Nigeria's Troubled North: Interrogating the Drivers of Public Support for Boko Haram

Akinola Olojo

ICCT Research Paper

October 2013

In this Research Paper, ICCT Visiting Fellow Akinola Olojo examines the key drivers of public support for Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. The author suggests that the effective formulation and implementation of a proactive (Nigerian) counter-terrorism strategy requires an incisive understanding of the political, socio-economic and religious/ideological drivers of public support for the group. The multi-dimensional nature of the Boko Haram crisis in northern Nigeria challenges conventional approaches used in addressing terrorist violence. Olojo reflects on the need for a bold mix of interventions and partnerships that combine elements of both hard and soft power. The application of these approaches by both domestic actors and external partners must necessarily draw upon an understanding of the key drivers that this paper explores.

About the Author

Mr. Akinola Ejodame Olojo is a Visiting Research Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). While at ICCT, he worked on a project that investigated the underlying drivers of violent radicalisation in northern Nigeria, with specific focus on Boko Haram. The project explored socioeconomic instigators such as poverty and underdevelopment with a view to ascertaining the extent to which they incite public support for Boko Haram. While examining the group's mobilisation strategies, his research analysed the catalytic role of religion and how this has been exploited by Boko Haram in generating mass appeal in Nigeria's troubled north.

Akinola is a PhD candidate at the Université Paris Descartes in France. He has a Masters in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London and a Masters in Political Science from the University of Lagos. From 2010-2012, he was a Peace, Security and Development Fellow at the African Leadership Centre (ALC) in both London and Nairobi. In 2011, he was an African Junior Professional Fellow at the International Peace Institute (IPI), New York. He has conducted external reviews for the knowledge production department of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) in South Africa. He is also an external reviewer for the Journal of Terrorism Research, the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

His publications include 'Engendering Counter-Terrorism in Northern Nigeria' (ICCT, June 2013); 'Mediation, Bounties and Amnesty for Boko Haram: A Deadlock of Priorities' (ICCT, May 2013); 'Engaging Boko Haram: Militarization, Mediation or Both?' (IPI, September 2012).

About ICCT - The Hague

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) – The Hague is an independent knowledge centre that focuses on information creation, collation and dissemination pertaining to the preventative and international legal aspects of counter-terrorism. The core of ICCT's work centres on such themes as de- and counter-radicalisation, human rights, impunity, the rule of law and communication in relation to counter-terrorism. Functioning as a nucleus within the international counter-terrorism network, ICCT – The Hague endeavours to connect academics, policymakers and practitioners by providing a platform for productive collaboration, practical research, exchange of expertise and analysis of relevant scholarly findings. By connecting the knowledge of experts to the issues that policymakers are confronted with, ICCT – The Hague contributes to the strengthening of both research and policy. Consequently, avenues to new and innovative solutions are identified, which will reinforce both human rights and security.

Contact

ICCT – The Hague
Koningin Julianaplein 10
P.O. Box 13228
2501 EE, The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 800 9531
E info@icct.nl

All papers can be downloaded free of charge at www.icct.nl
Stay up to date with ICCT, follow us online on Facebook*,* Twitter *and* LinkedIn

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the northern region of Nigeria has experienced a surge in terrorist violence instigated by the sectarian group known as Boko Haram. Several analysts have advanced the view that poverty, longstanding economic disparities within Nigeria,[1] and structural violence,[2] are key factors underlying the crisis. However, the complex nature of the situation in Nigeria has at the same time caused some observers to characterise Boko Haram's aggression as violent extremism beyond a domestic agenda. The group's use of suicide attacks particularly presents a dreadful trait typical of international terrorist violence; a style of brutality hitherto alien to the Nigerian state. Nevertheless, Boko Haram has been able to draw upon a considerable base of local sympathy and support largely from the ranks of uneducated, unemployed and impoverished youths in northern Nigeria. In addition, the group's ability to manoeuvre and stage-manage the force of religion in achieving its objectives appears to be dangerously reinforced by the influence of political interests and elites.

These multi-dimensional challenges continue to confound the Nigerian government, leaving it struggling to clearly define the problem and to devise a comprehensive strategy to prevent and counter it. This paper argues that the effective formulation and implementation of such a strategy requires an incisive understanding of the political, socio-economic and religious/ideological drivers of public support for Boko Haram. Enhanced knowledge of the recruitment dynamics that feed and sustain the group could particularly inform a more proactive counter-terrorism framework for the Nigerian state. This paper therefore presents the case for a thorough examination of the factors that have inspired public support for Boko Haram and the trajectory of the group's mobilisation of various forms of support in northern Nigeria.

This study draws upon a considerable number of open sources and it acknowledges the general difficulty which research in the field of (counter-)terrorism encounters while trying to gather primary source data.[3] In the case of Nigeria, this challenge is more apparent due to the manifold (and on-going) security risks involved in acquiring such data in the north-eastern zones of conflict. Nevertheless, the author of this paper has attempted to complement secondary sources with a modest blend of data obtained through interviews and research reports. Two central questions at the core of this study include: To what extent do socio-economic issues such as poverty and underdevelopment among youths, the role of religion, and political interests explain the motivations for public support for Boko Haram? Second, how can the existing leadership in Nigeria address the escalating crisis; and what role can institutional leadership at the local, national and regional levels play in addressing the problem?

One of the theoretical considerations in this paper relates to the structural violence paradigm. Its suggestion of how economic deprivation, class discrimination and societal injustice prevent citizens from reaching their full potential helps to place in context the influence which socio-economic drivers exert on public support for Boko Haram. The awareness that a lack of economic, social and/or political development feeds into the structural factors conducive to terrorism is not new; it already played a prominent role in the first ever resolution adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) on counter-terrorism in 1972 (GA Resolution 3034).[4] In fact, the logic of the structural violence paradigm, as advocated by its chief proponent Johan Galtung, underscores how socio-cultural systems, political structures and state institutions act as indirect instigators of

---

[1] A. Adesoji, "The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria", *Africa Spectrum* 45, no. 2 (2010), pp. 95-108.

[2] A. Walker, "What is Boko Haram?", *USIP Special Report*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace (2012), http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR308.pdf.

[3] B. Schuurman and Q. Eijkman, "Moving Terrorism Research Forward: The Crucial Role of Primary Sources", *ICCT Background Note* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), pp. 1, 5 and 8.

[4] I. Briscoe and B. van Ginkel, "The Nexus between Development and Security: Searching for Common Ground in Countering Terrorism", *ICCT Policy Brief* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), p. 6, http://www.icct.nl/download/file/Briscoe-van-Ginkel-Nexus-between-Security-and-Development-March-2013.pdf; also see http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/27/ares3034%28xxvii%29.pdf.

violence.[5] Individual and group grievances, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and economic marginalisation, can be used as mobilising instruments by sinister groups to find support and recruits for terrorist violence.[6] The relevance of this can also be understood in terms of societal challenges that are increasingly being conceptualised within the framework of human security. As already noted, these issues collectively inform one of the central questions of this study primarily because of its causal link with the crisis context of northern Nigeria. While this is the case, the structural violence approach may very well lose some of its potency when evaluated based on the accounts of other country/conflict settings. Even in the Nigerian situation, and as this paper will further highlight, while structural violence helps to explain the motivations for public support for Boko Haram, it nonetheless remains inadequate as a single factor instigating the crisis. Indeed, not every Boko Haram member that has engaged in violence is socio-economically deprived. At the same time, not every socio-economically deprived individual will be motivated to lend support to acts of terror perpetrated by the group. Therefore, this study acknowledges that there will always be nuances reflected in varying contexts both within and outside the Nigerian case study.

After briefly tracing the course of Boko Haram's emergence as a group, this paper will shed light on the bearing which political and elite interests may have exerted on public support for Boko Haram. Subsequently, the socio-economic context of the crisis will be examined with a view to determining the degree to which it incites public support for Boko Haram. Beyond these issues are other intervening variables that are frequently at play within the Nigerian state. The fifth section will focus on the most important among these, probing the catalytic role of religion and how this has been exploited by the group in generating mass appeal in the north. The sixth part will explore the often assumed external dimension of Boko Haram's activities within the context of weapons, terrorist funding and foreign fighters. The concluding sections will underscore what is instructive about the lessons emerging from the undercurrents of public support for the group, while also reflecting on implications for the development of more robust and concerted counter-terrorism policies.

2. Boko Haram: Emergence and Emancipation for (Northern) Nigeria?

Most authors[7] generally agree that the *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad,* more widely known as Boko Haram, first appeared in 2002. However, a view seems to be emerging that traces back the rise of the group as far as 1995,[8] when it existed as a little-known Muslim youth organisation called Shabaab.[9] During this period, it was under the leadership of a man known as Lawan Abubakar, who situated the group's headquarters in Maiduguri, Borno State, in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Lawan was reported to have departed for further studies at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia,[10] and the group's control was transferred to the late Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. There are additional accounts that trace Boko Haram's emergence to a group of Muslim students from the

---

[5] J. Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191.

[6] I. Briscoe and B. van Ginkel, "The Nexus between Development and Security" (2013), p. 5.

[7] It is important to note that, while there are several writers, there are still very few researchers whose facts or findings on the Boko Haram crisis are based on actual empirical (field) work. While this is an understandable reality owing to the high risks involved in carrying out research in certain parts of northern Nigeria, it inadvertently continues to obscure the validity of details about the group.

[8] A. Bello, "Boko Haram: The Greatest Security Threat to the Sovereignty of Nigeria", *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences Research (IJMSSR)* 2, no. 2 (2013), p. 67.

[9] This view is based on an interview by the author with a Nigerian security official. It has also been expressed by several other writers such as Isioma Madike. See I. Madike, "Boko Haram: Rise of a deadly sect", *National Mirror* (19 June 2011), http://www.nationalmirroronline.net/sunday-mirror/big_read/14548.html. The name Shabaab indicated here is not in any way related to Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

[10] E. Ujah et al., "Yar'Adua orders probe of Boko Haram leaders' killing", *Vanguard* (4 August 2009), http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/08/yaradua-orders-probe-of-boko-haram-leaders-killing/.

University of Maiduguri. Isa Gusau[11] argues that these students, led by a man known as Aminu Tashen Ilimi, dropped out of school in response to the preaching of a foreign Islamic scholar who convinced them that Western education was *haram* (unlawful) in Islam. This particular account suggests that it was this band of individuals that came in contact with Mohammed Yusuf, who, following conviction about his newfound ideology, altered the message of his religious sermons to the extent that he was later prevented from preaching at the Indimi mosque in Maiduguri around the year 2000.

While contention over the precise year of Boko Haram's formation is not the main focus of this section, it is important to note that the trajectory of the group's journey predates the period that is commonly assumed and analysed by scholars. More significantly, the group's antecedents prior to 2002 underscore similarities with some of the circumstances surrounding the *Maitatsine*[12] uprising during the 1980s in northern Nigeria. What is noteworthy about the period between 2002 and 2009 is the fact that Mohammed Yusuf is believed to have successfully gained a huge followership comprised of individuals aged between 17 and 30 years old.[13] Many poor families and unemployed youths from northern Nigeria, as well as neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon, enrolled in Yusuf's religious complex, which included a mosque and school used for ideological propagation. In fact, in 2004, the group extended this structure to Yusuf's home state of Yobe where a base called "Afghanistan" was established in the village of Kanamma. Boko Haram initiated social programmes aimed at helping the impoverished and the indigent. The group's rhetoric appeared to be populist because it came across strongly as a defence for the common northerner against the rapacious plundering of the rich as represented by the state itself.[14]

When translated from Hausa language into English, Boko Haram conveys a meaning which suggests that "Western education is sinful". However, in his study of "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Nigeria", Abiodun Alao[15] draws attention to a clarification made by the group's leadership about how the group's belief actually affirms the supremacy of Islamic culture and civilisation, rather than just a limited opposition to Western education. In its early years, the group generated mass appeal among thousands of youths who were already disenchanted with the Nigerian state, which Boko Haram regarded as a poorly administered secular system. The group's name was further indicative of the bidding games over Islamic authenticity that undergird the Salafi discourse appropriated by the Kanuri and disaffected Hausa against an already Islamised elite, resented for the prevalence of corruption and white-collar crime.[16] Boko Haram also impugned the political elites of northern Nigeria for their cooperation with Christian political leaders within the national framework of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.[17]

---

[11] I. Gusau, "Boko Haram: How it All Began", *Sunday Trust* (17 June 2011), http://sundaytrust.com.ng/index.php/the-arts/35-people-in-the-news/people-in-the-news/5869-boko-haram-how-it-all-began.

[12] In the early 1970s, Mohammed Marwa, popularly known as Maitatsine, began espousing radical Islamic preaching in northern Nigeria. This later resulted in widespread riots and the deaths of more than 4,000 Nigerians. Between 1980 and 1985, northern states such as Kaduna, Borno, Bauchi and Kano experienced a spate of violence, with Kano bearing the brunt of fierce riots in October 1982. For detailed analysis of the Maitatsine crisis, see A. Adesoji, "The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria", *Africa Spectrum* 45, no. 2 (2010), pp. 95-108. For an in-depth study of the links between Maitatsine and Boko Haram, see A. Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigeria State", *Africa Today* 57, no. 4 (2011), pp. 98-119. Further discussions on this are detailed in A. Alao, "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Nigeria", *Country Report,* (London: Conflict, Security and Development Group, 2012).

[13] I. Ker, "Diagnostic Review of Insurgency in Nigeria: The Cultural Dimension", *The Eminent and Expert Working Group Meeting on National Counter Insurgency Strategy* (2012), The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Plateau State, p. 12.

[14] W. Hansen and U. Musa, "Fanon, the Wretched and Boko Haram", *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2013), pp. 281-296.

[15] A. Alao, "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Nigeria" (2010), p. 44.

[16] M. Tanchum, "Al-Qa'ida's West African Advance: Nigeria's Boko Haram, Mali's Tuareg, and the Spread of Salafi Jihadism", *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* VI, no. 2 (2012), pp. 75-90.

[17] Ibid.

Boko Haram's popularity in northern Nigeria benefitted immensely from the immediate post-September 11 global context, which was characterised by al Qaeda's anti-Western avowals calling for universal jihad. In spite of widespread condemnation against the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States (US), there was a prevailing mood among numerous young Muslims in northern Nigeria which drew inspiration from the "guts" that Osama bin Laden personified. While there was an increase in religious consciousness,[18] 2002 also saw a rapid increase in the number of babies bearing the name Osama in northern Nigeria. In Kano State, where there were celebrations after the September 11 attacks, seven out of ten babies in a particular hospital were reported to have been given the name by their parents.[19] The ensuing military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, which commenced in 2001 and 2003 respectively, coincided with diffuse events in Nigeria that inadvertently created the ideal environment for Boko Haram to capitalise on. Muslims in the Middle East were thus portrayed as oppressed brethren in the eyes of socio-economically vulnerable youths amid an atmosphere of religious anxiety. Expressions of sympathy by "comrades" in northern Nigeria steadily transcended to bolder expressions of violence, aided by the catalytic and charismatic input of Boko Haram's leadership.

It is important to briefly draw attention to another historical detail that may have also fed into the contemporary dynamics of support for Boko Haram's rise and insurgency. Prior to British colonisation, the current region of north-eastern Nigeria was a territory under the sovereign control of the Bornu Empire, composed of a majority of Kanuri-Muslims. However, the imposition of British control contributed to an increased allegiance of the local people to the Bornu Sultanate, as well as profound dissatisfaction with the activities of the British authorities.[20] It can be argued that this fuelled the rise of fundamentalism among the Kanuri. Although this anti-colonial discontent was not unique to only the Kanuri people, it could help to explain aspects of the genesis of sympathy and popular support for Boko Haram.[21]

While the group focused on internal planning and mobilisation, this state of affairs was complicated by conflicts with the Nigerian police in communities such as Gwoza, Borno State in 2004. Clashes with security agencies later extended to other areas including Kanamma, Geidam and Damaturu in neighbouring Yobe State. By October 2004, Boko Haram ambushed a police patrol team in Kala-Balge, near Lake Chad, killing three officers and capturing twelve who were later killed.[22] The combination of local and global factors associated with the foundational years of Boko Haram contributed to the elicitation of public support enjoyed by the group. However, this fusion was not devoid of the intervention of political actors in Nigeria's northern establishment.

3. Political Interests and Elite Exploitation

The spectrum of public support for Boko Haram is representative of both active and passive elements of Nigerian society. Passive supporters may not make personal sacrifices in the form of suicide attacks. However, their sympathy with the activities of insurgents, as well as refusal to betray them, is a key factor that undermines the government's counter-terrorism efforts.[23] Therefore, public support for the purpose of this paper refers to both, active and passive backing of the group by sections of Nigerian society.

---

[18] Part of this heightened consciousness was reflected in the increasing number of Islamic conferences organised specifically for youths. In 2004, the author of this paper observed and participated in one such forum titled: 'Islam and Christianity: Any Meeting Point?'. It was under the auspices of the Muslim Student's Society of one of the major universities in Nigeria.

[19] See BBC News, "Osama baby craze hits Nigeria" (3 January 2002), http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1741171.stm.

[20] The radical consciousness of the Kanuri people of present day Borno State was also reflected in the formation of the Borno Youth Movement. It was a Nigerian political party founded in June 1954 that challenged colonial rule, while calling for administrative reforms of native authorities.

[21] I. Ker, "Diagnostic Review of Insurgency in Nigeria: The Cultural Dimension" (2012), p. 10.

[22] International Crisis Group, "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict", *International Crisis Group Africa Report* no. 168 (2010), http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/nigeria/168-northern-nigeria-background-to-conflict.aspx.

[23] I. Ker, "Diagnostic Review of Insurgency in Nigeria" (2012), p. 11.

In January 2012, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan noted that some sympathisers of Boko Haram were not only members of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of his government, but also the country's armed forces.[24] Although intelligence reports in 2013 appear to suggest that the group's support base is generally weak,[25] earlier periods are highly indicative of the passive, yet profound role that political entities may have played in bolstering the group. For instance, the expression of this tacit role by northern Nigerian elites is reflected in the complex political dynamics in Borno State. Before 2009, Boko Haram was believed to be under the influence of key politicians. There have been suspicions that certain political elites in Borno State funded the group and lifestyle of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. Such individuals were further described as politicians who relied on the popular support which Yusuf could amass in favour of electoral victory during elections in 2003 and 2007. In fact, during this period, an influential affiliate of Yusuf's group was appointed as the Commissioner of Religious Affairs in Borno State. This man was known as Alhaji Buji Foi and before his death at the hands of security forces in July 2009, he was regarded as a major financier of Boko Haram.

While the late Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf was executed in a similar fashion around the same time, evidence of popular (and political) support for Yusuf was reflected in his position as a Borno State representative in Nigeria's Supreme Council of Sharia. Northern Nigerians who lent support to Boko Haram in the past are suspected to have done so partly because they believed in the group's radical ideology. However, more significantly, when this ideology resonates among individuals with access to power and resources, it clearly benefits the group's operational capacities.[26] Political actors who at one period or the other associated themselves with Boko Haram's leadership capitalised on the ability of the group to mobilise broad support from its members. This support was of course based on Yusuf's access to resources, which was partly invested in the acquisition of dozens of taxis, buses and motorcycles that he distributed to unemployed youths who became members of his group. While these ventures generated daily monetary returns to the group's coffers, they also endeared the teeming population of jobless youths to Yusuf.[27]

It is important to point out that prior to 2009, the activities of Boko Haram were yet to be regarded as a major security threat to the country. Therefore, the prevailing perception of the group by many northern indigenes at the time was that of a radical organisation with occasional tendencies towards violence. The theory of securitisation as advanced by the Copenhagen School[28] helps to make sense of the counter-terrorism dynamics that followed the Nigerian government's reaction to Boko Haram in 2009. In July that year, over 1,000 people lost their lives in several cities across the northern region as a result of major clashes between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces. This created the conditions under which the then Yar 'Adua government was able to declare the group as a significant security threat to the country. More recently in June 2013, securitisation of the group was reinforced by President Jonathan, who authorised the gazetting of an order which officially brought the activities of Boko Haram within the purview of Nigeria's Terrorism Prevention Act.[29]

---

[24] See A. Ogbu, "Jonathan: Boko Haram in Government, Threat Worse Than Civil War", *This Day* (8 January 2012), http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/jonathan-boko-haram-in-govt-threat-worse-than-civil-war/106713/.

[25] Interview by author with a Nigerian security official in May 2013. There have been a number of Boko Haram-inspired attacks in 2013. However, there is no evidence reflecting a significant increase in offensive capability. For instance, since the high profile attack on an international organisation such as the United Nations office in Abuja in 2011, the group has not been able to stage a similarly sophisticated offensive on a global target.

[26] A. Bello, "Boko Haram: The Greatest Security Threat to the Sovereignty of Nigeria" (2013), p. 70.

[27] Ibid.

[28] The foundational understanding of the securitisation theory can be found in B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[29] T. Usman, "Jonathan officially declares Boko Haram a terrorist organisation", *Premium Times* (4 June 2013), http://premiumtimesng.com/news/137586-jonathan-officially-declares-boko-haram-a-terrorist-organisation.html.

The securitisation policy appeared to diminish the appeal that Boko Haram exuded among political circles and altered the perception of some who previously saw the group as one with legitimate motives.[30] It further induced a surge in the exchange of allegations between political elites suspected to be affiliated with Boko Haram before 2009. For instance, in 2011, a senator representing one of the senatorial districts in Borno State refuted allegations of association with Boko Haram following the arrest and interrogation of a group member known as Mallam Ali Konduga.[31] More pointed suspicions have characterised the altercation between another serving legislator from Borno State and a former governor. A recent thrust for this controversy stems from the arrest of Shuaibu Bama, who happens to be a nephew of a serving senator, and who was arrested at the house of a former governor in October 2012.[32] While these issues remain tainted with some obscurity, it should be noted that allegations exchanged between (political) elites which hint at Boko Haram affiliation can also be a shrewd political tool to neutralise opposition within the context of state politics. However, beyond this ambiguity is the fact that since the takeover of Boko Haram's leadership by Abubakar Shekau, accompanied by the escalation of violence since July 2009, the evolution and outlook of the group has grown beyond proportions that both political elites (and leaders) can manage.

4. Socio-Economic Drivers: Poverty and Underdevelopment

One significant factor that has stimulated the drive towards violent extremism, recruitment and support for Boko Haram is economic deprivation. Abject poverty and economic dislocation of livelihoods have drastically reduced the options of many young Nigerians in the northern region. As highlighted above, deducing from the structural violence paradigm, individual and group grievances, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and economic marginalisation, can be used as mobilising instruments by sinister groups to find support and recruits for terrorist violence.[33] As this section will highlight, in the particular context of Nigeria, it is the combination of these factors that Boko Haram has exploited in a bid to gain support for its activities in northern Nigeria.

In May 2013, the Nigerian government released dozens of women and teenagers previously detained as relatives of suspected Boko Haram members. Among the youths were individuals who confessed to previously accepting payments of 5,000 Nigerian Naira from Boko Haram militants, who in turn provided them with kegs of fuel to set schools ablaze in Maiduguri, Borno State.[34] This is indicative of the economic desperation expressed by thousands of youths who have been rendered vulnerable by the shortcomings of Nigeria's leadership over several decades. According to Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the measure of relative poverty[35] is most apparent in the northern region. In comparison with the southeast and southwest zones, which have relative poverty rates of 67.0% and 59.1% respectively, the north-east and north-west zones have higher figures of 76.3%

---

[30] During the major Boko Haram uprising in July 2009, several Christians and Muslims in the north either lost their lives or suffered great loss of property.

[31] Y. Alli and G. Ogunwale, "Boko Haram Sponsors: SSS Detains Senator", *The Nation* (22 November 2011), http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/27140-boko-haram-sponsors-sss-detains-senator.html.

[32] A. Isah, "Ex-Governor Modu Sheriff Is After My Seat, Senator Zannah", *Leadership* (29 October 2012), http://leadership.ng/nga/articles/38610/2012/10/29/exgov_modu_sheriff_after_my_seat_sen_zannah.html?quicktabs_1=2&quicktabs_2=0.

[33] I. Briscoe and B. van Ginkel, "The Nexus between Development and Security" (2013), p. 5.

[34] N5,000 is equivalent to approximately 25 Euro. See Y. Ibrahim and H. Matazu, "Boko Haram Pardon: 23 Women, 35 Kids Freed", *Weekly Trust* (1 June 2013), http://weeklytrust.com.ng/index.php/top-stories/12796-boko-haram-pardon-23-women-35-kids-freed.

[35] Relative poverty is defined by reference to the living standards of majority in a given society.

and 77.7% of relative poverty.[36] In regard to other vital indicators such as the education of girls, there are similar patterns of inequality with the northern region having much lower enrolment rates in comparison with the south. However, it is important to point out that the contrast in overall deprivation levels between the north and south is also a consequence of bad governance by successive northern leaders in their constituencies.

The phenomenon of the "youth bulge" in Africa and particularly in Nigeria has further increased the steady supply of economically-deprived individuals who have become susceptible to recruitment by Boko Haram. With almost 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has one of the youngest population groups in the world and it is growing rapidly.[37] While Nigeria is firmly within the category of a very young age structure, with nearly three-quarters of its population under the age of 30,[38] political violence inspired by marginalised youths in the country are stark reminders of the negative impact exceedingly large and mismanaged youth populations can exert across the world. Although many scholars are justified in pointing out that the connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect and complicated,[39] the huge number of young people living on the margins of Nigerian society intensifies these linkages.

Ahmed Salkida, who had close contact with Mohammed Yusuf, held the belief that followers of Boko Haram were numbering up to hundreds of thousands, most of them *Almajiris*, school dropouts, renegade civil servants and parliamentary staff.[40] While the lack of reliable data and the difficulty of discerning between passive and active support for the group still poses a challenge, as of May 2013, Boko Haram youths were reported to still abound in areas such as Sambisa Games Reserves Forest in Borno State.[41] Although socio-economic deprivation is clearly a powerful variable in the crisis equation in Nigeria, caution must be exercised in the way its predictive value is underscored. This is because there are other intervening variables which must be examined. Therefore, in considering the theoretical relevance of structural violence in a crisis that has a sectarian angle, reducing the Boko Haram crisis to causes such as economic inequality and social marginalisation can obscure analysis of the role which other factors play – the most predominant among them being religion.

5. Religion: Opium of the Masses?

The factor of religion is examined here because of the central role it plays as a defining feature and fault line of the Nigerian state. In Nigeria, the two dominant religions of Christianity and Islam have considerable reverence for the respective spiritual headship provided by their leaders, and this has been a major issue underlining sectarian consciousness, tensions and radicalisation.[42] More significantly, nearly every decade of Nigeria's contemporary history is replete with violence and conflicts that have religious undertones. Prior to Nigeria's civil war, thousands of southern Igbos of Christian orientation were killed by northern Hausas (Muslims) in 1966. In 1980, hundreds died as a result of several weeks of rioting sparked by a confrontation between the Maitatsine

---

[36] National Bureau of Statistics, "*Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report*" (2012), p. 16, http://www.proshareng.com/news/16302.html.

[37] African Union, "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend for Africa's Socio-Economic Development", *State of the African Population Report* (2012), p. 33.

[38] E. Leahy et al., "The Shape of Things To Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World", *Population Action International* (2007, updated 2011), p. 26.

[39] See e.g. A. Krueger and J. Malečková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003), pp. 119-144.

[40] W. Hansen and U. Musa, "Fanon, the Wretched and Boko Haram" (2013), p. 9. Ahmed Salkida is one of the few Nigerian journalists who interviewed the late Mohammed Yusuf. Claiming threats against his life and family, Salkida reportedly left Nigeria in 2013 for the United Arab Emirates.

[41] A serving Senator of Borno State shed light on this during an interview which was posted online on YouTube on 12 May 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKdRi_MKFnc.

[42] A. Alao, "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Nigeria" (2010)*,* p. 12.

group[43] and the Nigerian Police at a rally in Kano State. In 1991, over 200, mostly southern Christians, lost their lives while over 20 churches were burnt by Muslims reacting to news of a planned visit by German Christian evangelist Reinhard Bonnke to Nigeria.[44] The 2000s ushered Nigerians into the bloodiest decade in which thousands have died as a result of Christian-Muslim clashes and terrorist violence instigated by Boko Haram. Religion in some cases thus appears to be the language of politics exploited by both state and non-state actors towards ends that are essentially parochial.

However, beyond these, religion by itself is not the problem or cause of the crisis in northern Nigeria. Rather, the destructive exploitation of Nigeria's religious temperament by Boko Haram has been contrived into a key driver of public support for violence in the country. It is the manipulation of religion that has been capitalised on by Boko Haram to the detriment of the Nigerian state while misrepresenting the Islamic faith and community. This point is crucial for an understanding of how the cause of conflict is not based on the mere presence of the factor of religion. Rather, conflict erupts when this factor, individually or collectively with other factors, is manipulated in favour (or disfavour) of certain interests. This assertion about the role of religion is also acknowledged by Jeffrey Seul, who explains that "religion is not the cause of 'religious conflict'".[45] Seul notes that when conflicts involving one or more religious groups occur, the combatants may be emboldened by a sense of religiously-defined identity and purpose, and their traditions may provide a fund of symbolic, moral and institutional basis that can be used to mobilise the group and legitimise its cause.[46] This occurred in the Nigerian case: while religion is essentially a force for good, Boko Haram employs it as a machination to express high levels of negativity. It has thus been stage-managed by the group as an instrument for stereotyping and demonising opponents, such that exhortations to violence in northern Nigeria have acquired great potency once framed in religious terms.[47]

More often than not, the predominant narrative advanced by Boko Haram has been the call for a Sharia state in Nigeria. For many years, this demand resonated with the religious aspirations of many young Muslims who were drawn by the group's assurance of political and economic emancipation. Consequently, the surge in the group's membership translated into widespread attacks against targets that are symbolically linked to the Christian community in Nigeria (Christian churches, holy days of Christian worship and Christians themselves). Some of these incidents include the attack on St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla on the outskirts of Abuja which claimed at least 35 lives on Christmas day 2011; the suicide attack on the Church of Christ in Nigeria in Jos on 26 February 2012; and the attacks close to the Evangelical Church of West Africa in Kaduna State on Easter Sunday, 8 April 2012. The character of these targets, however, does not conceal the fact that victims of the group's assaults also include Muslims who reside within northern states already governed by Sharia law in Nigeria.

In his book, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty,* Stuart Elden[48] makes a compelling attempt to explain how terrorist attacks targeted at US interests are part of a complex chain of cause and effect that fit into a nuanced and broader geo-political picture, into which countries like Nigeria fall. For instance, Elden's analysis of Osama bin Laden's message broadcasted on 11 February 2003 informs an understanding of why certain countries like Nigeria are experiencing (terrorist) violence today. In the broadcast, bin Laden criticised 'illegitimate' Muslim nations that have become 'apostate' and are in need of liberation by jihad.[49] Evidently, it is this rhetoric of liberation that Boko Haram has used in anchoring its call for a replacement of the Nigerian

---

[43] See footnote 12 for details on the Maitatsine as a violent extremist group in northern Nigeria.
[44] International Crisis Group, "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict" (2010).
[45] J. Seul, "'Ours is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 5 (1999), pp. 553-569.
[46] Ibid., p. 564.
[47] International Crisis Group, "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict" (2010).
[48] S. Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
[49] Ibid., p. 41.

federation with a pure Sharia state. However, this objective is problematic for a variety of reasons, not in the least because Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria clearly states that "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State religion".[50]

The escalation of violence and its impact on the northern region appears to have diminished the influence which the call for a (Boko Haram-styled) Sharia imposition previously conveyed. Similar to the actions of al Qaeda, the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram is not religiously inspired; rather they purport to be religiously justified by manipulating Islamic law and its sources in order to legitimise themselves in the eyes of Muslims. Indeed, within mainstream Sunni legal writings on the conduct of war, it is forbidden to intentionally kill individuals classified under the category of non-combatants.[51] Consequently, a number of leaders in the Nigerian Muslim community have spoken against Boko Haram's professed objectives and actions. Some of these individuals include Mallam Yusuf Inuwa, late Sheikh Abba Aji, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi and late Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam. The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III – the spiritual head of Muslims in Nigeria – has further denounced the actions of the group by calling them evil.[52]

6. Transnational Drivers: Firearms, Funds and Foreign Fighters

Following the extra-judicial killing of Boko Haram's leader in 2009, the group's reliance on domestic public support appeared to be in dire need of external reinforcement, especially in the form of weapons and fighters. While such external involvement has for long remained contentious, they appeared to be more apparent in light of Boko Haram's insurgency since July 2009. This external reinforcement seemed to have been reflected in the sophistication of the attack on the UN office in Abuja in August 2011. The incident helped to corroborate the often assumed transnational dimension of the crisis in Nigeria. Not only was the UN (suicide) attack a novelty in the country, it underscored a semblance with terrorist tactics employed by infamous groups such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al Shabaab,[53] and the al Qaeda core. In May 2013, security agencies in Nigeria discovered an arms warehouse at the residence of a Lebanese national in Kano State. The cache of weapons was located in an underground bunker beneath the master bedroom and investigations point towards the existence of a Hezbollah terrorist cell in Nigeria with links to Boko Haram.[54] Some of the weapons confiscated included rocket-propelled guns and anti-personnel mines, which were clearly beyond the range of weapons normally stolen by Boko Haram from local police stations.[55]

In addition to allegations of financial proceeds from local politicians, businessmen and organised criminal networks, suspicions have increased with regard to Boko Haram's interception of charity funds generated by the UK-based aid organisation Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust. In 2012, Lord Alton of Liverpool raised fears in the British

---

[50] Federal Government of Nigeria, *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with Amendments* (2011), http://www.rvision.org/epubl/Niger_constitution_1999.pdf.

[51] A. Achtar, "Challenging Al-Qa'ida's Justification of Terror", in D. Fisher and B. Wicker, eds., *Just War on Terror: A Christian and Muslim Response* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 32.

[52] The Nation, "Sultan Condemns Bombing after Meeting with President" (28 December 2011), http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/31354-sultan-condemns-bombing-after-meeting-with-president.html.

[53] The author's conviction about transnational links between Boko Haram and al Shabaab was informed by conversations with a Somali researcher in January 2012. These conversations were further reinforced during the author's 6-month stay in Nairobi at the height of *Operation Linda Nchi* launched by the Kenya Defence Forces against al Shabaab.

[54] Sahara Reporters, "Nigerian Army Links Boko Haram to Hezbollah" (30 May 2013), http://saharareporters.com/news-page/nigerian-army-links-boko-haram-hezbollah.

[55] Such incidents include the raid on police stations in Bama and Gwoza areas of Borno State in September 2004.

parliament about Boko Haram's alleged links with this organisation.[56] While the exact context of financial flow from this organisation remains unclear, it calls to mind previous claims about this organisation's involvement in financing a violent uprising in Yobe State, Nigeria in 2003. In relation to this, the director of the charity was arrested by the Nigerian authorities in February 2004 following the discovery of his financial transactions running into millions of Naira with a Kano-based businessman who acted as a middleman between the charity and Boko Haram.[57]

In a court case involving Kabiru Sokoto, the Boko Haram mastermind behind the 2011 attack on St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, the name of an Algerian organisation was revealed by prosecution witnesses based on the testimony of the accused. When translated from Arabic, the name of the organisation denotes "the group from the sunset". Sokoto further confessed that Boko Haram had earlier received a cash donation from this organisation.[58] These external funding links have similarly found expression elsewhere. In September 2011, rare pointers regarding Boko Haram's funding sources were further disclosed during a visit led by former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo and civil rights activist Mallam Shehu Sani to the relatives of the late Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf. On this occasion, Yusuf's family revealed that about 40% of the group's funding came from outside Nigeria.[59] They further noted that while the group had representatives in Chad, Niger and Cameroon, it would be difficult for the Nigerian army to crush Boko Haram because of their capacity to reach out beyond Nigeria if they so desired. These statements match some accounts which explain how suicide bombers of the group are usually Chadians, Nigeriens and Cameroonians.[60]

The regional proximity of groups such as AQIM and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) further problematises the external ramifications of Boko Haram's activities. Although a well-defined network between these Sahelian groups and Boko Haram may not be identifiable for now, isolated alliances between them appear to exist.[61] In November 2011, the Algerian Deputy Foreign Minister cited intelligence reports that indicated ties between Boko Haram and AQIM.[62] In June 2012, this claim was followed up by the US' designation of Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kambar as global terrorists with close ties to AQIM. It is believed that Kambar, a native of Borno State, trained together with al-Barnawi in Algeria at an AQIM training camp around 2009, following the major Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria that year. Beyond this, a number of arrests following counter-insurgency operations by the Nigerian government have revealed an increasing number of Boko Haram-hired mercenaries.[63] Some of these foreign fighters include Cameroonians and Nigerians who through the assistance of local Almajiris participated in Boko Haram attacks in Bama area of Borno State. In June 2013, the Nigerian government's Joint Task Force (JTF) arrested a major recruiter for Boko Haram as several militants reportedly fled from Maiduguri towards Niger Republic. These terrains beyond Nigeria's borders also harbour camps where Boko Haram militants have trained in the past. Quite understandably, these external dynamics influenced Nigeria's military involvement in the Sahel as part of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).

---

[56] J. Doward, "Peer raises fears over UK charity's alleged links to Boko Haram", *The Guardian* (9 September 2012), http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/09/uk-charity-boko-haram.

[57] A. Bello, "Boko Haram: The Greatest Security Threat to the Sovereignty of Nigeria" (2013), p. 70.

[58] I. Chiedozie and O. Adetayo, "Boko Haram: Amnesty panel meets Kabiru Sokoto, others", *Punch* (10 May 2013), http://www.punchng.com/news/boko-haram-amnesty-panel-meets-kabiru-sokoto-others/.

[59] Al Jazeera, "Suspects charged in Nigeria bombing" (25 December 2011), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/09/201191741850730889.html.

[60] Y. Alli, "How bombers are chosen, by Boko Haram suspect", *The Nation* (9 February 2012), http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/36248-how-bombers-are-chosen-by-boko-haram-suspect.html.

[61] A. Nossiter, "Increase in Jihadi Attacks in Africa May Reflect Movement's Weakness", *New York Times* (24 September 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/25/world/africa/increase-in-jihadi-attacks-in-africa-may-reflect-movements-weakness.html?_r=1&.

[62] L. Chikhi, "Algeria says Nigeria's Boko Haram tied to Al-Qaeda", *Reuters* (13 November 2011), http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/13/us-nigeria-sect-algeria-idUSTRE7AC0SV20111113.

[63] Interview by author with a Nigerian security official.

7. Recent Trends in Public Support for Boko Haram

The Boko Haram crisis is rapidly unfolding with dynamics that constantly imbue analysis of public support for the group with much difficulty. As explained in this paper, this complexity is underscored by the way Boko Haram has been able to exploit the political, socio-economic and ethno-religious fault lines of the Nigerian state. The challenges presented are also a consequence of the group's ability to appropriate discourses of anti-Western rhetoric generated by regional and global non-state actors. However, there remains the overarching question about the exact level of public support Boko Haram currently draws upon. In view of this inquiry, this paper suggests that in spite of the persistence of violence in northern Nigeria, public support for the group is actually on the decline. This position is advanced for a number of reasons. First, the increasing reports of foreign fighters from neighbouring countries may be an indication that the once robust domestic membership of the group could have diminished in size. Although this trend may also appear to suggest that the group has been able to inject some "special skill" from outside Nigeria's borders, it nonetheless matches the emergence of a more loosely-defined, more decentralised and autonomous organisation under its current leadership. More so, one that appears to be in desperate need of support and sustenance by all means possible.

Second, although there have been several more terrorist incidents following high profile attacks such as the 2011 assault on the UN office in Abuja, these attacks have reflected a relatively lower level of sophistication in terms of offensive capability. The decrease in assault sophistication may well be a sign of a weakening internal structure that previously relied on the inspiration drawn from group members. As a result, there have been more cases of "hit and run" guerrilla-style attacks and fewer instances of attacks capable of successfully hitting a high profile target. While this of course may be an indication of the government's enhanced intelligence capabilities, the situation also presents itself as a consequence of an undermined and less cohesive group.

Thirdly, since the death of its first leader Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram's ideological rhetoric appears to have undergone some form of alteration in terms of its narrative. It used to be a vehement and non-negotiable call for a Sharia state. However, the tone of this message seems to have been watered down and in fact, lost some of its potency. For instance, at certain stages, the group switched to a demand for the release of its comrades from detention centres – hence the series of attacks on several prison centres in some northern states.[64] In other periods, there were reports that factions within Boko Haram were predisposed to peaceful talks and negotiations with the Nigerian government. This dilution of the group's initially definable mandate is further reflected by the splinters that have broken away to form other groups such as the *Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan*. This toned-down narrative could therefore be seen as an indicator that the group is recalibrating in order to sustain – or preferably increase – its membership numbers.

A fourth pointer towards Boko Haram's loss of public support is evidenced by the increasing frustration and resentment among many Nigerians against the group's increasingly violent and destructive activities.[65] This of course is to a large extent a cumulative reaction to the loss of lives and destruction of livelihoods caused by the group in the northern region. In fact, youth groups have started to take matters into their own hands by conducting raids against suspected Boko Haram members, and have even joined the military JTF in recent operations against militants in areas such as Hausari and Fezzan in the city of Maiduguri in Borno State.[66]

---

[64] Some of the attacks on prisons include: Bauchi State in September 2010; Adamawa State in April 2011; Kogi State in February 2010; Yobe State in March 2012; and Borno State in March 2013.

[65] In July 2013, enraged youths in Maiduguri under the tag "Civilian JTF", went in search of political elites suspected to be sponsors of Boko Haram in Borno State. See M. Olugbode, "Boko Haram: Irate Youths Attempt to Raze Sheriff's Residence in Maiduguri", *This Day* (2 July 2013), http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/boko-haram-irate-youths-attempt-to-raze-sheriff-8217-s-residence-in-maiduguri/152156/.

[66] The author's view on the waning support for Boko Haram was informed by an interview with a key security official in 2013.

Additionally, the Nigerian government's securitisation policy against Boko Haram, which labels and criminalises the group, seems to have diminished the appeal of the group at least within political circles, altering the perception of some who previously saw the group as one with legitimate motives.

The collective impression underscored by the aforementioned indicators is that Boko Haram as a well-defined and structured group appears to be losing its ability to elicit broad-based support from the masses in northern Nigeria. This brief prognosis is based on emerging trends and conditions which are naturally subject to change. However, it does in no way suggest that policymakers should ignore the need to address the underlying (and longstanding) political, socio-economic and ideological drivers that have for long underpinned public support for the group. Indeed, while public support for Boko Haram may be on the decline, the principal drivers capable of altering the public support dimension of the crisis in the long-term persist and require critical attention. There is need for a bold mix of interventions and partnerships that combine elements of both hard and soft power. Exactly how these approaches can be applied by both domestic actors and external partners thus requires an understanding of the various drivers that this paper has examined.

8. Towards a Concerted Counter-Terrorism Approach

Given the complexities of the Boko Haram threat as described thus far, a comprehensive approach is needed to effectively counter the group, its appeal and public support base, and to provide avenues for dealing with the past as well as the way forward. The call for a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism in Nigeria is one that must go beyond hard-line or military responses. The government's declaration of a state of emergency in the north-east may curtail the frequency of attacks. However, this will only serve as a temporary measure because longstanding issues with a political, socio-economic and religious character still retain the potential to instigate future groups similar to Boko Haram if they are not addressed. A comprehensive approach necessarily needs to be built on a deep understanding of the drivers and dynamics of, in particular, the north-east Nigerian context. In addition to hard, military measures and security cooperation with neighbouring states, such a counter-terrorism approach needs to encompass inter-religious dialogues and mediation processes. It ought to address issues of socio-economic development and governance, as well as the problem of prosecuting, detaining and rehabilitating Boko Haram militants who have broken the law. While this counter-terrorism approach has to be context-specific, locally-inspired and placed within a framework of human security, it should also build on the collaboration of and engagement with external and non-governmental actors on all levels. The concerted approach will include the following elements.

Socio-economic Development, Youth Empowerment and Good Governance

Developmental reforms and policies need to be geared towards improving economic infrastructure, stimulating human enterprise and supporting political institutions that are corruption-free and accountable. The socio-economic security of individuals in northern Nigeria certainly needs a boost. However, this should be implemented along with the development of other regions in the country. Particular focus should be targeted at educational needs, and in fulfilling this requirement, women must be incorporated into a broad strategy of empowerment. Progress in these areas will help to undercut the ability of violent extremists who exploit the economically vulnerable in society. Improving governance, strengthening the rule of law and stemming the tide of corruption will also reduce the support base and appeal that Boko Haram has gained from the vast number of

---

Also see N. Musa, "JTF, youths arrest 30 Boko Haram members", *The Guardian* (11 June 2013), http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124320:jtf-youths-arrest-30-suspected-boko-haram-members&catid=1:national&Itemid=559.

unemployed youths. The extent to which youths are constructively engaged in their societies intrinsically determines their resolve to be less vulnerable to factors such as economic deprivation and political alienation, which may be conducive to the spread of violence. The failure of the government to constructively tap into the youth bulge in Nigeria has inadvertently created a steady supply of young and violent extremists for groups like Boko Haram. From the Niger Delta region to the northern region of Nigeria, youths are the victims in most of Nigeria's crises. While efforts to curtail these challenges require political will, the Northern States Governors Forum (NSGF) should be used as a platform by the central government to hold respective governors from that region to greater account.

Bridging the Knowledge-Policy Gap

The multi-dimensional nature of the Boko Haram crisis challenges conventional understanding of the drivers of terrorist violence. It does so through its provocation of multiple perspectives and theories through which researchers and policymakers analyse, interpret and develop counter-terrorism measures. There is a need for a deeper understanding of issues bordering on radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in Nigeria. Their linkages are complex and thus require critical analysis that can be carried out based on collaborative engagement of experts and joint research initiatives. Such empirical studies should aim to investigate causes, dynamics, actors and contexts. The conflict dynamics reflected in the north-eastern zone where states such as Borno and Yobe are located, are in stark contrast with the situation in the north-western zone with states such as Sokoto and Kebbi. To the extent that there are nuances in the way radicalisation and violent extremism connect and manifest, the entire northern region cannot therefore be taken for granted as a whole region engulfed in crisis. More critical research needs to be carried out. For instance, the analytical distinction between radicalisation and terrorist violence made by scholars such as John Horgan[67] helps to make sense of analyses that can be done in the different northern zones. Hence, there is need for more detailed and empirical research which can inform counter-terrorism initiatives that are context-specific, and for platforms that allow policymakers, practitioners, researchers and community organisations to share experiences, knowledge and cooperate in this shared challenge.

The Use of Force, National and Regional Intelligence Coordination

While the government's military approach cannot always match the hit-and-run guerrilla tactics of Boko Haram, the utility of force should not be completely discounted. The on-going state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States has emphasised armed action and so far, this has placed some pressure on several areas suspected to be hideouts of Boko Haram militants. The actions of the JTF, however, need to constantly reflect a sense of accountability towards the people whose security they have chosen to safeguard. The broader network of security sector actors, which includes the Nigerian Police, should avoid a repetition of extra-judicial killings and other forms of human rights abuses. As this paper has explained, the struggle against Boko Haram or terrorism in Nigeria transcends the country's borders. Therefore, the Nigerian government also needs to work more closely with its neighbours in the West African sub-region, the Sahel and the entire continent. They must strengthen coordination, improve intelligence gathering and facilitate the flow of crucial information in a timely and pre-emptive manner. Their actions must be able to rapidly adapt to the changing tactics adopted by infamous and criminal networks across various sub-regions in the continent. Intelligence and security agencies within Nigeria must also recognise that the realisation of objectives depends on their ability to work with and win the trust of local communities.

---

[67] John Horgan's explanation of how the relationship between radicalisation and terrorism is poorly understood speaks directly to some of the major issues that need critical understanding in the different zones of northern Nigeria. J. Horgan, "Discussion Point: The End of Radicalization?" (2012), http://www.start.umd.edu/start/announcements/announcement.asp?id=416.

Mediation, Peaceful Negotiation and Inter-Religious Dialogue

Mediation should not be relegated as a method that can be used to engage local non-state actors. It still offers a potentially useful opportunity in areas where the unidirectional approach of military force has fallen short.[68] Without doubt, mediation comes with its risks. However, in view of several attempts initiated by the Nigerian government to reach out to Boko Haram members in the past, this option still holds some significance, as long as it is strategically executed, focused and inclusive. In regard to inter-religious affairs, efforts to address Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria in previous years were reflected in the policy initiative that established the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) during the Obasanjo administration in 2000. Building upon this initiative, inter-religious dialogue and inter-faith working groups should be encouraged so that interaction can translate into greater understanding and cooperation in not only religious matters, but also socio-cultural and political issues. Furthermore, the government needs to engage credible Islamic scholars and experts, who can contribute to the process of de-mystifying doctrines which sectarian groups often distort and use in propagating extremist ideologies and violence within communities.

Detention, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Extremist Offenders

Little attention has been directed to the phenomenon of prison breaks and how its recurrence can be better addressed within a counter-terrorism framework for Nigeria. These jailbreaks across the north have been dramatic and their incidence reflected in a yearly series since 2010. They underscore issues bordering on the detention of extremist offenders and the need to focus on the challenges of rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders. What happens to alleged Boko Haram militants after arrest and detention? What is the nature of the rehabilitation phase? What measures can be put in place to safeguard the process of reinsertion and reintegration into communities? These questions and issues remain largely unexplored concepts within the narrative of counter-terrorism in Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011[69] and the Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act of 2013 accord little regard to these concerns. Policymakers need to consider this and ensure that the mechanisms of rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives are underpinned by detailed and unambiguous knowledge of domestic undercurrents. While this will help to inform effectiveness in implementation, there must also be a concomitant strengthening of the rule of law, judicial and prison systems in the country.

External Actors and Global Partners

From the experiences gained in conflict situations such as Iraq and Afghanistan, it is clear that solutions to challenges arising from the crisis in Nigeria must ultimately come from Nigerians. They must necessarily be home-driven and based on local knowledge inspired by local actors who understand the local dynamics within Nigeria. A society's path to peace and security greatly depends on the vision and values that can shape such a society's future and these can only come from within. While these solutions can certainly benefit from external support and cooperation, external actors must seek to not only engage with the Nigerian government at the highest levels in Abuja. They need to be more creative in their approach and intensify joint endeavours with academic and research institutions working on peace, conflict and terrorism issues. More specifically, external actors need to explore the possibilities of collaborative relationships with organisations that work at the intersection of academic research, policy and mentoring on youth leadership. One such organisation is the African Leadership Centre (ALC),

---

[68] A. Olojo, "Engaging Boko Haram: Militarization, Mediation or Both?" *Global Observatory* (2012), New York: International Peace Institute, http://www.theglobalobservatory.org/analysis/358-engaging-boko-haram-militarization-mediation-or-both.html.

[69] National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011* (3 June 2011), http://easylawonline.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/terrorism-done.pdf.

which is a joint initiative of King's College London and the University of Nairobi. It is based on the African continent with an extensive network of young African men and women who are trained to become the next generation of leaders in countries like Nigeria. External collaboration with such organisations offers the advantage of credibility based on proven performance, first-hand local knowledge of country situations, the emphasis on youths as an agency of transformation, and its unique partnerships with several academic and policy institutions in Nigeria.

9. Concluding Remarks

Overall, policy responses to the Boko Haram crisis must be conceptualised within a framework that does not exclusively focus on (Muslim) youths as the problem. Indeed, as the crisis in the Niger Delta region of the country has shown, youths in the southern region of Nigeria are also capable of taking up arms against the Nigerian state. The Boko Haram crisis must be considered as part of the wider process of identity formation wherein Nigeria is struggling to define itself as a nation and people. It is a severe symptom of Nigeria's longstanding post-colonial struggle, which like previous crises, has once again unearthed pertinent national questions. However, more significantly, the crisis has demonstrated the sheer determination and resilience of the Nigerian people, while at the same time presenting another opportunity for progressive forces within the country to reclaim what has been lost.

Bibliography

Achtar, Ahmad. "Challenging Al-Qa'ida's Justification of Terror". In David Fisher and Brian Wicker, eds. *Just War on Terror: A Christian and Muslim Response*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010.

Adesoji, Abimbola. "The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria". *Africa Spectrum* 45, no. 2 (2010), pp. 95-108.

Adesoji, Abimbola. "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigeria State". *Africa Today* 57, no. 4 (2011), pp. 98-119.

African Union. "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend for Africa's Socio-Economic Development". *State of the African Population Report* (2012).

Alao, Abiodun. "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Nigeria". *Country Report 2010,* London: Conflict, Security and Development Group, 2012.

Al Jazeera. "Suspects charged in Nigeria bombing". (25 December 2011), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/09/201191741850730889.html.

Alli, Yusuf. "How bombers are chosen, by Boko Haram suspect". *The Nation* (9 February 2012), http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/36248-how-bombers-are-chosen-by-boko-haram-suspect.html.

Alli, Yusuf and Gbade Ogunwale. "Boko Haram Sponsors: SSS Detains Senator". *The Nation* (22 November 2011), http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/27140-boko-haram-sponsors-sss-detains-senator.html.

BBC News. "Osama baby craze hits Nigeria" (3 January 2002), http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1741171.stm.

Bello, Abdulmajeed. "Boko Haram: The Greatest Security Threat to the Sovereignty of Nigeria". *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences Research (IJMSSR)* 2, no. 2 (2013), p. 67.

Briscoe, Ivan and Bibi van Ginkel. "The Nexus between Development and Security: Searching for Common Ground in Countering Terrorism". *ICCT Policy Brief* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), http://www.icct.nl/download/file/Briscoe-van-Ginkel-Nexus-between-Security-and-Development-March-2013.pdf.

Buzan, Barry. *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

Chiedozie, Ihuoma and Olalekan Adetayo. "Boko Haram: Amnesty panel meets Kabiru Sokoto, others". *Punch* (10 May 2013), http://www.punchng.com/news/boko-haram-amnesty-panel-meets-kabiru-sokoto-others/.

Chikhi, Lamine. "Algeria says Nigeria's Boko Haram tied to Al-Qaeda". *Reuters* (13 November 2011), http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/13/us-nigeria-sect-algeria-idUSTRE7AC0SV20111113.

Doward, Jamie. "Peer raises fears over UK charity's alleged links to Boko Haram". *The Guardian* (9 September 2012), http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/09/uk-charity-boko-haram.

Elden, Stuart. *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Federal Government of Nigeria. "1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with Amendments" (2011), http://www.rvision.org/epubl/Niger_constitution_1999.pdf.

Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace and Peace Research". *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191.

Gusau, Isa Umar. "Boko Haram: How it All Began". *Sunday Trust* (17 June 2011), http://sundaytrust.com.ng/index.php/the-arts/35-people-in-the-news/people-in-the-news/5869-boko-haram-how-it-all-began.

Hansen, William and Umma A. Musa. "Fanon, the Wretched and Boko Haram". *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2013), pp. 281-296.

Horgan, John. "Discussion Point: The End of Radicalization?". National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2012), http://www.start.umd.edu/start/announcements/announcement.asp?id=416.

Ibrahim, Yahaya and Hamizu Kabir Matazu. "Boko Haram Pardon: 23 Women, 35 Kids Freed". *Weekly Trus*t (1 June 2013), http://weeklytrust.com.ng/index.php/top-stories/12796-boko-haram-pardon-23-women-35-kids-freed.

International Crisis Group. "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict". *International Crisis Group Africa Report* no. 168 (2010).

Isah, Ahuraka. "Ex-Governor Modu Sheriff Is After My Seat – Senator Zannah". *Leadership* (29 October 2012), http://leadership.ng/nga/articles/38610/2012/10/29/exgov_modu_sheriff_after_my_seat_sen_zannah.html?quicktabs_1=2&quicktabs_2=0.

Ker, Iomongu. "Diagnostic Review of Insurgency in Nigeria: The Cultural Dimension". *The Eminent and Expert Working Group Meeting on National Counter Insurgency Strategy* (2012), The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Plateau State.

Krueger, Alan and Jitka Malečková. "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?". *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003), pp.119-144.

Leahy, Elizabeth, Robert Engelman, Carolyn Gibb Vogel, Sarah Haddock and Tod Preston. "The Shape of Things To Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World". *Population Action International* (2007, updated 2011), p. 26.

Madike, Isioma. "Boko Haram: Rise of a deadly sect". *National Mirror* (19 June 2011), http://www.nationalmirroronline.net/sunday-mirror/big_read/14548.html.

Musa, Njadvara. "JTF, youths arrest 30 Boko Haram members". *The Guardian* (11 June 2013), http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124320:jtf-youths-arrest-30-suspected-boko-haram-members&catid=1:national&Itemid=559.

National Bureau of Statistics. "*Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report".* (2012), p. 16. http://www.tucrivers.org/tucpublications/Nigeria%20Poverty%20Profile%202010.pdf.

Nossiter, Adam. "Increase in Jihadi Attacks in Africa May Reflect Movement's Weakness". *New York Times* (24 September 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/25/world/africa/increase-in-jihadi-attacks-in-africa-may-reflect-movements-weakness.html?_r=1&.

Ogbu, Ahamefula. "Jonathan: Boko Haram in Government, Threat Worse Than Civil War". *This Day* (8 January 2012), http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/jonathan-boko-haram-in-govt-threat-worse-than-civil-war/106713/.

Olojo, Akinola. "Engaging Boko Haram: Militarization, Mediation or Both?". *Global Observatory* (2012), http://www.theglobalobservatory.org/analysis/358-engaging-boko-haram-militarization-mediation-or-both.html.

Olugbode, Michael. "Boko Haram: Irate Youths Attempt to Raze Sheriff's Residence in Maiduguri". *This Day* (2 July 2013), http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/boko-haram-irate-youths-attempt-to-raze-sheriff-8217-s-residence-in-maiduguri/152156/.

Sahara Reporters. "Nigerian Army Links Boko Haram to Hezbollah". (30 May 2013), http://saharareporters.com/news-page/nigerian-army-links-boko-haram-hezbollah.

Schuurman, Bart and Quirine Eijkman. "Moving Terrorism Research Forward: The Crucial Role of Primary Sources". *ICCT Background Note* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), http://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schuurman-and-Eijkman-Moving-Terrorism-Research-Forward-June-2013.pdf.

Seul, Jeffery. "'Ours is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict". *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 5 (1999), pp. 553-569.

Tanchum, Michael. "Al-Qa'ida's West African Advance: Nigeria's Boko Haram, Mali's Tuareg, and the Spread of Salafi Jihadism". *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* VI, no. 2 (2012), pp. 75-90.

Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011 (2011), http://easylawonline.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/terrorism-done.pdf.

The Nation. "Sultan Condemns Bombing after Meeting with President" (28 December 2011), http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/31354-sultan-condemns-bombing-after-meeting-with-president.html.

Ujah, Emma, Emeka Mamah, Kingsley Omonobi, Chioma Obinna, and Daniel Idonor. "Yar'Adua orders probe of Boko Haram leaders' killing". *Vanguard* (4 August 2009), http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/08/yaradua-orders-probe-of-boko-haram-leaders-killing/.

Usman, Talatu. "Jonathan officially declares Boko Haram a terrorist organisation". *Premium Ti*mes (4 June 2013), http://premiumtimesng.com/news/137586-jonathan-officially-declares-boko-haram-a-terrorist-organisation.html.

Walker, Andrew. "What is Boko Haram?". *USIP Special Report* (2012), Washington: United States Institute of Peace, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR308.pdf.