

SHORT STUDY REPORT

ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA (IMN)

The Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) was created approx. 1979 by a Shia Muslim university activist, Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, who was inspired by the 1979 Iranian Revolution which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power after the overthrow of US-allied Shah in a popular uprising. The spiritual headquarters is located at Husqiniyya Baqiyatullah in Zaria, Kaduna State, Northern Nigeria. The IMN incorporates both Shia and Sunni Muslim beliefs. The movement's primary objective is to raise awareness about itself, and to advocate the liberation of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel. Khomeini remains the group's main inspiration with IMN supporters first pledging allegiance to him at their gatherings, and then to their local leader, Sheikh Zakzaky. The IMN views itself as an independent government with Sheikh Zakzaky as the only legitimate source of authority in Nigeria. It does not recognise the authority of the Nigerian government, and views the government's leaders - both Muslims and Christians - as corrupt and ungodly, with Sheikh El-Zakzaky being revered as the only legitimate source of authority in Nigeria. Therefore, the IMN views the Nigerian executive, legislative and judiciary arms of government as corrupt, ungodly and subservient to the Islamic government framework and the Sharia legal system. As such, the IMN political system is in contradistinction to the Nigerian political framework. To carry out its political mandates, the IMN has well-organized branches and administrative structures in most of Nigeria's 36 states. These structures work effectively with local members who are well entrenched into the political fabrics of the Nigeria political order in order to manipulate and subvert the system to conform to their Islamic ideologies. In 2015 the leader of IMN was arrested by the Nigerian government after a confrontation with the military, during which approx. 350 protesting IMN members were killed. Since then, the IMN has been staging protests, some resulting in serious injuries and fatalities, across the country. Consequently, Nigeria's government has taken the controversial decision to ban the IMN's pro-Iranian Shia group, accusing it of causing violence and being an enemy of the State. The government's position is that "Any person engaged or associating in any manner that could advance the activities of the proscribed Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) shall be treated as a terrorist, enemy of the State, and a subversive element and shall be brought to justice." The IMN is challenging the ban, arguing that it is a peaceful movement which has, in fact, borne the brunt of State-orchestrated violence. With a membership of over 8 million people, the IMN is a major contributor to the economy of Nigeria. The IMN has considerable capital investments in trade and commerce, schools, hospitals, oil and gas, agriculture and food processing, poultry, clothing and fabrics, and other essential economic areas. An important social advantage the IMN has built over its almost forty-year history is a large demographic composition of over 8 million Shia Muslim converts spread across Nigeria's 36 states. The IMN is the largest Shia organization in Nigeria, with the ability to draw tens of thousands of crowds to its gatherings. This is largely because of the efforts of the leader, Sheikh Zakzaky, who spurred the growth of Shiaism in a country where there were a negligible number of Shia before the Iranian revolution. To meet the needs of increasing adherents, IMN operates schools and hospitals, especially in the predominantly Muslim states in Northern Nigeria. This often compensates for the lack of government-funded schools in the areas. The IMN has a registered Foundation called the Fudiyya Foundation, with over 360 primary and secondary Islamic schools. Many of its adherents are well-educated professionals with top positions in government establishments, army, police and intelligence agencies across Nigeria. Over the years, the organization has been able to infiltrate other Islamic and ethnic groups with its beliefs and ideologies. Many well-educated IMN adherents are gainfully employed in both public and private sectors where their skills are being used to contribute to the technological advancement of society.