Youth in Northeast Nigeria: Perpetrators or Peacebuilders? A Discourse Analysis of the Public and Policy Representation of Youth in Northeast Nigeria

Wit, Julia de

Youth in Northeast Nigeria: Perpetrators or Peacebuilders?

Julia Mara de Wit
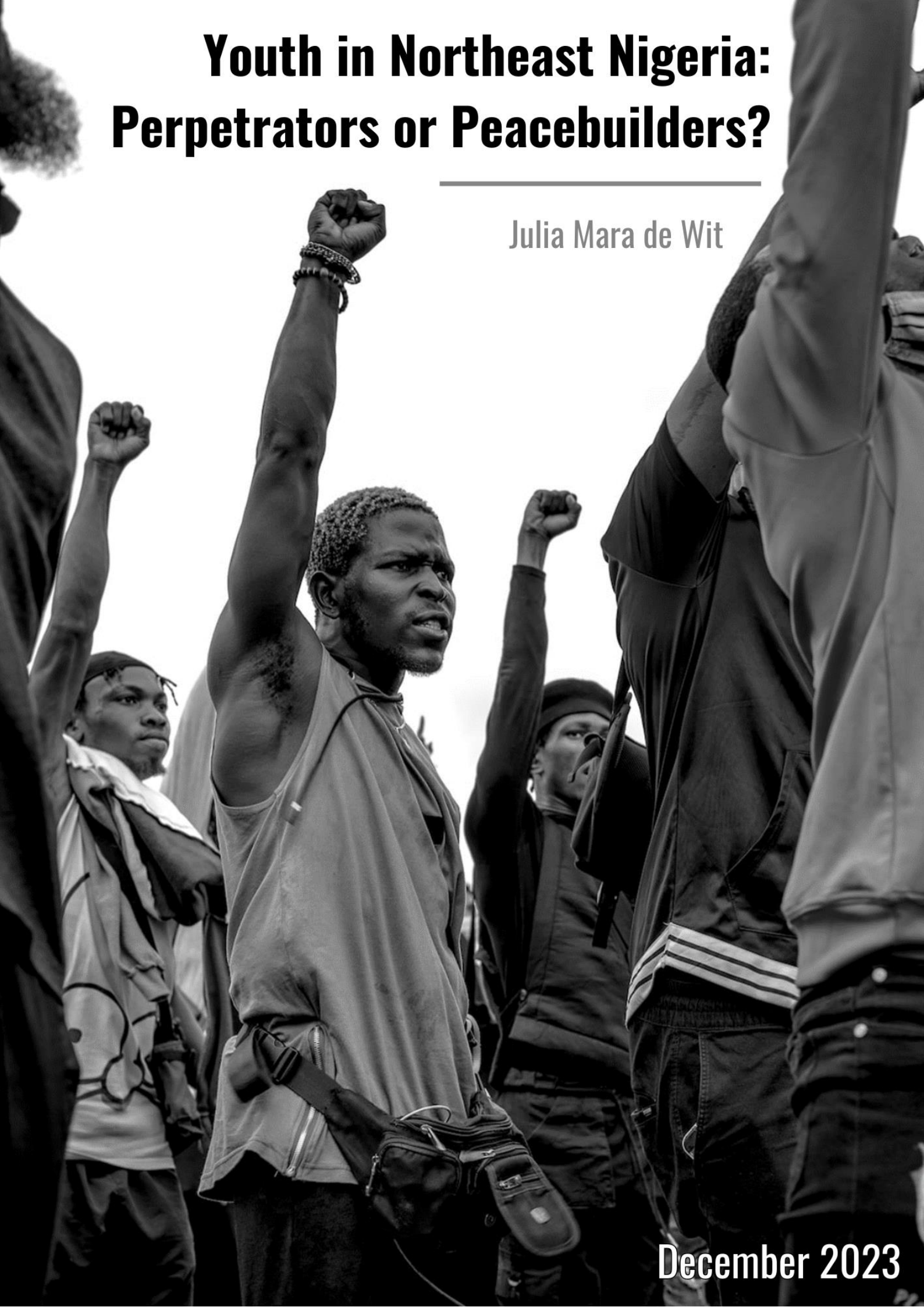
December 2023

Youth in Northeast Nigeria: Perpetrators or Peacebuilders?

A Discourse Analysis of the Public and Policy Representation of Youth in Northeast Nigeria

Julia Mara de Wit 3437434

Supervisor: Dr Vineet Thakur

Second reader: Dr Andrea Warnecke

MA Thesis International Relations- Global Conflict in the Modern Era

Faculty of Humanities

Leiden University

14.895 words

December 8, 2023

Abstract

Since 2009, northeastern states in Nigeria have been heavily plagued by the insurgency group Boko Haram. Additionally, an upsurge in recruitment and radicalization among Nigerian youth can be observed. Subsequently, fear and distrust in youth among communities arise, where young Nigerians are perceived as inherently dangerous, feared to be involved with Boko Haram. The emergence this stereotype has profound implications for the position of youth in society and prompts questions regarding the factors that contribute to the perpetuation of this stereotype. Therefore, this research aims to explore how youth in northeast Nigeria are portrayed through public and policy discourse, especially in regards to Boko Haram. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis as the methodological framework, this research critically scrutinizes if the Nigerian media, politicians and policymakers depict youth as a threat to society. Findings of the discourse analysis reveal a prevailing negative rhetoric surrounding youth in northeast Nigeria. They are presented as a demographic who are often unemployed and excluded from society. Additionally, young Nigerians are consistently associated with recruitment, radicalization, crimes and involvement in violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram. All these components appear interconnected, revealing a vicious cycle of stigmatization and violence. Drawing upon securitization theory, this research concludes that media, policymakers and politicians wield their influence to portray youth as a threatening actor to society, contributing to the perpetuation of a detrimental narrative that further fuels stigmatization and marginalization of youth in northeast Nigeria.

Key words: Youth, Violent Extremism, Securitization, Stereotypes, Northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram, Critical Discourse Analysis

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
NNYP	Nigerian National Youth Policy
NNAP YPS	Nigerian National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security
NIYEAP	Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan
DIFD	Department for International Development
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
MJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
PCVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

"Every young person was seen as a potential Boko Haram member"

Dauda Gombe

Youth Representative Dutch Embassy, Abuja Nigeria[i]

1. Introduction

Since 2009, Nigeria has been plagued with violence caused by the Islamic militant group Jama'atu Ali Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Juhad, more commonly known as Boko Haram (Hentz, 2019). Tens of thousands of civilians have lost their lives and millions were forced to leave their homes due to the insurgency (Brechenmacher, 2019). The violence caused by Boko Haram is especially present in the Lake Chad region in Nigeria, consisting of the northeastern states Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2022). The militant group initially emerged as an Islamist reform movement with the objective to install an Islamic government that adheres to *Sharia* law. They aimed to overthrow the current government, a system that, according to Boko Haram's ideology, is inspired by the British political and legal system (Brechenmacher, 2019; Zenn, 2020). Over the years, this Islamist movement has increasingly resorted to violence, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians (Brechenmacher, 2019). In response, the Nigerian government has countered the insurgency with punitive military efforts which have been widely criticized for claiming the lives of too many innocent civilians (Jerome, 2015). The insurgency, its extreme violence and the counterefforts of the government impact the livelihood of many northeastern Nigerians. Beyond direct consequences such as loss of life and forced displacement of citizens, the effects also extend to fostering marginalization and distrust among diverse citizen groups, particularly the youth.

Although exact numbers are unavailable, it is estimated that the majority of the Boko Haram fighters consist of people between the age 18 and 35 years old (Mercy Corps, 2016; Oko, 2022). Research has indicated that young people in Nigeria are more susceptible to recruitment due to varying reasons, such as social pressure, unemployment, lack of trust in the state, marginalization and the desire to belong (Onuhoa, 2014; Mercy Corps, 2016; Botha & Abdile, 2017). Youth who decide to join Boko Haram are particularly deployed for peer recruitment and suicide bombings, creating a stigma that many young Nigerians are a threat to society. As a result, fear and distrust towards youth emerges among fellow citizens (O'Connor, Betancourt, & Enelamah, 2021). This fear and distrust further excludes and marginalizes youth from society and, subsequently, a vicious circle emerges. This cycle makes the recruitment of

young people increasingly easier for Boko Haram, as social exclusion perpetuates their appeal. Additionally, the stigmatization and subsequent marginalization of youth in Nigeria makes it harder for youth to participate in the political and social spheres of civic space, which is already challenging (Bangura, 2022). Hence, youth are often seen as either the perpetrator or victim of violent extremism and recruitment, while their role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is neglected.

Previous research on conflict analysis in has primarily centralized around strategic and tactical factors of conflict (Kah, 2018). This study seeks to broaden this perspective by examining the mechanisms through which youth become involved in conflicts. The constant recruitment and (perceived) involvement of youth in conflict is one of the main fuels for conflicts, however this aspect seems underexplored (Hilker & Fraser, 2009). For this reason, the securitization theory is employed in this study. This theory argues that when powerful actors, such as state representatives, frame an issue or actor as an existential threat, a perception of threat is created (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998). Accordingly, youth in northeast Nigeria are securitized when they are presented as objects of risk by influential actors. Consequently, they face increased exclusion due to the heightened fear and distrust, rendering them more susceptible to recruitment: a vicious cycle emerges. The securitization of youth in northeast Nigeria is an overlooked issue and the role of influential public figures herein remains unexplored. The objective of this thesis is to contribute to a deeper understanding of this complex dynamic.

Nigeria has one of the youngest populations in the world; almost 75% of the country is under 35 years old according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020). Its neighbouring countries are similarly young: 64,5% of the population in the Sahel countries were under 25 in 2020/2021 (Dieng, 2021). Given these Nigeria's substantial youth demographic, ensuring the inclusion and engagement of young people is of high importance. However, these young populations are plagued by conflict and corruption, allowing for a small civic space (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2022). The distrust towards young Nigerians, fuelled by biases and fear, particularly in conflict-driven areas, imposes additional barriers to their meaningful involvement. Consequently, young Nigerians are generally disengaged from society and excluded from political processes and institutions (Ibezim, 2019; Ezemanaka, 2021).

The disengagement of such a large bulge of the country emphasizes the importance of more research into the securitization of youth in Northeast Nigeria. The stereotype that emerges as a result of securitization is the portrayal of a young Nigerian facing unemployment and residing in impoverished economic conditions, who is automatically associated with Boko

Haram. This prejudice can have devastating effects on the Nigerian society, especially because of its youthful population. How youth are represented in the media, political speeches and national policy, can shape this stereotype (Levinsen & Wiens, 2011). Prejudice-denoting terms that are used throughout public outlets, can lead to prejudices of certain demographic groups in society (Rozado, Al-Gharbi & Halberstadt, 2023).

1.1 Research Question and Objectives

The stigmatization and stereotyping of youth can be created and/or stimulated by public and policy discourse. A negative narrative in, for example, political speeches or news articles, may cause or enhance stigmatization of youth. If youth are constantly linked to violent extremism, unemployment or laziness, this can result in a negative view of youth. Therefore, it is crucial to research if and how discourse in Nigeria affects the public perception of youth. In order to do so, this research presents a discourse analysis of public and policy discourse regarding youth in northeastern Nigeria, particularly in relation to Boko Haram. In essence, I ask: *How are Nigerian youth portrayed by media, politicians and policymakers, especially in regards to Boko Haram?* The objectives of this thesis are to 1) uncover if the public and policy discourse represent youth in a negative way; 2) particularly examine if the discourse associates them to Boko Haram and; 3) understand how this discourse encourages fear and distrust. Moreover, this study aims to add to existing academic literature which primarily emphasizes strategic causes of conflict or radicalization motivations of youth. Rather than reiterating these themes, this study is centres around the prejudices of youth regarding recruitment, radicalization and involvement in violent extremism.

1.2 Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured as followed. Chapter 2 offers a conceptualization, a discussion of existing literature and portrayal of the sociopolitical and historical context. Chapter 3 introduces and explicates the theoretical lens and research method utilized in this research. In chapter 4 the results of the discourse analysis are presented, discussed and interpreted. Lastly, chapter 5 will end the thesis with a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This literature review will provide an extensive conceptualization of *youth* and *social exclusion.* Additionally, it will explicate the securitization theory and how it relates to this study. Then, the existing debates regarding the role of youth in violent extremism and the possible consequences are discussed. Lastly, the historical and socio-political context are presented.

2.1 Conceptualization

2.1.1 Youth

Universally, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of 'youth' (Baah-Boateng 2016; Tyyskä, 2017; Bangura, 2022). Simply, it can be expressed in age; the African Union uses the range of 18-35 while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Nigerian National Youth Policy define youth as people between the age of 15 and 29 (UNDP, 2018; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Nevertheless, this conception is considered by some as a Western connotation, where youth is relatively uniform, rigid and often associated with a carefree and enjoyable period (Tyyskä, 2018; NNYP, 2019). Some scholars argue that youth cannot be explained as an age-bound category and it should be interpreted as a stage in life between childhood or adolescence and adulthood (Baah-Boateng, 2016; Tyyskä, 2017; Bangura 2022). Moreover, the period is rather characterized by uncertainty, marginalization and economic inequality for youth in the southern hemisphere.

Hence, defining youth by the stage in life is culturally relative as it depends on the societal, cultural, political and economic situation in which someone lives (Tyyskä, 2017). The stage between adolescence and adulthood is defined by Honwana (2013) as waithood where, she argues, the majority of youth in several African countries seems to be stuck in. Bangura (2022) draws on Honwana's definition and explains waithood in Africa as a result of the lack of socio-economic opportunities that are available for many African youth since the post-independence era. Bangura (2022) advances beyond the concept of waithood and introduces the concept of youthhood: a period that is associated with poverty, illiteracy and lack of social status, regardless of age. Additionally, dependence on family, unemployment and being in need of social and economic assistance are often viewed as characteristics of youthhood. The difference with waithood is that people in youthhood are not necessarily in the phase between childhood and adulthood; they are just perceived as such because of their socio-economic status (Bangura, 2022). Consequently, socially active and employed youth are often excluded from

this classification while adults that are impoverished, unemployed and in need of social and economic assistance are still perceived as youth, regardless of their age (Bangura, 2022). Hence, this creates a statistical bias, representing all unemployed and dependent citizens as youth.

Youthhood as explained by Bangura (2022) highlights the problematizing perception of youth that exists in several African societies. However, as aforementioned, Bangura's definition excludes an important group of youth, namely the social active, employed and participating youth. The negative perception of youth is enhanced by the power structures that exist in many African states (Bangura, 2022). Power is often in the hands of a small group of older elites and subsequently youth are politically underrepresented in society. Moreover, youth are consistently excluded from (local) governing positions and decision-making processes. As a result, youth are more prone to joining the informal, and often illegal, sector. This makes them more likely to join the criminal network, militias or extremist politics than other age groups (Bangura, 2022). This further deteriorates the perception of youth and may lead to stereotypes. However, Bangura (2022) emphasizes that the majority of these excluded youth do not join the criminal network or extremist militias. They mostly join the informal economy, practice informal politics through protesting or volunteering at civil society organizations or they leave the country (Bangura, 2022).

Thus, the concept of youth is context dependent and signifies the period in life where someone moves from childhood (complete dependence) to adulthood (complete independence). How and when this transition takes place is locally and culturally dependent and cannot be expressed in age brackets (Tyyskä, 2017). For instance, in Nigeria, marriage is considered a significant social landmark that signifies adulthood (NNYP, 2019). Nevertheless, a definition without defining an age group remains contestant and difficult to demarcate because it creates statistical bias. For consistency and in deference to the availability of data, this thesis therefore deploys the age group of 15-29 years old, in line with the age group used in the Nigerian Youth Policy (NYP). This policy differs from the UN definition (15-24) as the NYP finds this bracket too narrow for African countries because of their relatively lower socio-economic status (NYP, 2019). Moreover, approximately 75% of the male population and more than 90% of the female population in Nigeria is married by the age of 29, which is considered a major social landmark for adulthood in Nigeria (NYP, 2019).

2.1.2 Securitization Theory

According to the securitization theory, security is not an objective reality but rather an outcome of a social process constructed by politicians and decision-makers (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998; Williams, 2003). An actor or issue is deemed a threat to state or society due to the portrayal as a risk by the securitizing actor. A securitizing actor is someone who has the social and institutional power to "lift the issue above politics" (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998, p.26). This actor does not have to be a state representative; other social entities can also lift an issue beyond politics. An issue is socially constructed as a threat through speech-acts when phrases such as 'threatening', 'dangerous' or 'we need to act now before it is too late' are used (Williams, 2003). This understanding of the securitization theory is along the lines of the Copenhagen School of thought, which emphasizes the importance of speech-acts (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998). Securitization occurs when, first, a securitizing actor employs a narrative of existential threat, the so-called securitizing move (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998). The second step is achieved when the audience accepts this representation. Subsequently, securitization justifies actions that are normally out of bounds, such as disproportional violence by state forces (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998). Hence, labelling an issue as an threatening, claims the right to deploy any means necessary to counter the perceived threatening issue. Securitization can therefore be used to legitimize force that would normally be considered disproportional (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998).

Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998), prominent scholars of the Copenhagen School, centralize speech-acts in securitization theory. Nevertheless, it is argued that the contexts surrounding this discourse should not be neglected (Bigo, 2000). This is the main criticism of the Paris School on the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School. Bigo (2000), the most prominent representative of the Paris School, argues that the practices, audiences and contexts that allow for this discourse, are also essential in securitization theory. When an issue becomes normalized and entrenched in society, it enables securitizing actors to create this rhetoric. Subsequently, de-securitizing a problem becomes increasingly challenging, given that when one politician counters the negative narrative of the issue, in reality, the issue is not immediately de-securitized. The issue is already embedded too deep in the society to simply de-securitize it through the use of language. Thus, Bigo (2000) argues that securitization is not solely caused by the use of a certain rhetoric; the context and activities beyond the rhetoric are equally essential.

This thesis utilizes the securitization theory to explore if and how Nigerian youth are portrayed as a threat to society. In lines with the Paris School, the complex and important

contexts surrounding Nigerian youth are acknowledged and included. The discourse surrounding youth as articulated by the securitizing actors, is central in securitization theory. The rhetorical nature of the securitization theory explains why this thesis has chosen to conduct a discourse analysis of speech-acts and written texts by journalists, policymakers and politicians. As aforementioned, the speech-acts alone do not do justice to the complexity of the issue. The context of youth in northeast Nigeria is crucial to understand the socioeconomic and political factors that allow securitization and explain why de-securitization is not easily achieved. The marginalized position of youth in northeast Nigeria enable media, policymakers and politicians to deploy a negative rhetoric. A rhetoric that for example portrays youth as lazy, dangerous and/or criminal. This discourse would not be utilized as easily when it would target a more powerful demographic of society, and it would not have the same consequences. Simultaneously, de-securitization is not a simple act either because of the entrenched issues (Bigo, 2000). Accordingly, when one politician declares youth as peacemakers, this will not automatically de-securitize them because society is already geared to perceive them rebels or criminals because of sociopolitical and economic factors.

So, the societal architecture is already arranged to marginalize youth in Northeast Nigeria, allowing for a negative rhetoric. This rhetoric creates a vicious cycle: securitization is enabled by the youth's marginalized position but subsequently deteriorates their marginalization even further. This subsequently makes them more prone to join criminal activities, confirming the narrative. This vicious cycle is further explicated in section 2.3. Thus, this thesis puts an emphasis on speech-acts as argued by Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998), but also elaborates on the context in which these speech-acts take place and how this complicates the de-securitization process, as articulated by Bigo (2000).

2.1.3 Social Exclusion

Social exclusion encompasses economical, social, political and cultural exclusion (Birchall, 2019). The Department for International Development (DFID) defines social exclusion as: "A process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live" (DFID, 2019). Hence, social exclusion is a result of unequal power relations (Birchall, 2019). When we break down social exclusion in the four different spheres, the following examples arise. Social exclusion includes poor access to health services, education, protection and livelihood

opportunities (Birchall, 2019). Economic exclusion encompasses a high rate of unemployment or poverty and exclusion from economic development. Cultural exclusion implies the exclusion based on cultural beliefs and superstitions, for example perceiving a certain demographic group as a burden. Lastly, political exclusion is the exclusion of people from decision-making and governing roles. Social exclusion can also be a causal factor in conflict and instability, implying that exclusion of particular groups can result in violent mobilisation. When a group is excluded from full participation in society, tensions arise.

2.2 Representation of Nigerian Youth: The Vicious Circle

This section provides an overview of the existing literature concerning the representation of Nigerian youth over the past decades, with a particular focus on their representation in relation to Boko Haram. First, it explains how the focus on radicalization and recruitment of youth in academic and policy realms have contributed to a negative image. Second, it is explicated how the focus on high unemployment and marginalization of youth adds to this negative perception. Third, it is argued that this negative perception subsequently leads to further exclusion and stigmatization of youth, substantiated by several existing studies. Moreover, speaking negatively about youth can foster distrust towards them, potentially leading to further youth radicalizing and joining Boko Haram. This vicious circle is clarified and describes why this study of discourse is relevant. Lastly, this section explains how this study will build upon existing literature.

Over the past decades, the focus within the realm of academic literature as well as (inter)national policies and politics regarding youth and violent extremism, has mainly been on youth's motivations to join extremist groups (Onuoha, 2014; Mercy Corps, 2016; Agbiboa, 2018; Kah, 2018). Youth are predominantly represented as either the perpetrators or the victims of violent extremism, whereas their social agency is neglected (Bruijn & Both, 2017; Agbiboa, 2018). Motivations of youth to join extremist groups have been commonly researched and it is widely acknowledged that social pressure, unemployment, lack of trust in the state, marginalization and the desire to belong are the predominant incentives (Onuhoa, 2014; Mercy Corps, 2016; Botha & Abdile, 2017). These conclusions are subsequently utilised by policymakers to mitigate the radicalization of youth and empower positive youth engagement such as youth leaders in civil organizations or the inclusion of youth in Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (PCVE) efforts (ICCT, 2019; Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2022).

Nevertheless, the focus in literature is primarily on the radicalization and recruitment of youth, rather than their positive role in peacebuilding. Accordingly, this emphasis may have led to an unintended consequence: a rhetoric that portrays youth as a demographic prone to radicalization and involvement in extremist groups because of unemployment, poverty or their social status (O'Connor, Betancourt & Enelamah, 2021). This signifies the securitizing move, as explained above. The securitization of youth can lead to negative outcomes such as stereotyping and stigmatization of youth by its community and remains understudied.

Furthermore, the high unemployment rate and marginalization of young Nigerians further sustain their negative image. According to the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning (2023), the unemployment rate of Nigerian youth was 53% in 2022. In this case, youth is defined by the Ministry as 15-29 years old. Additionally, available research suggests that youth in northeast Nigeria are excluded from society in several ways (Onuoha, 2014). Young people aged 16-29 in Nigeria are especially vulnerable to economic and social exclusion (Birchall, 2019). According to Birchall (2019), Nigerian youth face multiple barriers to social inclusion; only 9 percent of youth, aged 15-29, attained postsecondary education in 2011-2016 (World Bank, 2019, p23). The poverty rate among youth rose with 6.3 percentage points between 2011-2016 (World Bank, 2019, p23). Meanwhile, the poverty rate among adults only rose with 2.5 percentage points and 15 percent of them attained postsecondary education (World Bank, 2019, p23).

The youth representation in Nigerian political life is extremely low due to the exclusion from governing systems (Bangura, 2022). For instance, age qualifications for elected positions obstruct youth from participating in politics in Nigeria which instigated the #NotTooYoungtoRun movement in 2016 (Udemeh, 2018). This bill was signed into law in 2018 and changed the age qualification for president from 40 to 30, for governor from 35 to 30, for senator from 35 to 30 and for representative in the House of Assembly of House of Representatives (Udemeh, 2018). Nevertheless, these new age groups still exclude a large portion of Nigerian youth. When utilizing the National Youth policy definition of 15-29 years old, youth only hold 1% of all leadership positions across all levels and tiers of Nigerian governance (Adejoro, 2022).

In addition to political representation, youth participation in politics can be measured through the recognition and inclusion of youth into developmental agendas and policies. For example, the Nigerian National Youth Policy was first introduced in 2009 and renewed in 2019 (Ibezim, 2019). In reality, however, youth are passive and reactive to these policies as a result

of the lack of implementation of the policies (Ibezim, 2019). Moreover, a widely made criticism is that youth were not included sufficiently in the policymaking process.

The constant exclusion from political, social, cultural and economic activities understandably leads to disengagement, causing youth to become more prone to being victims of recruitment and, thus, perpetrators of violence (Conciliation Resources, n.d.; Onuoha, 2014). Additionally, and possibly consequently, Boko Haram mainly focuses its recruitment on socially excluded, unemployed youth (Onuoha, 2014). They view this demographic as more vulnerable and more susceptible to recruit as they are often searching for a place to belong or financial support. Recruited youth are often deployed for suicide bombings and recruitment of other youth (Onuoha, 2014).

Accordingly, the wide attention for youth radicalization in the academic and policy realm and the high unemployment and marginalization of youth in Nigeria's society leads to the stigmatization of youth. According to O'Connor, Betancourt & Enelamah (2021), communities in northeast Nigeria have slipped into a state of distrust. The wide suspicion of youth leads to further marginalization from society which simultaneously causes youth to become increasingly more susceptible for undertaking violence. Furthermore, there is a fear of the disorder they might cause by their ideological choices. This culture of fear and state of distrust ultimately leads to the stigmatization of youth (Bruijn & Both, 2017). Hence, a vicious circle is created, as depicted in Figure 1.
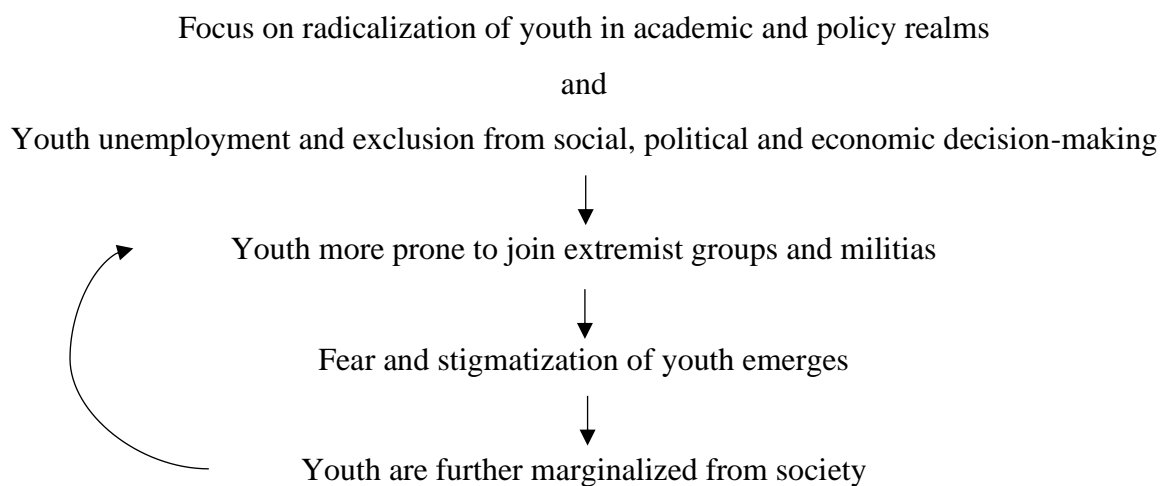

Figure 1

This vicious circle displays the state of distrust towards youth that creates a stereotype of youth in northeast Nigeria. Existing literature stresses that the negative representation and the accompanying prejudices are a crucial barrier for youth to participate in civic space (Dietrich,

2015; O'Connor, Betancourt & Enelamah, 2021; Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2022). However, the role that language and representation plays in this marginalization, lacks academic attention.

Contrarily, the mutual distrust between youth and the Nigerian government is extensively examined in academic writings (Dietrich, 2015; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). As aforementioned, Nigerian youth are generally excluded from social, economic and political participation, resulting in a lack of trust in the state (Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2022; Bangura, 2022; Conciliation Resources, n.d.). Moreover, police brutality and the unjustified arrests of Nigerian youth during the end-SARS movement in 2020, a protest against state violence, has led to progressively more hostility between the state and Nigerian youth (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). In the northeast of Nigeria specifically, the distrust also stems from the counterinsurgency efforts of the government that have led to many (unwarranted) arrests of youth suspected of belonging to Boko Haram (Dietrich, 2015). The arrested youth are often mistreated, abused and even left to die by military forces. A mutual distrust emerges, with Nigerian security forces suspecting youth of Boko Haram affiliation. Simultaneously, the youth fear wrongful arrests by the security forces. While a plethora of studies have examined the distrust between youth and state in Nigeria, the distrust between youth and community remains inadequately understood (Dietrich, 2015; O'Connor, Betancourt & Enelamah, 2021). Thus, this study aims to contribute to this understanding.

2.3 Historical and Socio-Political Background

2.3.1 Boko Haram

Boko Haram loosely translates to 'Western education is a sin' and is a fundamentalist, jihadist insurgency which emerged around 2002 as an Islamist reform movement (Newman, 2013; Brechenmacher, 2019). Their ultimate goal is a state led by their own version of the *Sharia* law. In 2009, the movement turned to violence, targeting both the government and civil populations to reach their goal. Since then, northeast Nigeria, as well as Cameroon, has been plagued by terrorism and violent extremism (Gana & Bukar, 2023). As a response, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) was established, comprising of troops from several West-African countries. Despite efforts of the MJTF to end Boko Haram, the insurgency was able to take control of 20.000 km^2 of land in the three northeastern states Borno, Yobe and Adawama (Gana & bukar, 2023).

Boko Haram uses several different tactics in their fight for power such as kidnapping and suicide bombings (Agwu, 2023). In Borno, the epicentre of Boko Haram with the deceiving

nickname 'Home of Peace', 200 Nigerian schoolgirls were kidnapped in 2014 (Zenn, 2020). This so-called Chibok kidnapping led to international reactions and worldwide recognition of the atrocities that Boko Haram commits. Brutalities such as these have caused the Nigerian government to use harsh and militant counterinsurgency efforts, costing the lives of many innocent civilians (Brechenmacher, 2019). This has led to extremely high instability and insecurity in the region over the past two decades.

In 2021, Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau was killed, most probably by suicide (UN, 2022). Although this setback has weakened Boko Haram, the group is still a threat to the society's safety (Zenn, 2023). According to the United Nations (2022), over 8 million people in the northeastern states are currently in need of assistance due to the extremist violence. The indiscriminate attacks have continued and still threaten the lives and livelihood of millions of civilians. The constant threat of extremist violence in northeast Nigeria has led to an atmosphere of fear and distrust (O'Connor, Betancourt, & Enalamah, 2021).

2.3.2 Socio-political context

With a population of over 200 million people, Nigeria has the largest population of the African continent (Zenn, 2020). Moreover, it is the country with more Christians and Muslims than any other African country. The Islamic population is primarily located in the north of the country and the Christians in the south (Zenn, 2020). The political balance is normally upheld in the country by continuously electing both one Muslim and one Christian candidate for presidential elections to represent both religions, as well as an equal division of ministers (Dyikuk, 2022). However, for the 2023 elections only Muslim candidates where elected, while the previous president Muhammadu Buhari was also a Muslim, which led to unrest among the Christian population of Nigeria (Dyikuk, 2022). In 2023, Bola Tinubu was elected as president in widely criticized elections. This political and religious context is particularly relevant to understand for this study as Boko Haram is an Islamist group that mostly operates in the north of the country.

3. Methodology

3.1 Discourse Analysis

This research aims to analyse the public and policy perception of Nigerian youth created by public discourse. Therefore, a qualitative analysis will be carried out in the form of a discourse analysis. A discourse analysis examines the language and language use behind the words in order to understand how it functions in a social context (Taylor, 2013). Language in this regard provides evidence and explanations for social phenomena. Through examination of discourse, a picture of society and its functions is depicted (Taylor, 2013). This analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of how discourse can create or add to the perception of Nigerian youth, specifically in relation to Boko Haram. This study is a case study, focusing on the context of Northeast Nigeria, but makes claims which have a broader importance and implications by adding to the securitization theory.

Discourse analysis involves the examination of the texts for features of rhetoric (Taylor, 2013). For example, differences are made between extreme, explicit claims and more moderate, implicit claims. Discourse analysis uses methods that focus on rhetorical, argumentative, communicative and grammatical aspects of talk and speech (Fairclough, 2001). Through the use of coding, these aspects are identified per text and bundled in overarching categories. This process will form a narrative which will lead to conclusions.

As aforementioned, this thesis aims to build upon the securitization theory. According to the securitization theory, the framing of an issue as threatening through the act of speech, does not always merely portray reality. When describing an issue or actor, the narrative transcends a mere objective depiction of reality but rather a subjective portrayal, at times meant to paint the issue or actor in a certain light. This implies that meanings and perceptions are inherently subjective, and the comprehension of reality depends on interpretative frameworks and linguistic constructs within a particular sociocultural context. These meanings systematically construct the subjects and worlds they address, emphasizing the role of language and discourse in shaping our understanding of reality. Hence, the discourse analysis of this thesis aims to construct a social reality of how Nigerian youth are presented. It aims to explore if the youth are portrayed as threatening actors to society, the fist step of securitization. The second step of securitization, the acceptance of the audience, requires an in-depth qualitative analysis in addition to the discourse analysis. Unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of this

research and therefore this research will focus on the first step of securitization: the securitizing move.

This discourse analysis comprises of a selection, coding and interpretation process. First, relevant texts were selected in which youth are mentioned in relation to Boko Haram, terrorism, radicalization, (un)employment and vulnerability. Subsequently, the coding process explores the narrative of the public and policy discourse surrounding youth. During this coding process, the overarching themes are identified and examined in order to uncover the portrayal of youth. The coding process will be explained in 3.2.4. Lastly, the interpretation process will interpret the coded data to build the narrative regarding youth in northeast Nigeria. This will be presented in the results section.

3.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

The framework employed in this research is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Notably, CDA is not a research method but should be considered a paradigm concerned with the relation between language and dominance (Wodak, 2014). As van Dijk (2015) clearly describes "Being critical (…) is a state of mind, an attitude, a way of dissenting, and many more things, but not an explicit method for the description of the structures or strategies of text and talk." (Wodak & Meijer, 2016, p.3). CDA is a critical perspective on discourse, particularly focused on how elite groups use language to exercise dominance in society (Wodak, 2014). Hence, CDA is concerned with how meanings of discursive practices contribute to the construction of social realities of power and discrimination. Mullet (2018) explains CDA as an analytical approach which can be used to critically interpret and explain how discourse can create, maintain and legitimize social inequalities. Importantly, Mullet (2018) presents a framework and notes that CDA research can employ different research methods and theoretical perspectives as it primarily functions as a paradigm. This research draws on Mullet's (2018) CDA lens with the aim to uncover the implicit power relations in discourse.

Furthermore, CDA is characterized by several key principles. First, CDA approaches are problem-oriented in the sense that they are interested in critically analysing a problem (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Second, CDA is aimed at deconstructing power dynamics by systematically analysing discursive practices (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Lastly, CDA researchers provide a self-aware subjective interpretation of the discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). They analyse both what is said and what remains unsaid.

3.1.2 Discourse Selection

In order to critically analyse discourse, relevant discourse related to social injustice or inequality in society should be selected (Mullet, 2018). In this case, that is the portrayal of youth in northeast Nigeria, particularly, but not limited to, in relation to Boko Haram and violent extremism. Hence, the analysis will be steered by the research question: *How are Nigerian youth portrayed by media, politicians and policymakers, especially in regards to Boko Haram?* The analysis will aim to explore if the rhetoric attempts to exclude youth by looking how this group is categorized and valued, how this is justified and what arguments are utilized (Taylor, 2013). The exclusion of a demographic group can be done for example through referencing to (past) conflicts with this group, which is a way of exercising power in society and leads to domination of certain population groups and the exclusion of others (Taylor, 2013).

3.1.2 Data Collection

The analysis aims to lay out the mechanisms of the public and policy discourse of youth. Consequently, the most prominent public and state documents were examined, namely news articles, policy documents and presidential speeches between January 2021 and November 2023. This specific time period was selected for several reasons. Firstly, as this study aims to find out the current representation of youth, a time frame as current as possible was chosen. Additionally, it enables the analysis of speeches delivered by two different presidents. Lastly, during this timeframe, three different national action plans that address youth are active. As this thesis focuses on youth in northeast Nigeria, the data was also selected with a focus on this region.

In order to obtain these documents, government websites and news websites were consulted. The *Daily Trust* is the most read newspaper in northern Nigeria and was therefore chosen as the source for the news articles (MacArthur Foundation, 2019). Articles between January 2021 and November 2023 were searched with the term *Youth* combined, separately, with the terms *Boko Haram, Radicalization, Vulnerable, Exclusion, Recruitment, Employment, Terrorism and Lazy.* Subsequently, the articles were sorted on 'Relevance' and the first ten pages, each containing ten articles, were scanned for relevant articles.

Important in this selection process was the interpretation of the terms in the relevant context. For example if an article focused on employment of adults and mentioned youth only in comparison, the article was deemed irrelevant for this study. This led to a selection of 81

articles (see Appendix A for an overview of the selection and Appendix for the consultation process).

For the speeches, all presidential speeches regarding national topics between January 2021 and November 2023 were consulted. These speeches were found on the news websites The Cable, The Guardian Nigeria, Vanguard, Premium Times Nigeria and Channels TV. Several speeches were found on the government website statehouse.gov.ng. Since Buhari stepped down and Tinubu was inaugurated in May 2023, speeches from both the previous president Muhammadu Buhari and current president Bola Tinubu were deployed. This led to the selection of 17 speeches. The speeches where youth are not mentioned are also taken into consideration as what is *not* said is also significant in a discourse analysis (see Appendix A for the complete selection).

Lastly, the policy documents *Nigerian National Action Plan for Youth Peace and Security* (2021-2024), *Nigeria Youth Policy* (2019-2023) and *National Youth Employment Action Plan* (2021-2024) were chosen for the analysis of the policy representation. The three policy documents all focus on youth and include plans for the relevant timeframe. As English is the national language of Nigeria, all the collected data is in English. The coding process will therefore also be conducted in English.

Thus, the discourse in the analysis consists of several voices: media, politicians and policymakers. An overview of all selected data can be found in Appendix A. Collectively, this data provides an image of the public and policy representation of Nigerian youth.

3.1.4 Coding

In order to identify the overarching themes, an inductive coding procedure will be conducted where the overarching themes are derived from the texts. This procedure identifies several core categories that capture the essence of the text through open, axial and selective coding. The first step is open coding, where the overarching themes of the texts are identified and the core categories are formed (Potter & Wheterell, 1994). This is done through a process of breaking down, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data (Potter & Wheterell, 1994). The texts are read multiple times to gain familiarity and ensure integrality. Subsequently, a re-examination of the categories will lead to subcategories, which is the process called axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Lastly, in the selective coding process the subcategories are connected to the core categories, explaining the relationships and providing a general explanation of the processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For the coding process, the program

Atlas.ti will be employed. In the results section, the identified themes are presented, explained and substantiated with relevant quotes. See Appendix C for screenshots of the coding process.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

As aforementioned, a Critical Discourse Analysis does not completely stay away from subjectivity (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The biases and interpretations of the researcher are taken into account in this analysis. As a young, white woman who is born and raised in the Netherlands, it is important to be constantly aware of my privileges and biases during this research. My social context significantly influences the knowledge construction process that forms this thesis. Therefore, claiming an objective truth is unattainable. In order to compensate for potential predispositions and attain a more intercultural approach, extensive use of Nigerian and critical scholars was deployed to form the theoretical foundations of this study. Still, as the Copenhagen and Paris school of thought informs the securitization theory that is employed in this research, the theoretical framework is mainly guided by a Western perspective. Therefore, in the preparations to this research, I have spoken to several Nigerian citizens and Dutch citizens living in Abuja, Nigeria. This has enhanced my understanding of the context my research is situated in and guided my approach.

4. Analysis

In the following chapter, the results and the corresponding interpretations of the discourse analysis are presented. Throughout the process of open, axial and selective coding, the codes that emerged were grouped and led to several overarching themes. The results are presented in accordance with these themes, which are *Youth as perpetrators, victims or peacemakers, Youth as decisionmakers or marginalized citizens, Unemployed or entrepreneurial youth* and '*Youth should' versus 'state should'*. The discursive practices regarding each theme will be discussed separately, however, cross-over relationships will also be identified and discussed.

4.1 Youth as Perpetrators, Victims or Peacemakers

4.1.1 Youth and Crime

Throughout the analysed news articles, speeches and policy documents, associations between youth and crime, violence, radicalization and terrorism emerge. To begin with, youth are often associated with the engagement in criminal groups and activities. It is, for example, stated that "in the last couple of years, criminal activities perpetrated by youth have become more rampant than ever" and that "unemployment and lack of meaningful empowerment by the government, among others, have been traced to an upsurge in such crimes among youth" (Daily Trust, 2022c, para. 2). By regularly linking crime with high youth unemployment, the media and policymakers portray a suggestive notion that unemployed youth are highly susceptible to committing crimes. Nevertheless, not only specifically unemployed youth are linked with crime involvement, as demonstrated by the following statement: "Nigeria has witnessed about 95 per cent of conflicts including thuggery, banditry, kidnapping, killings, cattle rustling, and thuggery carried out mainly by youth" (Ahmadu-Suka, 2022, para. 1).

Claiming that a substantial number of conflicts are instigated by youth contributes to the cultivation of a negative perception of Nigerian youth. This assertion initially presumes and labels youth as a homogeneous collective. This critical viewpoint can be incorporated into the existing literature on youth, emphasizing the need to consider the diverse characteristics within this age-defined cohort. By essentializing the group, the discourse obscures the existence of socially active, employed, and engaged youth subsets. Attributing criminality to this aggregated portrayal of youth further perpetuates a discursive qualification of youth as inherently risky. In this context, statistical data functions as a tool that shapes the perception and production of young people as objects of risk.

Moreover, their susceptibility is recurrently framed as a causal factor for criminal behaviour, as exemplified in the Nigerian National Action Plan for Youth, Peace, and Security (NNAP YPS), which asserts that "young people are particularly susceptible to violence and crime" (NNAP YPS, 2021, p. 27). This framing reinforces a narrative that may oversimplify the complexity and diversity within the youth demographic.

Thus, especially in the articles and policy documents, the relationship between crime and youth is often discussed. Nevertheless, the responsibility of youth joining criminal networks is not solely put on the youth themselves. The lack of empowerment and support by the government is also suggested as a factor driving youth into criminal engagement, as illustrated by the first quote. Accordingly, in multiple news articles the government is discursively involved as an actor in the crimes perpetuated by youth. Similarly, the policy documents discursively involve the government as a responsible actor, however they address it from a different perspective. While the news article authors mainly distance themselves from the government, attributing responsibility to the government, the policy documents take a closer stance. This can be derived from discursive differences such as "by the government" in news articles while the policy documents state their objectives for example as "promote young people's engagement", suggesting their own active role in these objectives.

Moreover, the discursively constructed causal link between youth and crime was not frequently made in the examined speeches. Only in Buhari's Independence Day Speech in 2021, youth was related to criminal activities. Namely, Buhari alleges people in national leadership positions for "funding and misleading our youth to conduct criminal acts" (Buhari, 2021b, para. 8). Subsequently, he pledges to enhance the country's security infrastructure. Markedly, Buhari attributes the responsibility of youth involvement in crimes to national leaders, excluding himself, rather than to the youth themselves. The limited attention given to the issue of youth criminality in the speeches can be explained by the fact that youth overall are not mentioned frequently in the presidential speeches. In only six of the seventeen analysed speeches, youth are somewhat elaborately mentioned. The remaining eleven speeches only shortly touched upon youth or did not address young Nigerians at all. When youth are addressed in the speeches, the focus tends to be on ambiguous promises of transformative change, such as "in our administration, women and youth will feature prominently" (Tinubu, 2023). A follow-up or clarifications of these promises are lacking. Notably, this lack of attention to youth by the presidents of such a youthful country, indicate a worrisome trend and neglects the importance of this citizen group.

4.1.2 Youth and Violent Extremism

Furthermore, recurrent connections between youth terrorism or violent extremism can be observed. While occasionally argued as unfounded or stereotypical, these connections are more often presented as a factual issue for the Nigerian society. For instance, youth are frequently represented as perpetrators of Boko Haram attacks in Northeast Nigeria: "It is regrettable to inform you that most of these killings in Gwoza were perpetrated by youths in Gwoza who have joined Boko Haram" (Ndume, 2023, as cited in Isamotu, 2023, para. 5) and "we realised that our children who joined Boko Haram were responsible for these attacks and I felt we should find a solution" (Sanusi, 2022, as cited in Daily Trust, 2022a, para. 7). These associations depict an image that youth in northeast Nigeria are predominantly responsible for Boko Haram attacks. Still, the use of personal pronouns such as "our children" and describing the events as "regrettable" implies that youth are still considered as an in-group of the community. Moreover, "I felt we should" implies a shared responsibility for the involvement of youth in the attacks. Although this suggests a responsibility beyond youth, it still continuously associates youth with extremist activities.

The constant depiction of youth in the forefront of Boko Haram, leads to an automatic association of youth with Boko Haram activities, especially in the northeastern region of the country. While it is not argued that *all* youth are members of Boko Haram, the constant connection leads to the association. Moreover, some articles that speak of youth domination in violent extremism, claim that Boko Haram is dependent on youth and therefore imply the significant importance of youth engagement in the extremist group. Collectively, these discourse elements suggest a high involvement of youth in Boko Haram and add to a stereotypical image of youth in northeast Nigeria.

Additionally, advising youth to stay away from terrorism adds to this stereotypical image: "My advice to Nigerian youths is to stay in peace, avoid terrorism, seek education and business to build a good future. Because in the coming few years we will be leaders." (Sadauki. 2023, as cited in Liman, 2023, para. 8). Implicit in this advice is the suggestion that Nigerian youth are frequently associated with terrorism rather than endeavours focused on peace, education, and constructive future-building. Moreover, it implies that Nigerian youth have a choice to "stay in peace", while ignoring the barriers they face due to their socioeconomic status. With this, their situational context is neglected and existing power structures are obscured. The discursive associations of youth with violent extremism in the Daily Trust, are read by many northeastern Nigerian citizens on a daily basis and may lead to a stereotypical view of youth.

Consciously or unconsciously, youth are linked to violent extremism, and particularly to Boko Haram.

Similarly, the policy documents also draw a connection between youth and violent extremism. The NNAP YPS for example claims that "youth are either active in the frontline or are at the receiving end of the aftermath of war" in most conflict situations around the world (NNAP YPS, 2021, p. 2). Accordingly, the Nigerian National Youth Policy (NNYP, 2019), states that Boko Haram significantly affects youth, both as the main victims and perpetrators of its activities. Hence, it is suggested in the policy documents that youth are highly involved in or affected by Boko Haram activities, as similarly articulated in several articles. Later in this section, we will delve deeper into the role of youth as victims.

Additionally, in the policy documents, notable emphasis is placed on the surge in violent extremism and radicalization among youth and strategies to mitigate this. For instance, the NNAP YPS states: "There is a rise in violence and violent extremism, especially among radicalized youth, threatening stability and development" in Nigeria (NNAP YPS, 2021, p. 28). Markedly, using the word 'threatening' suggests that radicalized youth threaten the stability and development of Nigeria, which indicates the securitization of Nigerian youth. The radicalized youth are represented as 'threatening', by the policymakers who in this case are the securitizing actors. Hence, policymakers distinctly assert the claim of an upsurge in radicalized and violent youth in Nigeria, contributing to the securitization of Nigerian youth: presenting them as a threat to society.

As a response to youth radicalization, the policy documents advocate for youth education and active engagement in society, as a means to counter terrorism, recruitment and radicalization. The goals stated in the NNAP YPS primarily focus on countering radicalization and recruitment through offering alternative narratives and incorporating peace into the education curriculum: "There should be provision of positive counter and alternative narratives to extreme and radical ideas by religious leaders and from other sources to prevent conflict." (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.72). Hence, the policy documents first adopt a discursive tone that highlights the increased involvement of youth in Boko Haram activities and subsequently propose strategies the government can use to counter this trend.

In a speech delivered by the then-president Buhari during the African Conference for Peace in January 2023, he emphasizes that the dire consequences around Lake Chad had led to people "losing their traditional source of living which culminated into the youths being recruited by terrorist groups who were seeking for means of livelihood, occasioned by difficult economic conditions" (Buhari, 2023). In the same speech, Buhari (2023) claims that the

idleness of youth and constant exclusion from discussions, can potentially make them more vulnerable to religious fundamentalism and extremism. With these inclinations, Buhari normalizes the move to radical and extreme ideas of youth who are idle and/or not able to participate in decision making processes. Additionally, he suggests that when youth lose their traditional source of living, they are more susceptible to recruitment and radicalization. These inclinations present a risky image of youth with these characteristics, possibly leading to prejudices and even further exclusion from society.

As president of the country, Buhari had great power and therefore, making these claims likely reinforces the inequal power dynamics in the country. Framing youth idleness, economic difficulties and social exclusion as possible factors that lead to recruitment, religious fundamentalism and extremism, results in a negative portrayal of youth. Especially when such an assertion is made by a powerful actor like the president, it can have long-term, detrimental effects. The negative portrayal and association will marginalize youth even further.

4.1.3 Youth as Victims and Peacebuilders

At the same time, youth are also considered as victims of violence and recruitment, for example in the NNAP YPS (2021-2024). In addition to addressing the surge in radicalization and violent extremism among youth, the action plan emphasizes the other side of the coin: "It must be recognized that youths are also one of the main victims of violence around the world, both in fragile and developed contexts"(NNAP YPS, 2021, p.27). Moreover, youth are displayed as more vulnerable and prone to committing violence when their needs are ignored by society and they are socially excluded: youth will be less prone to commit crimes or join groups when they "become co-owners in the community, state and national project." (Kwanashie, 2022, para. 7). Especially youth from grassroots can "easily be lured to believe radical and violent ideologies" (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.74). Notably, when speaking about youth who are prone to recruitment and radicalization, the word 'vulnerable' is frequently used as an adjective. Contrarily, when speaking about youth who are considered peacemakers or entrepreneurs, the words 'vibrant', 'energetic' and 'empowered' are deployed. Thus, it is suggested that engaging and empowering youth will result into more resistant youth. The negative adjectives such as 'vulnerable' and 'idle' are utilized far more often than the latter adjectives. Simultaneously, the characteristics of vulnerability and idleness are framed as causal factors to youth radicalization, recruitment and involvement in violent extremism. Collectively, this leads to the stereotype that many

Nigerian youth are vulnerable and idle, subsequently linking them to radicalization, recruitment and violent extremism.

Furthermore, the portrayal of youth as perpetrators is frequently acknowledged as an existing stereotype that needs to be challenged. This negative association is not explicitly endorsed in the texts themselves; instead, it is recognized as a prevailing sentiment that requires change. For example, the NNAP YPS (2021) speaks about youth as "vibrant and energetic" (p. 5) and as key in national development efforts but argues that they are "always associated with vices such as: restiveness, violence, crimes, insecurity, etc." (p. 5). This association is often discussed coupled with the notion of peacebuilding: "Young people are more often perceived as the main perpetrators of political violence, social unrest and violent extremism despite their increasing roles to build sustainable peace." (NNAP YPS, 2021, p. 25-26). Additionally, in an article by a professor of the University of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, he states:

> The youths are not the greatest threat to Nigeria but it's greatest hope. Despite the fact that youth often become the target for radicalization by violent extremist groups, many young people display extraordinary resilience and are addressing violent extremism in a broad range of settings. (Bwayili, 2021)

These reflections on the negative association of youth are discussed with the aim to decrease this perception, and thus can be considered as an attempt to build up a more positive view of youth in Nigeria.

Additionally, youth are framed as peacebuilders in several policy documents and articles. Especially in the NNAP YPS, youth participation in peacebuilding is widely addressed and established as one of the main objectives. It calls for the acknowledgement of the positive role of youth in peacebuilding and encourages the government to facilitate better participation and involvement of youth in PCVE: "Thus, it is important to meaningfully engage youth as veritable partners in preventing violence" (NNYP, 2019, p.84). However, some sources argue that youth still needs more education on youth in order to substantially contribute to it: "[…] it is important for youth to understand the peace process so that they can drive it." (Musa, 2022, as cited in Ahmadu-Suka, 2022, para. 5). This thought was reiterated in several articles and policy documents. Still, the prevailing sentiment in the texts is that their role as peacebuilders is neglected and more involvement should be facilitated by the government.

Overall, youth are represented as perpetrators, victims and peacebuilders of crime and violent extremism. Nevertheless, the dominant narrative implied by the discursive practices is that of youth as perpetrators. Their involvement in crimes, violence, terrorist attacks and specifically Boko Haram activities in northeast Nigeria is prevalent in the data. The increasing youth engagement in violent extremism and crime is predominantly presented as a threat to society, and thus contributes to the securitization of youth and the inequal power dynamics in Nigeria.

4.2 Youth as Decisionmakers or Marginalized Citizens

4.2.1 Political Exclusion

Another narrative that is woven throughout the data corpus, is the argued lack of political, societal and civic engagement of youth. A consensus can be found regarding the matter of youth exclusion and the promotion of increased engagement of youth, by both the state and society. Youth are excluded from governance, political discussions and decision-making roles, that narrative is evident: "Nigerian youths despite their capabilities, are suffering from aged-long national endemic of youth exclusion in governance and political leadership; given their under-representation and in most cases total exclusion in leadership, governance and decision-making" (Eze, 2021, as cited in Jimoh, 2021b, para. 3).

Accordingly, the prevailing sentiment is the belief that the government should more actively include youth in decision-making roles, governance and politics, and they should enhance its efforts to facilitate youth engagement. In this sense, more responsibility is placed with the government, rather than with the youth themselves. The government should "recognize their [youth] unique role and further engage them as meaningful partners and leaders. The government must not fail our future" (Bwayili, 2021, para. 4). Especially in the articles, the low youth engagement in governance and the failures of the government regarding this issue, is frequently emphasized. In the policy documents, the focus is more on how this engagement can be enhanced:

> Address barriers to meaningful youth engagement in civil and political affairs, and
> enhance opportunities for constructive involvement and meaningful participation of all
> Nigeria youth in community and social development, political processes and
> governance agenda at all levels, to the limit of their ability, desires and experience.
> (NNYP, 2019, p.10)

Tinubu (2023) emphasizes in his inaugural speech, that the state will include women and youth prominently in their administration. It is one of the five principles of his administration, however the implementation of this principle remains unclear throughout his speech. It can be inferred that Tinubu perceives current youth engagement and representation as insufficient and aims to rectify this. However, it is noteworthy that, out of the seven analysed speeches of Tinubu, only his inaugural speech mentions youth. This observation is remarkable given that he designates youth inclusion as a key principle, portraying a discrepancy between the rhetoric and prioritization in his articulated administration. Therefore, the absence of mentions in the other speeches underscores the importance of what is *not* said in evaluating his commitment to his promise.

While the prevailing narrative attributes low youth engagement primarily to the government, others assign responsibility to the youth themselves. They argue that youth should speak their minds, be more active in politics and take the lead in problem-solving. In an *Daily Trust* interview with young entrepreneur Mustapha Abubakar Gajibo (2022), he argues that the youth should take the lead in solving problems and not wait for the government to solve them (Daily Trust, 2022b). Moreover, the National President of the National Youth Council of Nigeria, Solomon Adodo, urged the Nigerian youth "to end lamentations and take practical measures over the challenges facing the nation" and ended with the statement that "youths are making changes across the worlds and Nigeria should not be an exception" (Adodo, 2021, as cited in Jimoh, 2021a, para. 8). Arguing that youth should stop their lamentations, implies that young Nigerians are complaining instead of taking action, and that they are responsible for their low involvement. This argument contributes to a negative image of youth created by the suggestion of youth as idle, which will be further examined in section 4.3.

Nonetheless, there is hope for the future regarding the role of youth in governance. The theme 'youth as the future of the nation' is likewise present in numerous articles and policy documents, underscoring the imperative to engage youth. Discursive practices that describe this sentiment include "youth are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the partners of today, but also the greatest investment for a country's development." (NNYP, 2019, p.22). Additionally, the country's youth are described as Nigeria's greatest hope instead of its greatest threat and it is argued that Nigerian youths "can turn things around in the country." (Daily Trust, 2022c, para. 3). Turning things around, however, implicitly suggests that the current powers of the country have to make room for

these changes. These discursive patterns, in both articles and policy documents, contribute to a positive presentation of Nigerian youth while challenging the current power dynamics in the country.

Thus, the overall narrative regarding youth engagement in governance, suggests that their involvement is currently insufficient and should be enhanced. Most sources argue that this improvement should be facilitated by the government. A consensus can be found on the fact that more youth engagement can yield significant improvements for Nigeria. They are currently excluded from the political sphere, but can, and should, become great decision-makers of the future.

4.2.2 Socioeconomic Marginalization

In addition to exclusion from the political sphere, youth encounter marginalization in socioeconomic spheres. Deprivations that affect youth disproportionally lead to social and economic inequality. Youth are depicted to be more economically deprived than other demographics, leading to more insecurity and struggles to attain basic needs. Moreover, youth have differential access to development opportunities and lower quality of social services (NNYP, 2019). This socioeconomic inequality is subsequently linked with violence in several data sources. For instance, in his New Year's speech, Buhari (2021a) contended that chronic poverty and social exclusion among youth are prevailing issues in certain parts of the country. However, cycles of violence impede the effectiveness of social policies aimed at addressing these issues. Furthermore, it is argued that exclusion and marginalization of youth is created by "ethnic diversity, religious, economic, social and political differences (…) within communities" (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.27). This illustrates the current power dynamics in Nigeria, where youth are evidently not part of the dominant group in society.

The socioeconomic exclusion of youth is also regularly linked to an upsurge of radicalization, violent extremism and (organized) crime. As articulated in the NNAP YPS:

> Likewise, the surge in radicalization and violent extremism within the last two decades also tends to be associated with the political and socio-economic disaffection of young men, and increasingly young women, who join extremist groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and ISIL. (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.26)

Using the words 'associated with' implies that a stereotype exists of young men and women who are politically and socioeconomically disaffected, are prone to radicalize and join extremist groups such as Boko Haram. This stereotype consequently leads to more marginalization and stigmatization, again illustrating the vicious cycle: "In the absence of opportunities and participation, youth become vulnerable and many times stay caught up in a vicious cycle of violence and stigmatization" (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.27). The stigmatization is enhanced by "social political, cultural and/or traditional patterns that perpetuate youth stereotypes" (NNAP YPS, 2021, p. 52). Markedly, the vicious cycle as explicated in Chapter 2 can be recognized in the data.

Thus, the relationship between youth marginalization and violent extremism is a recurring theme throughout the articles and policy documents. This relation perpetuates the stereotype of marginalized youth as more prone to engage in extremist practices. Subsequently this stereotype can have substantial effects on the representation of Nigerian youth, who are inevitably majorly marginalized from society. Consequently, they become stuck in the vicious cycle of stigmatization and violence.

4.3 Unemployed or Entrepreneurial Youth

As is made evident in the data, the unemployment rate among Nigerian youth is extremely high: "With the unemployment rate estimated at an all time high of 33 per cent as of 2022, Nigerian youths have been receiving end of the nation's poor economic system." (Daily Trust 2022c, para. 6). The high unemployment among youth is, according to the analysed articles and policy documents, mainly attributable to the lack of opportunities and jobs that are available for them. Therefore, the emphasis is predominantly on enhancing youth employment through education, job creation and entrepreneurship. The narrative that the state should offer more opportunities and support for youth is herein prevailing: "Interfaith has urged the federal and state governments to provide jobs for the youths to prevent their recruitment into crimes" (Daily Trust, 2021, para. 1). Subsequently, this appeal is adhered to in Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan 2021-2024 (NIYEAP): "Employment creation, including for young people, remains a key goal and priority of the Nigerian Government" (NIYEAP, 2021, p.18) and as Tinubu (2023) promises in his inaugural speech: "My administration must create meaningful opportunities for our youth. We shall honour our campaign commitment of one million new jobs in digital economy" (Tinubu, 2023). The responsibility of enhancing the

quality of and access to education is also placed with the government, which would arguably enhance the employment of youth.

However, not all responsibility is put with the government. Some argue that youth should create jobs for themselves, focus on learning and change their mindset. For instance, the matter that youth only want a job in the service sector while the opportunities that ICT and agriculture offer are neglected by young people, is raised repeatedly:

> In general, many Nigerian youth still lack adequate appreciation of the potentials of the agricultural sector and the opportunities in agro-based enterprises, and hold a biased perspective of the sector as being non-prestigious, manual labour-oriented demanding, and lacking in the potential for commensurate economic returns. (NNYP, 2019, p.58)

Moreover, some argue that many Nigerian youth suffer from the get-rich-quick syndrome: "It can be said that the one of the top scourges slowing Nigeria's development is limited youth participation in innovative skill acquisition programmes. This factor is not unconnected with get-rich-quick syndrome prevalent among youth" (Daily Trust, 2022c, para. 3). The get-rich-quick syndrome implies that Nigerian youth focus on earning as much money as possible, as fast as possible, instead of building a future or focusing on the long term future of the country. This can be associated with the suggestion that youth are 'idle' and should change their mindset. For instance, in one of the articles, national leaders are urged to promote skill acquisitions and discourage idleness in the North of the country (Olaniyi, 2023, para. 3). Likewise, in the NNAP YPS, one of the recommendations states to encourage vocational stills in order to increase employment and reduce idleness (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.69). Additionally, as aforementioned, then-president Buhari (2023) made the link between idleness of youths and religious fundamentalism and extremism. The use of the words idle or idleness creates an perception of youth as people who avoid working but still want to earn as much money as possible. Subsequently, linking this idleness with fundamentalism and extremism enhances the threatening image of Nigerian youth.

The perceived idleness can also be linked to the argument that the youth should change their mindset, as articulated several articles: "Our youths need to change their mindsets. About 90 per cent of students in higher institutions go there to acquire certificates, and thereafter scout for jobs that are not easy to get. They should learn to get something done" (Gajibo, 2022, as cited in Daily Trust, 2022b, para 10). The suggestion that the high unemployment rate among youth is caused by their idleness and mindsets, adds to a negative image of Nigerian youth and

places the responsibility upon them. The issue of responsibility will be elaborated on in section 4.4.

An increase of youth employment is not only beneficial economically, it is also encouraged because of the proclaimed causal relationship with crime and violent extremism; unemployment is argued to cause and upsurge in banditry, crime, recruitment and violence. In the NNYP it is stated that:

> The high rate of youth unemployment has several negative socio-economic and political implications. The frustration that accompanies long-term unemployment among young people is believed to feed political and ideological unrest and violence as untrained, jobless and alienated youth may be ready to take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money. Thus, youth unemployment is also a political and security issue, as well as a socio-economic one. (NNYP, 2019, p.50)

With this, it is suggested that youth who are unemployed are more prone to undertake violence for money. Additionally, the word 'alienated' is used, referring to youth who are excluded from society, and 'untrained' referring to uneducated young people. Hence, this can be traced back to the previously made argument that socially excluded youth are often linked to violence. Moreover, it is argued repeatedly that unemployment is a major factor in the surge in recruitment and radicalization of youth, especially in conflict-ridden regions such as northeast Nigeria. As youth are predominantly portrayed as unemployed, rather than entrepreneurial and hard-working, this contributes to the negative portrayal of Nigerian young people as threatening. The unequal power balance, where the influential policymakers make this public statement while the Nigerian youth cannot defend themselves, leads to the further deterioration of the representation of Nigerian young people.

4.4 'Youth Should' versus 'State Should'

As illustrated in the previous sections, it remains contested who should be held responsible for the high rates of youth exclusion, unemployment, poverty, radicalization and criminal involvement in Nigeria. As aforementioned, some attribute the responsibility to the government, claiming they should provide more opportunities and support for the youth. Others, however, argue that the youth themselves are responsible for seeking jobs, climbing

out of poverty, participating in society and staying out of criminal activities. The discursive practices utilized often reveal to whom the responsibility is attributed. Assigning the responsibility with the youth, leads to an increasingly negative perception of youth, suggesting that it is their own fault and the surrounding factors play no role.

Overall, arguments that the 'state should' engage, include, or involve the youth more are prevalent in the data than the argument that the 'youth should'. Mainly in the policy documents and articles, the state's responsibility is one of the central arguments. Criticism regarding the low youth employment and involvement and the high youth participation in terrorist activities, are often followed with a pressing advice to the government to change this. It is frequently implied that the government should offer a more enabling, facilitative, supportive environment where youth can participate in societal, political, economical and civic life. For instance, one of the NIYEAP recommendations acclaims to "promote an enabling environment for the establishment and development of youth-led enterprises" (NIYEAP, 2021, p.24). Moreover, involving youth in society is promoted: "Increased interactions with the youth will help them change their mindsets, for just as they can be easily molded towards violence, so can they be molded towards peace." (NNAP YPS, 2021, p.3). Using the narrative of the 'state should' or promoting to 'help' or 'mold' the youth, implies that the government is not doing enough and is expected to do more. Hence, the responsibility is primarily placed with the government, arguing that they do not facilitate sufficient youth inclusion.

Nevertheless, the phrase the 'youth should' can also be drawn from the data. However less frequent, several articles and policy documents imply to expect more action from the youth. The 'youth should' for instance be more active, change their mindset, create jobs, focus on learning, avoid corruption or quit crimes. During a conference for youth innovation, the Kano state chairman Goni Umar told the youth "to focus on learning and not spend their money on luxury while trying to build a business, stressing that they should learn to delay gratification and keep on learning new innovations to build on" (Umar, 2023, as cited in Naganye, 2023, para. 4). And even more articulate:

Permit me to say this, the problem of Nigeria is not corruption, bad governance, insecurity etc. endless as the list seems. The problem is our youth. We have failed to realise and understand how powerful we are in a country of over 200 million people with more than 70 per cent of its population as youths. (Nukah, 2022, para. 5)

Although the responsibility is mainly put on the government, the youth are also expected to take more action. Sometimes explicit, however also implicitly by neglecting the external factors, such as economic deprivation, that make it difficult for youth to successfully participate in society. Still, the prevailing narrative regarding responsibility causes a more negative image regarding the government's lack of support than the lacking commitment of youth, and therefore does not substantially contribute to the negative image of Nigerian youth.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the research question: *How are Nigerian youth portrayed by media, politicians and policymakers, especially in regards to Boko Haram?* The objectives were to 1) uncover if the public and policy discourse represent youth in a negative way; 2) particularly examine if the discourse relates them to Boko Haram and; 3) understand how this discourse encourages fear and distrust. Through a CDA lens and utilizing the securitization theory, a discourse analysis of news articles, presidential speeches and policy documents was conducted which has led to the following conclusions.

The results of the analysis revealed that Nigerian youth are primarily negatively portrayed by media, politicians and policymakers. The media and policymakers regularly associated youth, especially in the northeastern parts of the country, with an upsurge of crime and violence. Youth are discursively treated as objects of risk. The volatile image of youth can also be found in the frequent association of youth with violent extremism, recruitment and radicalization. In news articles, attacks of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria were often attributed to young perpetrators. Irrespective of the veracity of this assertion, the constant focus on the young age of the perpetrators contributes to the adverse portrayal of Nigerian youth in a broader context. Moreover, the young nature of Boko Haram was frequently emphasized in both policy documents and articles. Unemployment, idleness and exclusion were the main factors argued to facilitate the recruitment and radicalization of young Nigerians. Additionally, discursive elements suggested that youth idleness and social exclusion were factors contributing to youth susceptibility to recruitment.

Overall, the upsurge in youth crime, violent extremism, radicalization and recruitment, was presented as threatening to Nigeria's stability and development. Although youth were also sporadically framed as the victim or peacebuilders in this context, the prevailing rhetoric suggested youth to be the main perpetrators. By positioning unemployment, social exclusion and idleness as causal factors for the increased recruitment and radicalization and by simultaneously emphasizing the high youth unemployment and exclusion, Nigerian youth are inevitably associated with violent extremism. This signifies a securitizing move of Nigerian youth by the media, policymakers and politicians.

Markedly, only a few speeches addressed youth. In these cases, it consisted mostly of ambiguous promises to increase engagement or accusing others of luring them into crimes. Findings reveal a discrepancy between the rhetoric of the presidents and the actual implementations of these promises.

Furthermore, the issue of responsibility was a recurring theme throughout the data. Findings reveal a complex dynamic between the government's responsibility and the youth's own responsibility. In most speech-acts, the government was discursively involved as the responsible actor for the high involvement of youth in violent extremism and crime, and the high unemployment rates that plague the country. Nevertheless, several sources argued that the youth should participate more actively in society. This responsibility was also made evident implicitly by speech-acts that neglected the socioeconomic factors that hinder the youth from effective participation. Still, most speech-acts contend that the state should provide more support for the youth to actively participate in the society. This rather contributes to a negative image of the government, than that of the Nigerian youth.

The vicious cycle as presented in the literature review can also be recognized results. In the literature, it was argued that due to the focus on youth radicalization in combination with the high youth employment and marginalization, youth are more prone to join extremist groups such as Boko Haram. As a result, fear and distrust towards youth emerges, excluding them from society even more. This again leads to youth being more likely to join extremist groups, and so on. The results of the discourse analysis confirmed the narrative of youth as predominantly centred around radicalization and high involvement in extremism. Youth were often linked to extremist groups such as Boko Haram, especially vulnerable and unemployed youth. Moreover, the high unemployment rate and marginalization of youth was frequently discussed in the analysis and argued to lead to more involvement of youth in violence, crime and terrorism. Lastly, the analysis revealed that this high involvement leads to a vicious cycle of stigmatization and violence, confirming the vicious cycle as presented in the literature review.

Furthermore, the securitization theory as presented in the conceptualization was also supported by the results of the analysis. According to this theory, an issue is considered as a security threat when it is presented as such by securitizing actors: those who have the social and institutional power to move an issue beyond politics. Accordingly, Nigerian youth would be considered as threatening, if portrayed as objects of risk. The analysis results reveal that Nigerian youth are indeed presented as threatening to the society. The consistent association of youth who are unemployed, idle and marginalized with radicalization and/or Boko Haram, creates a threatening image of Nigerian youth. Even though several sources describe youth as hope for the future, de-securitization proves more complex due to the intricate socioeconomic and political context. The marginalized position of youth in society allows for the negative discourse by media, policymakers and politicians.

Moreover, the results of the analysis reveal the inequal power dynamics between youth and the securitizing actors. The latter comprise the dominant power in the country, and discursively suggest that youth in northeast Nigeria are threatening to society. The youth itself, on the other hand, are a marginalized demographic in society and therefore cannot speak up for themselves, or at least are not properly listened to. Their lack of powerful voices to counter these instigations increase the inequal power dynamics that are already prevailing in northeast Nigeria.

Thus, based on this research it can be concluded that media, politicians and policymakers create a predominantly negative image of youth in northeast Nigeria and frame them as threatening. In news articles, activities of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria are repeatedly assigned to young perpetrators. Policymakers elaborately address the concerning upsurge of youth radicalization and involvement in violent extremism. And the current and previous president claim to offer support to youth in order counter these developments, however seem to fail at this job by neglecting them in most other speeches. Altogether, the overall narrative that became evident in the discourse analysis revealed a negative, threatening image of youth in northeast Nigeria, especially of those who are unemployed and socioeconomically insecure.

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations

Nevertheless, a few limitations of this research should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the aforementioned biases have influenced the interpretations made in the analysis. Although attempted to mitigate the influence, the Western theoretical foundation of the securitization theory leads to an inevitable Western approach to this research. As this theory is based on Western contexts, more research would be necessary to examine if the theory is equally applicable to non-Western contexts. Secondly, only the first step of securitization was adequately studied, namely the so-called securitizing move. The second step, if the audience accepts this presentation, was beyond the scope of this research. It would be highly recommended for future research to delve deeper into this second step of securitization. This could for example be done through in depth interviews with a larger dataset, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the public perception of youth in northeast Nigeria.

This study has contributed to current research by focusing on the effect of discourse regarding Nigerian youth, rather than emphasizing their motivations to join extremist groups. Mainly focusing on youth's motivations creates a skewed image of youth in Nigeria, while their potential role in peacebuilding and PCVE is neglected. The constant recruitment of youth

is an essential driver of conflict and the negative portrayal of youth, fuels this recruitment. The vicious cycle of stigmatization and violence, in which many young Nigerians seems to be stuck in, creates significant challenges for future of Nigeria. Therefore, more research into this vicious cycle, and how powerful public figures can impact this, is recommended.

6. Bibliography

Adejoro, D. (2022) On Youth Inclusion in Nigerian Politics: 2023 and Beyond. *This Day Live*. Retrieved from: https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/05/26/on-youth-inclusion-in-nigerian-politics-2023-and-beyond

Agwu, G. A. (2023). The Boko Haram Conflict and Food Insecurity: Does Resilience Capacity Matter? *Journal of African Economies, 32*(4), 352–382. doi: 10.1093/jae/ejac015

Ahmadu-Suka, M. (2022). Why Youths Embrace Banditry, Violence- ActionAid. *Daily Trust.* Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/why-youths-embrace-banditry-violence-actionaid/

Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. (2022). The Role of Youths in Countering Violent Extremism in Northeast Nigeria. *Accord*. Retrieved from: https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-role-of-youths-in-countering-violent-extremism-in-northeast-nigeria%EF%BF%BC/

Baah-Boateng, W. (2016). The youth unemployment challenge in Africa: What are the drivers? *The Economic and Labour Relations Review 27*(4), 413–431. doi: 10.1177/1035304616645030

Bangura, I. (2022). Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa. Chapter 1: Introduction, Youth and the Quest for Change in Africa. Retrieved from: file:///Users/juliadewit/Downloads/10.4324_9781003253532-1_chapterpdf.pdf

Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. (2002). Using Conflict Theory. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.* doi:10.1017/CBO9780511613692

Bigo, D. (2000). When Two Become One: Internal and External Securitisations in Europe. In M. Kelstrup, & M. Williams (Eds.), *International Relations Theory and The Politics of European Integration. Power, Security and Community* (pp. 171 - 204). Routledge.

Bigo, D. (2006). Internal and External Aspects of Security. *European Security, 15*(4), 385-404. doi: 10.1080/09662830701305831

Birchall, J. (2019). Overview of social exclusion in Nigeria. *Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies*. Retrieved from: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14809

Brechenmacher, S. (2019). Stabilizing Northeast Nigeria After Boko Haram. *CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE.* Retrieved from: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Brechenmacher_Nigeria_final.pdf

Buhari, M. (2021a). New Year's Speech President Buhari 2021. Retrieved from: https://referencetelevision.home.blog/2021/01/01/2021-nigerias-youth-react-to-president-buharis-new-year-speech-on-social-media/?amp=1

Buhari, M. (2021b). President Muhammadu Buhari's Independence Day speech. Retrieved from: https://guardian.ng/features/nigeria-at-61-full-text-of-president-muhammadu-buharis-independence-day-speech/

Buhari, M. (2023). Buhari's Speech after receiving Award for Peace in Africa. Retrieved from: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/01/buhari-receives-award-for-peace-in-africa-lists-conditions-for-future-harmony/

Buzan, B., Wæver, O. & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers. doi: 10.1515/9781685853808

Bwayili. M. H. (2021). We Must Fight Terrorism Before It Consumes Us All. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/we-must-fight-terrorism-before-it-consumes-us-all/

Conciliation Resources. (n.d.). Young people prevent violence in northeast Nigeria. Retrieved from:https://www.c-r.org/our-work-in-action/young-people-prevent-violence-northeast-nigeria

Daily Trust. (2021). Crime: Interfaith Urges FG To Provide Jobs For Youths. *Daily Trust*. https://dailytrust.com/crime-interfaith-urges-fg-to-provide-jobs-for-youths/

Daily Trust. (2022a). How I Use Traditional Methods To Resolve Disputes In My Community. *Daily Trust.* Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/how-i-use-traditional-methods-to-resolve-disputes-in-my-community/

Daily Trust. (2022b). 'I Dropped Out Of University To Pursue My Passion In Tech'. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/i-dropped-out-of-university-to-pursue-my-passion-in-tech/

Daily Trust. (2022c). Int'l Youth Day: Six Crucial Roles Youths Should Play To Rescue Nigeria. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/intl-youths-day-six-crucial-roles-youths-should-play-to-rescue-nigeria/

Daily Trust. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/about-us/#google_vignette

de Bruijn, M. & Both, J. (2017). Youth Between State and Rebel (Dis)Orders: Contesting Legitimacy from Below in Sub-Sahara Africa. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 28(4-5),* 779-798. doi: 10.1080/09592318.2017.1322329

Dyikuk, J. J. (2022). Nigerian Christians cry foul over Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket. Retrieved from: https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/nigerian-christians-cry-foul-over

EUOM. (2023). European Union Election Observation Mission NIGERIA 2023 Final Report General Elections. Retrieved from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files /documents/2023/EU%20EOM%20NGA%202023%20FR.pdf

Ezemanaka, K. E. (2021). Youth Violence and Human Security in Nigeria. *Social Sciences, 10*(7), 267. MDPI AG. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci10070267

Fairclough, N. (2001). Language and Power, 2nd edn. *London: Longman*

Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning. (2023). FG Inaugurates Committee To Tackle Increasing Youth Unemployment In Nigeria. https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/fg-inaugurates-committee-to-tackle-increasing-youth-unemployment-in-nigeria/

Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. (2019). National Youth Policy 2019-202. *Enhancing Youth Development and Participation in the context of Sustainable Development.* Retrieved from: https://www.prb.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/06/ Nigeria-National-Youth-Policy-2019-2023.pdf

Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. (2021a). Nigerian National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security. *An adoption of UNSCR 2250.* Retrieved from: https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/Nigeria-YPS-NAP-1-2021-2024.pdf

Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. (2021b). Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan 2021-2024. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/---ilo-abuja/documents/publication/wcms_819111.pdf

Hentz, J. J. (2019). The multidimensional nature of the Boko Haram conflict. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 29*(5-6), 839-862. doi: 10.1080/09592318.2018.1519295

Hilker, L. M., & Fraser, E. (2009). Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states. Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team. *Social Development Direct.* Retrieved from:https://linkasea.pbworks.com/f/McLean+Kilker,+Lyndsay+&+Erika+ Fraser+April+2009.pdf

Ibezim, E.A.C. (2019). The Philosophy of Youth Inclusion in Nigerian Politics: Trend, Challenges and Prospect. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations, 11*(1). Retrieved from: https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/view/190041

Isamotu, H. K. M. (2023). Boko Haram Attacks Escalate In Borno. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/boko-haram-attacks-escalate-in-borno/

Iwuoha, V.C., & Aniche, E.T. (2022). Protests and blood on the streets: repressive state, police brutality and #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. *Secur J* 35, 1102–1124. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-021-00316-z

Jerome, A. (2015). Lessons from Colombia for Curtailing the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria. *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations*, 5(94). Retrieved from: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Lessons-from-Colombia-for-Curtailing-the-Boko-Haram-Jerome/9d87ace97e71861e9bc48f687d40125f6079e8e7

Jimoh, A. (2021a). Unemployment: ActionAid Asks FG, Others To Implement Youth Policies, Boost Innovations. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com /unemployment-actionaid-asks-fg-others-to-implement-youth-policies-boost-innovations/

Jimoh, A. (2021b). We'll Keep Pushing For Better Deals For Youths, Says Speak Out Nigeria. *Daily Trust.* Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/well-keep-pushing-for-better-deals-for-youths-says-speak-out-nigeria/

Kah, H. K. (2018). Youths Extenuation Of Violent Extremism In Northern Cameroon And Nigeria. *African Journal, for the Prevention and Combatting of Terrorism, 7*(1). Retrieved from: https://caert.org.dz/Publications/Journal/revue%20%20N%207-1.pdf

Kwanashie, M. (2022). Social Entrepreneurship: Road To Addressing Youth Restiveness In Nasarawa State. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/social-entrepreneurship-road-to-addressing-youth-restiveness-in-nasarawa-state/

Liman, D. (2023). What We're Doing To Tackle Societal Vices- Sadauki. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/what-were-doing-to-tackle-societal-vices-sadauki/

MacArthur Foundation. (2019). Daily Trust Foundation. Retrieved from: https://www.macfound.org/grantee/daily-trust-foundation-10099129/

Mercy Corps (2016). 'Motivations And Empty Promises' Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth. Retrieved from: https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/201912/Motivations_and_Empty_Promises_Mercy_Corps_Full%20Report.pdf

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1(2), 13-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690200100202

Mullet, D. R. (2018). A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 29*(2), 116-142. doi: 10.1177/1932202 X18758260

Naganye, A. A. (2023). Youth Innovators Rewarded At ACF, Dangote School, Media Trust Conference In Kano. *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/youth-innovators-rewarded-at-acf-dangote-school-media-trust-conference-in-kano/

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2020). National Youth Survey. *Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development in collaboration with National Bureau Of Statistics.* Retrieved from: https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/1241079

Oko, O. (2022). The challenges of subduing insurgency in restive and dysfunctional societies: lessons from nigeria's experience with boko haram. *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law, 30*(2), 281-336. Retrieved from: file:///Users/juliadewit/Downloads/30TulJIntlCompL281.pdf

Olaniyi, M. (2023). Buhari: $1bn Spent To Regain Territories From Terrorists. *Daily Trust.* Retrieved from: https://dailytrust.com/buhari-1bn-spent-to-regain-territories-from-terrorists/

Onuoha, F. C. (2014). Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram? *United Stated Institute of Peace*, Special Report 348. Retrieved from: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf

Potter, J., & Wetherall, M. (1994). Analyzing discourse. In A. Bryman & R. Burgess (Eds.), Analyzing qualitative data (pp. 47- 68). *London: Routledge.* Retrieved from: https://mysocialbliss.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Alan-Bryman-Analyzing-Qualitative-Data-19941.pdf

Rozado, D., Al-Gharbi, M., & Halberstadt, J. (2023). Prevalence of Prejudice-Denoting Words in News Media Discourse: A Chronological Analysis. *Social Science Computer Review, 41*(1), 99-122. https://doi.org/10.1177/08944393211031452

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.*

Tinubu, B. (2023). Inaugural Speech President Bola Tinubu. Retrieved from: https://www.thecable.ng/full-text-tinubus-inaugural-speech-as-president-of-nigeria

Tyyskä, V. (2017). Conceptualizing and Theorizing Youth: Global Perspectives. In by H. Helve & G. Holm (eds.), *Contemporary Youth Research*. Taylor & Francis. doi: 10.4324/9781315259437-9

Udemeh, H. (2018). Age Qualifications to hold political office: a civil society experience from Nigeria. Retrieved from: https://www.civicus.org/index.php/re-imagining-democracy/stories-from-the-frontlines/3365-age-qualifications-to-hold-political-office-a-civil-society-experience-from-nigeria

Van Dijk, T. (2013). CDA is NOT a method of critical discourse analysis. In Ediso. Retrieved from: https://www.edisoportal.org/ca/blog/en-voz-alta/cda-is-not-a-method-of-critical-discourse-analysis

Van Dijk, T. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis. In D. Tannen, H.E. Hamilton and D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. doi: 10.1002/9781118584194.ch22

Vezovnik, A. (2018) Securitizing Migration in Slovenia: A Discourse Analysis of the Slovenian Refugee Situation. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 16*(1-2), 39-56. doi: 10.1080/15562948.2017.1282576

Waever, O. (2012). Aberystwyth, Paris, Copenhagen: the Europeanness of new 'schools' of security theory in an American field. In *Thinking International Relations Differently* (pp. 57–80). Routledge. Doi: 10.4324/9780203129920-9

Williams, M. C. (2003). 'Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly 47*(4), 511 – 31. doi: 10.1046/j.0020-8833.2003.00277.x

Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2016). Methods of Critical Discourse Studies. *Sage*. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284725923_Methods_of_Critical_ Discourse_Studies_3rd_edition

Wodak, R. (2014). Critical Discourse Analysis. In Leung, C. & Street, B. V. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to English Studies.* Routledge Handbooks Online. doi: 10.4324/9781315852515.ch20

World Bank, (2019). Nigeria on the Move: A Journey to Inclusive Growth. *Nigeria Systematic Country Diagnostic*. Retrieved from: https://documents1.worldbank.org/ curated/en/891271581349536392/pdf/Nigeria-on-the-Move-A-Journey-to-Inclusive-Growth-Moving-Toward-a-Middle-Class-Society.pdf

Zenn, J. (2020). Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria. *Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers.* doi: 10.1515/9781626378933

Zenn, J. (2023). Brief: Nigerian President Buhari's Term Ending with Boko Haram Not 'Technically Defeated'. *Terrorism Monitor Volume, 21*(3). Retrieved from: https://jamestown.org/program/brief-nigerian-president-buharis-term-ending-with-boko-haram-not-technically-defeated/

[ii] (D. Gombe, personal communication, May 10, 2023)