to reaching a similar status as the prophets. On the other hand, Yusuf depicted martyrdom as a straight-forward reoccurring and pain-free act:

“…martyrs do not feel the pain of death, not more than the sting of an ant. If an ant or a bug stings you, you will feel a small pain. But once you remove it, the pain is gone. That is the similitude of a martyr’s death. It is for this reason you would see a martyr while he is dying, he would still be calm and admonishing. …this special treatment in paradise is the reason why the martyrs desire to return to earth and be martyred again.” (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 67-68).

In comparison, Shekau uses a different narrative, mainly emphasizing theological justifications for the group’s actions. His martyrdom marketing is less prevalent and lacks Yusuf’s sophistication, as Shekau’s used a more insisting and coercive manner to bring his message across (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 248, 313-314). For example, on 12 May 2014 Shekau published a video in which he justified the Chibok kidnappings and repudiated Muslims who had disapproved this specific act. The girls were used as ‘pawns’ to negotiate the release of incarcerated Boko Haram members and, notably, Shekau also mentions the possible intoxication and sedation of these girls: “If you like, you can say that we intoxicated them or gave them some concoction to drink” (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 314). This is remarkable because the allegations of sedated suicide attackers had yet to materialize.

The assumption that Boko Haram under Shekau failed to construct a martyrdom culture is also sustained by statements of other members: In a series of letters from disaffected Boko Haram members to leaders from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) Shekau is heavily criticized about a failing martyrrology and the loss of crucial (civilian) support. According to the appraisal, Boko Haram suffers from ‘loose morals’, ‘division of families’, and ‘incorrect religious practices’, which resulted in an alarming decline in the number of supporters and ‘the Nigerian people bad-mouthing the religion and jihād and causing general chaos’ (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 238).

As mentioned earlier, major recent analysis by Elizabeth Pearson (2018: 42) shows that Boko Haram deliberately desists from ‘capitalising’ on their female suicide bombers: their deaths are not used in propaganda videos, nor have they been exploited as ‘poster girls’. There is also little to suggest that martyrdom operation, especially when it comes to women, is
supported by Nigerian Muslims. In fact, several surveys show that few Nigerians Muslims see suicide attacks as religiously justified (Pearson, 2018: 43).

These impressions are important because they indicate that over time, Boko Haram lost the suitable conditions to attract new martyrs; while Yusuf’s martyrology attracted thousands of members within the first years of the group’s emergence, Shekau failed to draw on these numbers and would even manage to lose valuable support (e.g., Trofimov, 2016).

Furthermore, it also supports the notion that the members who had followed the ideological pathway continued into the Yusufiyya faction after 2009, disregarding Boko Haram led by Shekau ((Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020: 183). This notion is collaborated by scientific data. Major recent analysis, based on a 2015 survey with former Boko Haram members, found that only 9.2% of respondents mentioned religious ideology as a motivation for joining the organisation (Botha and Abdile, 2017: 5).

4.1.3.1 Foreign Fighters

Boko Haram also uses a Nigeria-centric approach for recruitment purposes and has largely avoided promoting its ideology at the international stage (Onuoha, 2010; Pearson, 2018: 49). This somewhat changed after their alliance with ISIL in 2015, as Boko Haram started with sub-regional recruitment, establishing their first operational cells outside Nigeria. Boko Haram’s desire to establish militant hubs abroad is likely to be found in the rapid shrinkage of support Nigeria. There are accounts of such efforts in Chad, Niger, and even Senegal (Mahmoud, 2018). Boko Haram achieved a reasonable level of success in terms recruitment beyond Nigerian borders. It should be noted, however, that this refocus has been limited to the Lake Chad area (i.e., Northern Cameroon, Southern Niger, and to a lesser extent Western Chad). As mentioned before, the people from this region share the same ethnic background, language, and other cultural features. It is, for example, not uncommon that members of one family live scattered across the four Lake Chad countries. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that these ‘foreign fighters’ have not been exploited for propaganda purposes.

Although a significant number of people joined Boko Haram from these surrounding countries, few did so because of ideological reasons. Most foreign fighters were either lured by financial incentives or forced into joining (Stahnke, 2015; Mahmoud, 2018: 108). In July 2014 Boko Haram kidnapped dozens of boys and girls aged between 7 and 15 in Kolofata Cameroon.
and in September 2016 over 1,000 Chadian Boko Haram members surrendered to Chadian forces at Baga Sola on Lake Chad. Notably, 70 percent of them were women and children. These cases are not only indicators of Boko Haram’s aspiration to attract foreign fighters, but it also indicates that the group’s inability to adequately convey their ideological message. The sub-regional recruitment strategy was not one for expansion, but rather one of pure necessity after losing popular support in the group’s epicentre. In this sense, Omar Mahmoud (2018: 108) is right in arguing that the split between Boko Haram and ISWAP in August 2016 only deteriorated Boko Haram’s recruitment efforts, especially in Nigeria. After all, both groups’ leaders (al Barnawi and Shekau) were Kanuris born in north-eastern Nigeria. Boko Haram compensated their loss of support by escalating violence against civilians: ‘they increasingly engaged in coercion, religious manipulation, kidnapping, and drug use to acquire new recruits’ (Mahmoud, 2018: 108).

The shortage of foreign fighters can also be explained by another, related, demographic aspect. In contrast to ISIL and Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram’s ties with the rest of the world are very limited. Although the Nigerian diaspora is one of the largest African immigrant populations in the world, the Nigerians abroad are usually not from Nigeria’s North-Eastern provinces and have, therefore, little association with Boko Haram.

**4.1.3.2 Boko Haram’s Online Propaganda and Recruitment Strategy**

Terrorist organisations increasingly depend on the internet for effective propaganda and recruitment practices. Boko Haram has long lacked a serious online strategy, using more traditional media and social networks to disseminate its message and recruit new members (Cox et al., 2018: 22). Although the online presence cultivated after the group’s alliance with ISIL in 2015, it remains rudimentary. Boko Haram uses the internet and social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook for propaganda purposes rather than for active recruitment. The group mainly uses YouTube and Facebook to propagate its message.

The most recent study on online radicalisation is entitled *Social Media in Africa: A double-edged sword for security and development*. The RAND research project commissioned by the UNDP examined the online presence of Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL in Africa. It confirms the significance of an online manifestation and supports the notion that Boko Haram is far behind compared to its counterparts when it comes to online propaganda and recruitment.
The report concludes that Boko Haram used the internet primarily to share propaganda and is less engaged in online recruitment. In February 2015, Boko Haram publicised images of children in training camps and footage of senior members justifying these practices on their twitter account *Al Urwah al Wuthqa*. However, this was an isolated attempt and there have been no signs of an advanced recruitment campaign. Boko Haram’s recruitment practice is primarily focussed on the local population, and in this sense, it is understandable that the online strategy is secondary to their offline campaign of social networks, monetary ‘loans’, kidnapping, and a lack of foreign fighters (Mercy Corps, 2016; Cox et al., 2018).

A recent published report for the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers confirms Boko Haram’s lack of online recruitment. Based on interviews with 1,607 Nigerian citizens, 60 civil society representatives working in Boko Haram territory, and 130 former Boko Haram members, Anneli Botha and Mahdi Abdille (2017: 3, 11) found that ‘none of the Boko Haram members had been recruited online’ and that 91,0 per cent of the Nigerian citizens and 94,1 percent of the Boko Haram members were convinced that Boko Haram radicalisation predominantly happens offline.
4.2 The case of Al-Shabaab – Background information

Al-Shabaab (or Harakat ash-Shabāb al-Mujāhidīn) translated as ‘the youth’ is a Salafi Jihadi terrorist organisation that originated in Somalia and operates across the Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab controls large territories in Somalia’s southern and central regions, but also operates in Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan. The group’s main areas of operation in Africa are presented in Figure 3 below. It should be noted that the group is also involved in Yemen and spread their operations (e.g., carrying out attacks and recruitment practices) to surrounding countries like Djibouti, Tanzania, and Mozambique. The group’s main objective the establishment of a state under sharia law in Somalia and, more broadly, in East Africa.

Figure 4. Focus countries Al-Shabaab in Africa
Al-Shabaab has a hierarchical organisation structure and is currently led by its commander Ahmad Umar (or Ahmed Diraye). The centralised command further contains a ten member Shura Council which directs the commanders who are each allotted a specific geographical area. The military unit is divided into two divisions: *Jaysh Al-’Usr* (‘army of hardship and suffering’), which consists of an army of commanders, foot soldiers, and a suicide squad; and *Jaysh Al-Hisbah* (‘army of accountability’), the organisation’s executive branch regarding justice, economics, morality, and ensuring that the Sharia laws are complied with. Furthermore, there is a specific media branch known as *al-Kataaib* (‘the battalion’), which oversees the group’s online recruitment and propaganda.

### 4.2.1 An historical perspective – The rise of Al-Shabaab

There are several opposing accounts of how Al-Shabaab originated. Somali politician and journalist Abdirahman ‘Aynte’ Yusuf Ali (2010; Hansen, 2013: 19) claims that the group ensued from a 2003 meeting in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Other authors put greater emphasis on an Islamic conference of a loose network of Islamists held in the same year in Las Anod, Somaliland (Shinn, 2011: 206). Other accounts, trace Al-Shabaab’s history further back, claiming that the group originated in the Al-Huda training camp in Hudur in 1996. Sig Jarle Hansen (2013: 19) argues that although these versions ‘have some truth in them, they are also misleading’. According to Hansen, the group’s foundation begun with a group of ‘like-minded’ Somali expatriates that fought in the 1979-1980 Afghan War.

Yet, for an appropriate understanding of Al-Shabaab and the reasons behind its advent, it is crucial to start with a proper examination of Somalia’s complicated historical context. Like Nigeria, Somalia is also shaped by colonialism. In the mid 19th century, the British East India Company established trade treaties with Somali chiefs and together with Italy (Italian Somaliland) was responsible for the mapping of present-day Somalia. The first violent resistance against the colonisers began in 1897 when Ethiopia attempted to take control of the Ogaden region in 1897. The uprise was led by Sayid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan (referred to as the ‘Mad Mullah by the British colonisers), a nationalist Muslim from Ogaden, who fought a religious war against the British and Ethiopians until his death in 1920.

Somalia lingered under British control until gaining independence in 1960. Historically, Somalia was mainly populated by nomadic pastoralists. It should also be noted that, other than in
Nigeria, Great Brittan took a more non-interventionist approach to governance in Somalia, leaving much of its control to the local clans and warlords. Somalia was ruled from the 1960s onwards by respectively President Aden Abdullah Osman Daar (1960-1967) and Prime Minister Abdirashid Ali Shermarke (1967-1969) and Mohamed Siad Barre (1969-1991). While the independence movement of Daar and Shermarke established a ‘genuine democracy’ that was celebrated for ‘its respect for human rights’, Barre headed an oppressive dictatorship that did not tolerate any form of dissent (UN Africa Watch, 1990: 14). Nevertheless, Barre’s dominance started to crumble after losing the Ethio-Somali War in 1978 over the Ethiopian occupied Ogaden. By the 1990s the opposition to Barre’s military junta had won: Rebels from various clans successfully ejected Barre’s regime in 1991 creating a power vacuum to fill. Somalia’s society disintegrated rapidly by clan politics and Warlordism, which marked the start of Somali’s civil war. As several Somali clans battled for power, the new political vacuum also gave pathway for organisations promoting Islamic agendas.

Although religion had not been at the forefront of the political discourse between 1960 and 1991 (Marchal, 2009: 382), it gradually gained momentum among the Somali population. The so-called ‘resurgence of Islam’ had already been underway for several decades (Hansen, 2013). Influenced by Saudi Arabian Wahhabism and Salafi teachings adopted from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Somali returnees brought new outlooks upon Islam to the homeland as early as 1960. These new ideologies resulted in the emergence of several new movements, notably the Unity of the Islamic Youth (Wahda al-Shabaab al-Islaami), the Islamic Group (Jama’at al Ahl al-Islaami), and the Islamic Revival Organisation (Munadamat al-Nahdah al Islāmiyah) which aimed at the inclusion of Islam in the political systems and day to day life. In 1983 the organisations merged into the Islamic Union (al Ittihad al Islamiyya or AIAI). AIAI engaged in terrorism tactics, predominantly on Ethiopian soil against Ethiopian dignitaries and was a prominent party during the 1990s but was effectively contested by the turn of the century. It has been argued that AIAI created the foundation for Al-Shabaab (Hansen, 2013: 21). Despite AIAI’s Sufi inclined ideology, several of Al-Shabaab’s early members had fought for the Organisation or studied at an AIAI school (e.g., Marchal, 2009; Hansen, 2013). However, the actual influence of AIAI on Al-Shabaab remains ambiguous. According to Hansen, there were only a small number of AIAI members that, heavily dominated by the Afghanistan veterans, co-founded Al-Shabaab (Hansen, 2013: 21).
The failure of the Somali state did not only pave the way for domestic Islamic organisations. When Osama Bin Laden moved to Sudan in 1992, he tasked his trustee Abu Hafs al Masri to seek partnerships with Somali Islamists. Al-Qaeda believed the Somali chaos to be the ultimate setting to recruit new members at low costs. In 1993, a group of Al-Qaeda members under the command of Al Masri partnered up with AIAI and hosted the first three training camps on Somali soil. However, Al-Qaeda had heavily underestimated the Somali campaign; they were often extorted and betrayed by Somali clans, and marginalised the importance of the traditional African Islam in the country which was based on Sufi rather than on Sunni ideologies (Downing, 2009: 14, 19-23; Shinn, 2011: 205). However, Al-Qaeda did manage to get a foothold in Somalia. Perhaps not as rapidly as was first anticipated, but they did recruit several Somalis to join the Jihad and gained support in a few regions by delivering some degree of stability and financial incentives. As David Shinn (2011: 205) put it: ‘The longer that the central government was unable to establish authority throughout Somalia and the warlords fought among themselves for power, the greater the opportunity for the Islamic groups to increase their following, in part by imposing stability.’

Another important development is the emergence of the so-called Sharia courts in Mogadishu. These communal centres of conflict resolution and rehabilitation were an important response to the anarchy and lawlessness that was raging over the city in the early 1990s. Each court was designed for an according to the demands of the respective community or family (reer) and supervised by elders and sheiks from the same neighbourhood (Ibrahim, 2019: 149). The courts soon proved to be successful: by the early 2000s, the courts’ jurisdiction and influence had augmented because of increased support and funding from the local communities. The expansion of power was a thorn in the side of Mogadishu’s warlords. The courts merged into the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), defeated the warlords, and took complete control over the city in June 2006.

It remains unclear what exact role the courts played in the eventual emergence of Al-Shabaab and radical Islamic movements more generally. A popular notion is that these courts formed a breeding ground for radical Islam and that Al-Shabaab arose from the courts’ training camps (Marchal, 2009). Marchal observed that the courts’ militants (Mu’askar Mahkamad) were educated and equipped to prevent clan allegiance, and later renamed Jamaa’a al-Shabaab (the youth group).

Yet, the ICU’s popularity had initially not much to do with radical ideology. They just happened to be a better alternative for the unpopular warlords or Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government
as both failed to protect the Somali population from the murder, rape, and robbery that had become part of day-to-day life in Mogadishu (Hansen 2013: 23; Ibrahim, 2019: 149). The eventual emergence of Al-Shabaab might more suitably be approached from a geo-political perspective. The ICU’s rapid upswing was alarming to foreign actors, especially the Ethiopians who saw the ICU as a fundamental threat to their own interests in the region. When Ethiopian troops forced the ICU out of Mogadishu by April 2007, radicalism found its way into Somalia. The Ethiopian intervention is commonly seen as ‘a mistake’ because it triggered nationalistic and economic grievances among the Somali population (Marchal, 2019: 314). This quest for redemption was hailed by a part of the ICU as a major motivation to continue the insurgency. Consequently, the ICU fragmented into a moderate and a radial unit; the former largely joined the TFG, and the latter, in turn, was divided in two main factions: Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam (The Party of Islam). Al-Shabaab would eventually remain as the organisation that continued the insurgency against the oppressors. The group immediately thrived on of the Somali population who sought revenge against foreign actors and the Somalis who chose to consort with them. Al-Shabaab was soon adopted by Al-Qaeda became a magnet for the global jihad attracting large numbers of foreign fighters.

4.2.2 Al-Shabaab’s attractive power - Push and pull factors

Today, Al-Shabaab is a logic and powerful substitute for a failing Somali government – the Federal Government of Somalia (FDG). The terror movement has proven to be an efficient governor, providing protection and economic opportunities. Recent research of the Mogadishu based Hiraal Institute (2020) has even demonstrated that Al-Shabaab is Somalia’s prime tax agency. Although Al-Shabaab do not officially ‘control’ Mogadishu, most of the city’s tax revenues are collected by the terrorists, but also outside the capital they employ sophisticated tax systems generating millions of dollars of ‘clean money’. They tax most of the major businesses in the form of an annual religious tax (Zakah) and monthly payments, and Al-Shabaab also controls the ports of Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Bossaso (Hiraal Institute, 2020: 1-2; Harper, 2020; Hourel, 2020). The group’s control is so prevalent and oppressive that even government officials pay taxes in return for protection or to prevent repercussions (Hiraal Institute, 2020: 6-7). Moreover, Al-Shabaab

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6 The TFG succeeded the Transitional National Government (TNG) in April 2004; despite support from the UN, the US, the African Union, the Arab League of Nations, and Ethiopia it had limited authority.
provides its taxpayers with services like product regulations and quotas, and various security assistances.

Besides governing, it has been argued that Al-Shabaab also possess a religious monopoly in the country. This is to say that there is a lack of sufficient religious alternatives: a young Somalian knows what Al-Shabaab stands for, but more moderate or less radical Islamic ideological groups are unable to bring their message across. Al-Shabaab is an organised shadow state that provides the Somali people with incentives and a clear ideological structure. In other words, Al-Shabaab, to some degree, have taken the role of the Islamic courts, as people relying on the group for socio-economic incentives, protection, and justice. Building on Horgan’s influential pathway theory, Al-Shabaab’s attractive power of pull and push factors are to be identified.

Push Factors:

- **Socio-economic deprivation:** The unemployment rates in Somalia and surrounding countries are among the highest of the world. Most of the population, particularly the younger generation, is deprived of basic human needs. For some individuals Al-Shabaab is a form of employment and thus an escape from the deadlocked state in which they find themselves. While the younger generations remain jobless, the country witnessed a significant emergence of wealthy people and their Western-orientated businesses that largely exclude much of the population. Although unemployment is a significant factor in pushing young Somalis towards radicalisation, it should not be overstated (Abdullahi, 2018: 342-343).

- **Weak governance and political injustice:** Several respondents claim that their decision to join Al-Shabaab was a direct consequence of a failing Somalian government. In contrast, Al-Shabaab provides security and effective justice structures, offering conflict resolution and mediation between clans like the Sharia courts once did. This coincides with the deprived socio-economic situation many Somalis find themselves in, inducing large-scall resentment among the population against the affluent elite. A small elite (i.e., wealthy businessmen and corrupt politicians) owns most of the land and are in control of the productive sectors of the Somali economy. Respondents claim that this elite exclude citizens from different clans politically and economically.
- **Revenge and grievances:** In a similar fashion, sentiments of revanche and despise are deeply rooted in the Somali people and go beyond just the socio-economic sentiments. There are Somalis who support Al-Shabaab for nationalist reasons. In his research, Abdullahi Ingiriis (2018: 344) describes how elderly men celebrated an Al-Shabaab raid against Ethiopian troops, killing 19 of them. This story exemplifies ‘the significance of the nationalist cause and grievances against the neighbouring countries’ (Abdullahi Ingiriis, 2018: 344). The intervention of foreign troops has augmented Al-Shabaab’s popularity. Respondents particularly expressed their concerns about the Ethiopian and Kenyan contingents within the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (Ali, 2018: 336).

- **Fear of victimization:** The fear of becoming a victim of the refusal to join Al-Shabaab has also been identified as a push factor. Respondents stated that they were concerned to be perceived as weak by their social environment and feared repercussions (M. Hassan, 2012: 19).

**Pull Factors:**

- **Religion:** The ideological pathway to joining Al-Shabaab is heavily prevalent and stated by interviewees as the most important reason to join the movement. More than half of all interviewees in Barret’s research gave religious motivations as the main reason for membership (Barret, 2018: 322). The main reasons given were the ‘belief that Al-Shabaab was doing God’s work, a desire to defend Islam as an act of jihad that would earn rewards in paradise, and a desire for Islamic brotherhood’ (Barret, 2018: 322). Similarly, M. Hassan (2012) also concluded that Al-Shabaab religious lure is effective. The main reasons for membership were ‘mental manipulation and fighting Islam’s enemies’, and the opportunity to ‘obtain paradise’ God (M. Hassan, 2012: 19).

- **Social ties:** Boko Haram alike, social causation has been identified as a powerful pull factor. Social and family ties to Al-Shabaab members are a crucial pathway to joining the organisation. Al-Shabaab has exploited family bonds and the desire to avenge loss of relatives killed by the adversary. In addition, the organisation also emphasises the honour and financial reward that await relatives of those who die as martyrs in the moral struggle (M. Hassan, 2012; Ali, 2018).
Reputation and economic incentives: It appeared from studies and interviews that several young men, especially in regions where Al-Shabaab has a large present, would join the ranks because of status. Walking the streets with a gun as a member would not only gain respect and induce fear, but it would also charm women. Moreover, several members stated that Al-Shabaab pays well, reportedly between 50 to 150 US dollar a month, depending on the type of work (M. Hassan, 2012: 19).

4.2.3 Al-Shabaab’s recruitment and propaganda strategies

The underlying subtleties for individuals to become an Al-Shabaab member have a lot to do with religious ideology. As Hussein Yusuf Ali eloquently penned down: ‘State failure alone cannot explain the root causes of radicalization and violent extremism in Somalia …Particular attention should be paid to the nature as well as the effect of Al-Shabaab’s ideology, and its communication techniques.’ This begs the question as to what extent Al-Shabaab develops a martyrdom culture, attracts foreign fighters, and deploys well-honed online strategies.

4.3.3.2 Martyrology: The Ideological Pathway

There is a strong correlation between religious drivers on one side, and grievance, clans, and economic incentives on the other side. This is to say that the individuals that join the ranks of Al-Shabaab for monetary gain or grievances largely share an underlying extremist ideology (Abdullahi Ingriss, 2018: 343). No nationalist or counter-ideological setting is capable resisting Al-Shabaab’s robust and sophisticated methods of propagating ideological messages. The group disseminates religious content systematically on various media outlets, calling for jihad against the Somali and Western occupiers; Al-Shabaab even manages to broadcast their religious philosophy on government radio (Abdullahi Ingriss, 2018: 343). Moreover, Al-Shabaab repeatedly disseminates martyrdom videos and audio-statements of martyrs before their attack (Taarnby and Hallundbaek, 2010: 23) and former leader and spokesperson of the group Sheikh Mukhtar Roobow inaugurated the Al-Shaheed foundation, a charity to raise money to help and educate the children of suicide bombers.

Another important reason for, particularly, young men to join Al-Shabaab is the deep-rooted craving for belonging. Many of these boys have nothing in life and Al-Shabaab can change that. Abdullahi Ingriss (2018: 44) notes: ‘they are eager to have a name, …want
revenge because they have been displaced from their land, …or want power and become famous’ even if that means to become a suicide bomber. Al-Shabaab’s overarching religious narrative allows the group to induce civilian support and tap into large supplies of potential martyrs, employing only carefully selected and trained recruits for their suicide missions. These martyrs are often indoctrinated from a young age; the organisation have distributed their martyrrology to the schools in the by them controlled areas, forcing teachers to only provide Al-Shabaab-appropriate study programmes (Africanews, 2018)

Although Al-Shabaab commonly uses coercion to recruit children, it does not need to compensate for a lack of ‘martyrdom consent’. In other words, Al-Shabaab does not use human-borne improvised explosive device (IEDS); they employ self-trained martyrs that willingly, whether brainwashed or not, die in face of religious pursuit. Contrary to some other terrorist organisations, Al-Shabaab features advanced techniques and indoctrination methods to create willingness among new recruits to carry out suicide missions. The month-long training and indoctrination camps and the waiting list for martyrs gives the impression of a well-conceived drop out competition and clearly substantiates the robustness of Al-Shabaab’s martyrdom culture (Warner and Chapin, 2018: 23).

4.1.3.3 Foreign Fighters

There have been numerous reports highlighting significance of foreign fighters in Al-Shabaab. Especially during the first years of the group’s emergence no effort was spared to attract fighters from abroad. For example, in January 2007, Al-Qaeda second in command Ayman al-Zawahiri released an audio statement entitled Set out and help your brothers in Somalia, calling on Muslims to partake in the Jihad in Somalia (SITE Intelligence Group, 2007). The invasion of foreign non-Muslim powers had created the conditions for a legitimate jihad and Al-Shabaab launched an advanced recruitment campaign. In doing so, not only did it attract Somalian citizens and sympathisers from surrounding countries but also radical Muslims and converts from and the Somali diaspora and other corners of the world. Tricia Bacon Daisy Muibu (2018: 416) argue that the reason for Al-Shabaab’s foreign fighter success lays in the group’s control of the Islamist opposition. With little competition from other organisations Al-Shabaab does not have to go to extreme lengths to attract the foreigners (e.g., by giving more authority or financial incentives).
Another reason behind Al-Shabaab’s foreign fighter success has to do with the use of these individuals for propaganda purposes, reaching out to other potential fighters and martyrs in a language they understand. For example, American national Omar Shafik Hammami (also known as Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki) had become a valuable pawn for the group’s international recruitment between 2007 and 2010.

Despite a gradual decrease of fighters from Arab countries and the Somali diaspora in the West, Al-Shabaab maintains a strong recruitment structure enticing large numbers of fighters from surrounding countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, and Uganda, but also from Mozambique and South Africa (Bacon, 2017; and Muibu and Bacon, 2018: 416).

4.1.3.4 Al-Shabaab’s Online Propaganda and Recruitment Strategy

Al-Shabaab is one of the most technologically advanced Jihadi terrorist organisations in the world (Cox et al., 2018: 12). Through their Kataib news coverage service and various other media Al-Shabaab uses the internet for four main objectives: recruitment, propaganda, financing, and operation coordination. The group is especially active on Twitter, YouTube, and Telegram and uses written statements and high-end videos for recruit purposes and propaganda. Cox et al. (2018: 13) argue that the increase of video production and the further development of their media wing since 2010 underlines the organisation’s ambition to acquire global attention and reach a larger pool of potential recruits.

In recent years, Al-Shabaab has increasingly focused on Twitter for recruitment and propaganda purposes. Since the launch of their first Twitter account @HSMPress in 2011, the group has played a game of cat-and-mouse with Twitter. The group’s accounts have been suspended several times and followed by the group establishing new accounts, such as @HSMPress1, @HSM_Press, and HSM_INFO. Cox et al. (2018: 14) identify Twitter and Facebook as a valuable propaganda tool for Al-Shabaab, ‘given its ability to deliver sound bite messages that can be quickly picked up and disseminated by the mainstream media’. Al-Shabaab have proven to be successful in disseminating their own course of events and, in doing so, reaching a broad audience. A recent example hereof is the propaganda film Mpeketoni, Reclaiming Muslim Lands Occupied by the Kenyan Crusaders issued by the Al-Kataaib Media Foundation. The release in March 2015 consisted of an Arabic, English, and a Swahili version and was quickly disseminated and picked up by mainstream media.
Al-Shabaab’s online approach has changed over time. The most recent study – published in March 2020 in the *Combating Terrorism Center At West Point Sentinel* – on this matter is entitled *Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab's PSYOPS Media Warfare*. It confirms the significance of Al-Shabaab’s refined media operations and claims that their psychological operations (PSYOPS) messaging is their new online weapon. Christopher Anzalone (2020) analysed six case studies and concluded that the group’s PSYOPS messaging is not only low cost and technological advanced, but also an effective way to weaken domestic and international support for their adversaries (Anzalone, 2020: 36). The most recent example of Al-Shabaab’s psychological media warfare is of November 2019. In a series of online messages directly aimed at the American public, Ahmad Umar claimed that domestic interests were disregarded by the US government. Trying to appeal to the American sensibility, Al-Shabaab argued that US taxpayers’ money is better used for domestic issues (e.g., security measures against mass shootings in American schools and the devastating wildfires that had been plaguing California) than unlawful and highly costly operations abroad which further dispossesses Muslim minorities (Anzalone, 2020: 36).
4.3 The case of ISIL – Background information

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daish (Dāʿesh), is a Salafi-jihadist terrorist organisation that is known for its attempt to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Although ISIL failed in their attempt and suffered a significant decrease of activity in the Middle East and North Africa, ISIL is gaining prominence in sub-Saharan Africa. ISIL has ascertained various strongholds, operating throughout the entire African continent; in 2019 alone, ISIL carried out terrorist attacks in 27 African countries. It should be noted that the organisation and ISIL-linked groups also operate throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Iran, Pakistan, and the Philippines. However, this dissertation mainly focusses on ISIL in sub-Saharan Africa aka Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), and Islamic State in Somalia Province (ISS), as illustrated in figure 4.

Figure 5. Focus countries ISIL in Africa
Traditionally, ISIL embraces a solid hierarchical structure with its central command in Iraq. After the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2019, Iraqi national Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi became the second Caliph of ISIL. Yet, due to the significant setbacks that the group sustained in Iraq and Syria the group no longer functions as a proto-state and has developed into a more hybrid organisation (Jordan, 2019). The group maintains a strict hierarchy at the upper levels, with Al-Ourashi in charge of two committees: the Consultative Shura Council and the Delegated Committee (Al-Hashimi, 2020). The Delegated Committee is the highest administrative body and each of its five members manages a department (i.e., finances, security, military, religious and judicial affairs, and media management). Beneath its central command, ISIL is more decentralised with geographical selected sectors in Iraq and sub-organisations outside of Iraq including those in Africa.

4.3.1 A Historical Perspective – The Rise of ISIL

It is conventional wisdom that Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi laid the groundwork for ISIL which materialised in Iraq after the 2003 invasion. Al-Zarqawi, initially part of Al-Qaeda, conflicted on the idea of using violence against ‘other’ Muslims, in particular Shiites and Takfiri (people who are seen as apostates). In 2005 Al-Qaeda’s second in command Al-Zawahiri urged Al-Zarqawi in a famous letter to end the discriminate violence against Muslims in Iraq. According to popular belief, it was this ideological conflict that eventually led to the creation of ISIL.

It is not that there is no truth in this narrative, but it fails to account for crucial extremist rudiments that had surfaced long before the US invaded Iraq in 2003. In fact, the real architect of the intellectual framework behind the Islamic State ideology was Abdulrahman Al-Qaduli (also known as Abu Ali Al-Anbari) – not Al-Zarqawi (H. Hassan, 2018). Al-Oaduli was born in Iraq and received strict religious education and military training; after obtaining a degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Baghdad in 1982, he served in the Iraqi army. Hassan Hassan (2018) goes to great lengths explaining that Al-Oaduli developed a grudge against deviant Islamic ideologies, he regarded Shiites and Sufis as aberrant and was highly disapproving of progressive Muslims. It should also be noted that ust after the 9/11 attacks Al-Oaduli already established a ‘proto-Islamic State’ in the city of Tal Afar in north-western Iraq. Moreover, H. Hassan (2018) claims that Al-Oaduli’s extreme sectarianist ideology influenced Al-Zarqawi and not the other way around.
In its heyday ISIL managed to govern large territories in Syria and Iraq and maintained, albeit for a short period of time, something that closely resembled a state. It can be argued that ISIL met the legal requirements to constitute as state, as there were clear signs of a permanent population, a defined territory, and effective government with the capacity to enter relations with other states. The popular contra-argument that ISIL lacked the official recognition of other countries is weak, not only because it is not a strict requirement according to International Law, but also because several countries had tacitly recognised ISIL as a state, by treating it as such (e.g., engaging with the organisations in traffic and trade).

The outcome of the conflict is clear and does not need in-depth interpretation. By December 2017, ISIL had not only lost approximately 95 percent of its territory in Iraq and Syria, but it also had to endure significant setbacks in Afghanistan and the Philippines. Consequently, ISIL’s focus shifted more and more towards the African continent. Their wilayat (external branches) in Africa were increasingly gaining momentum and it has been argued that the group’s Caliphate aspirations would be more realistically attainable in Africa than anywhere else, as numerous terrorist and insurgent organisations have demonstrated the ability to suppress African armies and conquer territories (Zenn, 2020).

4.3.2 ISIL’s Attractive Power - Push and Pull Factors

Like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, ISIL thrives on the African continent by taking advantage of power vacuums within failed states and manipulating historical narratives. The pre-colonial African Muslim-societies were largely influenced by a Sufi Islamic ideology, based on a local African context. The Sufi Islam, also known as the African Islam, is basically a combination of Islamic religion and culture, and indigenous African customs and traditions (H.A. Hassan, 2020: 1). Abdulsasit Kassim and Jacob Zenn (2017: 87) argue that Salafi groups, such as ISIL, aim to withdraw legitimate status from Sufism by portraying it as a dissenting form of Islam. Yet, the Sufi scholars of the 1800s are deeply respected by sub-Saharan Muslims and ISIL wants to avoid losing crucial support among the Muslim population as happened with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (See chapter 4.2.1). The solution put forward by ISIL is the ‘Jihadization’ of the 19th century Sufi theology. They try to arrogate the Sufi-heritage of the pre-colonial reforms ‘by effectively “Salafizing” their narratives without conjuring the Sufi legacies of the past jihadist campaigns’ (Kassim and Zenn, 2017: 87). In other words, Salafists use the Sufi historical narratives and
understandings of Islam to justify their adherence to the Salafi interpretation of the Jihad. ISIL’s attractive power in Africa is largely based on this ‘Salafi-Jihadi appropriation’ of Sufism and their successful campaign of subsuming local conflicts, often spurred by colonial resistance and ethnic division, into their global jihads (Kassim and Zenn, 2017: 87-88).

Perhaps the most significant success of ISIL in Africa is its transformation of ISWAP and ISCAP into effective and organised networks. Besides providing training camps, financial support, and religious supervision, ISIL has established significant strongholds in West and Central Africa. There is a great deal of evidence that ISWAP, ISCAP, and ISGS are gradually gaining momentum (Zenn, 2020). The ISIL efforts have particularly paid off in respect of recruitment and support. For example, since 2017 ISWAP has largely overshadowed Boko Haram with an estimated army of 3,500 – 5,000 men, in comparison with no more than 1,500 Boko Haram fighters in 2019 (Warner and Hulme, 2018, 23; Crisis Group, 2019: 2). After the death of Shekau on 19 May 2021, ISWAP is likely to become an even more crucial link in ISIL’s caliphate aspirations.

Ostensibly, ISIL has moved away from discriminate violence against Muslims, given that Shekau was deposed from ISWAP for being too radical. ISWAP’s current leader (and son of Muhammad Yusuf) Abu Musab Al-Barnawi openly condemned Boko Haram’s KfRec tactic. He has denounced the large-scale kidnapping and enslavement of Muslim women, and, more generally, the violence against local Muslims (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018: 445-467; Pearson and Zenn, 2021: 4). On 19 February 2018, a group of militants attacked the Nigerian town of Dapchi situated in Yobe state. During their raid, the group targeted the Government Girls Science and Technical School and abducted 110 schoolgirls. Although the kidnapping was rapidly attributed to Boko Haram (e.g., BBC, 22 March 2018), it emerged that ISWAP was responsible for the mass-abduction. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (Perkins, 2021), five of the girls were killed while in captivity, the 105 Muslim girls were released short after, and the only Christian girl, Leah Sharibu, remains captive to date. The girls who returned home safely reportedly stated that Al-Barnawi had only lectured them about the essence of an African caliphate (Maclean and Abrak, 2018; Pearson and Zenn, 2021: 15). The Dapchi kidnapping not only confirms that ISWAP differs from with Boko Haram on the idea of attacking Muslims, but it also shows that ISWAP does not consider mass-abductions as a means for the recruitment of martyrs.
As ISIL operates in various regions without a clear focus country, it is difficult to identify a set of push and pull factors. Because ISIL is operating in the same regions as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab a reference to chapter 4.1.2 and 4.2.2 will suffice.

4.3.3  ISIL’s Recruitment and Propaganda Strategies

It is commonly known that ISIL is driven by a strong religious narrative. The African continent provides the group with fertile ground for their main objective of a global caliphate. Current trends in sub-Saharan Africa suggest that ISIL is gaining momentum using, besides terrorism tactics, as well as an ideology driven ‘soft’ approach, attempting to garner crucial support among local Muslim populations. These findings are important because they shed light on the group’s ambitions in terms of establishing a martyrdom culture, the use of foreign fighters, and a sophisticated internet strategy. Although this dissertation is focussed on ISIL in Africa, the organisation’s hierarchical structure allows for a more general analysis.

4.3.3.3  Martyrology: The Ideological Pathway

The establishment of the caliphate has drawn Muslims from every corner of the world, it is perhaps ISIL’s main ideological pull. Because ISIL’s perception of caliphate is more than just an emotional identity driven by utility and historical symbolism to motivate their adherents: It was a fundament for performative utterance. This is to say that ISIL, supported by the caliphate, could instigate social action and change among Muslims, or in the words of British philosopher John Langshaw Austin (1962: 6, 109): it is not just declaring something (constative), but also realising it. A performative utterance is impossible to ‘judge, assess, or appraise’ and must, therefore, be declared by the appropriate autorotative figure – in the case of ISIL this was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Austin, 1962: 139; Togsulu, 2019: 96). In a sense then, the Caliphate gave ISIL authority to call on people’s moral obligation to fight the Jihad and become a martyr.

It is unconventional knowledge that many ISIL sympathisers, stirred by Baghdadi’s call for martyrdom, have restored themselves to carry out suicide attacks in name of Allah. It is evident that Al-Baghdadi played a significant role in ISIL’s martyrdom narrative. In his speeches he would often cite the Qur’an to stress the endless rewards for martyrs: ‘Let those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come, fight in God’s way. To anyone who fights in God’s way, whether killed or victorious, we shall give a great reward’ (The Qur’an
In fact, ISIL’s ideological martyrdom pathway has been so strong that it has been designated a ‘industry’ rather than a culture (Winter, 2017).

In a similar vein the organisation’s glorification of death has also led to the mobilisation of the so-called ‘cubs of the caliphate’. ISIL invests heavily on the long-term indoctrination of children starting at a young age. By playing videogames, the children learn about Jihad and martyrdom in a playful way, and through booklets and applications the children are fully immersed into the group’s ideology (AIVD, 2017: 6; Vale, 2018: 26). Accordingly, ISIL mothers get instructed to raise courageous well-trained boys and girls. This includes bedtime stories of jihadi warriors and the veneration of ‘celebrated martyrs’ (Vale, 2018: 26).

This immersive upbringing serves different purposes: by disengaging the children from ‘countervailing influences’ it propagates hate and resentment towards the West and other perceived enemies of Islam, and it fosters an intrinsic motivation to become prosperous martyrs themselves (Vale, 2018: 26). The many ISIL propaganda videos show glimpses of harsh physical training camps where the children also learn to become submissive: “I must listen and obey, even if I have to die” (Frontline, 2015).

### 4.1.3.5 Foreign Fighters

Creating a sense of moral obligation among Muslims, ISIL have been effective, especially in the first years of the caliphate, to attract many fighters from around the world. The exact number of foreign fighters that joined ISIL in Syria and Iraq is up for debate, but estimations vary between 30,000 and 40,000 (Benmelech and Klor, 2020). The self-proclaimed ambassador of ISIL to Turkey Abu Mansour al-Maghribi even claims that ISIL managed to lure more than 40,000 highly motivated fighters, often with the sole purpose of becoming a martyr (Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2019: 4).

A recent study conducted by Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor (2020) investigated ISIL’s global recruitment of foreign fighters. They found that the flow of foreign fighters was triggered by a strong ideological narrative and a feeling of being excluded from homogenous Western societies. ISIL succeeded in feeding the international Muslim community with a religious duty to resent the violent prosecution of Muslims.
ISIL has not gained this level of sway in Africa but did found ways to propagate their ideology and through their African affiliates also manage to attract foreign recruits (Doctor, 2020; Seldin, 2021).

4.1.3.6 ISIL’s Online Propaganda and Recruitment Strategy

The Al Hayat Media Center is ISIL’s media wing which largely administers the organisation’s recruitment and propaganda processes. Through their digital magazine *Rumiyah* ISIL publishes multilingual contents. ISIL has a highly refined internet and media strategy that consists of a broad-spectrum of social media platforms and applications. Some of these platforms are well known, such as Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, but ISIL also uses less-known applications like JustPaste.it, Kik, and Ask.fm to communicate with its adherents (Milton, 2016; Cox et al., 2018: 30). Most of the group’s African support base is reached through a large presence on Twitter and Facebook on which the group disseminates a vast number of violent contents. Overtime ISIL has innovated its technology, as is evident from the use of drones in making propaganda videos. Part of this innovation aims to circumvent the continues suspension of online accounts, most particularly Twitter. In response to these shutdowns, ISIL invested heavily in the development of thousands of Twitter ‘bots’ that simultaneously spread automated messages. Furthermore, ISIL created The Dawn of Glad Tidings application, a recruitment app designed to thwart social media filters.

ISIL also needs the internet for their unique recruitment processes. One of which

This ISIL recruitment process involves a perceptible set of steps, from creating a micro-community, social isolation, to urging the ‘target’ to act. ISIL would create a micro-community on social media in which potential recruits are to interact with other sympathisers. They are then isolated from countervailing influences and encouraged to cut ties with family members and friends. Once the target is fully isolated, ISIL recruiters will turn to WhatsApp or Telegram for private conversations in which they urge the recruit to ‘take action’ (Cox et al., 2018a: 34).
5 Analysis Kidnapping for Recruitment with Most-Similar-Systems Design

In this chapter the three terrorist organisations are compared using the MSSD. By analysing the similarities and differences outlined in chapter 4, it attempts to identify whether these findings coincide with the group’s different strategies (section 5.1). A clear difference regarding these factors might explain the variation in outcomes, i.e., the fact that Boko Haram’s uses KfRec, while Al-Shabaab and ISIL abstain from using this tactic. Finally, this chapter recapitulates the findings into a table and provides the first conclusions (section 5.2).

5.1 Comparison and Explanation

This section discusses the similarities and differences between the three organisations. Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL do not significantly differ in terms of general background, ideological objectives, and organisational structure. In fact, the organisations have emerged in similar environments and under similar circumstances. Furthermore, all three organisations engage in similar terrorist tactics such as suicide attacks, kidnapping, and public executions. The organisations have been heavily engaged with one and other, and by conveying the same message of unifying Muslims under Sharia law, they propose an alternative for corrupt and oppressive regimes to deprived and resentful people. Thus, it is evident that these conditions do not explain the different outcomes.

If the forgoing analysis of the basic factors (or control variables) does not explain the different outcomes between the selected terrorist organisations, then what does? This dissertation has identified the following potential explanatory factors: An effective martyrdom culture, the use of foreign fighters, and advanced online recruitment and propaganda strategies.

5.2.1 Martyrdom Culture

Constructing a culture of martyrdom requires an all-encompassing approach full of symbolism and religious justification and indoctrination. For martyrdom to fully penetrate a society the concept should be fully immersed in day-to-day life. ISIL and Al-Shabaab clearly show features of a society in which martyrdom is entrenched in their respective communities. Al-Shabaab and ISIL have created advanced training camps in which children not only endure rigorous physical
preparation but are also mentally programmed to become martyrs. In turn, ISIL created a highly effective martyr-celebration culture in their territories by instructing parents to educate their children about the importance of martyrdom as a heroic act and its rewards.

In contrast, Boko Haram seems less engaged in constructing and maintaining such a culture. Since the death of Mohammad Yusuf, the religious narrative changed and became less prevalent. Compared to the other groups, Boko Haram does not exploit their suicide attacks as a religious endeavour and are less engaged in the commemoration of their ‘martyrs’. Moreover, the use of children, women, and individuals with disabilities as human bombs against their will suggests that Boko Haram is less able to indoctrinate and bring their message across.

These dissimilarities can explain the differences in outcome regarding the use of the KfRec tactic. In other words, it is plausible that the lack of martyrdom culture on the side of Boko Harm tends to result in the adoption of an unconventional tactic to recruit human bombs.

5.2.2. Foreign Fighters

In a similar vein, the foreign fighter phenomenon can shed light on Boko Haram’s resort to KfRec. Simply put, a wider target market means more potential. In the case of ISIL, it is said that many of the ‘foreigners’ were among the most motivated and radical fighters and in pursuit of martyrdom (Pearson, 2018: 46). Similarly, Al-Shabaab have been successful in recruiting foreign fighters by sophisticated propaganda and recruitment campaigns to activate the Somali diaspora. In contrast to Al-Shabaab in the Somali context, Boko Haram is unable to largely recruit from Nigeria’s diaspora because the Nigerians abroad have little affiliation with the Boko Haram resentment and ideology. Boko Haram has largely avoided to attract foreign fighters. It has been argued that Boko Haram simply did not need foreign fighter nor women from abroad to populate its territories (Onuoha, 2010: 65; Pearson, 2018: 49-50). However, this claim is only partially correct. A decade ago, Boko Haram experienced a looming influx of young fighters, mostly from Northern Nigeria, but the number of Boko Haram fighters have been in drastic decline since early 2015 (Warner and Hulme, 2018: 23; Crisis Group, 2019: 2) and Journalist Ahmed Salkida claimed in February 2016 that Boko Haram largely consisted of female members (e.g., Pearson 2018: 36, 50). It indicates that Boko Haram lacked the experience and proper recourses to attract foreign fighters when they needed them.
In summary, the number of foreign fighters coincides with the contrasts between the strategies applied by the three organisations. Thus, the presence or absence of foreign fighters seems to be suitable in explaining the different outcomes.

5.2.3. **Online Recruitment and Propaganda Strategy**

It is evident that Boko Haram has a less advanced online recruitment and propaganda strategy in comparison with Al-Shabaab and ISIL. The empirical data even suggests that Boko Haram’s online recruitment is ordinary at best, and it contrasts sharply with the group’s ‘offline’ or physical recruitment practices (Botha and Abdile, 2017; Cox et al., 2018). The recently published RAND report commissioned by the UNDP gives a valuable insight in the internet strategies of the three organisations in Africa. Cox et al. (2018a: 65) noticed that the groups significantly vary in levels of sophistication. According to the data, ISIL is the most, using a multi-platform recruitment and propaganda strategy. It is also clear that Boko Haram is less engaged in social media recruitment than its two counterparts (Cox et al., 2018a: 66). For example, Al-Shabaab has reportedly used YouTube and chatrooms to actively recruit in the Somali diaspora (Cox et al., 2018a: 66). Similarly, ISIL exploits a vast variety of messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, and Kik) to communicate with potential recruits and coordinate attacks in Africa (Cox et al., 2018a: 66). The report also states that a key finding is that Boko Haram’s internet use for recruitment purposes ‘is not as overt as that of al-Shabaab or ISIL’ (Cox et al., 2018a: 25, 67). In sum, the use of an internet strategy differed between the organisations and correspond with the differences in outcome.

5.2 **Most-Similar-Systems-Design**

Table 2. presents data collected from a variety of recourses on the main ideological and tactical variations of the three group. It shows that an effective martyrdom culture, the use of foreign fighters, and advanced online recruitment and propaganda are essential in explaining Boko Haram’s unconventional KfRec tactic. These findings validate the notion that Boko Haram’s unconventional KfRec tactic is driven by opportunism and tactical advantages and a response to the group’s inadequacy to recruit and indoctrinate potential martyrs.
Table 2. The values the basic and explanatory factor, and outcomes of the three organisations.

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<th>Boko Haram</th>
<th>Al-Shabaab</th>
<th>ISIL</th>
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<td>Sizable terrorist organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jihadi Salafi ideology</td>
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<td>Control of territory in African context</td>
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<td>Use of suicide attacks</td>
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<td>Use of Kidnapping</td>
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<td>Targeting of civilians</td>
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<td>Among deadliest terrorist organisations</td>
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<td>Caliphate objective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective Martyrdom Culture</td>
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<td>Foreign Fighters</td>
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<td>Advanced Online Recruitment and Propaganda</td>
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<td>Deploys KfRec tactic</td>
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Conclusion: Reviewing the Research Question and Main Findings

This dissertation compared three Salafi-Jihadi terrorist organisations, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIL, using a Most-Similar-Systems Design. The main objective was to explain the discrepancies between the three organisations with respect to the use (or not) of the KfRec tactic. To date, Boko Haram is the only terrorist organisation that have used abductees as human bombs. The frequency and meticulous nature of their kidnapping practices, and the reported use of women, children, disabled individuals, and babies as human bombs confirm this theory. Notably, Boko Haram represent itself as an organisation that adheres to a strict Salafi-Jihadi ideology. The use of ‘human bombs’ that have not given any form of consent thus indicates that the concept of martyrdom has lost its meaning, and that ‘martyr’ or ‘suicide bomber’ have become inaccurate terminologies.

At this point it is useful to recapitulate the research question as formulated in chapter 1.3:

What are the reasons behind the development of Boko Haram’s unconventional tactic of kidnapping to recruit human bombs?

The MSSD was used to explain why Boko Haram uses KfRec while Al-Shabaab and ISIL do not. The course of this dissertation scrutinised and compared each organisation in terms of organisational structure, history, demographics, political struggle, attractive power, and recruitment and propaganda strategies. By comparing organisations that are most similar, this research was able to isolate explanatory factors. It enabled more in-depth analysis of each organisation which, in turn, allowed for accurate testing of the hypothesis validity.

To some extent this dissertation has been guided by preconception; it has suggested that Boko Haram’s massive deployment of KfRec is a response to a shortage of potential martyrs which, in turn, must be explained in the context a failing martyrdom culture and inadequate recruitment and propaganda practices. Since Boko Haram’s first suicide attack on 16 June 2011, suicide bombings had increasingly gained momentum as a Boko Haram tactic (Onuoha, 2014: 4) It should also be noted that Boko Haram initially (i.e., before the mass-abductions began in early 2013) deployed ‘highly radicalized individuals willing to carry out suicide bombings in pursuit of martyrdom’ (Onuoha, 2014: 4). Yet, the empirical data suggests that Boko Haram has increasingly lost support and experienced a drastic decline in numbers of active fighters since 2015. It is within this context that this dissertation proposes that the difference between Boko Haram on one side, and Al-
Shabaab and ISIL on another lies in the martyrdom narrative and the sophistication of recruitment and propaganda strategies.

In conclusion, the application of the MSSD confirmed that Boko Haram, in comparison with Al-Shabaab and ISIL, does not actively cultivate a culture of martyrdom, avoids the use of foreign fighters, and lacks a sophisticated online recruitment and propaganda strategy. This conclusion supports the hypothesis, as formulated in chapter 1.3, that Boko Haram has adhered to KfRec because of a small(er) influx of potential martyrs. Overall, this dissertation contributes to the existing body of literature on Boko Haram and, more importantly, the real methodological value of this dissertation is its contribution to future research on a terrorism and kidnapping, characterised by the relatively new tactic of kidnapping for recruitment.

Reflecting upon the most recent developments, Boko Haram seems to have lost momentum after the death of Shekau on 16 May 2021. The most recent reports even state that large numbers of Boko Haram and ISWAP members have surrendered to Nigerian forces (Ayitogo, 2017). These developments are certainly an overwhelming victory for the Nigerian counter-terrorism campaign, yet, as this dissertation has demonstrated, one should always stay alert of the use of more unconventional tactics, because necessity is the mother of invention.
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