



Pseudolegal Manipulation of Islamic Law by Extremist Groups: A Comparative Analysis of ISIS and Boko Haram

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Abstract

Background: Violent extremism remains a major challenge to governance and social stability. Although ISIS and Boko Haram have been widely examined from political and security perspectives, limited comparative research explains how these organizations manipulate Islamic law to construct *pseudolegal authority* and alternative systems of governance. This study addresses that gap by analysing their reinterpretation of Islamic legal concepts.

Methods: This study employs a qualitative comparative case study using discourse analysis of speeches, propaganda publications, official declarations, and other documentary sources produced by ISIS and Boko Haram. The analysis is guided by Legal Pluralism Theory and Radicalisation Theory and interpreted through classical Islamic jurisprudence and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*.

Results: The findings reveal that both organizations strategically manipulate *takfīr*, *jihād*, and *hudūd* to establish *pseudolegal authority* and legitimize violence. ISIS institutionalized these narratives through centralized bureaucratic structures and a pseudo-state model, whereas Boko Haram adopted a decentralized insurgent governance model adapted to local socio-political conditions.

Discussion: The comparative analysis demonstrates that extremist governance is sustained through selective interpretation of religious texts, decontextualization of classical jurisprudence, and legal instrumentalization, transforming Islamic legal discourse into a mechanism of ideological domination and political control.

Conclusion: Countering extremist pseudolegal narratives requires strengthening authentic Islamic jurisprudence through *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, constructive legal pluralism, religious literacy, and credible religious institutions to promote peaceful governance and sustainable counter-radicalization.

Novelty: This study develops an integrated analytical framework combining Legal Pluralism Theory, Radicalisation Theory, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* to conceptualize *pseudolegal authority* as a mechanism of extremist governance while proposing a normative framework for counter-radicalization grounded in authentic Islamic legal principles.

Keywords: *Pseudolegal authority*; Islamic law; Legal pluralism; *Maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*; Violent extremism.

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism has become one of the most persistent challenges confronting contemporary societies, particularly in countries characterized by religious diversity, political instability, and legal pluralism. Beyond its immediate security implications, violent extremism undermines governance, weakens social cohesion, erodes public trust in state institutions, and disrupts sustainable development. Classical studies have long demonstrated that religious violence cannot be understood solely through theological interpretations but must also be examined through political, historical, and socio-cultural dimensions (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Wiktorowicz, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Brown, 2014; Cook, 2015). In Nigeria, the emergence and expansion of Boko Haram have

transformed violent extremism into a multidimensional crisis affecting education, humanitarian protection, economic development, and institutional governance. The insurgency has generated widespread displacement, weakened agricultural productivity, intensified humanitarian emergencies, and created prolonged insecurity across several regions (Adelaja & George, 2019; Honnavalli et al., 2019; Eteng et al., 2021). Consequently, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that sustainable counter-radicalization requires comprehensive approaches integrating legal, educational, social, and religious dimensions rather than relying exclusively on military or security responses (Mohammed & Neuner, 2022; Brown, 2023; Abdullah et al., 2025).

Recent scholarship further suggests that radicalization emerges through complex interactions among ideological narratives, governance failures, identity crises, social exclusion, and institutional weaknesses. Comparative research highlights that countries such as Indonesia and Nigeria share several structural characteristics, including Muslim-majority populations, plural legal systems, and continuing debates concerning the relationship between religion and the modern state (Hosen, 2017; Anggraeni, 2023; Abdullah et al., 2025). Psychological studies likewise demonstrate that extremist recruitment frequently exploits individuals experiencing perceived injustice, loss of significance, or identity uncertainty (Bélanger et al., 2023; Di Cicco et al., 2025). Educational institutions therefore play an increasingly strategic role in strengthening resilience against extremist ideologies by promoting critical religious literacy, inclusive citizenship, and moderate interpretations of Islam (Sabir-El-Rayess, 2020; Saada, 2023; Sahar, 2025). Simultaneously, digital communication has transformed both extremist propaganda and preventive strategies, making online religious moderation an increasingly important instrument for countering radical narratives (Winter, 2015; Hadiyanto et al., 2025; Schumann et al., 2025).

Within contemporary Islamic legal scholarship, discussions concerning violent extremism increasingly emphasize the importance of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, *maṣlaḥah*, justice, and legal pluralism as normative foundations for peaceful social order. The concept of legal pluralism explains how state law, Islamic law, customary law, and community norms coexist and continuously interact within multicultural societies (Merry, 1988; Hosen, 2017; Anggraeni, 2023). Rather than generating conflict, constructive interaction among these legal systems may strengthen institutional legitimacy and encourage peaceful conflict resolution. Recent studies argue that *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* provides ethical principles capable of protecting religion, life, intellect, property, and human dignity while promoting social justice within plural societies (Jalili et al., 2024; Azizah & Shalihah, 2025). Likewise, recent developments in Indonesian Islamic governance illustrate that integrating Islamic legal values with state institutions can reinforce accountability, legal certainty, and public trust without undermining democratic governance (Zuhdi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, comparable analyses remain relatively limited within the Nigerian context, despite the influential role of Islamic institutions and faith-based organizations in preventing radicalization and strengthening community resilience (Shittu et al., 2022; Ishaku et al., 2021).

Although numerous studies have examined Boko Haram and violent extremism from political science, criminology, psychology, and security perspectives, considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding how Islamic law may contribute to counter-radicalization within plural legal systems. Existing literature predominantly focuses on military interventions, security operations, extremist organizations, psychological trauma, and ideological recruitment (Celso, 2015; Darden & Estelle, 2021; Mohammed & Neuner, 2022; Brown, 2023; Farber, 2025). Other scholars have explored religious discrimination, humanitarian displacement, governance reforms, and transnational security cooperation (Ajiboye, 2025; Bautista et al., 2025; Islam et al., 2025). However, relatively few studies integrate *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, legal pluralism, Islamic governance, and community-based legal institutions into a unified analytical framework capable of explaining how Islamic law can function as a preventive mechanism against radicalization rather than merely serving as a theological or doctrinal discourse.

This study addresses that scholarly gap by examining the contribution of Islamic law to counter-radicalization strategies within Nigeria's plural legal environment. Specifically, the article develops an integrated analytical framework combining legal pluralism, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, governance theory, and contemporary counter-extremism scholarship to explain how Islamic legal principles may strengthen institutional legitimacy, social cohesion, and sustainable peacebuilding. The study also contributes to expanding interdisciplinary discussions connecting Islamic legal studies, governance, education, and security studies while offering comparative insights relevant to other Muslim-majority societies confronting similar challenges. By emphasizing normative governance rather than purely coercive approaches, this article seeks to demonstrate that Islamic law possesses

significant potential as a constructive framework for preventing violent extremism, strengthening democratic governance, and fostering long-term social stability within legally plural societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary scholarship generally understands violent extremism as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be explained solely through ideological or religious factors. Early theoretical works emphasize that radicalization develops through gradual interactions among political grievances, identity formation, perceived injustice, and social marginalization rather than through isolated theological indoctrination (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Wiktorowicz, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Brown (2014) further argues that misinterpretations of Islamic religious texts often emerge from selective readings detached from broader historical and jurisprudential contexts. More recent empirical studies reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that extremist organizations strategically exploit psychological vulnerability, identity crises, and the human search for personal significance to facilitate recruitment (Honnavalli et al., 2019; Mohammed & Neuner, 2022; Bélanger et al., 2023; Di Cicco et al., 2025). Comparative analyses of Indonesia and Nigeria similarly reveal that weak governance, social inequality, and ineffective institutional responses significantly contribute to the persistence of radical movements despite differing political and legal systems (Abdullah et al., 2025). These findings collectively indicate that violent extremism should be understood as a complex governance challenge requiring interdisciplinary legal, social, educational, and institutional responses rather than conventional security measures alone.

From the perspective of Islamic legal scholarship, contemporary debates increasingly reject the assumption that Islam inherently legitimizes violent extremism. Instead, Islamic jurisprudence emphasizes the protection of human dignity, justice, and public welfare through the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Classical Islamic scholars have consistently viewed governance as an instrument for preserving religion, life, intellect, property, and human dignity while preventing social disorder and injustice (Taimiyah, 1976). Recent scholarship has expanded these principles into modern legal discourse by demonstrating that *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* provides an ethical foundation for promoting peaceful coexistence within multicultural societies (Jalili et al., 2024; Azizah & Shalihah, 2025). Likewise, studies concerning religious moderation argue that Islamic teachings can function as preventive mechanisms against ideological extremism when interpreted through contextual, inclusive, and justice-oriented approaches (Saada, 2023; Hadiyanto et al., 2025). Rather than encouraging exclusivism, Islamic law offers normative principles capable of strengthening social harmony, tolerance, and responsible citizenship. Consequently, contemporary Islamic legal scholarship increasingly positions *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as an essential framework for countering extremist narratives while preserving both religious authenticity and constitutional order.

Another important body of literature concerns legal pluralism and its relationship with governance in Muslim-majority societies. The concept of legal pluralism explains that multiple legal orders—including state law, Islamic law, customary law, and informal community norms—simultaneously regulate social behavior within diverse societies (Merry, 1988). Rather than viewing these legal systems as mutually contradictory, contemporary scholars argue that constructive interaction among them may strengthen institutional legitimacy and improve conflict resolution (Hosen, 2017; Tahir, 2022; Anggraeni, 2023). Recent studies further demonstrate that integrating Islamic legal values into modern governance frameworks can enhance public trust while preserving democratic accountability and constitutional legitimacy (Zuhdi et al., 2025). Similar findings have been reported in community-based Islamic institutions that successfully combine religious authority with social reconstruction and preventive governance initiatives (Shittu et al., 2022; Ishaku et al., 2021). Nevertheless, legal pluralism may also become vulnerable to ideological fragmentation when competing interpretations of Islamic law are manipulated by extremist actors seeking to challenge state authority. This tension highlights the necessity of developing governance models capable of harmonizing religious legitimacy, legal certainty, and institutional accountability within plural legal environments. Beyond religious extremism, pseudolegal claims have also emerged in anti-government movements that reject state authority by constructing alternative legal narratives, illustrating that pseudolegal reasoning represents a broader phenomenon of ideological legitimacy across different sociopolitical contexts (Sarteschi, 2021).

Recent studies also emphasize that effective counter-radicalization increasingly depends upon education, digital communication, community participation, and preventive interventions rather than coercive law enforcement alone. Empirical evidence further indicates that preventive strategies can significantly reduce susceptibility to radicalization and anti-social behavior associated with violent extremism (Vicente & Vilela, 2022). Educational

institutions contribute to preventing radicalization by fostering critical thinking, religious literacy, and inclusive citizenship capable of resisting extremist propaganda (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020; Saada, 2023; Sahar, 2025). Simultaneously, digital platforms have become both arenas for extremist recruitment and opportunities for disseminating moderate religious narratives. Research on online religious moderation demonstrates that digital communication can effectively promote peaceful interpretations of Islam while reducing ideological polarization among younger generations (Winter, 2015; Hadiyanto et al., 2025). Conversely, studies concerning internet-mediated radicalization warn that online environments may accelerate extremist mobilization through algorithmic amplification, ideological echo chambers, and transnational communication networks when left unregulated (Schumann et al., 2025). Broader governance literature similarly stresses the importance of coordinated institutional responses involving governments, religious organizations, educational institutions, and civil society to strengthen resilience against violent extremism while promoting sustainable peacebuilding (Farber, 2025; Islam et al., 2025; Schmidt & Simha, 2025).

Despite the substantial expansion of research concerning terrorism, radicalization, Islamic law, governance, and legal pluralism, significant conceptual gaps remain. Existing studies generally examine these themes independently, focusing either on security policy, psychological mechanisms, educational interventions, or religious doctrine without integrating them into a coherent legal-governance framework. Limited attention has been devoted to explaining how Islamic law, particularly through *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and legal pluralism, can function simultaneously as a normative, institutional, and governance-based strategy for preventing radicalization within Nigeria's complex legal landscape. Furthermore, empirical studies addressing Boko Haram predominantly emphasize military operations, humanitarian consequences, and security management while paying comparatively less attention to the preventive role of Islamic legal institutions in strengthening social cohesion and institutional legitimacy (Adelaja & George, 2019; Celso, 2015; Darden & Estelle, 2021; Ajiboye, 2025). Accordingly, this study develops an integrated conceptual framework that connects Islamic legal theory, legal pluralism, governance, and counter-radicalization scholarship to explain how Islamic law may contribute to sustainable peacebuilding and institutional resilience in contemporary Nigeria. This framework constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the present study and serves as the analytical foundation for the subsequent methodological and empirical discussions.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design to examine how extremist organizations manipulate Islamic legal concepts to construct pseudolegal systems of governance and legitimize political violence. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on understanding meanings, narratives, interpretations, and ideological constructions rather than measuring numerical relationships or causal effects. The comparative case study method enables a systematic examination of similarities and differences between two prominent extremist organizations, namely ISIS and Boko Haram, which operate within different geographical, political, and socio-legal contexts. ISIS represents a highly centralized transnational organization that attempted to establish a bureaucratic form of territorial governance through the declaration of a so-called caliphate, while Boko Haram represents a more decentralized insurgent movement whose ideological narratives developed within Nigeria's complex political and religious environment (Celso, 2015; Thurston, 2018). The analytical framework combines Legal Pluralism Theory and Radicalisation Theory to investigate how competing legal claims emerge when non-state actors challenge established legal authorities and construct alternative normative orders (Merry, 1988; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Through this framework, pseudolegal manipulation is conceptualized as a process whereby extremist groups selectively reinterpret religious legal traditions to produce ideological legitimacy, social control, and political authority.

The research data consist of documentary materials derived from publicly available extremist narratives, including speeches, propaganda publications, official declarations, ideological statements, and organizational communications produced by ISIS and Boko Haram. These materials were selected because extremist organizations frequently utilize textual and symbolic representations of Islamic law to communicate authority, justify violence, and mobilize followers. The study also examines relevant classical Islamic jurisprudential sources and contemporary academic literature concerning Islamic law, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, legal pluralism, radicalization, and violent extremism. The inclusion of Islamic jurisprudential materials is essential to distinguish between established Islamic legal traditions and extremist reinterpretations that detach legal concepts from their historical, methodological, and ethical foundations. The data collection process follows purposive sampling principles, whereby sources were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly

materials containing discussions of religious legitimacy, punishment, governance, warfare, and authority. This approach allows the study to identify recurring ideological patterns while maintaining analytical sensitivity toward the complexity of Islamic legal discourse. Previous qualitative studies emphasize that documentary analysis and thematic interpretation are effective approaches for examining ideological narratives and social phenomena embedded within textual sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Ahmed et al., 2025).

The collected data were analyzed using discourse analysis combined with thematic analysis to identify how Islamic legal terminology was constructed, transformed, and strategically employed by ISIS and Boko Haram. The analytical process involved several stages, including data familiarization, identification of recurring themes, categorization of legal-religious narratives, comparative interpretation, and theoretical reflection. The main analytical categories included the concepts of *takfīr* (excommunication), *jihād* (struggle), *ḥudūd* (Islamic legal punishments), sovereignty, governance, and religious authority. Each category was examined to determine how extremist groups selectively interpreted Islamic legal concepts, removed them from their broader jurisprudential contexts, and transformed them into instruments of ideological domination. The findings were subsequently compared between ISIS and Boko Haram to identify patterns of convergence and divergence in their approaches to pseudolegal governance. Analytical validity was strengthened through theoretical triangulation by interpreting extremist narratives through legal pluralism, radicalisation theory, and classical Islamic legal principles, particularly the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* concerning justice, protection of life, human dignity, and social welfare (Taimiyah, 1976; Jalili et al., 2024; Azizah & Shalihah, 2025). Accordingly, this methodology does not evaluate Islamic law based on extremist claims but critically examines how Islamic legal language is strategically appropriated by violent actors to construct alternative legal orders that contradict established jurisprudential traditions and principles of peaceful governance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pseudolegal Construction of Islamic Authority: The Manipulation of Islamic Legal Concepts by ISIS and Boko Haram

The findings of this study demonstrate that ISIS and Boko Haram do not merely employ religious narratives as ideological justification for violence, but actively construct *pseudolegal systems* by manipulating Islamic legal concepts to establish alternative claims of authority. This process reflects a transformation of religious discourse into a political and legal instrument through which extremist groups challenge existing state institutions and traditional Islamic authorities. From the perspective of legal pluralism, such phenomena illustrate the emergence of competing normative orders in which non-state actors attempt to create alternative legal frameworks outside recognized legal institutions (Merry, 1988). However, unlike legitimate forms of legal pluralism that involve interaction between state law, religious law, and customary norms, extremist groups construct artificial legal systems based on selective interpretations, ideological exclusion, and coercive enforcement. This pattern is consistent with broader studies on religious violence, which emphasize that extremist movements frequently reinterpret religious traditions through political objectives rather than through established theological and jurisprudential methodologies (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Wiktorowicz, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

ISIS represents the most developed example of pseudolegal Islamic authority because it attempted to institutionalize its interpretation of Islamic law through the establishment of a territorial *caliphate*. The organization created administrative structures, judicial institutions, religious police, and regulatory mechanisms that simulated state governance while claiming divine legitimacy. Through this process, ISIS transformed selected concepts from Islamic jurisprudence into instruments of political domination. The concept of *jihād*, for example, was reduced primarily into armed confrontation, while historical, ethical, and jurisprudential limitations surrounding warfare were largely removed from consideration (Brown, 2014; Cook, 2015). Similarly, the use of *takfīr* allowed ISIS to delegitimize Muslims and political opponents who rejected its authority, thereby creating a binary worldview between supporters and enemies. Previous studies indicate that ISIS's propaganda strategy depended heavily on constructing symbolic legitimacy through religious narratives, visual representations, and claims of restoring an authentic Islamic political order (Celso, 2015; Winter, 2015).

In contrast, Boko Haram demonstrates a different model of pseudolegal construction characterized by decentralized authority and localized adaptation within Nigeria's complex socio-political environment. Rather than establishing a comprehensive bureaucratic system similar to ISIS, Boko Haram developed an insurgent form of governance by challenging the legitimacy of the Nigerian state and promoting its own interpretation of Islamic authority. The movement's narratives frequently portrayed state institutions, secular education, and existing

political structures as incompatible with its understanding of Islam. This approach reflects how extremist organizations exploit social grievances, governance weaknesses, and identity conflicts to strengthen recruitment and ideological commitment (Honnnavalli et al., 2019; Adelaja & George, 2019). Studies concerning Boko Haram further demonstrate that radical movements often emerge through interactions between ideological narratives, political marginalization, and institutional failures rather than through religious interpretation alone (Thurston, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2025).

The comparative findings indicate that although ISIS and Boko Haram differ in organizational structure and governance strategies, both employ similar mechanisms of Islamic legal manipulation. The main distinction lies in their institutional approaches: ISIS pursued centralized legal-bureaucratic authority, whereas Boko Haram relied on decentralized insurgent control. The comparison is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative Construction of Pseudolegal Authority between ISIS and Boko Haram

Analytical Dimension	ISIS	Boko Haram
Model of authority	Centralized pseudo-state authority through the declaration of <i>caliphate</i>	Decentralized insurgent authority challenging state legitimacy
Legal strategy	Institutionalization of extremist interpretations through courts, regulations, and enforcement bodies	Selective use of Islamic narratives to justify resistance and social control
Main manipulated concepts	<i>Takfīr</i> , <i>jihād</i> , <i>ḥudūd</i> , and political sovereignty	<i>Jihād</i> , opposition to secular governance, and religious legitimacy
Governance orientation	Attempt to create an alternative Islamic state structure	Attempt to undermine existing governance and establish ideological dominance
Relationship with Islamic jurisprudence	Selective appropriation detached from broader legal methodologies	Contextual adaptation of extremist interpretations within local conflicts

Source: Developed by the authors (2025).

The findings therefore reveal that pseudolegal construction by ISIS and Boko Haram operates through the selective appropriation of Islamic legal language while disconnecting it from the ethical objectives and methodological principles of Islamic jurisprudence. Authentic Islamic legal traditions historically developed through complex interpretive processes involving scholarly authority, contextual reasoning, and considerations of justice and public welfare (Hosen, 2017; Anggraeni, 2023). In contrast, extremist groups bypass these mechanisms by presenting their interpretations as absolute and unquestionable. This process creates what may be understood as *pseudolegal authority*, where legal terminology is maintained but its normative foundations are replaced by ideological objectives. Consequently, the manipulation of Islamic law by extremist groups should not be interpreted as a representation of Islamic jurisprudence itself, but rather as a strategic transformation of religious concepts into instruments of political control and violent legitimacy. This finding strengthens the argument that counter-extremism efforts require not only security-based responses but also the reinforcement of credible Islamic legal scholarship, religious literacy, and governance frameworks capable of preventing ideological distortions.

Extremist Governance and the Transformation of Islamic Law into an Instrument of Violence

The findings further demonstrate that the manipulation of Islamic law by ISIS and Boko Haram extends beyond ideological narratives into the construction of governance mechanisms designed to regulate social behavior, enforce obedience, and legitimize violence. Both organizations transformed selected Islamic legal concepts into instruments of political authority by presenting their interpretations as the only legitimate representation of divine law. This process illustrates how extremist movements convert religious norms into *governance tools* through selective interpretation, exclusionary narratives, and coercive practices. Unlike authentic Islamic legal traditions that emphasize justice, accountability, and public welfare, extremist organizations reconstruct legal concepts according to political objectives and revolutionary agendas. Within the framework of radicalisation theory, such transformation occurs when ideological entrepreneurs exploit grievances, identity conflicts, and social uncertainty to create narratives of absolute legitimacy and enemy construction (Wiktorowicz, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Consequently, extremist governance should be understood not merely as a security problem but also as a legal and institutional challenge involving competing claims over authority, legitimacy, and social

order. This finding is consistent with broader scholarship emphasizing that effective responses to terrorism require robust legal frameworks grounded in the rule of law rather than purely coercive approaches (Wei, 2024).

ISIS provides the clearest example of how extremist groups institutionalize violence through a pseudo-legal governance structure. After declaring its so-called *caliphate*, ISIS attempted to replicate state functions by establishing administrative departments, judicial bodies, taxation mechanisms, and enforcement institutions. Beyond ideological control, extremist governance also depends on financial sustainability and informal economic networks, reinforcing broader concerns regarding terrorist financing, institutional accountability, and democratic governance (Kalokoh, 2024). However, the legal system developed by ISIS was fundamentally based on selective readings of Islamic sources that removed historical context, jurisprudential diversity, and ethical limitations. Concepts such as *hudūd* were implemented as instruments of fear and political control rather than as part of a broader Islamic legal framework emphasizing justice and evidentiary standards. Similarly, the concept of *jihād* was reconstructed into permanent warfare against perceived enemies, ignoring classical discussions regarding intention, proportionality, and protection of civilians (Brown, 2014; Cook, 2015). Research on ISIS confirms that the organization's governance model relied heavily on symbolic religious authority combined with administrative violence to maintain territorial control and ideological loyalty (Celso, 2015; Winter, 2015; Darden & Estelle, 2021).

Boko Haram demonstrates a different but interconnected pattern of extremist governance, where Islamic legal narratives function primarily as instruments of insurgency and social disruption rather than as a fully developed administrative system. The organization emerged within a context of political instability, socioeconomic inequality, and institutional weakness in northern Nigeria. Instead of creating a state-like bureaucracy similar to ISIS, Boko Haram established localized systems of coercion through territorial influence, intimidation, forced obedience, and ideological mobilization. Its rejection of state institutions and secular education was framed through religious narratives that portrayed existing governance structures as illegitimate. This strategy demonstrates how extremist groups exploit local grievances and social vulnerabilities to strengthen their authority among marginalized communities. Studies on conflict dynamics in Nigeria indicate that prolonged insecurity, displacement, humanitarian crises, and weakened economic structures have contributed to conditions in which extremist narratives can gain influence (Adelaja & George, 2019; Eteng et al., 2021; Salihu et al., 2024). Furthermore, faith-based institutions and community organizations have been identified as important actors in challenging extremist narratives and rebuilding social trust within affected communities (Ishaku et al., 2021; Shittu et al., 2022).

The comparative analysis reveals that ISIS and Boko Haram share similar mechanisms in transforming Islamic law into an instrument of violence, although their governance models differ significantly. Both organizations utilize religious terminology, construct narratives of moral superiority, and redefine legal concepts to justify coercive authority. The main differences appear in their institutional capacity, territorial ambitions, and governance strategies, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative Characteristics of ISIS and Boko Haram's Extremist Governance Models

Analytical Dimension	ISIS	Boko Haram
Governance model	State-like extremist administration through the <i>caliphate</i> project	Insurgent governance based on territorial influence and social disruption
Function of Islamic law	Used to create formal regulations, courts, and administrative control	Used primarily to justify rebellion, ideological resistance, and coercion
Violence justification	Presented as enforcement of divine legal order	Presented as opposition against allegedly illegitimate secular authority
Institutional strategy	Centralized bureaucracy and systematic enforcement	Decentralized networks and adaptive local mobilization
Main social impact	Attempted replacement of existing legal-political institutions	Destabilization of state authority and community structures

Source: Developed by the authors (2025).

The transformation of Islamic law into a mechanism of violence also demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between religious principles and extremist interpretations. Contemporary scholarship on radicalization emphasizes that extremist movements frequently manipulate religious identity by creating

narratives of exclusion, victimhood, and existential conflict (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020; Mohammed & Neuner, 2022; Bélanger et al., 2023). Digital communication has further strengthened these processes by enabling extremist groups to disseminate propaganda, recruit followers, and normalize ideological violence across transnational networks (Hadiyanto et al., 2025; Schumann et al., 2025). However, such manipulation does not represent the broader intellectual tradition of Islamic law, which historically developed through interpretive diversity, scholarly debate, and ethical objectives. The findings therefore indicate that extremist governance emerges through the separation of legal concepts from their normative foundations and their replacement with ideological objectives. This process creates a form of *legal instrumentalization* in which Islamic terminology is preserved while its essential commitments to justice, human dignity, and social welfare are abandoned. Accordingly, counter-radicalization strategies require strengthening legal literacy, religious education, institutional legitimacy, and community resilience to prevent extremist actors from monopolizing interpretations of Islamic law (Saada, 2023; Sahar, 2025; Farber, 2025).

Reconstructing Islamic Law as a Counter-Radicalization Framework: *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, Legal Pluralism, and Sustainable Peacebuilding

The findings of this study demonstrate that countering extremist manipulation of Islamic law requires not only rejecting violent interpretations but also reconstructing Islamic legal discourse through authentic jurisprudential principles, particularly *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and constructive legal pluralism. The comparative analysis of ISIS and Boko Haram reveals that extremist groups succeed in promoting pseudolegal narratives partly because they claim exclusive ownership over religious interpretation while weakening the legitimacy of established Islamic scholarly institutions. Therefore, an effective counter-radicalization framework must restore the relationship between Islamic law, justice, public welfare, and responsible governance. Classical Islamic legal thought has consistently emphasized that law should serve social order, prevent harm, and protect fundamental human interests. Taimiyah (1976), for example, emphasized that governance and legal authority must be oriented toward justice and public benefit rather than personal or political domination. Contemporary scholarship further develops this perspective by highlighting that *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* provides an ethical foundation for understanding Islamic law as a system aimed at protecting religion, life, intellect, property, and human dignity (Jalili et al., 2024; Azizah & Shalihah, 2025). Thus, the findings suggest that extremist groups do not represent an alternative interpretation within Islamic jurisprudence but rather a distortion that contradicts the fundamental objectives of Islamic law.

The application of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* provides an important analytical framework for evaluating the contradiction between extremist practices and authentic Islamic legal objectives. First, the principle of *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (protection of religion) demonstrates that religion cannot be preserved through coercion, hatred, or violence against innocent communities. Although ISIS and Boko Haram claim to defend Islam, their actions have contributed to social fragmentation, religious stigma, and negative perceptions of Islamic teachings. Second, the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (protection of life) directly challenges extremist violence, including attacks against civilians, forced displacement, and systematic destruction of communities. Third, *ḥifẓ al-'aql* (protection of intellect) highlights the importance of education, critical reasoning, and intellectual freedom as barriers against extremist indoctrination. Research on Islamic education and radicalization demonstrates that educational environments emphasizing critical religious literacy and inclusive citizenship can reduce vulnerability to extremist narratives (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020; Saada, 2023; Sahar, 2025). Fourth, *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of property) and protection of human dignity further reveal the incompatibility between Islamic legal objectives and extremist practices involving economic destruction, exploitation, and abuse of vulnerable populations. Accordingly, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* functions not only as a theological principle but also as a practical framework for evaluating whether legal claims genuinely promote justice and social welfare.

Beyond *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, the findings indicate that legal pluralism provides an essential governance perspective for preventing extremist monopolization of Islamic legal authority. Contemporary Muslim societies often operate within plural legal environments where state law, Islamic norms, customary traditions, and community practices interact continuously. Legal pluralism does not necessarily create institutional conflict; rather, it can provide mechanisms for balancing religious values, constitutional governance, and social diversity when managed through legitimate institutions (Merry, 1988; Hosen, 2017; Anggraeni, 2023). The Indonesian experience demonstrates that the integration of Islamic values within state institutions can strengthen accountability and public trust when conducted through constitutional frameworks and inclusive governance models (Zuhdi et al., 2025). This perspective offers an important contrast to extremist approaches, which reject plural legal arrangements and attempt to replace existing institutions with exclusive ideological systems.

Therefore, strengthening legitimate forms of legal pluralism can reduce opportunities for extremist actors to exploit religious identity by demonstrating that Islamic values can coexist with democratic governance, human rights, and social diversity.

The findings further reveal that sustainable counter-radicalization requires cooperation among legal institutions, religious authorities, educational organizations, civil society, and transnational governance networks capable of addressing contemporary security challenges (Islam et al., 2025). This finding complements broader counterterrorism studies showing that effective mitigation of violent extremism requires integrated and multidimensional intervention strategies rather than isolated security responses (Mohammad et al., 2025). Religious moderation, particularly through credible Islamic scholarship and community-based engagement, represents a significant mechanism for preventing extremist narratives from dominating public discourse. Studies on faith-based organizations in Nigeria demonstrate that religious institutions can contribute to counter-radicalization by rebuilding social trust, supporting vulnerable communities, and promoting peaceful interpretations of religious teachings (Ishaku et al., 2021; Shittu et al., 2022). Similarly, digital platforms have become important spaces where moderate religious narratives can challenge extremist propaganda and encourage constructive religious engagement among younger generations (Hadiyanto et al., 2025). However, digital environments also present challenges because extremist networks continue to utilize online spaces for recruitment and ideological dissemination (Schmidt & Simha, 2025; Schumann et al., 2025). Therefore, counter-radicalization strategies must combine theological, educational, technological, and institutional approaches rather than relying solely on security interventions. Based on the findings, this study proposes a reconstructed framework integrating *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, legal pluralism, and institutional governance as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah-Based Counter-Radicalization Framework

Framework Component	Analytical Function	Contribution to Counter-Radicalization
<i>Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i>	Evaluates legal claims based on justice, welfare, and human dignity	Prevents distortion of Islamic law into violence-based ideology
Legal pluralism	Balances state law, Islamic values, and social diversity	Strengthens institutional legitimacy and peaceful coexistence
Religious education	Develops critical understanding of Islamic concepts	Reduces vulnerability to extremist interpretations
Community governance	Engages religious and social institutions	Builds resilience against radical narratives
Digital religious moderation	Provides alternative online narratives	Counters extremist propaganda networks

Source: Developed by the authors (2025).

Overall, the findings establish that Islamic law possesses significant potential as a constructive framework for countering violent extremism when interpreted through its authentic ethical and jurisprudential foundations. The central problem identified in this research is not the existence of Islamic legal principles but the deliberate manipulation of those principles by extremist organizations seeking political domination. By integrating *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, legal pluralism, and institutional governance, Islamic legal discourse can function as a preventive mechanism against radicalization and as a foundation for sustainable peacebuilding. This approach challenges the assumption that religion and democratic governance are inherently incompatible and instead demonstrates that legitimate Islamic legal traditions can contribute to social stability, justice, and inclusive governance. Therefore, addressing extremist pseudolegal narratives requires strengthening authentic religious authority, expanding legal literacy, and promoting governance systems capable of transforming Islamic legal values into instruments of peace rather than violence.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the manipulation of Islamic law by extremist organizations represents a strategic process of constructing *pseudolegal authority* rather than an authentic expression of Islamic jurisprudence. The comparative analysis of ISIS and Boko Haram demonstrates that both groups selectively reinterpret Islamic legal concepts, particularly *takfīr*, *jihād*, and *ḥudūd*, to legitimize violence, establish alternative claims of authority, and challenge existing legal institutions. However, their governance models differ significantly: ISIS developed a centralized and bureaucratic pseudo-state structure through the declaration of a so-called *caliphate*, while Boko

Haram adopted a decentralized insurgent governance model shaped by local political instability and social grievances in Nigeria. These findings answer the central research objective by showing that extremist manipulation of Islamic law operates through decontextualization, selective interpretation, and the replacement of jurisprudential principles with ideological objectives.

The study further demonstrates that countering extremist pseudolegal narratives requires reconstructing Islamic law through its authentic normative foundations, particularly *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and constructive legal pluralism. The findings indicate that Islamic law, when interpreted through principles of justice, public welfare, human dignity, and institutional accountability, can function as a preventive framework against radicalization rather than as a source of extremism. The theoretical novelty of this research lies in integrating Legal Pluralism Theory and Radicalisation Theory to conceptualize pseudolegal manipulation as a mechanism of extremist governance. This framework expands existing discussions on violent extremism by moving beyond security-oriented approaches and highlighting how legal-religious narratives are transformed into instruments of political domination. The study also contributes to Islamic legal scholarship by demonstrating that extremist interpretations must be critically distinguished from established Islamic jurisprudential traditions based on ethical reasoning and social objectives.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research relies primarily on documentary analysis of extremist narratives, academic literature, and publicly available materials; therefore, it does not include direct interviews with former members, affected communities, religious authorities, or policymakers. Second, although the comparative analysis of ISIS and Boko Haram provides important insights, future research may expand the framework by examining other extremist movements across different socio-legal contexts. Third, further empirical studies are needed to evaluate how institutions, educational programs, and community-based initiatives practically implement *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*-based counter-radicalization strategies. Nevertheless, this study provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how Islamic legal discourse can be protected from ideological manipulation while strengthening religious literacy, plural governance, and sustainable peacebuilding. By repositioning Islamic law as a framework of justice and social responsibility, the research contributes to broader debates on law, religion, and counter-extremism in contemporary plural societies.

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