

The Role of Charismatic Leadership of Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky in the Development of Shiism in Nigeria

Amir Bahram Arab Ahmadi *

Associate Professor, West Asian and African Studies, Faculty of World Studies,
University of Tehran, Tehran, IRAN.

(Received: 27 January 2024 - Accepted: 4 August 2024)

Abstract

Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky is one of the most prominent Shia scholars in Nigeria, who has gained considerable fame throughout West Africa for his unparalleled efforts in promoting and developing the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). The present study aims to examine the tumultuous life of this esteemed scholar and to provide a shining portrayal of his services to the Shia community in Nigeria. The main focus of this paper is on the life and challenges of the leader of Nigerian Shia Muslims; and answer the central question posed regarding 'To what extent Shaykh Zakzaky has succeeded in his strategic goals?' The theoretical framework of this article is based on the theory of charismatic leadership by the German sociologist Max Weber, and the hypothesis of the article revolves around Shaykh Zakzaky's public acceptance among the Shia community in Nigeria. The research method applied is library-based with a descriptive-analytical approach, and the attention paid to this topic, which is somewhat novel and original in its nature, is considered an innovative aspect of the article.

Keywords: Nigeria, Zakzaky, Shiism, Islamic movement, Iran.

*. Corresponding Author: arabahmadi@ut.ac.ir

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Introduction

Malam¹ Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky, a distinguished Shia scholar in Nigeria, has attained notable popularity within Nigeria and West Africa for his steadfast endeavors in advocating for and nurturing the Ahl al-bayt (AS) religion. Recognized for his distinctive stances, revolutionary spirit, and support for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Shaykh Zakzaky remains a respected figure despite his prolonged incarceration. This enduring respect spans across both Muslim and Christian communities in Nigeria. Serving as the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) for over four decades, Shaykh Zakzaky has led the largest faction of the country's minority Shia Muslims. Despite enduring injuries, incarceration, and over sixteen years in various prisons across Nigeria, he has steadfastly maintained his leadership within the Shia community, holding a prominent position in the country.

1. Main Object and Question

The present study aims to scrutinize the life of Shaykh Zakzaky, assessing his contributions to the Shia community in Nigeria. The research delves into the challenges faced by the Shia leader and evaluates the extent of his success in achieving strategic goals. Furthermore, the author has endeavored to answer the underlying question in detail and persuasively, based on the available documentation, regarding the extent to which Shaykh Zakzaky has succeeded in achieving his strategic objectives.

2. Theoretical Framework

This article's theoretical framework draws upon Max Weber's charismatic leadership theory, as articulated by the German sociologist. In the realm of terminology, "Charisma" is specifically used to characterize individuals who possess, either inherently or in the perception of others, an extraordinary capacity for leadership. This term, frequently utilized in political science and sociology, encapsulates the inspirational qualities of leaders who, through their capabilities, wield profound and exceptional influence over their followers.

According to Weber, charisma represents a distinctive aspect of a personality that crystallizes under favorable conditions. As perceived by the German sociologist, the foundation of charismatic leadership lies in the individual's personal appeal and societal acceptance, which may manifest in religious, political, militant, or oratorical dimensions. Weber posits that charismatic leadership propels individuals toward innovative

1. "Malam" or "Mwalimu" in African native languages means teacher and is considered a respectful title.

values and concepts that have long been primed, fostering a revolutionary mindset against the prevailing status quo. He contends that charismatic leadership fundamentally relies on the personal attributes of the leader and the acknowledgment of these traits by their followers, thereby establishing an emotional bond between the two parties.

3. Methodology

This article employs a descriptive-analytical method, primarily relying on an extensive review of literature from various sources. The descriptive aspect of the methodology involves a comprehensive examination of existing documents, publications, and scholarly works related to the subject matter. Through this, we aim to provide a detailed account of the life, contributions, and challenges of Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky, shedding light on his significant role in the development of the Ahl al-Bayt teachings and the notion of the Islamic revolution in Nigeria.

The analytical component of the methodology involves analyzing the available data to derive meaningful insights into the extent of Shaykh Zakzaky's success in achieving his strategic objectives. This process includes a meticulous exploration of various aspects of his leadership, taking into consideration factors such as societal acceptance, the impact on the Shia community, and the charismatic elements that contribute to his influential leadership style.

4. Hypothesis

The article's hypothesis is rooted in Shaykh Zakzaky's widespread popularity among the Shia community in Nigeria. The author systematically provides a detailed and logical response to the central question, drawing from available documents.

5. Literature Review

Notably, the life of the Shia leader in Nigeria has received limited attention from Iranian writers, potentially attributed to a lack of comprehensive information. Despite the insightful contributions of Amirbahram Arabahmadi's book, "The Fundamental Role of Shaykh Ibrahim Ya'qub Zakzaky in the Formation and Development of the Shiism Movement in Nigeria," scholarly works on this subject remain scarce. Only a handful of books, such as "Good Servant of God" by Iman Norouzi and "The Political and Social Situation of Nigeria" by Reza Adabi Firouzja'i and Habib Zamani, briefly touch upon the topic, particularly in the aftermath of the tragic 2015 Zaria massacre of Shia Muslims. Nazanin Ghaybi Hajipour and Mahdieh Namdar, in their article titled "The Effects and Reflections of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in Nigeria," and Mohammad Nabizadeh and Hossein Madarshahi, in their

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article titled "An Investigation of Ibrahim Zakzaky's Preaching and Educational Methods in the Expansion of Shiism in Nigeria," have both undertaken an analysis of Shaykh Zakzaky's characteristics from diverse perspectives. In the realm of international discourse, the life and endeavors of the Shia leader in Nigeria have been extensively explored in various books and articles.

Noteworthy among these are works such as "The Secular Sacred Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion" by Malcolm Balenhol et al.², "Religion and Global Politics Soft Power in Nigeria and Beyond" by al-Fath Abdul Salam et al.³, "Recognition of Religion or Belief" by Komtan⁴, and "Law, Religion and Human Flourishing in Africa" by Christian Green. Additionally, the "The World Almanac of Islamism 2019," compiled by the US Foreign Policy Council, has also delved into this subject.

It is important to note, however, that these works have often approached the topic with a predominantly critical perspective; while they provide extensive coverage of the life and actions of the Shia leader in Nigeria, they tend to offer only brief insights into the broader themes of Shia and Shiism, as well as Shaykh Zakzaky's role in Nigeria.

6. Innovation

The concentration on exploring the life and contributions of Shaykh Zakzaky represents a relatively novel and original topic, thus constituting an innovative dimension within the scope of this article.

7. From Childhood to Science Learning

2. In this book, the authors have amalgamated concepts from contemporary religious studies with those utilized in the examination of nationalism and internationalism. Through this interdisciplinary approach, they endeavor to chart a novel research trajectory, employing cognitive perspectives to explore the intricate interplay between religion and populism (or neopopulism) within Western democracies.

3. This book critically explores the establishment of soft religious power in African countries and its potential to reshape perceptions of the continent. The authors employ a comprehensive approach, analyzing the influence of religion on the foreign relations of African nations. This analysis integrates concepts from recent developments in religious studies with those traditionally employed in the study of nationalism and internationalism. By bridging these conceptual domains, the book aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between religion and the diplomatic dynamics of African countries.

4. The author of this book has scrutinized the systems, laws, and mechanisms established by governments for the recognition of religions.

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Ibrahim Yaqoub Zakzaky was born on May 5, 1953 (15 Sha'ban 1327 AH) in Zaria, Nigeria, into a family deeply rooted in religious devotion⁵ (Kabir Korau, 2007: 353).

His father, Mawalim Ibrahim, earned the title "Mwalimo" (teacher or professor) owing to his extensive knowledge and educational pursuits. Zakzaky's ancestral lineage can be traced back three generations to Mawlana Hussein, originally hailing from Mali, who migrated to Sokoto following the uprising led by Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio. In Sokoto, Mawlana Hussein became one of the esteemed companions of Shaykh Uthman.⁶ Mawlana Hussain assumed the role of religious advisor to the Amir and Caliph of the Islamic state of Zazzau (Zaria) in the early 19th century, following the establishment of this Islamic state (Biography of Mu'allim al-Zakzaky, 2004: 2-3).

It is noteworthy that the ancestors of Shaykh Ibrahim Ya'qub Zakzaky are believed to have originated from Mauritania, and his paternal grandfather migrated to this country during the 19th century to participate in the jihad led by Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio (Siollun, 2019: 249).

Ibrahim was the fifth child in his family. In his formative years, he received education in several traditional Quranic schools (Korau, 2007: 377). At the age of fifteen, he enrolled in the "Fatah" Arabic school in Zaria, where, owing to his exceptional abilities, he completed the four-year program ahead of schedule (Falola and Genova, Historical Dictionary of Nigeria, 2009).

Subsequently, Ibrahim continued his studies at the Shaykh Nasser Kabara Islamic Studies School in Kano from 1971-1975, where he earned a Grade II certificate. Simultaneously, he delved into various Islamic sciences under the guidance of esteemed religious scholars in northern Nigeria. Following the completion of his GCE A-Level studies, Shaykh Zakzaky furthered his education by enrolling in Ahmadu Bello

5. In the Hausa language, the term "Zakzaky" translates to "a man from Zazzau (or Zaria)."

6. The jihadist movement of "Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio, a famous Nigerian scholar," led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in parts of present-day Nigeria and its surrounding areas in the early 19th century, lasting for a hundred years. During this period, Islam became a powerful political force in Nigeria due to the efforts of Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio and his loyal companions, to the extent that after a century, the effects and remnants of the Sokoto Islamic government are still felt in northern Nigeria (Smaldone, 1978: 159). Some Shia ideas were also disseminated among Muslims in the Sokoto Caliphate during this period.

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University, where he pursued a degree in economics (Arabahmadi, 2018: 54).⁷

Throughout his university years, Shaykh Ibrahim dedicated particular attention to fostering the unity of Muslim students, assuming the role of Secretary-General of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in 1977 and 1978. In the subsequent year (1979), his active engagement within the organization led to his appointment as the Deputy Director of International Affairs for the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria. Despite completing his studies with honors in 1979, the authorities of Ahmadu Bello University opted not to confer an excellence degree upon Ibrahim due to his involvement in Islamic activities and participation in protest movements in northern Nigeria⁸ (Harvard Divinity School, 2023).

Following his graduation, Shaykh Ibrahim entered into matrimony with Mrs. Zeenat Ibrahim, a Muslim hailing from northern Nigeria, and subsequently became the father of nine children⁹ (Arabahmadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 55-56).

Ibrahim Zakzaky demonstrated considerable success in memorizing the entire Quran during his youth. Throughout his thirties and forties, he engaged in extensive research on Islamic sciences, maintaining this scholarly pursuit until his arrest and severe injury in 2015 (Biography of Shaykh Zakzaky, 2003).

7. Ahmadu Bello University was established in 1962 by Ahmadu Bello, a distinguished Nigerian Muslim figure, in the city of Zaria. Regarded as the fourth most prestigious university in Nigeria in terms of academic standing, the institution boasts a substantial library housing hundreds of thousands of Islamic and Arabic books. This extensive collection renders it unique in Africa, underscoring the university's commitment to fostering a rich academic environment with a significant focus on Islamic and Arabic studies.

8. However, according to Abdul Rauf Mustafa in his book "Nigerian Sects and Social Disorder: Muslim Identity and Conflict in Northern Nigeria," Shaykh Zakzaky was reportedly expelled in 1979. The expulsion was allegedly based on charges of attempting to set fire to the university president's office and orchestrating a group attack on university liquor clubs at Ahmadu Bello University (Mustapha, 2014: 71). The Harvard University website also affirms Shaykh Zakzaky's expulsion from the university, citing his involvement in protest movements in northern Nigeria as a contributing factor (Harvard Divinity School, 2023).

9. Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky had nine children, consisting of seven sons and two daughters. Tragically, six of his sons—Ahmad, Mahmoud, Hamid, Hamad, Humaid, and Ali Hyder—lost their lives in separate incidents involving the Nigerian army. Three of his sons faced a brutal fate during the army's assault on the Quds Day march in 2014, while the remaining three lost their lives in the attack on the Shia Husseiniyah and Shaykh Zakzaky's residence in Zaria in 2015. The collective loss underscores the profound impact of these tragic events on Shaykh Zakzaky and his family.

8. Joining the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN)

Zakzaky joined the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in his youth, and shortly thereafter, he became a member of the Nigerian Muslim Brotherhood, an affiliated branch of MSSN.

The Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), established in 1954, aimed to encompass all Muslim students in the country and disseminate Islamic teachings among them. It emerged as one of the largest religious organizations in West Africa, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s when it experienced significant growth, establishing numerous branches in states and cities across Nigeria, with a notable presence in various universities¹ (Biography of Shaykh Zakzaky: 2003). In fact, the shaykh became more interested in the goals of this organization, which were:

- Fostering unity and solidarity among all Nigerian Muslims grounded in faith in God and an Islamic approach rooted in brotherhood and fraternity as the foundational elements for attaining lasting peace;
- Advancing and propagating Quranic studies as the divine holy book and reinforcing Arabic as the language of the Quran;
- Enhancing the welfare of Muslims, safeguarding their interests, and advocating for their rights within both society and the government;
- Training proficient preachers to advocate for and fortify Islam in Nigeria.

His active engagement in realizing these objectives within the MSSN framework later served as a valuable experience in organizing the "Islamic Movement in Northern Nigeria."

Zakzaky's early initiatives toward fulfilling the goals of the MSSN proved to be a noteworthy foundation for the formidable and challenging path he would encounter in the future (Islamic Movement of Nigeria /Ikhwan al-Muslimeen / Muslim Brothers, 2003).

1 . The Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) presently oversees the administration of over ten thousand mosques situated within high schools, colleges, and universities across Nigeria. Additionally, the organization has established multiple branches in various cities throughout the country. The majority of the MSSN's programs and ceremonies are conducted within these religious centers, highlighting their significance as focal points for the organization's activities. MSSN demonstrates a particular inclination towards the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and maintains positive relations with the Nigerian Shia community. This collaborative and inclusive approach reflects the organization's commitment to fostering unity and understanding among different Islamic traditions within the Nigerian context.

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9. Familiarizing with the Islamic Revolution of Iran

Shaykh Zakzaky was predisposed to the thoughts and ideologies of Muslim Brotherhood leaders, including Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna, before his journey to Iran (Nzeh, 2002: 2). He held a deep respect for influential figures such as Hassan al-Banna, Mawdudi, and Sayyid Qutb (Umar & Shirbon, 2000). However, it was during the Islamic Revolution in Iran that he became acquainted with this transformative Islamic movement and experienced its profound influence (Harvard Divinity School, 2023).

Even before the success of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Shaykh Ibrahim, captivated by the perspectives of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, emerged as a devoted disciple of Imam Khomeini. His unparalleled courage was evident as he stood among the select few who vehemently defended the legitimacy of the Nigerian government in religious matters, a stance that posed a significant challenge (Harjula & Ylanko, 2006: 59).

The onset of the Islamic Revolution in Iran coincided with Shaykh Ibrahim's concluding years of university education. Consequently, in 1980, he embarked on a journey to the Islamic Republic of Iran in his capacity as the Deputy Secretary-General of African Muslim Students, accompanied by a group of Nigerian Muslim students. During this multi-day visit, Zakzaky engaged in meetings with political officials of the Liberation Movements Committee, representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various religious authorities. Additionally, he visited seminaries in Qom and actively participated in religious activities within these centers. Remarkably, despite Imam Khomeini's ailment, Shaykh Ibrahim had the opportunity to meet with him during this period (<http://www.hawzah.net>, 2023).

10. Commencement of Religious Engagements

Zakzaky's encounter with the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran left a profound impact on him. At the age of 27, he embraced the school of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and, upon returning to Nigeria with a newfound background in Shiism, initiated his political and religious endeavors under the banner of the "Islamic Movement of Nigerian Students in Sokoto." Equipped with his inherent talent for delivering impassioned speeches and compelling sermons, the young Zakzaky embarked on the challenging path of introducing Shiism to Nigerian Muslims, garnering the support of a select group of friends (Arabahmadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 60-62).

Following his public proclamation of the invitation to Shiism, Zakzaky, in collaboration with like-minded associates and considerable

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effort, established the first Shia concept in Nigeria known as the "Islamic Movement of Nigeria" (IMN) or "North Nigeria Islamic Movement" in 1980, drawing inspiration from the Islamic Revolution of Iran (Weimann, 2010: 131; Loimeier, 2011: 301).

The Islamic Movement of Nigeria achieved notable success in drawing a substantial following, particularly among young men and women in urban areas (Balkenhol, Hemel, & Stengs, 2020: 94). In a brief span, the organization's membership expanded to tens of thousands across both urban and rural areas in northern Nigeria, solidifying its position as one of the most cohesive Islamic organizations in the northern states of the country.¹

The onset of the Islamic Revolution in Iran coincided with a resurgence of civilians in the Nigerian political landscape, marked by the adoption of a new constitution through special constitutional law and the Council of Representatives of Nigeria. Concurrently, numerous unofficial delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran undertook visits to African countries, disseminating the message of the Supreme Leader to Muslims.

They distributed tapes of Imam Khomeini's speeches and books detailing the Islamic Revolution, an effort that Nigerian Muslims, particularly those in the northern regions, received with great enthusiasm. The visitations and interactions of these unofficial Iranian delegations in Nigeria had significant impacts on the transformation of Islamic followers in the country. Zakzaky, in particular, drew upon their guidance as a catalyst for his enthusiastic and revolutionary activities (Organization of Culture & Islamic Relations, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 5).

During this timeframe, Zakzaky's initiatives progressively extended to encompass cities and villages, fostering connections with diverse civil movements globally, particularly organizations advocating for the rights of Palestinians (Shiism in Nigeria, 2012). To deepen his understanding of the teachings of Shiism, he spent a significant period in Qom,

1 . Although the "Islamic Movement of Nigeria" is considered a Shia organization that, in addition to the integration and improvement of the situation of Muslims, is taking steps towards strengthening and expanding the religion of Islam and Ahl al-Bayt (AS) principles and its main paradigm is Islamic Republic of Iran, some Nigerian Muslims who are sincere members of this movement consider it not as an Islamic organization but as a national ideological movement against anti-Islamic measures of Nigerian governments and churches. However, Shaykh Zakzaky, as the founder of the "Islamic Movement of Nigeria" organization, has always emphasized that "Islamic Movement of Nigeria" is beyond an intellectual process and by creating regular sub-organizations including administrative, educational, health, and cultural departments, was and still is trying to make the "Islamic Movement of Nigeria" one of the largest Islamic organizations in Nigeria.

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engaging in an intensive course on Islamic sciences at the Qom seminary (Arabahmadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 62).

Shaykh Zakzaky's reformist initiatives against the Nigerian government, coupled with his pointed criticism of officials' negligence in addressing social and cultural issues—specifically the proliferation of alcohol and obscenity-sparked protests among numerous students in northern Nigeria. These demonstrations were directed against the administration of the then-president, Shehu Shagari (Martin E. Marty; R. Scott Appleby, 1996: 197).

As a consequence of these strategic actions, in 1981, a significant number of Muslim students openly questioned the legitimacy of the government, formally declaring their allegiance solely to the law of God and expressing a profound commitment to the religious legitimacy of Nigeria.¹ Through political meetings, they advocated for the closure of liquor stores and the enforcement of Islamic hijabs in universities and religious establishments.¹ In response to these³protests, President Shagari of Muslim Nigeria appointed a committee to investigate the matter. Following a comprehensive examination, the committee proposed several recommendations to the government:

- 1) The inclusion of a mosque in the building plans of all institutions of higher education;
- 2) The mandatory requirement for female students in all institutions of higher education and federal universities in northern Muslim areas to wear Islamic dress;
- 3) The appointment of a suitable individual to lead congregational prayers in all educational institutions in Nigeria;
- 4) The prohibition or restriction of liquor licenses;
- 5) The arrest of individuals selling alcohol without a license, by government directives. State assemblies were urged to expedite the implementation of the ban on alcohol sales and consumption;
- 6) The imperative to ban immoral women's clothing in northern Islamic states.

This committee, grounding its proposals on logical reasoning, highlighted the precarious and volatile situation. It underscored the influence of numerous student groups across various universities in the northern states of Nigeria by the Islamic Revolution of Iran as the primary motivation behind its recommendations. Ultimately, Shaykh

1 . In that period, Zakzaky was one of the main faces of nationwide student protests that demanded that Islamic laws be considered in the review of Nigeria's constitution (Shiism in Nigeria, 2012).

1 . The secret code of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria was initially "Imam Khomeini".

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Zakzaky was officially identified as the primary leader of the student protests in northern Nigeria.

In response, the government took action by arresting Zakzaky in 1981. Subsequently, stringent laws were enacted in Nigerian universities, leading to a comprehensive prohibition of all religious activities and events in institutions and higher education centers in the northern part of the country. Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky, encountering imprisonment and conviction for the first time, remained incarcerated until 1985, when his release occurred following a military coup and an amnesty for prisoners (Arabahmadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 62).

11. Continuation of Islamic Struggles

Following his release from prison, Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky resumed his preaching activities, openly advocating for the establishment of a government modeled after the Islamic Republic as the optimal form of governance for Nigeria. During this period, he employed practical methods, including extensive travel to various cities in northern Nigeria and delivering speeches at universities. Additionally, Zakzaky utilized visual aids such as pictures and films depicting the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which proved highly effective.

Through his practical behavior, expressions of love, and compelling statements, Shaykh Zakzaky gradually attracted many impoverished individuals in northern Nigerian states to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) religion. This led to the expansion of the Islamic Movement of Northern Nigeria and sparked the awakening of numerous Muslim groups in Kano state and other northern regions. Their reaction against widespread administrative mismanagement and corruption in the country resulted in Zakzaky's imprisonment from 1987 to 1996.

In 1993, the military coup led by General Abacha triggered protests from various religious and non-religious groups and parties in Nigeria. These groups demanded the implementation of the constitution, the conduct of elections, and the establishment of democracy. Concurrently, the leader of Nigerian Shias and his supporters in the Islamic Movement of Northern Nigeria, deeming Abacha and his associates as corrupt, officially declared their initiation of a soft war against the oppressive government in various states.

The persistence of Zakzaky's political struggles resulted in his arrest in 1996, with the Nigerian police citing the alleged establishment of an illegal radio station, an attempt to overthrow the military government, and engagement in anti-national security activities as the grounds for his

1 . Unavoidable soft engagement strategy with declining regimes.

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arrest. In contrast to previous instances, his imprisonment in 1996 provoked robust protests from supporters of the Islamic Movement of Northern Nigeria. They demanded his unconditional release through demonstrations, leading to widespread clashes between his supporters and security forces, resulting in casualties (on both Mekenkamp, Tongeren, & Veen, 1999: 349).

As these clashes continued and protests expanded to various cities in Nigeria, members of the Islamic Movement of Northern Nigeria issued a threat that the entire country would descend into chaos if their leader was not released. Faced with escalating tensions, the Abacha military government ultimately succumbed to the pressure and released Shaykh Zakzaky after a period of imprisonment.

In 1998, in response to the Saudi government's opposition to accepting Nigerian pilgrims on health grounds, Shaykh Zakzaky orchestrated widespread protests across the country, drawing nearly one million participants.¹ These protests unfolded across the northern states and in the city of Lagos; the sheer scale of these demonstrations unnerved Nigerian officials, leading to the renewed arrest of Shaykh Ibrahim on charges of acting against the national security of the country, resulting in a brief period of imprisonment.

During his second term in office from 1999 to 2007, "Olusegun Obasanjo" sought to establish a more politically open environment in

15. In 1996, Shaykh Zakzaky, during an interview, derided the accusation of establishing a private and unlicensed radio station in Kaduna, dismissing it as a pretext for his arrest. He sarcastically remarked, "They claimed that I had established an illegal radio station in Kaduna, so they concluded that I am a threat to the country's security and arrested me!" However, no concrete evidence was presented to substantiate this claim (<https://www.tell.ng/>, 1996: 40).

1 . The leader of Nigeria's Shias denounced the degrading treatment of Nigerian pilgrims by Saudi Arabian agents, characterizing it as a violation of the principles of dignity and pride that the Nigerian government and people uphold. He accused Nigerian officials of complicity, alleging that they accepted bribes from the Saudi government, leading to their passive response to Saudi Arabia's oppressive actions and their unquestioning compliance with Saudi orders.

1 . Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky, at 71 years old, has endured nearly 16 years of his life confined in various prisons and detention centers across Nigeria. His imprisonments include "Sokoto Prison," "Anogu Prison" (1981-1984), "Lagos Prison" (1984-1985), "Kiri Kiri Prison" (1985), "Kaduna Prison" (1987 and 1997-1998), "Abuja Prison" (1987-1989), and "Port Harcourt Prison" (1996-1997). He has also been held in undisclosed locations from 2015 to 2021. During this period; Shaykh Zakzaky endured significant adversity, particularly stemming from the 2015 Zaria massacre, resulting in severe injuries. These injuries included blindness in his left eye, partial blindness in his right eye, paralysis of his right hand, and severe malnutrition. Despite these daunting conditions, Shaykh Zakzaky remained resolute in his unwavering commitment to the struggle against injustice and corruption in Nigeria.

Nigerian society by dismantling some prominent signs of dictatorship and addressing public grievances. Shaykh Zakzaky astutely capitalized on this opportune moment and successfully guided a substantial number of Nigerian Muslims to embrace the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) faith over these eight years. This period witnessed a noteworthy increase in the number of Shia Muslims in Nigeria during the early 2000s (Arabahmadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 62).

The progress of the Shia movement and the promotion of Shiite beliefs continued during the 2010s. Many Nigerian Muslims who had a strong inclination towards Sufi tendencies and love for Ahl al-Bayt (AS) turned to Shia beliefs by accepting Shaykh Zakzaky's revolutionary ideas and his enlightenment about the terrorist acts of al-Qaeda and the hatred of terrorist Takfiri groups, especially after the emergence of Boko Haram in 2009. As a result, the number of followers of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) in Nigeria increased to an astonishing ten million (Shia Followers in Nigeria, 2020). During this period, Shaykh Zakzaky not only endeavored to expand the Shia community in both urban and rural areas of Nigeria but also focused on enhancing the intellectual and ideological underpinnings of the Shias. Consequently, the "Islamic Movement of Nigeria" transformed into a social and cultural organization dedicated to public welfare under the guidance of Shaykh Zakzaky and the central leadership of the Islamic Movement.

12. Government's Hostile Policy Against Shaykh Zakzaki and his Companions

As previously elucidated, Shaykh Zakzaky and the Shia community in Niarab ahmadigeria encountered numerous challenges and fluctuations throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

In the initial half of the 2010s, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria underwent maturation and consolidation, solidifying its position. However, the election of General Muhammadu Buhari as president in 2015, which had a longstanding friendship with Shaykh Zakzaky, sparked a significant upheaval against the Shia community, contrary to expectations of amelioration in their circumstances. Under the false pretext of Shia individuals allegedly attempting to assassinate the country's army commander, the Nigerian army carried out a brutal assault on Hussainiya Zaria on December 12, 2015, resulting in the tragic loss of numerous Shia worshipers amid their prayers.

Subsequently, they targeted Shaykh Zakzaky's residence, conducting a ruthless three-day operation that resulted in the martyrdom of nearly all members of the core of the Islamic Movement in Northern Nigeria, including three of Sheikh's sons and hundreds of Shia Muslims. Shaykh

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Zakzaky and his wife also endured severe beatings (Faith in the Face of Militarization Indigenous, Feminist, and Interreligious Voices, 2021: 215).

Moreover, a substantial portion of the Shia Muslim infrastructure in Zaria, including the Zaria Husseiniya, Shaykh's residential house, Fudiya Islamic Center, Darul Rahma (Martyrs Cemetery), Cinema village, and the tomb of Shaykh Zakzaky's mother, were obliterated. Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky and his wife, both severely injured, were subsequently taken to an undisclosed location (www.amnesty.org, 2015).

The Nigerian government, endorsing the army's actions, deemed all activities of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria illegal. This development ushered in a new wave of oppression against Shaykh Zakzaky and the entire Shia Muslim community, an unprecedented level of persecution. **Unlawful Detention of Shaykh Zakzaky (2015-2021)** For a span of over six years, commencing from December 13, 2015, to July 28, 2021, Shaykh Zakzaky and his wife, Zeenat Ibrahim, endured imprisonment; Despite fervent protests from foreign diplomats, international organizations, the Islamic Human Rights Commission of England, and certain countries condemning the brutal massacre of Zaria Shias and urging the release of the leader of the Islamic Movement in northern Nigeria, the Nigerian government, citing an alleged unsuccessful attempt by the Shias to assassinate the Chief of Staff of Nigeria, refrained from lifting restrictions against Shiites and releasing Shaykh Zakzaky.

Simultaneously, the government and security forces persisted in leveling baseless accusations against him, leading to the unjust prolongation of his unlawful detention without a fair trial (www.ihr.org.uk, 2019).

During these six years, distressing reports surfaced regarding the extremely poor health and medical conditions of Shaykh Zakzaky in prison, as he grappled with various illnesses and serious physical ailments. Conversely, Nigerian Shia and members of the Islamic Movement consistently voiced vehement opposition to the ongoing illegal detention of their leader, fervently demanding his unconditional release through numerous peaceful protests. Regrettably, these demonstrations were met with military attacks, culminating in the tragic martyrdom of several Shia Muslims (<https://crescent.icit-digital.org>, 2019). Throughout these years, Shaykh Zakzaky not only withstood the pressures imposed by Nigerian security officials but also thwarted their conspiracies through heroic resistance. A notable instance of this resilience was observed when he was sent to a hospital in Delhi, India for treatment in 2019. Shaykh Zakzaky, noting suspicious behaviors

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from Nigerian and Indian intelligence forces and facing restrictive measures imposed on him and his wife at the hospital, opted to return to Nigeria, leaving the medical treatment unfinished (www.aljazeera.com, 2019). Ultimately, due to his persistent resistance, combined with internal and external protests, the absence of any evidence against him, and the conclusive verdict of the Nigerian Supreme Court absolving him of all charges, Shaykh Zakzaky, and his wife were released from their unjust detention in August 2021. They returned to their home in Zaria, welcomed with joy and enthusiasm by the Shia community (www.thisdaylive.com, 2021).

14. Shaykh's Global Presence

The leader of Nigeria's Shiites, from the outset of his involvement in ideological and political struggles, strategically prioritized the internationalization of the Nigerian Shia movement. Despite relative limitations during the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, he consistently engaged in global travels to various countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Algeria, France, Spain, Azerbaijan, and Iran, aiming to showcase the Nigerian Shia community and the 'IMN' (Zakzaky, 2024).

Shaykh Zakzaky conducted interviews with renowned international media outlets such as Newsweek, The Guardian, BBC, Press TV (<https://www.presstv.ir>, 2021), and Lebanese TV networks. Additionally, he delivered talks to websites in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, elucidating his perspectives on Islam and the Nigerian government. These efforts have significantly elevated his international presence and advanced the recognition of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria over the past decades. In recent years, documentaries featuring Shaykh Zakzaky have been produced and broadcast on television networks globally. Furthermore, interviews with esteemed international media outlets have enhanced the international standing and profile of the charismatic leader of Nigerian Shias, bringing his perspectives to the forefront of international discourse.

Shaykh Zakzaky has engaged in discussions about the Islamic world and the Nigerian government with various local and international websites, reinforcing his global position. These films and interviews are available on YouTube, contributing to wider public accessibility and increasing awareness about Shaykh Zakzaky and his resolute and outspoken stance (www.islamicmovement.org, 2023)

15. Shaykh Zakzaky's Social Service

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Although a significant part of Ibrahim Zakzaky's life consists of resistance and perseverance against the conspiracies of enemies and repeated imprisonments in the terrifying prisons of Nigeria, this Mujahid scholar has also provided many services in his blessed period, both individually and as part of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, which has benefited not only Shias but also all Muslims in the country. In addition to the expansion of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) faith, which has always been the strategic principle of the leader of Nigerian Shias, one of the most important actions of Shaykh Zakzaky during the past forty-three years has been the effort to restore the social identity of Muslims in the country and restore their lost self-confidence in a country where church authorities have always been the hidden and overt power and have taken steps to suppress Muslims. Shaykh Zakzaky has consistently advocated for unity among Nigerian Muslims, promoting friendship among different Islamic sects, and emphasizing the true teachings of Islam. Despite facing challenges from extremist groups, his focus has been on fostering harmony and addressing internal differences in Nigeria. Shaykh has played a significant role in establishing Islamic and public welfare charities, including Dar al-Rahmah, health and treatment centers, and publishing Islamic newspapers and books. Despite facing challenges, such as the destruction of facilities and the illegal declaration of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, these cultural and social initiatives have been resumed to a lesser extent after his release. Moreover, in a region historically marked by conflicts between Muslims and Christians, Zakzaky has consistently advocated for mutual respect, preserving peaceful relations, and reducing differences between the two religious communities.

16. Shaykh Zakzaky's Recent Programs and Initiatives

Since his release from a six-year illegal imprisonment, Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky has undertaken extensive initiatives to strengthen the unity of the Shia community and bridge gaps within the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN). A pivotal step has been the re-formation of a professional cadre for the IMN's future leadership, addressing the void left by prominent figures such as Shaykh Muhammad Mahmoud Turi (Deputy Head of the Islamic Movement) and Mustafa Said (Director of IMN Health and Treatment Center).

These figures close associates of Shaykh Zakzaky and founders of the IMN were martyred during the army's attack on Shaykh's home in December 2015. Shaykh Zakzaky is also working to heal divisions within the Shia community that emerged during his imprisonment (Mohammad, 2024).

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By calling on branch leaders and providing necessary guidance, he aims to strengthen the internal unity of the Shia community in the country. Additionally, Shaykh Zakzaky emphasizes the unity of Muslim communities in Nigeria, both Shia and Sunni, participating in numerous international video conferences, webinars, and meetings with Muslim leaders in the country. This emphasis on unity is crucial for the activation of Muslim parties in Nigeria's political scene, especially after the 2023 presidential elections, which saw the victory of President Bola Tinubu (Princeton University, 2023).

In this regard, Tinubu is gradually building trust with the large Shia community of this country and is removing the wall of distrust between members of the Islamic Movement and the government by completely removing the restrictions on Shaykh Zakzaky. This is happening while the new president is facing a lot of problems such as a debt of 167 billion dollars, major economic problems, violence by Boko Haram extremists, violent actions by separatists and armed bandits in large parts of Nigeria, and so on (Princeton University, 2023).

17. Challenges and Difficulties

As mentioned earlier, the life of Shaykh Zakzaky has been summarized in his relentless struggle against the Nigerian government, despite countless damages and losses, including the death of six of his sons and other family members. In this regard, he has faced numerous challenges and problems over the past four decades, which have not only been problematic for him but have also prevented him from achieving some of his goals (Juma, 2023).

The fluctuating behaviors of the governments against him and the Shiites, which in some periods Shaykh faced relative freedom of action, and in some other periods, he faced severe restrictions, are one of the serious challenges facing the leader of the Nigerian Shias. The hostile approach of the governments of the time has led to his imprisonment several times, from which he has been released each time. In addition, the violent actions of the Nigerian army against Shaykh and Nigerian Shias, which have sometimes led to the severe suppression of Shia gatherings and the killing of innocent people, are among the other problems facing Shaykh Zakzaky.

The violent actions of the extremist Islamic group Boko Haram (Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad), which is considered one of the toughest enemies of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, are another challenge for Shaykh Zakzaky. Members of this terrorist group have officially declared war against Shaykh Zakzaky and the Islamic Movement since 2015 and have killed a considerable number of Nigerian

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Shia Muslims through numerous suicide attacks over the years. The conspiracies of the deviant Wahhabi sect, which, like other African countries, has a strong base in Nigeria, and the hostile actions of extremist organizations affiliated with them, such as the "Jam'īyyatu Izalatil Bid'ah wa Iqamatu al-Sunnah" and the provocative activities of the "Jamā'at al-Tajdid al-Islamiyya" against Nigerian Shia Muslims, are other fundamental challenges for Shaykh Zakzaky (Dr. Abdul Salaam, 2023). As already discussed, the thoughtful approach combined with the patience and resistance of the charismatic leader of Nigerian Shias has so far prevented the government and opposing organizations from fulfilling their conspiracies against Shias and the Islamic Movement in Northern Nigeria. Although these challenges and conspiracies have caused problems for Shaykh Zakzaky and his followers, they have not only failed to prevent the spread of the school of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and the inclination of Nigerian Muslims toward the Islamic Movement but also indirectly provided further progress of Ahl al-Bayt faith in the country through the unity and cohesion of Nigerian Shias (Abdullah, 2023).

Conclusion

It is evident that the Shia movement in Nigeria, borne out of the struggles and sacrifices of Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky and his followers, has garnered widespread public support from Nigerian Muslims in recent decades. The significant increase in the number of Shias, particularly among enlightened individuals, is a remarkable and noteworthy phenomenon on the African continent. Many followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) in Nigeria are willing to sacrifice their lives, property, and possessions for the expansion of Shiism in the country. These successes can be attributed to the leadership of Shaykh Zakzaky, a great leader inspired by the Islamic Revolution of Iran. He planted the seed of Shiism in Nigeria, a strategically important West African country, dedicating his wealth, health, and children to its progress. Despite sustaining injuries and losses during the Zaria massacre in 2015, Shaykh Zakzaky has remained steadfast in his principled positions, unwavering in his goals (Zakzaki, 2024).

The current situation in Shia-populated areas of Nigeria, despite Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky's release from prison and relatively peaceful treatment by the government, remains marked by an atmosphere of anxiety. The leader of Nigerian Shias, having endured severe suffocation through mass killings and widespread human rights violations, continues to harbor distrust toward government policies and security agencies. This

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article seeks to delve into the lifelong struggle of Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky over the past four and a half decades, providing a comprehensive portrait of his journey. Additionally, the article employs Max Weber's theoretical framework of "Charismatic leadership" to characterize Shaykh Zakzaky. The indicators presented in the introduction are carefully examined throughout the article's pages. Consequently, the central question of the article, "To what extent has Shaykh Zakzaky succeeded in his strategic goals?" is addressed across various sections. The conclusion drawn is that Shaykh Zakzaky has achieved resounding success in realizing his strategic and operational objective of nurturing Shiism into a thriving presence in Nigeria.

The current population of over ten million followers of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) in Nigeria stands as clear evidence of this accomplishment. Despite numerous conspiracies and sabotage, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria has evolved into a widespread and organized institution, standing as one of the major and dynamic Islamic organizations in the country. Presently, the followers of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) in Nigeria place special emphasis on the observance of Shia rituals and ceremonies. A notable example is the symbolic Arbaeen march from Katsina to the demolished Husseiniyah Baqiyatullah in Zaria, covering a distance of 180 kilometers.

This annual march, attended by a substantial number of Shia Muslims in Nigeria, stands as the second-largest Arbaeen march globally, following the Najaf to Karbala march. The resilience and commitment of Shia Muslims in Nigeria, exemplified by their self-sacrifices in support of Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky, their unwavering stance against oppression and injustice from security forces, and their persistent efforts in recent years to secure his release, including sacrifices of life and property, underscore the widespread popularity and esteem of Shaykh Zakzaky among the Shia community in the country.

The overarching hypothesis of the article, "The General Popularity of the Sheikh among the Shia Community of Nigeria," is well-supported by these collective actions. Undoubtedly, Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky is an exceptional leader who has catalyzed a significant movement in Nigeria with minimal resources, despite the country's status as one of the most controversial in Africa. Confronting numerous challenges, Shaykh Zakzaky remains resolute in achieving his lofty goals, foremost among them being the consolidation and further expansion of the current position of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) in Nigeria. The dedicated Shia followers in the country, by demonstrating self-sacrifice and fearlessness in the face of oppression, injustice, and extensive efforts to secure Shaykh Zakzaky's freedom, affirm the tremendous popularity and influence he holds within the Shia community in Nigeria.

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