

**The Boko Haram Insurgency and Good Governance in Nigeria 2007-2020**

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency has raged on for close to 12 years and incidentally seemed to pick up in intensity not long after the significant disarmament and demobilization of the Niger Delta militants. However, unlike the Niger Delta militants who agitated over injustice in the geographical spread of indices of development especially when the massive contribution to the national coffers and devastating environmental degradation of the region are considered, the Boko Haram Insurgency is fundamentally rooted in religion. The insurgents and their disciples advocate a strict adherence to the tenets of Sharia Law. What is disturbing and discomfiting however is the resort to violence in a bid to enshrine their religious beliefs. A lot of the attacks, kidnaps and raids have been unreasonable but this has drawn the attention of the Nigerian government to the plight of the people readily available to be used as Boko Haram Insurgents. Due to the intensity of the attacks, the Federal Government's efforts to establish rural grazing areas for the violent herdsmen and in a bid to quell the spate of attacks and clashes between herdsmen and farmers was fiercely resisted and dubbed by many on social media platforms as an Islamization agenda. The federal government in a bid to mitigate the devastation in the Nigerian North East proposed a Ministry of the North East and has embarked on developmental programmes in the region. The thinking behind this is a realization that violence and civil unrest is often an indication of discontent. More often than not when the root issues have been properly addressed the tide of violence is usually stemmed. In the case of Boko Haram, some scholars have argued that deep poverty and illiteracy are fundamental reasons why people would readily resort to violence as a way of expressing their religious grievances. There are also others who have argued that the insurgency was a political tool when the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was not of Northern extraction. This paper will attempt to look at the correlation between ethno religious violence in Northern Nigeria and good governance.

Keywords: **Boko Haram, Islam, Terrorism, Jihad, Governance, Sharia**

**Introduction**

According to Newson, C (2011) starting in mid-2009, the international community watched as the Niger Delta took a break from violence. The decision to cease hostilities was shared. Militia leaders were taken aback by government raids on the camp of Tompolo, a powerful rebel commander. The Nigerian government was losing billions of dollars in oil revenues to militia attacks. Community sympathies for militancy were waning as battle fatigue and the costs of conflict grew. By October, most of the major militia leaders accepted an amnesty offered by the federal government, which guaranteed fighters freedom from prosecution and a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process with monthly stipend payments. Soon, however, it seemed all was not well. The personal involvement of then president Umaru Musa Yar'adua gave the process an early boost, but political attention to the amnesty dropped off significantly and was dealt a further blow after illness took the president to Saudi Arabia for treatment. In the six-month political crisis caused by his absence, progress largely stalled. A presidential amnesty committee was constituted, but it accomplished little beyond establishing procedures to pay 20,192 registered former militants their monthly stipends of \$430.

In one of his first speeches after taking office in May 2010 following Yar'adua's death, President Good luck Jonathan named the strife in the Niger Delta as one of his administration's three top priorities. A new amnesty coordinator, TimiAlaibe, was appointed and eventually set up a camp offering two weeks of militant "reorientation training" conducted by a U.S. organization and a Nigerian partner nongovernmental organization (NGO).Alaibe had claimed "graduates" will be matched to suitable further study and jobs, but evidence of this is slight so far. Attacks on oil installations dropped close to zero after the 2009amnesty was announced, and somewhat normalized economic activity resumed in the delta. Yet the government still has not produced a credible work plan to address the many complex and holistic issues of demobilization and development needed to achieve peace.

Newson adds that few practitioners would defend a two-week course as likely to reorient armed group members, particularly if follow-up remains in doubt. And apart from early token handovers, there has been no serious effort at disarmament, nor any real acceptance that militias have handed in a significant portion of their arsenals.

### **Lessons from the Amnesty Programme**

Since 2009 the chances for converting the amnesty into something more than a temporary cease-fire have largely eroded. The kidnapping industry in the delta persists, with a broadening of targets crossing new social and geographic divides on a monthly basis. An uptick in sea piracy since August 2010 and a series of armed raids on offshore oil platforms in November 2010 suggest some armed groups feel it is time to return to their previous activities. Incentives for violence in the region have not changed fundamentally, and profitable pursuits such as crude oil theft have not dried up. Mounting rumors talk of a large arms build up like those seen ahead of the 2003 and 2007 elections, even as, starting in late summer 2010, elections have drawn political attention away from the Niger Delta yet again (though the October 1 car bombings in Abuja forced a brief return to the limelight).

Most signs suggest a fresh crop of militants are likely to emerge within the next twelve months to demand their share of the resources being tapped from the region—

unsurprisingly, when the amnesty process has not addressed root conflict issues or the region's persisting economy of violence.

The international community has found it difficult to key into the sketchily defined amnesty process effectively. Several of Nigeria's strategic partners made appropriately cautious early offers of technical assistance, such as with the DDR process. Diplomatic actors also genuinely tried to understand the amnesty's evolving actors and dynamics, though many had complicated briefs that limited the time they could spend on them. But when the Nigerian government rejected outside help, international engagement on the delta was left struggling. To their credit, foreign governments have so far refused to back the amnesty with blank checks; limited support remains open through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Yet there may not be much for them to do until greater political will emerges, which has led some to adopt a wait-and-see approach, effectively treating the amnesty as reason to keep their distance from the delta. As the amnesty appears to be slowly deteriorating, the challenge for international actors is to make plans for two distinct scenarios: a late recourse to action by the Nigerian government or another surge in violence, which must be navigated and followed by the next opportunity for a lasting peace.

### **The Boko Haram Insurgence**

The conflict in the Niger Delta cannot rightly be described as an ethno religious conflict. It was more of an uprising and violent insurgence against injustice towards the goose that lays the golden egg. What it showed however as regards this study is that violence can often be an indication of some of inequity or injustice in the society. It is hence important that government always takes the effort to determine the root source of a conflict in its efforts to bring a lasting solution.

According to Campbell, J (2014) Boko Haram is a radical Islamist movement shaped by its Nigerian context and reflecting Nigeria's history of poor governance and extreme poverty in the north. The movement is unique in that it combines a sectarian, radical Islamic agenda with violence. Its stated goal is the establishment of a sharia state, but it shows little interest in actually governing or implementing economic development. It is based on the fundamentalist Wahhabi theological system and opposes the Islam of the traditional northern Nigerian establishment, which is broadly tolerant. Boko Haram and its more radical splinter, Ansaru, are steadily expanding their area of operations.

Kidnapping has become a major source of revenue and is widespread, while attack shave occurred in Lagos and Kano. The government's response has been to treat Boko Haramas a part of the international al-Qaeda movement. Security service abuses are likely a driver of some popular support for or acquiescence to Boko Haram. The struggle between the government and Boko Haram has dire humanitarian consequences. Many people have been internally displaced in northern Nigeria and many refugees have fled to neighbouring countries. The international community may be asked to help provide humanitarian assistance in what is one of the poorest parts of the world.

### **Expanding Territorial Control and Military Setbacks**

In 2013, the Nigerian military intensified its campaign against Boko Haram. Yet its indiscriminate tactics failed to degrade the group's capacity and deeply alienated the

region's civilian population. A state of emergency imposed on Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States only deepened the cycle of violence. In high-level statements and meetings, both the U.S. and European governments stressed the need to improve civilian protection and address the root causes of violence.

Despite these warnings, Jonathan pushed for more security assistance while downplaying the degree of dysfunction within the Nigerian military and the worsening humanitarian crisis. As a result, the bilateral relationship between the United States and Nigeria deteriorated. In April 2014, Boko Haram's kidnapping of 276 female students from the town of Chibok made worldwide headlines, drawing greater policy attention to the crisis. Several Western governments—including the United States—offered technical assistance and intelligence-sharing to help find the girls.

The U.S. State Department formed a Nigeria Planning and Operations Group that brought together technical and regional experts as well as a military liaison to plan and coordinate rapid responses to the crisis. However, concerns over human rights abuses by Nigerian security forces hampered greater cooperation, even as Boko Haram expanded its control of the northeastern countryside. Increasingly concerned about Boko Haram's threat to regional stability, the United States as well as France and the UK began shifting their focus to Nigeria's neighbors. Various U.S. agencies began pushing for greater military cooperation between the Lake Chad countries, and the United States leveraged the Global Security Cooperation Fund and the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund to increase security assistance to Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

This shift allowed the U.S. government to support military efforts against Boko Haram while circumventing the policy hurdles associated with direct aid to the Nigerian government. In parallel, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) launched several smaller-scale stabilization efforts aimed at increasing community resilience to violent extremism in the wider Lake Chad region.

### **REGIONALIZATION AND RETURN TO CLANDESTINE TACTICS (2015-PRESENT)**

In early 2015, in the midst of Nigeria's election season, a renewed military offensive began making headway against the group. After repeated delays, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNTJF)—a loose coalition of troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—seized back most of the territory previously held by Boko Haram. Counterinsurgency operations triggered new waves of displacement as civilians were pushed from the countryside into military-controlled camps in urban centers. Yet the involvement of neighboring countries also sparked an increasing regionalization of the crisis and further militarization of the conflict response. With Buhari's inauguration in May 2015, relations between the Nigerian government and Western partners improved, opening the door to increases in Western security assistance—including the deployment of U.S. and British military advisers and the sale of light attack aircraft in 2017.

Over the past three years, Boko Haram's decline has been uneven. As the insurgents were pushed back into more remote rural areas, they reverted to earlier tactics, relying on guerilla-style attacks and suicide bombings. Nigerian security forces have struggled to consolidate control over rural areas and protect urban centers from sporadic attacks. While the number of fatalities associated with the group has declined, the number of attacks has fluctuated, and patterns of violence have remained largely consistent since

2014. The group has splintered into two main factions or cells: a larger faction led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi now brands itself as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), while AbubakarShekau still commands a group of militants under the group's previous name, Jama'atuAhlisSunnaLidda'awatiwal-Jihad (JAS). Over the course of 2018, ISWAP appears to have expanded its reach in northern Borno, reportedly even recapturing a number of towns near Lake Chad previously controlled by the Nigerian military. While some areas—particularly in Adamawa State, Yobe State, and southern Borno—have thus seen greater security and the return of displaced populations, other parts of Borno State still struggle with ongoing military operations and humanitarian crisis conditions.

### **The International Response Comes Late**

The donor community on the ground in Nigeria was late to acknowledge the severity of the crisis, and slow to scale up its response. Several factors explain this pattern. First, in the early years of the crisis, international partners were hesitant to push back against Nigerian authorities' assurances that the conflict response was under their control. In contrast to other conflict-affected states, the Nigerian government wields significant resources and regional power, resulting in a greater stature vis-a-vis international partners. Donor governments thus prioritized working through Nigerian government structures rather than sidestepping local authority, even as bureaucratic obstruction, a lack of committed interlocutors, and in-fighting between different levels of government slowed down the response.

Second, donor states and the United Nations (UN) had little political interest in declaring the region a large-scale emergency, which would have required additional commitments of resources in an already crisis-ridden international context. For example, in 2014–2015, the UN leadership in the country did little to press for greater international involvement, despite evidence of worsening conditions in the northeast. Western capitals, already preoccupied with crises in Iraq, South Sudan, and Syria, in turn saw Nigeria as a resource-rich country with less need for international aid. Those donors already present in Nigeria prior to the crisis had mostly specialized in development programs in areas such as health and education, which often relied on close collaboration with Nigerian authorities. Few had a direct presence in the northeast, and those that did worked via partnerships with smaller local groups. However, the scale of these efforts was far below the level of need.

Thesedynamics further delayed the transition to a comprehensive conflict response.

Lastly, the deteriorating security situation and lack of communication lines with Boko Haram limited access and made it difficult to obtain accurate assessments of the rapidly evolving crisis.

Beginning in 2013, the state of emergency in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States severely restricted mobility and communication flows in the region. Even as the military began pushing Boko Haram into retreat in 2015, continued insecurity prevented the return of civilian administration, and access beyond Maiduguri remained tightly controlled by the Nigerian military. Despite this difficult context, several donors launched small-scale peacebuilding and countering violent extremism (CVE) programs in the northeast, generally centered on Maiduguri. Yet persistent security concerns and

access restrictions prevented a rapid scale-up. Only in mid-2016 did reporting on widespread starvation in Bama, a town in northeastern Borno, trigger a radical increase in the overall donor response. International aid organizations thus reached many areas more than a year after they had been retaken by Nigerian military forces. They found people living in devastating conditions, with little access to food or basic supplies. Most initial efforts prioritized delivering emergency humanitarian assistance to the newly accessible areas. For example, USAID ramped up humanitarian assistance in Nigeria “from virtually nothing in 2014 to \$291 million committed for fiscal year (FY) 2017.”

### **A Contested Shift toward Stabilization and Early Recovery**

As security conditions improved in late 2016 and early 2017, the discourse of both the Nigerian government and its international partners began shifting toward stabilization. The Nigerian government released the so-called Buhari Plan, which outlines its postconflict recovery priorities in the northeast that range from emergency assistance to stabilization and early recovery. A regional stabilization strategy—developed by the African Union and Lake Chad Basin Commission—followed in 2018. Programs aimed at setting the ground for a transition to longer-term development and governance activities began to take shape. For example, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) rolled out initial assessments to learn about people’s perceptions of governance in the northeast and displaced communities’ willingness to return to their home communities, which served as a basis to inform their programming. In March 2017, the U.S. government finalized a strategy for countering Boko Haram and ISWAP, which states that the United States seeks to ensure that the Lake Chad basin countries, together with local authorities and international partners, are “able to address specific regional and community-level conditions that are drivers of conflict and that make communities vulnerable to violent extremist groups.”

Yet this shift toward stabilization has also provoked resistance. Humanitarian aid organizations working in Nigeria have argued that it comes too soon, noting that the conflict is still ongoing and hundreds of thousands of people remain beyond the reach of basic emergency assistance. They fear that the language of stabilization is playing into the hands of Nigerian authorities who are eager to emphasize a return to normality and a shift to long-term development assistance while downplaying ongoing crisis conditions. Over the past year, for example, Nigerian authorities have pushed aggressively for displaced civilians to return to their home communities, while Buhari has repeatedly declared that Boko Haram has been “technically defeated.” Humanitarian actors warn that a change in donor priorities may lead to aid being allocated based on the Nigerian government’s political priorities rather than civilian needs, thereby leaving vulnerable groups without assistance.

### **The Boko Haram Conflict and Good Governance**

Although the bone of contention of religious insurgents is enshrinement of Sharia law, good governance and sensitivity by the Nigerian government can go a long way in dissuading a young population from enlisting as terrorists. According to Uguanyi, B.I (2014) et al the Niger Delta Militancy is a consequence of the failure of the Nigerian state to deliver basic services and development in the region. An effective and sustainable control of the militancy in the region requires, therefore, an accelerated and holistic

development of the region to compliment the successes of the amnesty policy. Achieving this development basically requires a positive attitudinal change on the part of the state and national political leaderships in the direction of using effectively the available resources for socio-economic development. Such is not only necessary for the control of the existing Niger Delta Militancy but for forestalling future ones that may be induced by similar neglect of development needs of people in the other parts or regions of Nigeria.

A similar approach must also be adopted in Northern Nigeria. The conflict with Boko Haram is essentially ideological. Apart from covert and overt Military operations to stamp out the activities of armed militants the population must be persuaded to continually act in the interest of the nation. An individual that is gainfully employed or occupied will not be readily susceptible to be recruited as an insurgent. Quality education, good infrastructure and opportunities to be gainfully employed are hence an imperative in stemming the tide of insurgency in Northern Nigeria.

According to Peacebuilders (2017), bad governance leads to corruption, poor service delivery, lack of education, conflict, poverty and lack of infrastructure. Economic factors including poverty, need for money, and employment constituted the third most likely reason for people to join Boko Haram (26%). This was equalled by the proportion of respondents who felt that the urge to belong to a group also played a significant role in influencing people's membership of Boko Haram (26%). Also not to be ignored is the influence of peer pressure (22%), the need for prestige or to be feared (22%) and lack of education (20%), which respondents felt also had marked influence on people's decision to become members. Only a very marginal sample of the peacebuilders thought that frustration with life (8%) and family pressure (4%) were accountable for membership in Boko Haram.

The overwhelming impression among the peacebuilders that religion and political factors were responsible for membership seems to detract slightly from the widespread theoretical view that poverty plays a major influence in terrorist recruitment. According to the findings of this study, poverty is one of the major factors but not the primary influence. The strongest appeal of the poverty thesis resonates in the fact that Boko Haram is said to lure recruits with offers of cash, loans and donations to poor traders.

The group is also believed to make cash payments to locals in return for information on movements of security forces. Peacebuilders views in the qualitative interviews confirmed that in some cases people were promised a loan or job and were so desperate that they failed to consider the consequences of joining. In the words of one peacebuilder, 'they are frustrated; they either have no education and no job or they have a degree but cannot find a job. They see the successful and rich people and resent them. They want to kill them. Peacebuilder's perspectives on the link between 'the need to belong' and joining Boko Haram in the quantitative survey is in line with psychopathological analysis, which posits that at an individual level psychological or mental factors are important in understanding why people join violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram. Contrary to the findings from the literature review, only a marginal sample of the peacebuilders (2%) believed that coercive recruitment was a major factor influencing Boko Haram membership. Joining Boko Haram based on fear accounted for merely 2% of the reasons peacebuilders gave.

The qualitative interviews with peacebuilders showed a strong perception that lack of purpose in life or aimlessness caused by unemployment was a major factor influencing

decisions to join Boko Haram. The qualitative interviews stressed that these individuals had nothing to do, felt vulnerable and were easily recruited to a perceived 'cause' as a result. Here the promise of a role, as well as that of money to support family members, held the strongest appeal. There was also a general perception that some people join Boko Haram without realizing what they were signing up for.

### **Conclusion**

It can hence be stated that good governance in any country can go a long way in stemming the tide of ethno religious conflict. When government provides a healthy and secure environment for people to thrive and prosper the atmosphere is less charged and disagreements between people of different religions are less likely to disintegrate into violent conflict. The Nigerian government must also take decisive steps to crush the agents of radicalization and encourage peaceful coexistence in all parts of the country. The bodies governing the different religions in Nigeria must also be accountable to the government and their member constantly instructed to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Inciting statements must be discouraged and persistent offenders promptly dealt with.

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