

BOKO HARAM AND THE NIGERIAN STATE: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: There exist several religions in Nigeria. Many of them are exploited for political gains. As Samuel Huntington has predicted, given the collapse of communism, the main contention and controversy in the world would revolve around religion. The religious tension in present day Nigerian tends to fulfill the logic of the above stated position. This phenomenon has a long history in the country. Within the last couple of decades, Nigeria has witnessed a rise in the numbers of radical Islamic sects notably among them, Maitasine, Darul Islam, and Boko Haram. These sects have resorted to the use of violence in a bid to realizing their ambitions of a wider Islamization of the Nigerian Population. Three of the most prominent perspectives shared on the rise of these radical movements are: poor socio-economic infrastructures and poor governance, poverty as a major catalyst to the rapid increase in the membership of these groups and the increase and aiding of religious extremist by politicians for their selfish ambition. This study reveals that while it is true that socio-economic factors may drive the radicalization and politicization of religious sects in the country, the fear of domination and indeed the fight for supremacy is at the heart of the current insurgency in northeastern Nigeria.

Keywords: politics, religion, infrastructures, Islam, poverty.

INTRODUCTION

The 1999 constitution of Nigeria states that there will be no state religion, guarantees freedom of religion and forbid any form of discrimination on the bases of religion beliefs. Also section 10 of the same constitution specifies that Nigeria or any of its sub-units shall not adopt any religion as State Religion (*The Nigerian Constitution* 1999: 24). The above stated position presupposes Nigeria a secular State. However, the Nigerian experience is a parallel to secularism in continental Europe, which tends to ban religion from public life and confines it to the private sphere. In principle, secularism calls for the separation of government institutions and personnel from their religions counterparts. Put in political context, it means the separation of religion and government.

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The separation of the state and religion is fundamental to the understanding of the rise of political Islam in Nigeria. Christianity and Islam are two major influences on the socio-economic, cultural and political life of the country. Each believes it has a special relationship with God that excludes other religion. This struggle for superiority is reflective of differences that belie a collective response to the violence behind religions fundamentalism in Nigeria. Rather than have a common platform for the engagement, each perspective revolves around a domestic agenda that seeks greater access to resources and political influence. This paper seeks to answer the following question: *a)* what factors led to the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria? *b)* what role has religion played in galvanizing the group? *c)* what issues have they generated? *d)* does constitutional ambiguity contribute to the problematic? *e)* does the character of the Nigeria state re-in force this phenomenon?

Although much has been written on political Islam, there is no general agreement at the level of definition. This has created not only the problem of conceptualization but also a corresponding problem of prefixing. What is political Islam and now best can it be defined? The issues generated by these polemics are not the focus of this study. Nonetheless, the author assumes the position of a conceptual plurality necessary for the understanding of political Islam: militant Islam, radical Islam, extremist Islam, fundamentalist Islam and revolutionary Islam. These constructed categories become necessary as they are believed to characterize political Islam.

In many of the studies carried out on the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, there is an implicit assumption that the rise of the group (like others before it) was as a result of state-neglect; a relative deprivation of a large percentage of the citizens by government. Central to this argument is that increasing poverty in Nigeria is accentuated by increasing unemployment. The resultant cost is that it creates the necessary condition for radical Islam to thrive. According to Isa (2010: 329):

the rising popularity of militant Islamist movements in Northern Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of factors including: increased inequality, injustices, poverty, failed social services as well as failed Structural Adjustment Programme.

This perspective is however, fraught with over generalization in that it could explain the rise of militant Islamic groups in some countries while it fails to do same in others. For example, it does not fully explain the conditions that led to the spill-over effects of the activities of Boko Haram in Cameroun.

Beyond the state neglect perspective itemized above, the idea of a civilization clash between opposing socio-cultural entities is a powerful metaphor with which to interpret the rise of radical Islam. Huntington (1996), warns that the fault lines of modern conflict will not be empires or states but “civilization”. He lists eight categories of civilizations and purposes that could conflict between civilizations with a potential to threaten global peace. Fundamentally, this will occur between the Islamic and the Judeo-Christian faiths. To those caught up with Islamic civilization, their primary attachment is to their religion and not to their nation-state (this is currently exemplified by the philosophy that derives the Islamic States in Iran and Syria (ISIS). To scholars and observers (Pham 2011; Olagunju 2011; Adebayo 2011; inter alia), the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is a product of an attempt by some northern states to Islamize the entire country. According to Olagunju (2011: 10):

we thought that Boko Haram people, because they say they do not want Western education, were really illiterates. We can see now that they are not. It is an ideological war that they are fighting.

However, Huntington thesis tends to ascribe to traits qualities that are actually determined by context. The fact that the targets of Boko Haram are Christians, Muslims and ordinary Nigeria citizens (regardless of their religions inclinations) makes his position inadequate to fully explain Islamic fundamentalism, at least in the Nigerian context.

THE EVOLUTION OF BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram whose real name is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda' Awati Wal Jihad (the Sunni Community for the propagation of the prophet's Teachings and Jihad), is a radical Islamic group founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in north-east Nigeria. The

group is also active in other geographically contiguous states which include Cameroun, Chad and Niger. Estimates put its membership between 600 and 10,000 (“The Guardian” 2014). Although Boko Haram has been linked with al-Qaeda over the years, it expressed support for the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 and pledged formal allegiance on March 7, 2015.

In its early days, many observers saw the group as a social movement meant to articulate the collective interest of the poor (Olagunju 2011). Although Boko Haram was not a violent movement at its inception, it has killed more than 5,000 civilians between July 2009 and June 2014 (this includes at least 2,000 in the first half of 2014, in a series of coordinated attacks predominantly in north-east, north-central and central Nigeria (“The Guardian” 2014; Sergie and Johnson 2014).

The evolution of Boko Haram is a response to the socio-economic flux borne out of a combination of decades-long mismanagement and pervasive corruption in Nigeria. Perhaps, this explains the adaptive nature of the group’s methods and membership in the ever changing circumstances of the country’s environmental ecology. According to Pérouse de Montclos (2014: 45):

this has allowed for multiple descriptions of the group to endure, bridging different narratives of terrorism, insurgency and criminality, where different drivers of conflict and instability have converged.

While it could be argued that the history of Nigeria is replete with the activities of Islamic sects, it is a fact that a multiplicity of domestic actors and interests combine within the complex political environment that the Nigerian represents to sustain the philosophy of these groups. For example, the criminality that drives the sectarian agenda of Boko Haram grew out of its confrontation with the Nigerian state. Thus, the group’s mutation into a radicalized violent insurgent group with shades of cultist and criminal motivations was due to prolonged period of mishandled response by the Nigerian government and its security forces (Adetayo 2014).

Originally a small group, Boko Haram with its grassroots appeal acted as a cohesive unit which retaliated to average killings of its members. For this reason and its rejection of Western education, the group is often compared to the Maitatsine movement of

the 1970s and 1980s in northern Nigeria. The Maitatsine group, led by Mohammed Marwa condemned the reading of books other than the Quran. Unlike Mariwa who claimed to be a prophet in the image of Usman Dan Fodio, Boko Haram's founding leader, Yusuf could pass for the leader of the underprivileged. Nevertheless, some analysts view the group as an extension of the Maitatsine movement (Johnson 2011). This stems from the belief that its ideology was inspired by the determined commitment to the eradication of heresies and the implementation of the Sharia legal codes in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, Boko Haram believes that it requires a change of political regime in Nigeria because a democratic and secular constitution contravenes and is an affront to the laws of Allah.

Boko Haram conducted its operations relatively peacefully during the first seven years of its existence. Although there were repeated warnings on the potential danger of the group to the government, such warnings were ignored partly because the group was once used as a political leverage in the election of the then Born State governor, Sheriff Musa ("The Guardian" 2009).

The metamorphosis of Boko Haram into a terrorist group started with the investigation carried out by members of the Nigerian Police force in 2009 into its activities. Code name 'Operation Flush', on 26th July of the same year, security forces arrested nine Boko Haram members and confiscated weapons and bomb-making equipment. Consequently, a joint military task force operation was launched against the group and by 30 July, more than 700 people had been killed (mostly Boko Haram member and police stations, prisons, government offices, schools and churches had been destroyed (Adesoji 2010). Subsequently, the leader of the group, Yusuf was arrested and died in custody.

The Nigerian military repression of Boko Haram's July 2009 uprising and the emergency rule imposed by government in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states in north-east-Nigeria since 2012 certainly contributed to an intensification of violence and the group's transformation into a terrorist group. Equally contributory was the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf in police custody in July 2009 which led to the enthronement of the more radicalized members of the group headed by Abubakar Shekau. In fact, those who were initially interested in negotiation with the Nigerian government were killed by the security forces in an effort

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to crush the group entirely. This attempt by government sent the group underground while its leadership went into exile and made contact with foreign Jihadist groups (“The Guardian” 2012).

Boko Haram carried out its first terrorist attack in Borno state in January 2010 claiming the lives of four people. In June of the same year, its new leader Abubakar Shekau instructed members of the group to commence retaliatory target of security forces and traitors but to spare civilians. This dramatic change of events was the watershed of a chain reaction of suicide attacks that extended beyond Borno State for the first time. In September, Boko Haram broke 105 of its members out of prison in Maiduguri along with over 600 other prisoners. This later transcended several areas of northern Nigeria (Martin 2013; “The Guardian” 2012; Peace and Security Council Report 2012). Since then, Boko Haram has increased the frequency and intensity of its attack with increased suicide bombings and assassinations.

Many believe that Boko Haram is leading an armed insurgency against corruption, abusive security forces and economic disparity in northern Nigeria security forces and economic disparity in northern Nigeria and feeding off tension that have existed between Muslim dominated north and Christian dominated south of Nigeria. In 2011, with improved operational capabilities, Boko Haram launched series of attacks against both soft targets and security posts like the one in June, killing 6 police officers at the Abuja police headquarters. However, the groups attack on the United Nations building in Abuja in which 11 UN staff members died as well as 12 others, with more than 100 injured, seems to suggest that the group’s ambition are broader than initially believed (Richard 2012). The group carried out 115 attacks in 2011, killing 550. At the end of 2011, Boko Haram maintained a steady rate of attack with individuals, groups, security forces and religious leaders as prime targets.

The implementation of the emergency rule in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states in Nigeria marked a turning point in Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Few days after the state of emergency was declared, the group embarked on a series of small-scale attacks on Christians and ‘strangers’ (non-indigenes) resident in northern Nigeria. Members of the police force drafted in by government to protect fleeing ‘southerner’ became prime targets. In Kano, on 20 January, Boko Haram carried out a deadly assault on



police building killing 190. Given the upsurge in the success recorded by the group against the upsurge in the success recorded by the group against security forces, many began to question the loyalty of the members of the Nigerian security force. This came to a head on 8 January 2012, when the Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan announced that Boko Haram had, in fact, infiltrated the army and the police, as well as membership of the government.

Since 2009, the Joint Task Force (JTF) was deployed to north-eastern Nigeria to quell Boko Haram violence. Unfortunately, the role of and abuses by this security force conspired to worsen the dire security condition in the area. In addition to the failure of the JTF to protect lives and property, it lost the trust of the people (an important resource in the battle against the insurgent group), as communities were also abused by the armed forces. Also, the high-handedness with which the members of the JTF prosecuted the fight against the insurgency helped to diffuse membership of the group from urban centres to the rural areas, enhancing an increased collateral damage.

The year 2013 witnessed the introduction of a new dimension to its insurgent activities by Boko Haram. Early into the year, the conflict spilled over the national borders to involve all four geographically contiguous countries in the sub-region (namely Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria). Added to this innovation, is the fact that Boko Haram in association with its splinter group Ansani, was linked to a number of kidnappings. The group kidnapped on different occasions seven French taunts in north of Cameroun in February, a French priest and other eight French citizens and obtained ransom payments for their release (Bureau of Counterterrorism 2014). Furthermore, the increased insecurity in north-east Nigeria led the government to extend the state of emergency in May 2013. This development was met by increased tension in the three states affected (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe) as Boko Haram heightened the tempo of its insurgent activities. As such, the total number of internally displaced persons increased from 250,000 to 650,000; an increase of 309 per cent. Thousands of others fled the country (Adrian 2014).

The most notorious act of Boko Haram so far took place in April 2014, when 276 girls from Chibok town in Borno state were kidnapped. Although over 50 of them managed to escape, the incident brought the group pervasive global attention. The girls'

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plight featured on “Bring Back Our Girls” posters all over the world. Within the same period, Boko Haram announced the formation of Islamic Caliphate which included Gwoza, a strategic town north-eastern Nigeria. The town of Bama, 70 kilometres from Maiduguri was equally captured (increasing the reach of the new caliphate). Despite the aggression of the Nigerian security forces against Boko Haram and suspected collaborators since 2009, the group continues to recruit new members. The upward trend in violence since then suggests that the more security forces have intervened, the worse the crisis has become.

BULKING THE TREND

At the start of 2015, Boko Haram controlled about 20 local government areas in north-eastern Nigeria (a territory the size of Belgium). Assisted by its foreign allies, the Nigerian army has declared in recent times that it had pushed back the insurgent group out of all but three local government areas in Bornu State (Braun 2015). President Jonathan was criticized for not doing enough to tackle the insurgency in the north-east. In a pre-election campaign, his main challenger Muhammadu Buhari chance was boosted by a reputation for toughness gained when he was military ruler of Nigeria between 1983 and 1985.

Indeed, more than 13,000 people have been killed and some 1.5 million made homeless in the Boko Haram conflict since 2009. In addition, cross-border attack launched from Boko Haram strongholds in Nigeria have threatened to destabilize neighbouring countries of Cameroun, Chad and Niger in the sub-region with increased security threats. To combat this menace, a sub-regional coalition force supported by the African Union Force was created. After series of negotiations, on 30 November 2014, a coalition force made up of soldiers from Benin, Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria was formed. Its task was primarily to fight Boko Haram insurgency in the sub-region (“The Wall Street Journal” 2015).

Apart from the foregoing, on March 6, 2015, the African Union endorsed the creation of an additional regional force of up to 10,000 soldiers to join the fight against Boko Haram. This regional force claimed a series of successes in rebel-held territory as

part of an operation to clear and control north-eastern Nigeria in time for the country's general elections rescheduled for March 28 after initial postponement from March 14. These forces have been particularly active in the Gaboru area of Nigeria on the border with Cameroun. A parallel joint Niger-Chad offensive retook Damasake from the insurgent group on March 27, 2015 (Nossiter 2015). This came in the wake of the announcement by the Nigerian military that its troops recaptured the town of Gwoza from Boko Haram on March 20, 2015. Gwoza is important to the extent that it was from this town the insurgents declared their caliphate in 2014.

As the onslaught against Boko Haram intensified, its leader Abubakar Shekau, on March 7, 2015 pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS). While on the one hand the declaration could be seen as an attempt by the group to rescue its sinking ship (given the fact that its previous allegiance was with al Qaeda), on the other, it has the potential to raise the spectre of violence and a stronger propaganda campaign that the Nigerian army, even with its influx of new weapons and African Union support, is much less equipped to combat.

President Jonathan's optimism about the recapture of towns initially seized by Boko Haram within a month passes for a swift victory after six years of bloody conflict. Two weeks before the rescheduled elections in Nigeria, Boko Haram was said to have suffered more than it had for years (Braun 2015). Though there was public relief that the insurgency was being blunted by the change in fortune for the group, it was unclear how effective the military operation had been. The rapid chains of success by the Nigerian army in partnership with its allies left many Nigerian wondering why it took until the final days of the election campaign to begin containing the insurgent group. Many questions how the government did in a few weeks what it could not for the last several years.

An important lesson should be drawn from previous experience by the Nigerian forces in dealing with Boko Haram. It is that after the declaration of the state of emergency in the north-east, Boko Haram went underground only to re-emerge later with more sinister tactics. Once again, the coalition forces should be mindful of a repeat performance. While the efforts of the multi-national forces should be applauded, it should be reminded that since none of the group's leaders has neither been captured nor killed, the

campaign runs the risk of breaking the group into splinter units. The narrative is that each sub-unit could resort to guerrilla warfare to prosecute the ideology of the group. Consequently, Boko Haram would retreat from the rural areas (where it currently faces intensive bombardment by the allied forces) to the urban areas where they would regroup as multiple cells, which eventually would become the conduits for insurgency.

There is no evidence, whatsoever, that Boko Haram has been defeated but it has been driven out of some territories. In the past, it melted into the countryside and the slums of urban centres where it regrouped and eventually resurfaced. While the regional assaults may have turned the tide against Boko Haram, but as a disrupted rather than decimated force, they still pose a significant threat to the sub-region.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT

The on-going religious insurgencies in northern Nigeria have received universal coverage. Not only has the attention of the international audience been irked by the criminal activities of the Boko Haram sect, human right organizations (both local and international) have strongly opposed and condemned such atrocities. Some governments (like the United States of America) have branded Boko Haram a terrorist group and has offered a reward of US 7m dollars for information about the whereabouts of its leader, Abubakar Mohammad Shekau (Bureau of Counterterrorism 2014).

Islam spread to Nigeria in the eleventh century through Borno, in the north-east of the country. Later, it spread to the Hausa land in the north-west as its established influence was felt in Kano and Katsina. This linear progression continued until the second half of the eighteenth century. Besides, it was consummated by the revivalist and purities activities of Uthman Dan Fodio, who launched a Jihad in 1804. The Jihad lasted for the next six year (Newman 2013).

Instructively, Uthman Dan Fodio religions movement had a political undertone concerning state formation and state conflict. The product of this exercise was the forged unity among the Hausa states under Sharia Laws. Subsequently, in 1812 the Hausa

states became a party of the Islamic Caliphate of Sokoto which ruled most of the northern Nigeria until it was ended with partition in 1903 when the British incorporated it into the colony of northern Nigeria. Thus, a great percentage of the caliphate's structures and instructions (includes the Islamic legal system, Sharia) were integrated into the British Colonial Administration in northern Nigeria.

Regional conflict in Nigeria dates back to 1953 when a religious riot broke out in Kano. The major cause of the conflict could be trace to the strain political relationship between the Northern and Southern political leaders in the National Parliament in Lagos over issue of self-government in 1956. However, the British Colonial Administration did little to address the basic issues that generated the crisis. This negligence allowed the sour relationship in politics to be festered with religious pathologies. Throughout the period of colonialism, the British did little to change the status-quo-ante.

After independence in 1960, attempts were made by northern leaders (notably Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Region of Nigeria) to revive the spread of Islam not only at the individual level, but also as an instrument of statecraft. Nevertheless, this was cut short by the military coup of January 15, 1966 which claimed the life of Ahmadu Bello and significant others.

In historical context, the military regimes that ruled Nigeria majorly for the greater part of 1966 through 1999 are often accused of making the most daring attempts at Islamizing the country. Supportive of this school of thought is the fact that the 1979, 1989, 1999, Constitutions were decreed into existence by the military with a mind-set to elevate Sharia to the constitutional status. This was widely speculated as the launching pad for religious insurgencies in Nigeria. In the late 1970s, and early 1980, there were major Islamic uprisings led first by the Maitasine and later by the Yan Tatsme in northern Nigeria. Specifically, the 1980s saw an upsurge in religious violence in northern Nigeria following the death of the Maitasine leader, Mohammed Marwa. Within the same decade, the controversy surrounding General Ibrahim Babangida enrolment of Nigeria in the Organization of Islam Conference (OIC) assumed the national stage. This move aggravated the frontal relationship between Christians and Muslims communities in the country.



Upon the return to democratic rule in 1999, in Nigeria, Sharia (the Muslim legal code) was instituted into the main body of the civil and criminal laws in 9 Muslim majority states and in some parts of 3 Muslim-plurality states in northern Nigeria. Consequently, there ensued the controversy over the status of non-Muslims in the Sharia legal system. This was followed by series of Christian-Muslim riots, killings and reprisals; notably in the central Nigerian state of Plateau.

THE IDEOLOGY OF BOKO HARAM

For the past years, the Nigeria government has demonstrated clearly that it is fighting the war against Boko Haram insurgency without a clear understanding of the sects world view. For a sect that morphed from a mere group of bandits to a group with international reach and armed with sophisticated weapons, it is imperative to understand its ideology. Boko Haram was founded as a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist sect advocating strict form of Sharia law. It developed into a Salafist-Jihadist group in 2009, influence, perhaps by the Wahhabi movement (Blanchard 2014). Members of the sect believe that their interpretation of the Quran is the 'true' Islam. Also they are convinced that this 'true' Islam is holistic and embraces all aspects of Muslims life in preparation for eternity.

Initially, the founder of Boko Haram (Mohammed Yusuf) set out to establish Sharia government in conjunction with Borno State Government in northern Nigeria in the administration of Ali Modu Sheriff. In fact, speculation has it that "owing to its growing influence, Governor Sheriff courted the group and rode on its popularity to win his re-election in 2007" (Osun Defender 2015). The sect's main grudge against the Nigeria state is that the existing socio-economic condition is both wrong and repressive. Primarily, it is wrong according to this perspective because it does not correspond to Islamic principles. Thus, in order to get rid of this condition of repression and wrongdoing, Boko Haram seeks to establish an Islamic state.

As self-styled Sunnis, they want to return Islam to what they view as the interpretation of first generation Muslims. This is a direct reference to the classical era of the caliphate. Arguably, the

Caliphate represents one of the longest political institutions in human history. Though its lifespan started in 622 (right after the death of Mohammed) it was abolished by Mustafa Kemal in 1924 (Idowu-Fearon 2015). A critical turning point, however, in the Sunni revivalist approach to state management found its vent in Ayatollah Khomeini led Revolution in Iran in 1979. Like other Islamists, a common shared pride and nostalgia for the restoration of the Caliphate represents a general claim, irrespective of their sectarian membership (Ray 2004).

Furthermore, the need to 'rid' Nigeria of immoral and imperial Western domination and influences through the adoption of an Islamic path forms its basic objective. Therefore, to Boko Haram the solution to this problem lies in an embrace of Islamic teaching and an understanding that all 'true' Muslims compose a single cohesive community and must work together to resist the encroachment of corrupt Western influences. As such, any Muslim that works contrary to this dictum is classed with 'unbelievers'. To realize this goal, the group intends to leave no stone unturned. Its leader, Shekau notorious threat that gained international currency summarizes this position: "I enjoy killing anyone – God commands me to kill – the way I enjoy killing chicken and rams" ("The Guardian" 2014).

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

The primary motive behind Boko Haram's deadly insurgency in north-east of Nigeria for the last six years is to enshrine Sharia Laws as State Laws. Section 1, sub-section 1 of the Nigerian Constitution (1999: 15) does specify that "the constitution is supreme and its provision shall have binding force on the authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria". Also, in sub-section 2, the constitution specifies that

the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed, nor shall any person or group of persons take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provision of this constitution

Furthermore, Section 38, sub-section 1 stipulates that

every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance (*The Nigerian Constitution*, 1999: 39).

However, the same Nigerian constitution does recognize in Section 6, sub-section 5 among others: *a*) the Sharia Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; *b*) a Sharia Court of Appeal of a State; *c*) the Customary Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; *d*) and a Customary Court of Appeal of a State.

Given the constitutional provisions stated above, a daunting problematic in Nigerian politics surrounds its secularity. Secularism as used in this paper is the separation of religion and government. This implies the primacy of the rules of secular society over their religious equivalent.

In Nigeria, one of the most hotly debated and so far unresolved problems centres on the secularity of its constitution. While section 10 of the constitution states that “the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as state religion” (*The Nigerian Constitution* 1999), the controversy over the status of Sharia Laws has generated much heat in the country. This has been complicated by the adoption of Sharia Laws in nine northern states in the country. Non-Muslims in these states have argued that the imposition of Sharia Laws violates the right to freedom of religion and affects non-Muslims (though they are supposed to be exempt from such laws). At the last Constitutional Conference held in the country, the Christian Association of Nigeria’s (CAN) delegates argued vehemently that the current Nigerian constitution looks more Islamic than secular.

According to Bagobiri and Bosun (2014), “Islam is mentioned in the Constitution 28 times and Muslim 10 times, Sharia 73 times, Grand Khadi 54 times but Christ, Christians and the church were never mentioned”. They opine that religion is being used as a manipulative tool to destroy the country.

Contrarily, advocates of Sharia legal codes have equally referred to the same provision of the Nigerian Constitution to justify the application of Sharia Laws as an integral part of Islam. Some have described attempts to stop or curb the implementation of

Sharia Laws as a violation of their own right to freedom of religion as Muslims. In fact, they view the current Nigeria penal codes as Judeo-Christian. To adherents of neither the Christian faith nor the Muslim beliefs, the greatest culprit is the Nigerian government which annually spends tax-payers money on religious pilgrimages. They fault the above practice on the ground that it tends to exalt two religions (Christianity and Islam) above all others in the country. By implication, it means Nigeria is not a secular state but a dual-religious state.

Given the complicated nature of the interpretation accruable to the execution of the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution, attempts at supplanting it by the Boko Haram sect appears palpable; at least to the members of the sect and those favourably disposed to their beliefs. However, the complexity of the issue, as well as its intensity seems to be mutually inclusive. This is particularly so because the problems generated by the holistic application of the Nigerian Constitution across the country tend to see as illegitimate the attempts to extend the application of Islamic laws outside the domain it has historically occupied in Nigeria. This feeds in on a corresponding problem of the fusion of religion and politics, which re-emphasizes the position of Sharia Laws and its unconstitutionality in the Nigerian context.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

No doubt, much has been written on the activities of Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria. Different perspectives hold that a reasonable percentage of the sect's support stems from three segmented but inter-related aspects of the Nigerian society: *a*) the relative economic neglect of the Muslim north; *b*) a country-wide fault line between the poor and the rich; *c*) and endemic corruption (especially within the political system).

However, the less often mentioned factors like: *a*) numerical shifts in percentage quotient between Christians and Muslims population in the country; *b*) the secularity or non-secularity of the Nigerian state; *c*) and the benefit content of insurgency in the country contributes significantly to the political economy of insurgency in Nigeria.

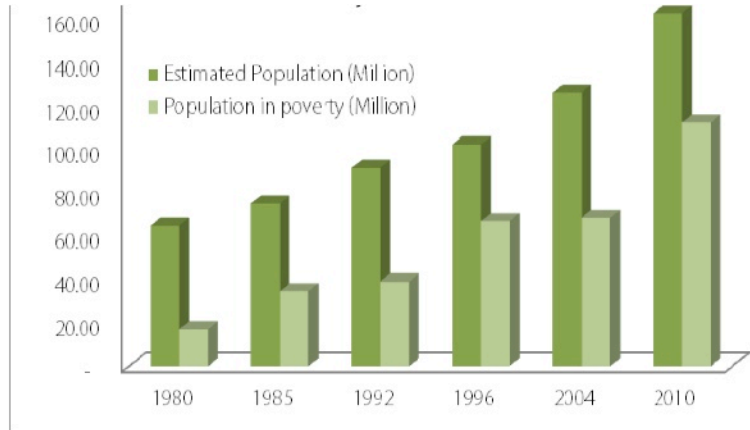


Fig. 1. *Estimated Population Versus Population in Poverty.*

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, Abuja, 2012.

Nigeria is a country with massive wealth, a huge population and has the largest economy in Africa. Also, it has one of the world's highest economic growth rates averaging 7.4 per cent (World Bank 2014). Despite high economic growth, poverty still remains significantly high at 33.1 per cent in the country (World Bank 2014). According to Rogers (2012), "despite the relative high levels of economic growth in recent years, Nigeria has not evolved an improved sharing (formula) for the fruits of that growth". Statistics show a great concentration of wealth in few hands at a time of a growing cohort of young people with minimal employment prospects. The figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Nigeria show that 69 per cent of Nigerians are poor (NBS, 2012). Figure 1 shows that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010.

This report indicates that the number of Nigeria living below poverty line increased from 68.7m to 112.5m (63.7 per cent rise in poverty incidence) within the period while there was a corresponding rise in population from 139.2m to 158.6m (13.9 per cent rise in population) over the same period. In fact, the World Bank (2014), data show poverty headcount ratio at US\$1.25 a day

Tab. 1. *Zonal Incidence of Poverty by different poverty measures*

Zone	Food Poor	Absolute Poor	Relative Poor	Dollar Per Day
North Central	38.6	59.5	67.5	59.7
North East	51.5	69.0	76.3	69.1
North West	51.8	70.0	77.7	70.4
South East	41.0	58.7	67.0	59.2
South-South	35.5	55.9	63.8	56.1
South west	25.4	49.8	59.1	50.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, Abuja, 2012.

(purchasing power parity in Nigeria at 68.0) in the period under review. Furthermore, table 1 shows the distribution of poverty incidence by different measures in Nigeria.

Across a broad spectrum of North versus South, the north had (and still has) the highest incidence of poverty in the country. This position highlights continuing difference between north and south divide in terms of poverty incidence. The World Bank (2014: 14) study shows that

the south and north-central regions showed progress in poverty reduction between 2010 and 2013, while the north-west witnessed little change and the north-east experienced in increase in the poverty rate along with a general decline in living standards.

The increasing poverty in Nigeria is accompanied by a corresponding increase in unemployment rate. The statistics revealed in figure 2 corroborate this situation as the number of unemployed Nigerians grew from 12.3per cent in 2006 to 23.9per cent in 2011.

Put in context, unemployment is higher in northern Nigeria than its southern counterpart. Government statistics show that the northern states have the higher proportion of uneducated Nigerians (NBS 2014). If you link a lack of education and attendant lack of opportunities to high male youth population, you can imagine



Fig. 2. *Unemployment Rate.*

Source: Unemployment Rate in Nigeria Between 2005 and 2011, National Bureau of Statistics, Abuja, 2012.

why northern Nigeria is actually a breeding ground for Boko Haram's recruits.

In Nigeria, despite the impressive economic growth witnessed for over a decade, unemployment and the incidence of poverty have worsened since 2004. Indeed, the Nigerian economy grew strongly at an average annual growth rate of 7.1 per cent, making the country the 3rd fastest growing economy in the world (behind Mongolia and China) and 7.8 per cent real growth rate. Also, Nigeria has a population growth rate of 2.6 per cent per annum and a parallel demographic structure that suggests youth burgess. The annual average entrant to the labour force in the country was 1.8m between 2006 and 2011. A reasonable percentage of these Nigerians were unable to gain meaningful employment. Thus, unemployment rose as earlier mention from 12.3 per cent of labour force to 23.9 per cent within the same period. This problem becomes more disturbing when youth unemployment is considered. In 2011, 37.7 per cent of Nigerian youths between the ages of 15-44 that were willing to work were out of jobs. The average youth unemployment in Nigeria in 2011 was 46.5 per cent (Bgl 2012).

It is a notorious fact that there is high prevalence of corruption in Nigeria. According to Elikaim (2010: 21), “the rise of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has been simply because of the failure of successive Nigerian governments to curb corruption, deliver public services, generate economic opportunity establish accountable securing institutions and engage communities both north and south in a more fully national polity”. The severe wealth and infrastructural disparities and the failure of the Nigerian government to enact policies that would enable the different ethnic nationalities that make up the country to better govern themselves seems to accentuate the problem for a country ranked 144 of the 177 countries ranked in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 (Transparency International 2013). Corruption remains a major cause of Boko Haram insurgency.

Boko Haram abhors the secularity of the Nigerian state. The sect seeks to establish a Caliphate based on the teachings and practices of ‘true’ Islam in Nigeria. This ‘true’ Islam is not only holistic but also embraces all aspects of Muslim life. Since Islam believes in the indivisibility of the (a). Dim (religion) (b). Dunya (way of life) and (c). Duala (government), the ultimate goal of Boko Haram is Islamic revivalism meant to restore the glorious past of puritanical Muslim community in place of the current ‘secular’ Nigerian state. Rogers (2012), Waldek and Jayasekara (2011) argue that it would amount to over simplification to view the groups ideology as apposed only to Western education in tandem with previous radical northern Nigerian groups. Thus, Boko Haram rejects all forms of secular authority and intends to establish a Nigerian state governed entirely by Sharia Laws. The sect has not been appeased by the re-introduction of Sharia Laws in some northern Nigerian states as they perceive Muslims who participate in the management of state affairs as polluted by corruption and Western-style ambitions. These false and corrupt Muslims must be done away with as well as the entire Nigerian government to make way for a pure Islamic state.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, accounting for almost one-sixth of the continent’s population and one-fifth of sub-Saharan population. Over the years, religion has played a dominant role in the country’s demography. Typically, the struggle for numerical supremacy between Christianity and Islam helps to sharpen the content of Nigerian polities. Before now, the pen-

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dulum swung in favour of Muslims in percentage ratio of the population of the country. According to Pew Survey (2009), 50.4 per cent populations were Muslims. However, a later study by the same body estimated that Christians formed the majority of the nation's population; comprising 50.8 per cent while Muslims had a share of 47.9 per cent. Adherents of the other religions accounted for the remaining 1.4 per cent of the population (Focus on Africa 2012).

Although the traditional belief was that Islam was the dominant religion in Nigeria, the percentage of Christians in Nigeria has grown from 21.4 per cent in 1953 to 50.8 per cent in 2011 (Pew Forum 2012). Part of what is responsible for this significant increase is the vigour attendant to an ever increasing evangelical exercise carried out by Pentecostal and revivalist Orthodox Movements in the country. To Boko Haram and its sympathizers, this trend poses a threat to the course of Islam, especially in northern Nigeria. This apparent reversal of fortunes appears incompatible with the general notion of adherents that Islam should be 'driven to the Atlantic Ocean'. As it stands, there is trepidation that if Christianity is not stopped in its trail, Islam perhaps, could be driven back to the desert. This possibly explains why Christians and their worship centres are often the targets of Boko Harams insurgency as well as those of other disparate groups scattered across northern Nigeria.

In terms of benefits, there are divergent perspectives on the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Primarily, the gridlock is between the former ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the former opposition All Progressives Congress (APC). While addressing a sub-committee of the British House of Commons, the spokesman for Nigerian opposition party (APC), Lai Mohammed claimed that former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and his party (the PDP) did manipulate the Boko Haram crisis in order to return to power in 2015. According to him:

the status quo favours the PDP and the president as the affected areas and indeed the northern region (of Nigeria) are APC stronghold. Therefore, the declaration of emergency rule and the general atmosphere of insecurity in these affected areas are likely to affect voting (low turnout due to displacement) to the benefit of the ruling party (Audu 2015: 7).

Conversely, members of the former ruling party (PDP) equally accused the former opposition party (APC) of having links with Boko Haram. It is worth remembering that the APC then presidential candidate, Mahammadu Buhari, has previously been suspected of inciting a violent uprising after losing the 2011 presidential elections resulting in nearly 1,000 deaths.

An expanded dimension of the foregoing includes the belief that Boko Haram is being used by powerful external forces as a conduit to destabilize Nigeria. To this end, Boko Haram is a proxy organization working on behalf of foreign powers. Notably among them is President Idriss Deby of Chad who has been pivotal in the release of many of the abductees of Boko Haram (Sahara Reporters, cited in Brimah 2013). The hypothesis is that the relationship between the Chadian leader and the group is meant to secure Chad's sole exploration and continued harvest of Oil in the disputed Chadian basin to the exclusion of Nigeria. Nigeria is related to the shared Chad basin oil and it is only logical that with the support Boko Haram gets from Chad, the dispute between the two countries over the basin of lake Chad is staved off. This has the tacit blessing of France, which more often than not, is involved in the same game-plan in order to secure its sphere of influence in the sub-region.

OFFICIAL RESPONSE

During the past five years, Boko Haram has exploited sectarian tensions and division between the predominantly Christian, oil-rich south and the relatively poorer, mostly Muslim north of Nigeria. Their campaign of tenor has resulted in thousands of death, in wholesome kidnappings, use of child soldiers and emergency rule in the three states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe in Nigeria's north-east. Currently, the sect is fighting to overthrow the government of the Nigerian state, which it sees as un-Islamic and pro-Western in order to create a 'pure' Islamic state. Adherents and sympathizers with the Boko Haram group are arguably influenced by the Koran, which sees anyone who is not governed by Sharia Laws as infidel.

There has been a steady growth of attacks of Boko Haram since 2011 in northern Nigeria. Figure 3 shows a report of civilian

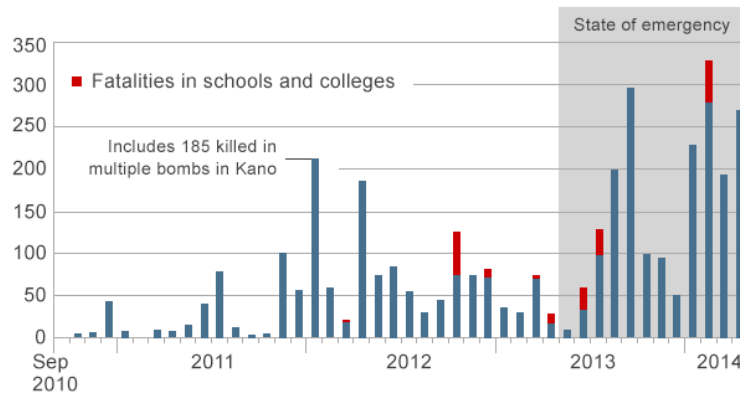


Fig. 3. Reported civilian deaths in Boko Haram attacks (Sep. 2010 – Apr. 2014)

Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, created by Prof. Clionadh Raleigh, University of Sussex.

deaths in the group's attack between September 2010 and April 2014 (Raleigh 2014, cited in Walker 2014).

The increase recorded above shows that the attacks have become increasingly sophisticated. It suggests, therefore that the group is better resourced as it can adapt easily to the ever changing tide of engagement with the Nigerian military. Added is the fact that Boko Haram is believed to benefit from local support and aid from sympathizers. These factors are said to thwart efforts at suppressing Boko Haram and therefore enable them to regroup (Gardner 2014). In response to the groups series of kidnappings (made popular by the seizure of some 270 school girls in Chibok town, Borno State on 14 April 2014), the international community expressed horror and outrage and pledged to consider taking action against Boko Haram.

The Nigerian government's counter-insurgency measures have so far had limited success. Its military have been relatively ineffective in countering Boko Haram insurgency primarily because their response to the menace has been hampered by an entrenched culture of official corruption in the country. While authenticating this claim, on 8 January, 2012, the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, announced that Boko Haram members had influenced the army, the police, the executive and the legislative arms of the

Nigerian government (Jonathan, cited in Adetayo 2014). Besides this deficit, the morale in the Nigerian army to fight the insurgency in the north-east of the country is further damaged by the poor state of the military hardware available to the foot soldiers.

Apart from the above, the Nigerian government official response to the insurgency in the north-east of the country is mostly through the counter-offensive measured of the Joint Task Force (JTF). After the declaration of the state of emergency in the three states referred to above, the Goodluck Administration got the approval of the National Assembly to deploy more troops to the region following the establishment of a new 7 Division of the Nigerian Army in Maiduguri. Ironically, the importance of the JTF is undermined by the use of excessive force, including use of live ammunition to hunt down suspected Boko Haram members resulting in a sizeable number of killings. As such, the JTF human rights records is poor and people do not trust them (Human Right Watch 2012) to avail them the needed information to defeat Boko Haram. Rather than eliminate the group, this uncooperative attitude from the people has caused it to disperse across north-east Nigeria and even to the neighbouring countries, notably Chad and Cameroun. Of course, the Nigerian government needs to know that no amount of fighting can possibly extinguish the ideological fervour emblazoned by indoctrination. Instead, there is need for rethink in terms of strategy and logistics needed to see through the campaign against Boko Haram insurgency in the country. As it stands, Boko Haram appears to have assumed a commanding position in northern Nigeria. Regardless of its numerical strength, the group appears able to easily overrun the region (except there is a difference in tactics by the Nigerian government), especially against the backdrop of poor law enforcement and impose its interpretation of Sharia Laws.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria poses a grave challenge to the corporate existence of the country. Since 2010, the groups attacks have caused more than 13,000 death; most of them were the vulnerable (women and children). Also, this violence has displaced more than one million people, driving

at least 170,000 into neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Chad and Niger (Obasi 2015). Thus, reversing the gains of Boko Haram comes at a great cost to Nigeria. As such, the Nigerian government needs to review its counter insurgency strategy and strengthen the political, military and diplomatic elements crucial to reversing this dangerous tide. Specifically, the under listed remedies could help put pay to the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria:

1) Deliberate efforts should be made to train and retrain the Nigerian military on how to fight an insurgency. This is where international partnership like the one commanded by the abduction of Chibok girls becomes an immediate imperative. To this effect, the Nigerian government needs to build on the promised support of the United States, British, Canada, China, Israel, etc., to multilaterally fight the insurgency. In addition, modern military hardware, ammunition, air power and logistical supports should be solicited by the Nigerian government from the aforementioned countries to operate in the rugged terrain along the Nigeria-Cameroun borders.

2) Necessary security reforms should be instituted to investigate and prosecute corruption in procurement and administrative maintenance of acquired assets, human rights violation in the Boko Haram afflicted areas of the country. This policy option could re-estate the rather alienated local support, low morale among the Nigerian military demoralized by inadequate support and heavy casualties and sabotage by Boko Haram sympathizers that have undercut the efforts of the Nigerian state.

3) At the level of sub-regional security, Nigeria and its affected neighbours (notably Cameroun, Chad and Niger) should collectively rise above sub-regional mistrust and frequent disagreements that apparent make them run at cross-purposes. Logistics at the level of governments should be worked out to practically implement the much publicized multi-national force agreed upon by Nigerian and its neighbours. Thus, the Lake Chad Basin Commission should be made to work in tandem with the United Nations and/or African Union force to the benefit of all the countries whose national security is currently being threatened by the activities of Boko Haram. Ultimately, to defeat Boko Haram, Nigeria must build trust and confidence with its neighbours.

4) Baring the provision of Article 10 and all other related provisions in the Nigerian Constitution, there is no definite declaration on the status of the Nigerian state; whether it is secular or multi-religious. Such ambiguity breeds, not only a myopic interpretation of the provision of the constitution but also a manipulative framework for religious radicalism. The Boko Haram crisis is an opportunity for the Nigerian government to institute constitutional amendment making it clear that Nigeria



is a secular state. Within this context, all Nigerians have a right to practice and propagate their faiths in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. Any breach of this provision must be made prosecutable by law. Also, the unconstitutionality of the current practice by government (at all levels) to identify with the Christian and Muslim religions in the sponsorship of religious pilgrimages or the erection of edifices should be incorporated into the amendment.

5) In response to Boko Haram insurgency, critical issues central to the group's ideology and therefore attractive to the appeal of religious pathos should be addressed by the Nigerian government. Socio-economic problems like corruption, unemployment (especially among the youths), rising crime rates, poverty, etc., need practicable and immediate attention beyond what is currently the case. Equally important, is the need for judicial reform necessary to speed up the process of litigation and in case of criminality, mete out the attendant penalty. Much of the appeal of the Sharia Courts hinges on the belief what its judicial process is more efficient than its civil equivalent. This perhaps, makes Islamic ideology attractive to the youth who feel powerless in the hands of the various political and legal arms of the Nigerian government.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the socio-economic and cultural ecology which contemporary Nigerian state presents help to sustain Boko Haram's ideology in terms of its organizational structure, group activities and sub-regional reach. This offers the key to the understanding of the support base of Boko Haram. The paper also argues that the ideology which is at the heart of Boko Haram's philosophy is ultimately religious focused. Thus, the group appeals to religious sentiment to recruit members and sustain its momentum.

Although conflicting narratives have been applied to explain the rise and transformation of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, this study discovered that the primary concerns of the group center on the domination of Nigeria by Western influences, the poverty of the Nigerian people (particularly those that reside in northern Nigeria) and the declining morality it identifies in both the Nigerian state and the lives of individual Nigerians. Part of the solution therefore, to these and other problems is an embrace of 'True' Islam and an understanding that all Muslims comprise a single cohesive community that should be ruled under a Cali-

phate. To achieve this goal, all Muslim must work together to resist the encroachment of corrupt Western influences.

However, the paper reveals that the reasons why Boko Haram insurgency occurs can be grouped into the following broad categories: *a*) constitutional issues; *b*) socio-economic issues; *c*) benefit content of insurgency; *d*) ideology; *e*) religious interpretation; *f*) and external influence.

From the analysis in this paper, it is shown that the most appropriate explanations for Boko Haram insurgency combine these variables. In fact, the argument here is that Boko Haram's beliefs make adherent psychologically predisposed to use violence and surrender their lives to propagate the ideology of the group. Also the existing abysmal social conditions and frustration prevalent in north-eastern Nigeria help to promote extremism. This is further re-enforced by state neglect and falling standard of living which spur a violent backlash from Boko Haram. Nonetheless, the paper is of the view that there is a convergence between explanations, which consider insurgency as a result of internalized radical Islamic beliefs (the type propagates by Boko Haram) and those that locate them in the externalized socio-economic conditions of the Nigerian state.

On the apparent inability of the Nigerian state to stop Boko Haram in its trail despite the different official responses, the paper reveals that primarily, the missing link is that the Nigerian government has operated so far a one-instant therapy to all the issues that mutually sustain the logic of the group. While the fire-for-fire approach is the most visible response of the Nigerian government, for a group whose recruitment and training lay important emphasis on the radicalization of its members and strong connection with a section of society, this policy option is insufficient to stop its expansionist tendencies. Rather, it would help to alienate those who feel connected to the peripheral sectors of society; who are sympathetic to the ideology, sentiments, idiosyncrasies and dialectical peculiarities and local circumstances of northern Nigeria.

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