

Abstract

The research examines the birth and evolution of the Islamic State West Africa Province. Originating as a splinter group of Boko Haram, ISWAP was soon able to establish itself as a predominant force in the Lake Chad Basin region. This research aims to identify and analyse the factors that have enabled this rapid expansion and growth. By first reviewing the literature on the concepts of insurgency, salafism and salafi-jihadism, it aims to contextualise ISWAP as an example of a recurring pattern of violence in the Nigerian context, the country where it originated, due to a mix of social, economic, political, and religious factors. Subsequently, the origins of the group will be explored by understanding the reasons for its split with Boko Haram and through its links with the Islamic State, of which ISWAP is currently the main affiliate. Through an examination of the main characteristics, the emergence of ISWAP will be presented through the theoretical lens of the population-centric approach. ISWAP's insurgency represents a particular case in point for its ability to have adopted an approach aimed at gaining the support of the local population. This effort proved to be the most influential factor in its expansion and strength. ISWAP has developed a population-centric model, capable of providing economic opportunities and security for communities, thus imposing itself in the conflict scenario between rival salafi-jihadist groups and government forces in Lake Chad. To date, ISWAP thus represents the main threat in the Lake Chad Basin region, being the group most capable of implementing the Islamic caliphate agenda.