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A Comprehensive Review of Research on Academic Perspectives Regarding Boko-Haram Insurgency in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract: Although scholars have written extensively on different aspects of Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, a systematic review of the literature appears to be lacking. The significance of this study lies in its unique approach to addressing the gap in the literature on the Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria. While previous works have explored various dimensions of the insurgency, this study makes an original contribution by conducting a systematic review to synthesize the findings of existing studies published between 2015 and 2023. Scopus and Science Direct databases were searched, and 107 journal articles and book chapters were sampled, out of which 46 were excluded for reasons. While 65 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, 28 more papers were excluded for not being relevant. 37 studies were selected having met the review criteria. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, this paper shows how scholars approached the phenomenon of Boko-Haram insurgency. Results show that there is a higher number of works on Boko-Haram, accounting for 24.3% and 18.9% of the publications in 2020 and 2023 respectively.

Keywords: Boko-Haram, Boko-Haram Insurgency, Conflict, Insurgency Effects, Terrorism.



1. Introduction

Conventionally, a literature review enables researchers to easily navigate the intellectual terrain of a particular discipline. It also helps immeasurably in assisting researchers to identify gaps with a view to bridging them. Weed [1] and Petticrew & Roberts [2] submit that reviews of related literature allow researchers to ‘filter out research that contributes little (clearing the brickyard)’, moderate variable findings of similar research (sorting out the bricks), and build edifices of previously undiscovered public knowledge’. However, scholars such as Nobilit & Hare [3] opine that deploying traditional methods of doing literature reviews comes with several limitations such as the absence of scientific rigor. This view is also supported by Briner and Walsh [4].

Pahlevan et al [5] observe that there are 14 different types of reviews based on the methods deployed in searching, appraising, synthesizing, and analyzing the items that constitute the body of knowledge. About systematic literature reviews, the authors state that systematic approaches for conducting reviews were developed in the field of medical sciences with the sole aim of improving the quality and transparency of literature reviews. In this sense, it is also believed that it reduces biases, and omissions [5]. According to Transfield et al [6], this type of review normally creates room for a ‘replicable, scientific, and transparent process, in other words, a detailed technology that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches by providing an audit trail of the reviewer’s decisions, procedures and conclusions.

The significance of this study lies in its unique approach to addressing the gap in the literature on the Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria. While previous works have explored various dimensions of the insurgency, this study makes an original contribution by conducting a systematic review to synthesize the findings of existing studies published between 2015 and 2023. This study is significant because it highlights the evolving nature of research on the Boko-Haram insurgency, identifies underexplored areas, and provides a solid foundation for future research and policy formulation in addressing the insurgency.

2. Literature Review

From the emergence of Boko-Haram insurgency in 2009 to 2023, it has attracted many researchers who have published on its history, as well as its socio-economic and political impacts on Nigeria in particular and its neighbors in general [7] - [13]. Despite the plethora of literature in this area, to the best of my knowledge, one hardly finds a systematic review of literature that may give him a holistic view of the nature of the current scholarship on Boko-Haram insurgency from 2015-2023. Commenting on the same vein, Dwivedi et al [14] argue that ‘for a field to progress, it must be conscious of its historical patterns to obtain insights into possible future developments and implications that contribute to the accumulation of knowledge’. On this basis, therefore, this paper seeks to investigate the current state of research in this area. The keyword search was conducted on both Scopus and Science Direct databases, while the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was used as the model of this paper. As Hall [15], as well as Wijesinghe et al [16] observe that the two selected databases are generally considered to have a larger coverage of arts and social science journals (including conflicts and insurgencies).

3. Methodology

Utilizing Scopus and Science Direct databases, I conduct a systematic literature review on the 18th of November, 2023 to find out the nature of the current scholarship on Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria from 2015-2023. In searching, only papers written in English and published from 2015-2023 were considered, while the keywords used are; Boko-Haram, Insurgency, Conflict, Terrorism, and Northern Nigeria. The search was also limited to the field of Arts and Humanities. This systematic review was done in line with the reporting checklist of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) [17] (see Table 1).

A total number of 107 papers on Boko-Haram insurgency were identified. The titles, abstracts, keywords, authors’ names and affiliations, journals’ names, as well as years of publications of the identified papers were exported to MS Excel spreadsheet. This stage was followed by a careful screening of the papers to find out their relevance to the subject matter of this study. Out of the 107 articles, 103 were in Scopus, while 4 were in Science Direct database.

After screening the papers, 42 (in Scopus) were excluded for being not relevant to the subject matter, while 65 papers received a full text assessment for eligibility. After the assessment, 28 more papers (24

in Scopus, and 4 in Science Direct) were excluded because they are not directly dealing with Boko-Haram insurgency.

Table 1. Summary of the Selected Papers

Year of Publication	Number of papers	Percentage
2015	3	8.1
2016	2	5.4
2017	5	13.5
2018	2	5.4
2019	2	5.4
2020	9	24.3
2021	4	10.8
2022	3	8.1
2023	7	18.9
Total	37	99.9%

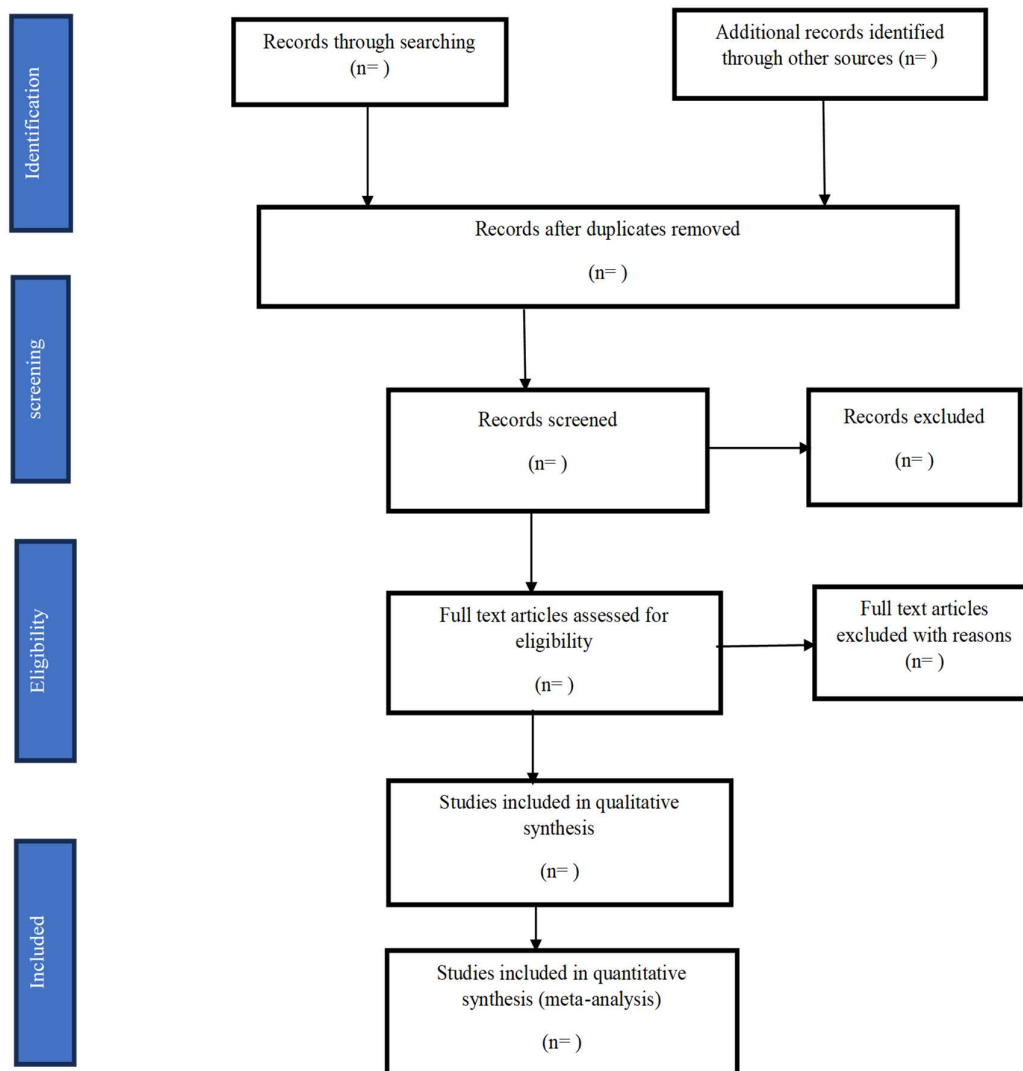


Figure 1. The PRISMA Flow Diagram

The excluded papers are either too generic by including other forms of insurgency, or too specific to issues related to women displacement, refugee camps, the role of traditional rulers in conflict resolution, to mention a few. However, 37 papers were finally considered relevant to the subject matter (Figure 2). From the research conducted, the result of this study is presented, while the PRISMA checklist was adopted for the analysis and discussions (Figure 1). This process helps immensely by supporting a mixed method of data analysis.

4. Finding and Discussion

This study reviewed 37 papers and the selection process is summarized in Figure 2. The literature search was conducted using Scopus and Science Direct databases, which resulted in 107 records. Out of this number, 42 (all in Scopus) were excluded as they are not relevant to Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria (2015-2023). While searching, keywords such as ‘Boko-Haram’, ‘insurgency’, ‘conflict’ and ‘Northern Nigeria’ were used.

The full text screening of the remaining 65 works was also conducted because 28 more papers (4 in Science Direct) were later excluded because they are not directly related to the subject of discussion. At the end of the screening, 37 papers (journal articles and book chapters) met the eligibility criteria (Figure 2). Table 1 shows the year of publication of the selected papers, number of papers published in each year, as well as their percentages from 2015-2023. The results show that there is a higher number of published works on Boko-Haram, especially in 2020 and 2023. For instance, 24.3% and 18.9% of the publications were published in 2020 and 2023 respectively. On the contrary, the lowest, which accounted for 5.4% of the publications, was conducted in 2016, 2018 and 2019.

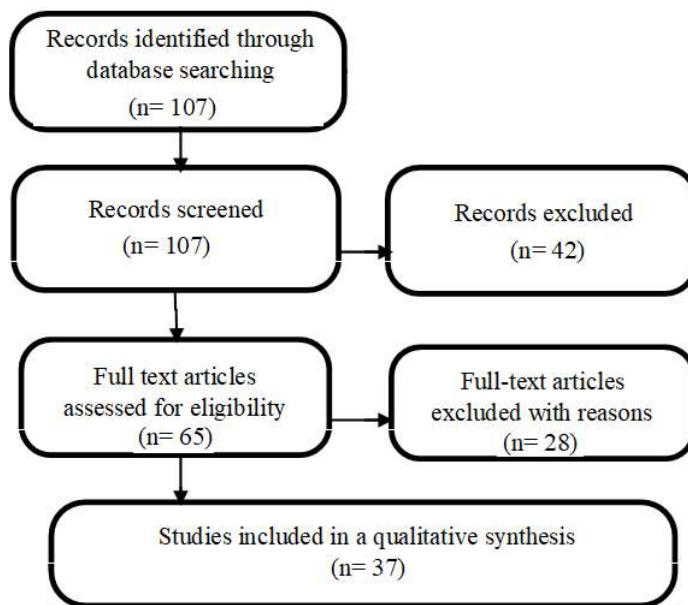


Figure 2, Flow Chart of The Study Selection Process

The origin of Boko Haram insurgency can be traced back to 2002 when a jihadist militant group emerged in Northeastern Nigeria. The name Boko-Haram, which literally means ‘Western education is forbidden’ was given to them by public commentators although they call themselves *Jama’at ahl Al-sunnah lil Adda’awati wal Jihad* (The Society for Prophetic Tradition and Jihad) in the local Hausa language.

The main objective of this militant organization is to establish an Islamic State based on a strict interpretation of Islamic corpus in Nigeria [18] - [21]. It was on this basis that they oppose Western education and civilization, which they regard as corrupting influences on Islamic society. Many researchers argue that the issues surrounding Boko Haram insurgency are complex and deeply rooted in factors such as socio-economic disparities, poor governance, corruption, and religious tensions [22] [23].

Book-Haram gained international attention for its violent attacks on both security forces and civilians mostly in public places through bombings, kidnappings, and guerilla warfare. Through their sporadic operations, especially in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and Kano states, many innocent civilians lost lives, while over a million others were displaced from their towns and villages [24] [25]. One of the most notorious incidents masterminded by Boko-Haram was the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014 [26] - [28]. This incident received a global attention and condemnation, which sparked the famous #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

Table 2. Summary of the Articles

S/N	Author(s)	Title	Year	Journal	Vol	No	Publisher(s)
1.	Agbibo D.E.	Ten years of Boko Haram: how transportation drives Africa's deadliest insurgency	2020	Cultural Studies	34	3	Routledge
2.	Olaniyan A.O.; Okeke-Uzodike U.	When two elephants fight: insurgency, counter-insurgency and environmental sufferings in northeastern Nigeria	2021	Journal of Contemporary African Studies	39	3	Routledge
3.	Weeraratne S.	Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria	2017	Terrorism and Political Violence	29	4	Routledge
4.	Idris A.; Tutumlu A.	Boko Haram's resilience and the porosity of Nigerian border	2021	Ikenga	22	1	University of Nigeria, Institute of African Studies
5.	Brigaglia A.; Iocchi A.	Entangled Incidents: Nigeria in the Global War on Terror (1994–2009)	2020	African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review	10	2	The Trustees of Indiana University
6.	Nwankpa M.	Understanding the Local-Global Dichotomy and Drivers of the Boko Haram Insurgency	2020	African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review	10	2	The Trustees of Indiana University
7.	Iyekekpolo W.O.	Boko Haram: understanding the context	2016	Third World Quarterly	37	12	Routledge
8.	Okolie A.-M.; Mbaegbu C.C.; Nwoke I.S.; Owonikoko S.B.	From cross-border banditry to insurgency in the Lake Chad region: response, collaboration and conflicting interest of Lake Chad region states	2023	Security Journal			Palgrave Macmillan
9.	Okoli A.C.; Lenshie N.E.	'Beyond military might': Boko Haram and the asymmetries of counter-insurgency in Nigeria	2022	Security Journal	35	3	Palgrave Macmillan
10	Agbibo D.E.	The Precariousness of Protection: Civilian Defense Groups Countering Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria	2021	African Studies Review	64	1	Cambridge University Press

S/N	Author(s)	Title	Year	Journal	Vol	No	Publisher(s)
11	Ugwueze M.I.; Ngwu E.C.; Onuoha F.C.	Operation Safe Corridor Programme and Reintegration of Ex-Boko Haram Fighters in Nigeria	2022	Journal of Asian and African Studies	57	6	SAGE Publications Ltd
12	Ola T.P.	Understanding the roles of women in Boko Haram's terrorism	2020	Journal of International Women's Studies	21	1	Bridgewater State College
13	Omeni A.	Boko Haram's increasingly sophisticated military threat	2018	Small Wars and Insurgencies	29	Nil	Routledge
14	Iocchi A.	Revolt, Navigation and Resistance. A Glimpse on the «Boko Haram» Conflict on Lake Chad	2019	Interdisciplinary Political Studies	5	1	University of Salento
15	MacEachern S.	Boko Haram, bandits and slave-raiders: identities and violence in a Central African borderland	2020	Canadian Journal of African Studies	54	2	Taylor and Francis Ltd.
16	Abubakar T.A.; Amurtiya M.	Boko-Haram Insurgency and Rural Livelihood Dilemma: Im-plication for Sustainable Development in North-East Nigeria	2023	Problemy Ekorozwoju	18	1	Politechnika Lubelska
17	Chigudu D.	Dealing with violent extremist organizations in Africa: The case of Boko Haram in Nigeria	2020	African Renaissance	17	2	Adonis and Abbey Publishers Ltd
18	Olaniyan A.	Boko Haram insurgency and the challenges of securing Nigerian state	2015	African Renaissance	12	1	Adonis and Abbey Publishers Ltd
19	Agbiboa D.E.	Borders that continue to bother us: the politics of cross-border security cooperation in Africa's Lake Chad Basin	2017	Commonwealth and Comparative Politics	55	4	Routledge
20	Amao O.B.; Maiangwa B.	Has the Giant gone to sleep? Re-assessing Nigeria's response to the Liberian Civil War (1990–1997) and the Boko Haram insurgency (2009–2015)	2017	African Studies	76	1	University of Witwatersrand
22	Adesoji A.; Alimi S.	State Legitimacy and the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria	2020	African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review	10	2	The Trustees of Indiana University
23	Amao O.B.	A decade of terror: revisiting Nigeria's interminable Boko Haram insurgency	2020	Security Journal	33	3	Palgrave Macmillan
24	Oluwadare A.J.	Boko Haram terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin Region: Implications for subregional security	2016	Journal of International and Global Studies	8	1	Lindenwood University
25	Okoli A.C.; Nwangwu C.	Organized Crime–Terror Nexus: Interrogating the Linkage Between Banditry and Terrorism in Northern Nigeria	2023	Journal of Asian and African Studies	58	5	SAGE Publications Ltd

S/N	Author(s)	Title	Year	Journal	Vol	No	Publisher(s)
26	Omotuyi S.	Franco-Nigerian détente? Nigeria, France and the Francophone states of the Lake Chad region in the era of the Boko Haram terrorism	2022	African Identities	20	1	Routledge
27	Hentz J.J.	The multidimensional nature of the Boko Haram conflict	2018	Small Wars and Insurgencies	29	Nil	Routledge
28	Butu H.M.; Hashim A.H.; Ahmad N.	Residents' resilience towards insecurity in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria	2019	Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities	27	Nil	Universiti Putra Malaysia
29	Aguwa J.	Boko Haram: History, ideology, and goal	2017	International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society	7	2	Common Ground Research Networks
30	Eke S.	Population-Centric Counterinsurgency in the Age of Salafi-Driven Insurgencies	2020	Journal of Global Security Studies	5	1	Oxford University Press
31	Olofinbiyi S.A.	The Intractable Malaise: Understanding the Patterns That Maintain the Terrorist Stronghold in Nigeria	2021	SAGE Open	11	2	SAGE Publications Inc.
32	Chukwurah D.C.; Eme O.; Ogbeje E.N.	Implication of Boko Haram terrorism on Northern Nigeria	2015	Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences	6	3	Mediterranean Center of Social and Educational Research
33	Akinola O.	Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Between Islamic Fundamentalism, Politics, and Poverty	2015	African Security	8	1	Routledge
34	Onuoha, F. C., Nwangwu, C., & Ugwueze, M. I.	Counterinsurgency operations of the Nigerian military and Boko Haram insurgency: expounding the viscid manacle	2023	<i>Ten Years of Boko Haram in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Counterinsurgency Challenges</i>	Nil	Nil	Springer Nature Switzerland
35	Amao, O. B.	A decade of terror: revisiting Nigeria's interminable Boko Haram insurgency	2023	<i>Ten Years of Boko Haram in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Counterinsurgency Challenges</i>	Nil	Nil	Springer Nature Switzerland
36	Ekumaoko, C. E., & Ezemenaka, K. E.	Responsibility to protect: External intervention on Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria	2023	<i>Ten Years of Boko Haram in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Counterinsurgency Challenges</i>	Nil	Nil	Springer Nature Switzerland
37	Onapajo, H., & Ozden, K.	Non-military approach against terrorism in Nigeria: Deradicalization strategies and challenges in countering Boko Haram	2023	<i>Ten Years of Boko Haram in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Counterinsurgency Challenges</i>	Nil	Nil	Springer Nature Switzerland

It should be observed the authors of the selected 37 papers on table 2 come from different fields of specialization. These include; historians, political scientists, psychologists, security analysts, economists, geographers, environmentalists, to mention, but a few. Being Scopus indexed, the papers are published by reputable publishers such as Routledge, Palgrave, Sage Publications, Bridgewater State College, Taylor and Francis Ltd, Adonis and Abbey, Universities, and research centres.

Boko Haram's activities also have a regional impact as it spilled over into neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger and created a serious security challenge for the region. Despite the counter insurgency efforts of the Nigerian state alongside regional and international partners, the conflict has persisted for many years.

Since 2015, works on Boko-Haram insurgency have progressively expanded, which include journal articles, books, chapters, theses and dissertations [29] [30]. Despite the growing number of research on this social phenomenon, one hardly gets a systematic review of the works conducted on Boko-Haram. On this basis, therefore, this study systematically reviews existing works on Scopus and Science Direct databases with a view to understanding the nature and dynamics of current scholarship in this research area using the PRISMA protocol [17].

In this study, a total number of 70 works (46 before eligibility assessment and 28 after the assessment) were excluded on two counts; (1) Because they are either too generic to include all forms of insurgencies and conflicts in Africa, or (2) for being too specific to other issues not directly related to Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria. Although the papers excluded after the eligibility assessment have explained some aspects of Boko-Haram insurgency, they tend to prioritize other issues not directly related. Some of these papers revolve around demography and vaccination of women, impact of Boko-Haram on women, victim's psychological trauma, and youth migration from conflict ridden areas, the role of joint task force in counter-insurgency efforts, as well as the contributions of the clergy and traditional rulers in counter-terrorism campaign. Other papers focus more on the challenges associated with IDP camps in North-Eastern Nigeria, comparative analysis between Boko-Haram and the Niger Delta militants, the impact of conflict on tourism, maternal mortality and religious violence, inter-faith dialogue and the efforts of the international community in curbing out insurgencies in Africa.

After the eligibility assessment, a total number of 37 selected papers were considered relevant. Table 1 shows that the highest number of papers accounting for 24.3% and 18.9% were published in 2020 and 2023, while the lowest number, which was 5.4% was published in 2016, 2018, and 2019. The plausible explanation for the growth of published papers as many scholars argue in 2020, can be attributed to the effect of the Covid-19 lockdown, which gave many scholars ample time to conduct research and publish [31] [32]. To buttress this point, Sharma and Sha [33] argue that more than 20,000 papers were published since December, 2019. The drop in terms of publications in 2016, 2018 and 2019 can be as a result of the fact that the Boko-Haram phenomenon had reached its climax and scholars were giving it a second thought after their earlier publications.

Thematically, the 37 selected papers mainly focus mainly on the history and ideological formations of Boko-Haram, their use of transportation during attacks, Boko-Haram counter-insurgency, expansion and resilience, global war on terror with particular reference to the activities of Boko-Haram insurgents, and their cross-border operations (Table 2). They also cover issues relating to the reintegration of ex-Boko-Haram fighters, the role of women suicide bombers, state legitimacy and Boko-Haram insurgency, as well as de-radicalization campaigns.

5. Conclusion

As earlier on stated in this paper, systematic reviews avail researchers with important avenues to apply existing knowledge in their works. Following this same line, this paper uses the PRISMA protocol to review published works on Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria from 2015-2023. Results show that although many researchers have written on different aspects of the Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, a systematic review of existing knowledge on the issue is grossly lacking. From the results collected, which was augmented with discussions and analysis of the nature of current scholarship on Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, this paper contributed immeasurably by adopting a systematic review approach to synthesize existing literature on the subject from 2015-2023.

Using Scopus and Science Direct databases, this paper identified 107 journal articles and book chapters on Boko-Haram and conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Out of this number, 46 papers were excluded for reasons, while 65 full-text articles and book chapters were assessed for eligibility. After the assessment, it was observed that 28 more papers must be excluded as they are not directly relevant to the subject matter. This exercise brought the number of relevant and selected studies to 37, which are

considered to have met the review criteria. This paper shows how scholars have approached the phenomenon of Boko-Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria from socio-economic, political and ideological perspectives. Results show that there is a higher number of works on Boko-Haram, accounting for 24.3% and 18.9% of the publications in 2020 and 2023 respectively, while the lowest amounted to 5.4% in 2016, 2018 and 2019.

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