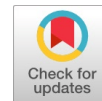


African Organised Crime, Transnational Crime and Terrorism: Assessing Areas of Convergence in Operational/Organisational Methods

Tunde Agara, Cyriacus Ndukwe, Esuga Folusho



Abstract: *Organised criminality in its various forms and sizes — mafias, syndicates, criminal gangs, cartels, cybercrime operators exploring internet spaces, or terrorists — has since the new millennium globalised in its operational and organisational structure, warranting the kind of robust scholarly research. Organized crime and terrorism in general have designated the African society with pigmentation of economic disorganization, erosion of moral and social values, and near state failure status. African organised crime, transnational crime, and terrorism are examined in the theoretical context of this work, including the 'strain of anomie', subcultures, and social disorganisation theory, to identify similarities in dimensions, culture, structure, and operational methodologies with similar crimes in the developed world. Additionally, to explore the dynamics of safety nets that African states and societies can leverage for their security. The study employed a time series research design and utilised secondary data collection through documentary review research, examining data from published materials such as books, journals, and memoirs. The theoretical study yielded results indicating that terrorism and African organized crimes are products of social structure, which emphasizes economic success — 'pathological materialism,' and the erosion of values and legitimate social constraints means to acquiring wealth. Findings also reveal a significant impact of organised crime on governance processes, the rule of law, and the overall economic structure and development. Furthermore, it is discovered to harm the law enforcement and judicial systems of states, especially in issues related to cross-border criminal networks. The study concludes that, besides the synergy of organisation that exists in criminal behaviour among organized crimes and terrorism, African organized crime is incubated within the environment of a poor governance system and social disorientation.*

Keywords: *Africa, Organised Crime, Transnational Crime, Terrorism, Convergence and Divergence in the Organisational Methods of Crime.*

Abbreviations:

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation

ASP: Anti-Social Personality

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I. INTRODUCTION

Our reference and use of the term 'organized crime' will follow the way the concept is popularly used in criminology and organised crime literature, as synonyms for 'armed banditry', 'theft-by-violence', 'armed robbery', and the actors involved as 'the professional robbers'. Although sociologists have offered several theories to explain crime and criminal behavior, very few of these theories have been directed or applied to organized crime, Tin, and Joanne (2023) [39], Luis and Vito, 2019) [29]. However, some of these theories nevertheless provide valuable insights into organised crime. The first of such theories is the 'strain of anomie' developed by Émile Durkheim (2023) [14].

The focus of the theory is that anomie occurs when individuals are confronted by the contradiction between their goals and the means of achieving or attaining them; as a result, they become alienated in the society in which they had hoped for a social existence. Hence, to Merton, organized crime would then be a normal response to pressures exerted on persons by the social structure, which emphasizes economic success — 'pathological materialism,' - the institutionally appropriate means of getting the wealth, therefore, becomes of little concern.

Thus, in Nigeria, just as everywhere, organised crime has flourished; the 'end justifies the means' doctrine becomes a guiding principle, especially when the pressure of prestige-bearing success tends to eliminate the practical social constraints meant to acquire this wealth. For instance, Kim (2020) [26] has explained that the concept of the 'American Dream', as exemplified by the capitalist society, which urges all citizens to succeed, does not distribute the opportunity to succeed equally, thereby leading to the adoption of illegitimate innovation and means to pursue and obtain success. However, 'routine' pedestrian criminal acts will not lead to any significant level of economic success, hence the need for 'innovation,' which is the adoption of sophisticated, well-planned, skilled, organized criminality. However,

... even though poverty and limited economic opportunity can certainly impel one toward innovative activities, they do not explain why middle-class youngsters become involved in organized crime or why crimes by the wealthy and the powerful

... continue to be a problem in the United States (and in Nigeria too), emphasis mine.

A significant question that should plague our minds is why anomie does not affect everyone equally, or better put, why do some persons suffering from anomie turn to criminal innovation, when others do not?

Ahmet (2020) [9] provided the answer in the second theory of differential association.



According to him, all behavior, either lawful or criminal, is learned. The majority of what is learned occurs within intimate personal groups, and the nature of what is learned, as well as how it is learned, depends on the intensity, frequency, and duration of the association.

According to Sutherland, when the association is criminal, the actor learns the techniques of committing a crime, as well as the drives, attitudes, and rationalisations that contribute to a favourable precondition for criminal behaviour. Thus, learning the techniques of sophisticated criminality requires being in the right environment or enclave where delinquent or criminal subcultures are flourishing. In such areas, individuals exhibiting criminal norms and ways of life are often well-integrated into the community, providing the right breeding ground for delinquent subcultures and entry into organised crime (Ivlita, 2020) [23].

The third theory that attempts to explain crime and organised criminality is the subculture and social disorganisation theory [28], as Wolfgang and Ferracuti (2021) [42].

As explained, a subculture implies a distinct constellation of values that differs from the larger or central value system of a society. In this regard, therefore, the existence of a delinquent subculture implies a type of behaviour or value system that is antithetical to the larger society's values. The subcultural theory, therefore, rests on the belief that criminal behaviour is learned, especially in areas where a large number of adult criminals reside. Thus, children are exposed to crime as a career and to the criminal way of life symbolised by organised crime. Delinquency is therefore transmitted through "contact not only with other delinquents who are their contemporaries but also with older offenders, who in turn had contact with delinquents preceding them. This succession means that the tradition of delinquency can be transmitted down through successive generations of boys in much the same way that language and other social forms are transmitted.

Although Neerdaels (2024) [33] agrees with the argument that anomie is not sufficient to provide a satisfactory explanation for why people participate in organised crime. This must be considered in conjunction with cultural transmission and differential association. However, even then, they pointed out that illegitimate opportunities for success, like legitimate opportunities, are not equally distributed throughout society. Thus, their theory of differential opportunity is based on the fact that even after deciding that a person cannot make it through legitimate means.

Thus put, conditions of extreme deprivation as in capitalist societies and as typified in Nigeria of today, can only and will limit access to opportunities or ladders of legitimate success, thereby leaving available the alternative to delinquent subcultures through [1] retreatism where youths retreat to activities in which drug usage is the primary focus, [2] con ict where gang activities are devoted to violence and destructive actions, where the actors can gain status denied to them in society, and [3] criminal/racketeering where gang activities approximate organized crime.

The final theory for our consideration is the social control theory. According to this theory, "delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken" (Barbara,

J. C. and John, 2020) [11]. The focus of the theory is on the processes by which a community influences its members to conform to already established and accepted norms of behaviour. In this regard, their concern is not with why people become involved in crime, but rather why most people conform to societal norms. Their answer to this question is that it is based on the strength of the bond that ties us to society and is determined by the external and internal restraints. By external restraints is meant social disapproval coupled with public shame and ostracism, which delinquent and antisocial actions attract, as well as the fear of punishment. Put simply, people are deterred from engaging in criminal behaviour by the fear of being caught and punished, with the punishment ranging from public shame to imprisonment, and in extreme cases, capital punishment. However, in areas where there are subcultural groups with moral sentiments favourable to organized crime, such public shame/social ostracism is rendered ineffective. It is not a deterrent in this case. What may act as a deterrent is the risk involved in being caught, but the potential of rewards from such action counterweighs this. However, for the delinquent, both risk and reward become relative to his socio-economic situation and status. In other words, the less one has to lose, the greater is the incentive, willingness, and motivation to engage in organized crime. As far as the internal restraints are concerned, this is tied to parental control and relationships as a child. As Ahmad and Novita (2024) summarise it, dysfunction that occurs during the early stages of childhood development, or parental influences that are not normative, results in an adult who is devoid of prosocial internal constraints. Such a person develops a psycho/sociopathology or antisocial personality disorder (ASP).

The rest of this paper is sectioned accordingly. Immediately after the Introduction, sections 2, 3, and 4 clarify the concepts relevant to this paper, namely African Organised Crime, Transnational Crime, and Terrorism [18]. The following section examines whether there is convergence or divergence among these three. The section discussing convergence is divided into two parts: convergence in operational methods and convergence in organisational methods. Finally, we conclude the paper.

II. CONCEPT CLARIFICATION I: AFRICAN ORGANISED CRIME

The first of the three concepts germane to this paper, which may need some further elucidation, is African Organised Crime. This is not to imply that organised crime in Africa is any different from organised crime elsewhere. However, specific differences can be discerned between it and other forms of organised crime, such as those of the Italian, Latin American, Asian, and Russian organised syndicates. In particular, certain factors have made the West African sub-region somewhat attractive for the development of criminal organisations. These factors include vast inequalities in wealth, unchecked population growth, and the associated rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation, coupled with a poor and near absence of infrastructural development and a large geographical expanse of 'grey areas' (or ungoverned areas).



Thus, organized crime readily provides an outlet option for individuals seeking to break out of poverty. Young people are, therefore, left with no other option than to join organized criminal organisations, and extreme rates of poverty, porous border security, and governmental inefficiency and corruption further aid this decision. These conditions, of course, engendered the growth of armed insurgent groups, an extensive network of narcotics trafficking, trafficking in women and children, illegal mining of natural resources such as diamonds, precious metals, and timber, and an enormous arms trafficking industry with supplies from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and North Africa, particularly Libya (Agara, Chizea and Izuagie 2019). As Mirseda and Ervin (2024: p.3) [32]:

States and communities with political, economic, and social dysfunctions experience a rise in social, political, and economic dysfunction, which manifests in organised crime. These criminal groups can be found with varied identities and are divided into every stratum, working in both the organised private and public sectors, including politicians, businesspeople, and union members at the regional, municipal, national, and international levels.

Particularly in Nigeria, as in other West African states, criminal organisations employ similar techniques to those of legitimate traders and businesses to perpetuate themselves. This technique is typical of a lineage-based society, where a successful entrepreneur invites more of his junior relatives or other dependents whom he can trust and his assured of their loyalty to join him in his line of Business as apprentices. In a criminal enterprise, personnel are often recruited through personal acquaintances, kinship, or close friendships for specific tasks, but not for permanent roles. It is common for those thus newly recruited to swear an oath (Ma's equivalent of Omerta) of allegiance, silence (never to reveal anything if caught), and loyalty before a shrine. Of course, this is intended to strengthen further the bond between criminal elements, families, lineages, or ethnic groups. Usually, among the drug trafficking criminal organisations, the practice is that those who take the most significant risks of transporting or carrying the drugs (often referred to as 'mules') have no permanent connection or relationship to actual members of the criminal organisations. They are typically hired hands, hired by a person using a pseudonym, and hence, in the event of arrest, they cannot provide security agencies with valuable information that may endanger the enterprise or individuals within the criminal organisation.

III. CONCEPT CLARIFICATION II: TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

The primary form of transnational criminal activities is drug trafficking, coupled with armed banditry. However, transnational criminal activities have diversified their portfolios and expanded their geographical areas of operation to reduce the risk of arrest. Their complete portfolios, and still increasing, include trafficking in people, smuggling, kidnapping, stolen vehicles, natural resources, arms, counterfeiting and intellectual piracy, cybercrime, money laundering, and corruption. Criminal organisations of this type transcend borders, are not operationally restricted by local and international boundaries, and therefore fall within the purview of organised crime. As Ahmad and

Novita (2024) have revealed, the degree of sophistication that characterises this type of organised crime can be measured by the extent to which it provides, otherwise scarce, services, contracts, and arbitration services to other criminals and sometimes legitimate entrepreneurs.

A central contention here has been how to define such organisations as a way of determining which organised criminal organisations can be so labelled or fall within the category. As Tosin (2023) [40] noted, a review of existing law enforcement and scholarly literature has even found it difficult to determine which organisation readily falls within this categorisation. For instance, Encyclopedia Britannica (2025) [41], definitions, which had been adopted for many years by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), state that;

An organised crime is a complex of highly centralised enterprises set up to engage in illegal activities. Such organizations engage in offenses such as cargo theft, fraud, robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and the demanding of "protection" payments.

Organised crime is any crime committed by a person occupying, in an established division of labour, a position designed for the commission of crimes, provided that such division of labour includes at least one position for a corrupter, one position for a corruptee, and one position for an enforcer.

Currently, the FBI defines organised crime as any group that has a formalised structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities. Such groups maintain their position through the use of actual or threatened violence, corrupting public officials, graft, or extortion, and generally have a significant impact on the people in their locale, region, or the country as a whole.

However, the term 'organised crime' was used to refer to hierarchical crime groups that monopolised the criminal market in a given area, deploying violence and corruption systematically in pursuit of their illicit activities, and making an abnormally high level of profit that allowed them to threaten the political and economic structures of the state. This conception sees systemic violence and corruption as the very essence of an organised criminal organization. So, the use of armed violence and violent activities aimed at instilling fear in the general populace, and an association of such practices for a political end, becomes the *modus operandi*.

Given this significant view, the concept of "organised criminality" refers to those criminal phenomena that, in addition to being attributed to collective or organised individuals, have the unique or main objective of obtaining and accumulating economic or material benefits. This definition implies that a greed motif drives organised crime and hence seeks economic gains for the particular criminal organisation. The wide range of illegal activities in which such criminal organisations are involved provides them with such opportunities. Their illicit activities range from illegal trade of all types, extortionate practices, robberies, attacks, and (paid) killings, labour and sexual exploitation, frauds and swindles, unlawful financial services, etc. These illegal activities are also complemented by other acts that are not always directly remunerated



but are seen as services to their 'clients', such as acts of violence and money laundering.

IV. CONCEPT CLARIFICATION III: TERRORISM: WHAT IS IT?

Terrorism by broader classification includes: (narcotic, cyber, biological, and internet), we shall be concerned with only three types – state-sponsored, politically (secularly) motivated terrorism, and of course, its counterpart, the religiously motivated terrorism. Historically, state-sponsored terrorism connotes the use of terror as an explicit tactic or strategy of the state. The state's action in this regard is not only shrouded in secrecy but also cloaked in the guise of legitimacy. Instances of this abound in Stalin's Soviet Union, Argentina in the 1970s and early 1980s, Pinochet's Chile, modern-day Colombia, and against the Kurdish peoples in Turkey and Iraq. The silence adopted by the Nigerian state to the many reports of atrocities perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen may also be considered as state-sponsored (Agara & Chizea, 2020). In this case, therefore, state terrorism is both an act of commission and omission, the act of involvement and abetting, hence, a deliberate act of passivity in policy making and enforcement of coercive force on identified terror acts and terrorist groups for political consideration and official indolence.

The emergence and increasing instances of religious-motivated terrorism have equally made it necessary to differentiate between them and their political counterparts. Although both employ the use of violence, they differ to a certain degree concerning the importance of this differentiation and for a better understanding of the concept. A good starting point is that for a terrorist action to qualify as being politically motivated, it must "challenge the state but affect no private rights of innocent parties", Paul and Ene (2024) [34], Steve (2023) [38], on the other hand, religiously motivated terrorism differs from other acts of terrorism primarily because [1] while political terrorism attempts to end a resolution within the lifetimes of the perpetrators, religious terrorism outlives its participants. This is predicated on the belief that the rewards of those involved in this cause are trans-temporal and the time limit of their struggle is eternity [2]. The targets of religious terrorism are not chosen for their military values. Instead, they are chosen for the sole purpose of making an impact on public consciousness, both by their brutality and suddenness [3]. The constant recourse to a 'god' to justify their action has the power of 'satanising' the enemies while making the perpetrators of religious terrorism 'godly'. As Juergensmeyer (2018) [24] had noted, this is a kind of "perverse performance of power meant to ennoble the perpetrators' views of the world while drawing viewers into their notions of cosmic war". The effect of this, as he had also noted, is "not so much that religion has become politicised but that politics has become religionised. Through enduring absolutism, worldly struggles have been lifted into the high proscaenium of sacred battles [4]." The targets of religious terrorism and violence also tend to assume and acquire a similar religious mien, explanation and perspective. For instance, following the 9/11 attacks, the then US President, George Bush, further whipped up national sentiments when he invoked the 'religious image' of America's "righteous

cause" as combating and bringing to an end the "absolute evil" of its enemies [5]. The 'divine' nature of religious terrorism, the notion that the battle is between 'good' and 'bad', 'truth' and 'evil', and the expectation of heavenly rewards for the terrorists all rule out the possibility of a compromise or a peaceful resolution [6]. The spiritual dimension of the war transcends the confines of human law and moral ideals. Society's laws are subordinated and, in extreme cases, deemed non-existent or inapplicable when recourse is made to a higher authority. The belief and perception here is that society's laws and limitations are of no relevance when one is obeying a higher 'divine' authority [7]. Finally, the result of religious terrorism is that it impacts a sense of redemption and dignity in the perpetrators. It is at this level that religious terrorism acquires a personal willingness on the part of the perpetrators, who often are men who feel alienated and marginalised from public life. It is essential to note that, irrespective of any definition accepted, terrorism always involves three basic components: the perpetrator, the victim, and the target of the violence. The perpetrator commits the violence against the victim. The victim is used to communicate with or send a message to the intended target. The target is expected to respond to the perpetrator. Fear is used as a catalyst to enhance communication and elicit the desired response (Miller, 2020) [31]. So, what distinguishes acts of terrorism from other types of violent action is their capacity to provoke an intense social or psychological impact (anxiety or fear) that is disproportionate to it. Thus, for any definition of terrorism to be acceptable, it must, at least, include these six major elements; [1] the use of violence or threat of violence [2], the existence of an organized group [3], the intention of achieving a political objective [4], the focus of violence must be a targeted audience that extends beyond the immediate victims who are often innocent civilians (usually accounted for as collateral damage) [5], in this case, the government can be either the perpetrator or the target, and finally [6], it is a form of insurgency usually favoured by the weak

V. CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?

Generally speaking, two lines are said to converge when their paths intersect or they meet at a single point. The same can be said of terrorism and criminal activities; their paths eventually intersect at one point. Scholars have noted that there exists a sharp distinction between global terrorism and organised crime (Christopher, 2019) [17]. However, with time, the distinction has become increasingly blurred. In recent years, the change in perspective has progressed to the point that some experts suggest eliminating this distinction, at least in certain instances where an apparent symbiosis exists between the two phenomena. Some of the information and reports provided by the mass media tend to reinforce this new tendency.

In short, scholarly opinion has favoured considering convergence between terrorism and organised crime, which could become a growing trend within the geo-political framework. A major factor responsible for this change of paradigm or opinion is the transition towards a globalised



economy and world system and the consequent emergence of a transnational form of organised criminality, which has increased the possibilities of terrorists becoming involved in illegal businesses. Both organized crime and terrorism are quick to exploit, and thrive through the various opportunities presented by globalization and the growing economic interdependence, improved communication and information, technologies, the increased blurring of national borders, greater mobility of people, goods and services across countries and the emergence of a globalised economy to move crime and terrorism further from their bases.

Enormous funds are at the disposal of terror groups, making organised crime and terrorism quick to follow the trail laid by this movement (Global Terrorism Index, 2014 report). As the world has witnessed, terrorist activities and the emergence of various cells or clones from the 'mother lode' Al Qaeda, are increasing their scope of actions and operations, range of capabilities and are undergoing profound change (Agara et al, 2017). The deteriorating political order and instability in many developing countries have also led to a growing underground economy, habituating people to working outside the state's legal frameworks. The easy access to small arms, the massive flow of emigrants, and the usual difficulties involved in accompanying meaningful international cooperation are working in favour of criminal organisations and terrorist groups. This type of environment provides impetus and even encourages the vast financial resources available to these terror groups to continue instigating more coordinated, internationally based criminal groups, i.e., a syndicate that creates new threats to the stability and security of the international system (Simplice, 2024) [37]. As the INTERPOL (2023) [21] had stated, "many international and transnational criminal organisations are continuing to expand their networks and links with other criminal organisations throughout the world, allowing the larger organisations to become increasingly powerful, technically sophisticated and global in their approach." This same scenario also played out for terrorist groups that have attained international status. Although terrorism and organised crime may differ in their goals, they nevertheless share a similar organisational style, geography, overlapping membership, and techniques.

VI. CONVERGENCE I: OPERATIONAL METHOD

The first and perhaps the most common mode of convergence is convergence by appropriation of methods, which describes instances where terrorist groups engage in acts typical of organised crime groups and share similar intentions for financing their operations (Michelle, 2021) [30]. Several such activities can be identified as;

- A. *Drug Trafficking*: Either on a large or small scale, both criminals and terrorists have been known to indulge in the trafficking or use of drugs. According to Yashasvi (2020) [43]. The convergence here is the possible assistance offered by professional drug traffickers in procuring these drugs.
- B. *Illegal Trading Activities*: According to Yashasvi (2020), Al Qaeda had made use of the black market to sell gold and diamonds to fund its operations and those of its numerous cells in other parts of the globe, such as the Boko Haram in Nigeria. Of equal note is the AQIM,

which is noted for involvement in the smuggling and illegal sale of cigarettes.

- C. *Theft and Armed Banditry*: The level and instances of armed banditry on Nigerian roads have escalated with the involvement of herdsmen and the terrorist group of Boko Haram. Although, there is little evidence to show whether they are involved in bank robberies, however, enough evidence is available to show that sister terrorist organizations like the Yemaa Islamiyya (the most powerful terrorist group in South-east Asia) and the Pakistani Taliban have constantly funded and replenish their war chest from money got from thefts and robberies of banks (Christiana, 2019) [15].
- D. *Forgery and Forging of Documents*: Granted the expanse of ungoverned spaces available in Nigeria and neighbouring Sahel region countries, with uncharted and illegal borderlands between them, this may not be a significant issue because of the ease of movement across borders. However, this activity becomes one of the chief logistical needs of terrorist groups that professional criminal forgers can meet. A significant number of terrorists have entered America and Europe using forged travel documents, passports, and credit cards.
- E. *Kidnappings*: In Nigeria, following in the wake of the Niger Delta militants, the Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen terrorist groups have raised this criminal activity to a level hitherto unseen or experienced. Globally, this has become the fastest and perhaps the most reliable way for criminals and jihadists to acquire funds. Kidnapping has therefore become a recurring mode of financing generally associated with terrorist groups globally (Agara, 2020). Extortion for Protection: This criminal activity is as old as crime itself. The use of intimidation, aggression, and threats to extort money from traders, villagers, businessmen, and professionals has become a general practice among terrorist groups in their locale of operation. It exemplifies a convergence in the modus operandi of criminals and terrorists.
- F. *Creation of Front or Screen Companies to Launder Money*: This is at a high level of sophistication that allows for the creation of dummy companies to launder and legitimize money or funds obtained from illegal means and sources. Organised crime, particularly the transnational variety, is involved in this. While we may argue that the Nigerian terrain may not be so sophisticated, we cannot rule out the possibility of sympathizers who may assist terrorist groups in this regard. In more developed climes and societies, examples of this type of financing are numerous (Palvidis, 2021) [35].
- G. *Other Misdemeanours*: This includes cybercrime, internet fraud, and operation of illegal websites for purposes of recruiting, planning attacks, and sharing of information INTERPOL, 2022).

The second area of commonality or convergence is through the hybrid transformation of a terrorist group into a purely criminal organisation. This occurs when the former is involved in illegal businesses and operations as listed above. However, the list cannot be said to be exhaustive, as it

becomes quite lucrative and productive with little or no effective interference from the police or other law enforcement agencies. The result is a form of hybrid transformation that sees terrorism take on the economic characteristics of criminal organizations, with a particular tendency towards accumulating economic profits rather than pursuing its primary political or religious goals. This had been the case with the Delta militants and the various ethnic militant groups that emerged, ostensibly to fight for their ethnic group's emancipation.

The political goal soon became a façade under which economic profits were accumulated and appropriated for personal enrichment. The cases of some leaders of these groups living in opulence and securing government contracts for themselves, with no visible improvement in the lives and lifestyles of the people they professed to be fighting for, justify this point. In the case of religious terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, the same can be said of them. The fact that they still professed to spreading Islamic tenets and achieving an Islamic state does not rule out the fact that specific individuals within the leadership ranks may be inclined towards personal accumulation and enrichment, as Agara (2020) has confirmed in the case of the Philippine Islamic terrorist leader, Abu Sayyaf. He initiated a new phase of the jihad that concentrated more on kidnapping, drug trafficking, and extortion on his assumption of leadership after the death of the former leader, Abdurajak Janjalani, in 1998. This has made analysts regard it as a hybrid blending of criminality with religious fervour since its religious goal and policy of Islamisation have not been publicly renounced. The same can be said of the Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen terrorist group in Nigeria.

The third, but not the least popular, form of convergence is direct cooperation with criminal groups or elements. This can take place at two levels. First is where an organized criminal organization shares similar religious ideology and beliefs with a terrorist group. Usually, this is caused by the radicalization of such criminal groups or by the deliberate targeting of people of similar religious beliefs as the criminal organization. The cooperation between these two elements can typically take the form of joint participation or collaboration in ventures or attacks on societal or governmental installations. Hence, shared religious affinity or belief, combined with a sense of victimisation or marginalisation, may compel this collaboration.

The last form of collaboration arises purely from an economic incentive or a practical need that benefits both parties. Hence, this collaboration becomes consensual and takes the form of offering services for which one of them lacks the ability or personnel. At the same time, the other has personnel who can render the required services. Instances of this type of collaboration include procuring weapons, explosives, or false travel documents from criminal organizations by terrorist groups whose ability and competence do not extend to this area of operations. There are substantiated reports of such collaborations between Al Qaeda and specific Russian and Eastern European criminal organizations.

VII. CONVERGENCE II: ORGANIZATIONAL METHODS

Specific attributes of organized crime have been identified by Ramasedi (2025). As he had claimed, these "attributes provide a basis for determining if a particular group of criminals constitutes organized crime and, therefore, needs to be approached in a way different from the way one would approach terrorists or groups of conventional criminals." Calamunci, & Drago (2020) [13], therefore, identified the main attributes of organised crime as [1] no political goals, [2] hierarchical order [3], has a limited or exclusive membership [4], constitutes a unique culture [5], perpetuates itself [6], exhibits a willingness to use illegal violence [7], monopolistic, and [8] governed by explicit rules and regulations. We will examine each of these attributes of terrorist groups and identify the similarities.

A. No Political Goals

The primary goals of all organised criminal enterprises are to generate substantial profits. This includes having the power that money gives, but whose procurement is not limited by legal or moral concerns. Criminals are not motivated by social doctrine, political beliefs, or ideological considerations. If at all, political involvement is to secure political patronage from politicians, further gain protection or immunity for their illegal activities. To a large extent, criminal enterprise and religious terrorism share a similar affinity for 'apoliticalness.' This is despite Ayatollah Khomeini's claim that "Islam is politics or it is nothing" (Ali, 2022) [10]. However, experience has shown that a group with political or ideological goals may consider its mission accomplished and no longer relevant; rather than disband, it can mutate or transform into an organised criminal group. Several examples abound of ex-militant groups and their members transforming into criminal groups, particularly when personal and pecuniary goals outweigh ideology or political reasons, and often drift across the amorphous divide between political and organised crime.

B. Hierarchical

An organised criminal enterprise's organisational structure does not follow the typical horizontal structure. Instead, it has a vertical power structure with the position of the leader delineated, where authority is inherent in the position and not dependent on who the occupant is at any given time. As Ramasedi (2025), has compared and noted, the structure of the African organized criminal organization is not anything like that of the Sicilian Ma a or the Japanese yakuza organized criminal syndicates, but more like that of the Russian organized crime, which is fashioned and designed along project-based cells, organized along kinship, ethnic or clan lines. The structure is somehow fluid and flexible, not permanent, such that on completion of an operation, members can disperse to reconvene or regroup at a later date for another operation. Within African organised crime syndicates, religious rituals (such as swearing before a shrine, covenants, and oath-taking) are used to strengthen solidarity and loyalty further. At the same



time, each member is expected to bring particular skills to the organisation.

The cell-like organisational structure, comprising a few members (usually not more than ten), ensures that each cell can operate independently of the others, and members of one cell are unaware of the members of the other cells. However, they may be aware of the presence and areas of geographical operations of each other. Hence, many features of a formal bureaucratic organizational structure are impractical to criminal organisations because they are primarily concerned with the very possibility that security agencies can monitor their communications. Thus, while telephone communications are kept to a minimum, written communication is avoided, and information, as well as orders, money, and other goods, is transmitted on a face-to-face basis. Lengthy chains of command, characteristic of bureaucratic structures, are shunned by organised crime, which limits the span of control, making each cell virtually autonomous. Decentralization, in a criminal organization is both advantageous for business and security. In a bureaucratic-like structure, all that would be necessary to incapacitate such an organisation would be to remove its top echelon. However, when the syndicate's power structure is amorphous, the action would be to merely sever such a person from their position as a patron to their clients. The result is that another person fills the position, assumes the role, and develops their clients.

C. Limited or Exclusive Membership

Membership in organised groups and terrorist organisations is never advertised or announced; instead, applicants are shortlisted for an interview. By their exclusivity, the membership is also exclusive, not open, but significantly limited with strict qualification or criteria such as ethnic background (as in the case of the Fulani Herdsmen who were predominantly of the Fulani stock (Ishaku, 2018) [22], kinship, race, criminal record, religious affiliation (particularly in the case of religious terrorism like the ISIS, al-Qaeda and Boko Haram). Apart from meeting the basic qualifications, potential members would also be required to be sponsored by a high-ranking member of the group and must prove their qualifications by demonstrating their willingness to perform any needed tasks, obey orders, and keep secrets.

As Ramasedi (2025) [36] has noted, the attractiveness and appeal of such groups can be seen in the steady stream of recruits desiring membership and access to these organisations. In some groups, members are expected to go through some form of gruesome initiation rites. In the case of ISIS, membership is less restrictive, with the influx of European non-Muslim youths joining the ranks and being recruited through the internet. However, their access is strictly limited to that of foot soldiers. It may not be admitted to the higher echelon until they have proven their loyalty and commitment by carrying out specific atrocious actions that demonstrate their level of dedication and loyalty to the cause. This is to guard against infiltration by secret agents of counter-terrorist groups. In both organisations, there are usually periods of apprenticeship which may range from several months to several years. In the case of terrorist organisations, this period is used in training the new members

in the 'art of war', such as bomb making, weapons training and the like, in camps located in Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Pakistan, hilly and mountainous areas constantly bombed by allied drones led by the United States.

D. Constitutes a Unique Subculture

The terms 'underworld' and 'secret organisations' best capture the views of members, which make them see themselves as distinct from the rest of society. They often view members of the larger society with some derision and contempt because they see themselves as superior to it and, hence, not subject to the rules and laws governing conduct within such societies. It had been noted earlier that religious terrorism differs greatly from secular terrorism, basically because they are predicated on different value systems, modes of justification, and legitimacy for their actions rest on a different concept of morality, belief systems, and worldview. While for the secular terrorist, terrorism becomes a means to an end, for the religious terrorist, terrorism is an end in itself. Violence, therefore, becomes a sacred instrument or means to achieve a divine duty in response to a divine imperative. They are not guided by any man-imposed political or social imperatives, but see their acts as a sacramental duty with a transcendental dimension, expedient for the attainment of their goals.

This explains in part why religiously motivated acts of terrorism are more intense and claim more fatalities than the relatively less discriminating violence perpetrated by secular terrorists. Guided by a perception that sees themselves; that is, religious terrorists, not as 'insiders' or members of the system, but as 'outsiders' seeking to effect fundamental changes in the existing order along specific doctrinal lines, the religious terrorist has a high sense of responsibility coupled with a sense of alienation that enables him to distance himself from the victims of his atrocities and thus able to contemplate ever more destructive means of expressing his dastardly acts. This explains the rhetoric familiar in the vocabulary of such demagogues denigrating and dehumanising their victims in terms such as 'in dels,' 'dogs,' 'children of satan,' and many others. The deliberate use of such terms not only justifies the acts of violence since the victims are not seen or regarded as human beings, but also justifies and erodes every form of constraint on violence and emboldens the perpetrators.

E. Perpetuates Itself

Both organized crime and terrorist organizations constitute an ongoing criminal conspiracy against society, but designed to persist through time and even after and beyond the lifetimes of the present members. It is this aura of persistence and permanence that provides the attraction and an essential basis for attracting members to the groups, thereby perpetuating their continued existence. (Francesco (2020) [20]) has noted concerning organised crime that for it to survive, it must have "an institutionalised process for inducting new members and inculcating them with the values and ways of behaving of the social system." The same can be said of terrorist organisations also. As Agara et al (2017) have noted, "while the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) may be credited with the internationalization of

politically motivated terrorism, at least the ethnonational political dimension of it, Al Qaeda could be credited with internationalizing the religious dimension."

Today, the emergence of many 'al-Qaedas' has made religious terrorism a vast enterprise, "an international movement or franchise operation with like-minded local representatives, loosely connected to a central ideological or motivational base, but advancing their common goal independently of one another" Al-Qaeda is reportedly to have 'cells;' operational bases in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Jordan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, Xinjiang in China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Mindanao in the Philippines, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kashmir, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Eritrea, Uganda, Ethiopia and the West Bank and Gaza in Palestinian areas of Israel Khusrav et al (2020) [25].

F. Willingness to use Illegal Violence

A distinguishing factor of both organized crime and terrorist groups is their willingness to use violence in pursuit of their goals. Their use of violence is not restricted by moral or ethical considerations, but is controlled only by practical limitations. In Islamic religious terrorism, violence is an integral aspect of its fundamentalism. In the Muslim tradition, the world is divided into two houses: the House of War (Dar al-Harb) and the House of Islam (Dar al-Islam). In the House of Islam, where Muslim governments rule by Islamic laws and principles, there is no need for a jihad, but in the House of War, where the world is still ruled and governed by infidels, then jihad becomes an imperative and an obligation. The presumption here is that jihad becomes a continuous duty until the whole world has accepted the Muslim faith.

An emerging dimension to the use of violence is the inclusion of female terrorists and the recourse to suicide bombings. Elsewhere, we have thoroughly interrogated these twin phenomena (Agara & Onimawo, 2018). One of the tragic aspects of modern terrorism, which seems to be gaining ground in popularity, is suicide bombers. Going by the number of successful operations and the dexterity of the bombers, it would seem that the Boko Haram religious terrorists in Nigeria especially favoured this type of technique. However, the modern-day phenomenon of suicide bombers has its roots in the earlier version of the use of assassins who constituted a religious sect in Islam. Suicide is easy to conceptualise as the willful and deliberate taking of one's life as a result of some perceived reason or cause, Brenda et al (2021) [12].

The irony of female suicide bombers is that in radical Islam, women's status as subordinate is fundamental and rigorously maintained; they are considered unclean, they must be kept hidden, and their bodies covered and made subordinate to men (Kirssa, 2025) [19] [27], so the few that have bridged the societal norms by appearing in public are better used as cannon fodder, explosive baggage or suicide bombers. It is a general irony to note that the leaders of terrorist movements who urge others to give their lives in pursuit of the goal of the movement usually have their children not been involved in

suicide missions but kept far away from the trauma and danger of the intifada. The female suicide bomber becomes a victim in the midst of what she considers the most empowering act of her life; even at death, she cannot escape from the stigma of her sex as a woman imposed on her by the religion, which now places a demand on her life. Thus, in a society that restricts options and opportunities available for women, where children at early age are socialised into terror and where martyrs attain the status of celebrities, where daily life is fraught with endless examples of humiliation and deprivation in a culture where honour has historically been among the most salient values, where religious leaders provide the most elaborate theological justification for martyrdom, it should be no surprise then that there will be endless volunteers among young people, both male and female, for martyrdom.

G. Monopolistic

All criminal organisation lays claim to particular territories, eschewing competition and instead establishing hegemonic control. This hegemony could be over a metropolitan area or section, a particular 'industry' (such as gambling, trucking, drug, prostitution, protection racketing, or/loansharking, or a combination of these). This monopoly is maintained and sustained through violence, the threat of violence, or corrupt relationships with government officials. Hegemony is enforced through the use of both methods – violence and support from corrupt officials. Due to the presence of opposing groups vying to carve out territorial claims from those of other groups, violence becomes a persistent possibility. However, territoriality is more closely associated with localness rather than the broad reach of transnational criminal organisations. In the case of political terrorist organisations, similar concerns of territoriality are essential. Such groups always operate within a defined territory or geographical area, where their influence and political goals can be effectively realised. But for religious terrorism, the 9/11 incidents have internationalised it, and so are transnational with 'cells' in virtually all areas of the globe. Bin Laden's declaration of a jihad against the United States in 1998 through a fatwa, calling on all Muslims to kill Americans, military and civilian and plunder their money (Christine (2021) [16]. Has led to the creation of many networks and extremist movements in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Kuwait and even in far remote areas such as Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya and other countries. These various networks were able to draw inspiration from Al Qaeda's activities, and by doing so, justified their local actions as belonging to a worldwide body of insurrections against infidels (Agara et al., 2017). In Nigeria, for instance, the Taliban (students of religion) connection to many of the religious terrorists' attacks has not been denied.

Governed by rules and regulations: Like all legitimate multi-layered organizations, organized crime is governed by strict rules and regulations that not only govern behavior and

relationships between and amongst members, but also which members are expected to follow. Contravening any of these rules

may lead to an outright death sentence. Among terrorist groups, similar rules and regulations exist, which inspired a code of silence and denial even under torture. However, a way of ensuring this silence is that information is shared on a 'need-to-know basis only. Information is shared only at the segmented level, where no one operative or person has the complete information except the leader and perhaps a few trusted lieutenants. Thus, each operative knows only part of the operation (the aspect that concerns him or his cell) and not the whole. This is assured by the cell's organisational structure, which they adopted, further enhancing security by providing a degree of separation between the leadership and the operatives.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This theoretical paper examines both operational and organisational methods of organised crime and terrorism to delineate their areas of convergence. However, areas where the convergence is more explicit are mainly in the methods of their operations, such as kidnapping, drug trafficking, illegal trading activities, theft and armed banditry, forgery and forging of documents, extortion for protection and creation of front or screen companies to launder money. Going by what has been muted that "in some cases, the terrorists imitate the organized criminal behavior they see around them, borrowing techniques," and this has led to more intimate connections, particularly in places where both groups exist together and in geographical areas riddled with poor governance, ethnic separatism, and/or where a tradition of criminal activity is prevalent such as in failed states, war regions, prisons and some urban neighborhoods

However, this is not to argue that there are still no areas of divergence, but to show that once terrorists and other criminal elements start to collaborate and cooperate, buying and selling goods from each other, they eventually share each other's goals as well as operational methods. In such a situation, society, the state, and the region are in great danger, and insecurity becomes a significant issue. Nigeria is facing a situation where criminal Fulani Herdsmen and Boko Haram are so into each other that it is even difficult for security agencies to identify which is which anymore.

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