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Sectarian Rebellions in Post-Transition Nigeria Compared

A. Carl LeVan

The Boko Haram, a radical Islamic group based in north-east Nigeria, has killed over 1,000 people since mid-2011. This article explores the historical origins and structural drivers of Boko Haram and puts them into context. It argues that the Nigerian government's coercive response to Boko Haram has perpetuated a cycle of violence and undermined endogenous sources of moderation based on cultural, institutional, and political conditions. State repression to implement a counter-terrorism strategy has radicalized the group, created incentives to find international sympathizers, and contributes to fragmentation that impedes political solutions. A comparison with rebellions in the oil producing Niger Delta helps identify some barriers to and opportunities for conflict resolution.

Keywords Nigeria; African security; terrorism; Islamic extremism; Boko Haram

Introduction

After years of violence, Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta showed some signs of stabilizing in 2010. A government amnesty brought 26,000 militants out of the creeks and into a demobilization process, generously paying former rebels to disarm. That year the country's political institutions also emerged stronger after surviving a serious succession crisis in which the president disappeared from public view for nearly six months. Then, in May 2011, citizens cast their vote in an election that showed respectable improvement over previous civilian-organized elections. Two months later, though, Nigeria's political fortunes took a sharp turn. Radical Islamists popularly known as Boko Haram bombed the United Nations headquarters a few hundred yards away from the US Embassy in the capital city of Abuja. The group had staged sporadic attacks on police stations in the north-east since 2003, and its violence had been escalating since 2009. Bombings in the north-central city of Kano left 200 dead in January 2012, and attacks on newspapers, primary schools, and churches continue. According to new data from the Council on Foreign Relations, at least 2089 people died in 328 incidents involving Boko Haram between June 2011 and December 2012.[1]

The Nigerian government has interpreted this horrific violence as a threat to the state and adopted a counterterrorism strategy that employs heavy-handed use of force. President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in four

(out of 36) states, sending troops to stabilize the north-east, setting up a new counterterrorism unit, and comparing the violence to the country's civil war between 1967 and 1970. He has also utilized new executive authority acquired through anti-terrorism legislation to detain an undisclosed number of suspects, some of whom are reportedly in secret detention facilities (Daily Trust 2012). According to human rights organizations, the Nigerian security services bear the blame for perhaps half of the 3,000 people killed since 2009. Civilians caught in the middle are now among thousands of Internally Displaced Persons, many of whom have taken refuge in the already overpopulated capital of Abuja (Oyelere 2012).

However, Boko Haram can also be interpreted as an insurgency against a state with a fragile basis for legitimacy in flawed elections, a constitution decreed by a transitional military regime, a federal structure rooted in colonialism, and failed government performance in an acutely underdeveloped area of the country. From this perspective, a resolution to the violence plaguing the north-east will require many of the same political steps necessary to consolidate democracy, including public accountability for official abuses and institutional representation that promotes responsive government policy. Counterterrorism strategy has had the opposite effect, creating victims instead of popular allies and deepening the state's legitimacy crisis. State coercion in the absence of local cooperation has bred radicalism and missed opportunities to build confidence in civilian law enforcement.

In this essay, I first put the historical origins and structural drivers of Boko Haram into context. Since a variety of sources already offer helpful background (Johnson 2011, Pham 2012), I provide only a brief description of its rise from obscurity in 2003 to international notoriety today. Second, drawing upon Nigerian media reports, interviews, and primary sources, I develop a limited comparison with rebels in the Niger Delta. Oil from these southern states generates over 90 per cent of the country's export earnings. I acknowledge important differences between the rebellions, including the tactical uses of violence, and then identify core lessons from recent militant demobilization. The militarized response to Boko Haram's insurgency will internationalize the crisis, further radicalize it, and undermine endogenous sources of moderation. Third, I identify key conditions necessary for a political solution and some of the historical and institutional factors conducive to such a strategy. The conclusion identifies national security dilemmas facing both Nigeria and Western nations concerned about the spread of radical Islam, and lists several options for encouraging peaceful outcomes.

The Rise and Radicalization of Boko Haram

Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) is a radical Islamist sect that arose in the city of Maiduguri, in Nigeria's remote north-eastern state of Borno several years after Nigeria's 1999 transition to democracy. It is popularly

known as 'Boko Haram', a name based on a Hausa phrase roughly translating to 'Western education is sinful' or forbidden; scholars often emphasize that this is an ascribed name that stuck. It attracted little attention until 2009, when a massive crackdown by security forces killed its leader along with dozens of civilians unconnected with the group. Since then its attacks have primarily targeted government offices, churches, and primary schools. At least 3,000 people have been killed by violence attributed to either Boko Haram or state security forces (Leadership 2012). This section provides some basic background on its emergence and then relates its violence to Nigeria's post-transition politics and recurring historical debates.

In mid-2003 a group of about 200 Muslims moved from the city of Maiduguri to nearby Yobe State with the goal of establishing an isolated community living according to strict Islamic principles. The group became known as the 'Nigerian Taliban', and local residents complained to government authorities, who attempted to disband the group (Palmer 2007). In December 2003 a conflict with the police killed 70 members including the group's leader, Mohammed Ali. The surviving members, now led by Mohammed Yusuf, returned to Maiduguri. Rather than rejoining the Alhaji Muhammedu Ndimi Mosque, where many of the followers had previously worshipped, Yusuf set out to establish a new one. The subsequent assassination of a popular preacher at Ndimi in 2007 is significant because some sources implicate Yusuf, and this would pinpoint an early shift to violent tactics (Walker 2012). However, other evidence suggests that Yusuf urged his followers to remain peaceful and that he 'promoted the spread of Islamic government through dialogue' because he did not believe in violence (Human Rights Watch 2012). Clashes with authorities continued during the intervening years, and the group came to be known as Boko Haram, attacking police stations and defying government orders stop preaching. As tensions escalated, organizations such as the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria and the National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations unsuccessfully urged traditional leaders in the northeast to intervene to dissuade potential recruits by identifying flaws in Boko Haram's theology (Da'Wah Coordination Council of Nigeria 2009).

In June 2009 tensions burst out into the open. Though details are murky, police interrupted a funeral procession for a Boko Haram member, possibly to demand that the motorbike riders wear helmets (though this could also be a pretext for the police). In the ensuing altercation, police killed 17 people. A leading newspaper blasted the police for disproportionate use of force, urging 'a policy of persuasion and dialogue to deal with such issues', since 'force as a first line of attack, only makes matters worse' (Daily Trust 2009). Mohammed Yusuf delivered on a pledge to retaliate with attacks on police stations in Borno and Bauchi states on 26 July. When the military and the police raided Boko Haram's headquarters in Maiduguri, approximately 800 people were killed in the mayhem (Amnesty International 2012, Pham 2012). After being arrested by the military and turned over to the police, Yusuf was shot while in detention. Since then Boko Haram has killed hundreds in attacks on churches, police stations, border posts, schools, and

other government buildings, and extrajudicial killings by the state security services have continued unabated.

Historical and Constitutional Contexts

Though Boko Haram's rise took place shortly after the 9/11 attacks on the United States and the resulting Global War on Terror, its critique of the Nigerian state originates in distinctly domestic legal, social, and historical contexts. Islam reached northern Nigeria centuries ago through the expansion of long-distance trade routes across the Western Sahel, facilitating voluntary conversion that helped solve some practical problems relating to trust and credit. In 1803, the charismatic Muslim scholar Usman dan Fodio was betrayed by a former pupil who rose to replace the sultan and who saw an Islamic reform movement among the commoners as a political threat. The swift crackdown on dan Fodio's followers convinced him to abandon decades of non-violent preaching. He launched a westward conquest that founded the Sokoto Caliphate based on a popular critique of corruption, slavery, and the ostentatious lifestyles of Muslim elites (Falola and Heaton 2008). His conquests, like other *jihads* of the era, 'have often been seen as among a number of responses to a situation of international crisis in the Islamic world', according to a major historical study. But what 'their leaders were concerned with, above all, was the local situation—manifestations of unbelief or oppression' (Isichei 1997, p. 293). The *jihad* was part of a statebuilding process, providing cultural and political coherence to overcome the seventeenth century's disparate (and warring) Hausa states (Adeleye 1971). The north-eastern area of Borno, the contemporary birthplace of Boko Haram, was mostly outside the Sokoto Caliphate. The oldest continuous Islamic state in Sub-Saharan Africa, Borno today shares more cultural affinity with the eastward Muslim cultures of the Savannah and its people generally reject the mystical Sufi Islam prevalent in Sokoto (Paden 2012).

The British conquered Sokoto in the early twentieth century and in 1914 created (and named) modern Nigeria by uniting northern and southern territories. They cut deals with northern Hausa and Fulani elites that kept Christian missionaries—and therefore English-language education—out, and in the spirit of indirect rule permitted extensive applications of Sharia. The drafters of Nigeria's independence constitution retained a core element of this bargain in 1959 by allowing Islamic law to govern certain areas of civil affairs. Not only did the north want to portray itself as a cohesive political community, moderate leaders including the region's first Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello, feared that an orthodox Islamic path would undermine free market development (Mohammed 2005, pp. 147–164). Independence in 1960 was followed by a long stretch of authoritarian rule from 1966 to 1979. The question of Sharia arose during contentious debates over a new constitution, and again it was resolved by permitting the application of Islamic law to civil affairs in the north (Laitin 1982). This happened only after a divisive split over whether to establish a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which unlike previous constitutions would acknowledge

Islam at the federal level, as well as deciding who should properly sit on the court and judge Personal Islamic Law. Ninety-two Sharia proponents boycotted the Constituent Assembly for three weeks; when they returned and the Assembly passed the constitution over their objections, they 'threatened to reopen discussion of the issue' (Gboyega 1979, pp. 253–254). The Sharia compromise thus lacked the explicit political support that it had in 1959, a weakness further compounded by the oversight of the entire exercise by a Christian military dictator from the south resistant to Sharia: Olusegun Obasanjo.

Less than a year after the 1979 democratic transition, riots erupted in the large northern city of Kano, and over the next five years thousands of people died during the Maitatsine rebellion. This revivalist Islamic movement led by Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa sprang from a confluence of factors, however, rather than simply the Constituent Assembly debates (Ibrahim 1997). The Iranian Revolution may have offered some inspiration and various northern groups criticized the secularism of the new Nigerian constitution. But scholars typically point to wastefulness and corruption of the 1970s oil boom as factors that accented class distinctions and resentment (Lubeck 1986). Like contemporary Boko Haram, elites' conspicuous consumption was associated with Western education and corruption, and Sharia offered a moral corrective. But whereas Boko Haram makes use of cell phones and Youtube, the Maitatsine movement broadly rejected modern technology, including even wristwatches (Adesoji 2011). Then, as now, federal security forces responded with excessive force that killed or injured thousands. A comprehensive government white paper blamed the national security services and the police for exacerbating the violence, emphasizing that 'no foreign government, masquerading under religion' played a role (West Africa 1981, p. 2746).

The Fourth Republic's Islamic Inheritance

A transition to democracy in 1999 ended another long stretch of authoritarianism and brought Obasanjo back to power as an elected president. A new constitution mirrored the federal secularism enshrined in the 1979 version. But this time, elites skipped the touchy deliberative process that had bedevilled the earlier Constituent Assembly and simply decreed the Fourth Republic's founding document. A few months later the governor of Zamfara State declared, 'Without shari'a there is no Islam', informing other northerners 'we are Muslims and must live and die as Muslims' (Mumuni 1999, p. 31). By the end of 2000, 12 state legislatures including Zamfara's had passed laws extending Islamic Law to the criminal code in addition to family and civil affairs. Between 2001 and 2007, surveys showed an *increase* in support for Sharia across these states, and in 2009 74 per cent of Nigerians associated it with lower levels of violence (Afrobarometer 2009). As in the early 1980s, riots broke out in Kano in 1999, and the adoption of Sharia by Kaduna's state legislature quickly triggered civic unrest, with hundreds of casualties. But rather than a spate of amputations for theft or stonings for

adultery, Sharia became a symbol—and some scholars argue an elite tool—for balancing the interests of north and south (Angerbrandt 2011). After a string of northern dictators ruling between 1983 and 1999, and since the democratic handover in 1979 took place only after a Supreme Court decision narrowly decided the contested election in favour of the northern candidate, it was the south's 'turn' to rule. 'When we formed the [People's Democratic Party]', the ruling party's former chairman said in an interview, 'we were extremely determined to address the injustice to the south in terms of the control of power.'[2] Thus, far from an endorsement of Boko Haram's agenda today, support for Sharia has expressed a general desire for order, recurring resentment over the same sort of oil corruption experienced in the 1970s, and anxiety about perceived marginalization of the north.

In fact the government has dealt with the broad question of Sharia and the discrete challenge of Boko Haram quite differently. Obasanjo responded to the spread of Islamic law across the state legislatures in 2000 with a calculated distance, a posture reinforced when courts declined to resolve the basic constitutional questions at hand. But his administration brutally suppressed rebellions in the Niger Delta, a strategy that survived the end of his second term in 2007 when President Umaru Yar'Adua, a son of the northern establishment, took over. Like his successor, current President Goodluck Jonathan, he reacted to Boko Haram with blunt force. The next section compares these rebellions, identifying lessons for mitigating today's north-eastern unrest.

Nigeria's Militants: North and South

Oil exports from the Niger Delta have generated over $400 billion in revenue for the federal government since the 1970s according to the World Bank, and billions more in corporate profits, while the local communities remained mired in poverty and pollution. Frustration across the six major oil producing states gathered momentum for half a century, but armed rebellion took on a new face in the early 2000s with kidnappings and attacks on offshore oil platforms. Though some of these militant groups still linger, the unrest has significantly declined since 2010. What mobilized—and then demobilized—the Niger Delta's militants? In this section I compare and contrast the Boko Haram and Niger Delta rebellions. The analysis leads to three salient lessons about the radicalizing effects of militarism, the impact of fragmentation on the underlying political conditions, and the hazards of internationalizing local grievances.

Militarization and Radicalization

The first lesson concerns how militarization of the Niger Delta facilitated radicalization, sowed mistrust of the security services, and undermined local

civil society peacebuilding efforts. Resentment about underdevelopment, political marginalization, and environmental destruction had been simmering in the Niger Delta since the 1960s. Barely 25 per cent of the area's population is literate and life expectancy is only 43 years (Technical Committee on the Niger Delta 2008). According to a 2011 audit by the United Nations Environmental Programme, cleaning up the environmental damage in the area populated by the Ogoni people will cost $1 billion for the first five years, and will take at least 25 years to complete. The devastating impact of oil extraction in the Niger Delta came to the world's attention in 1995 when the military government infamously hanged the renowned playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others for their activism on behalf of the Ogoni, one of the area's many ethnic minorities.

In 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council spoke up for the largest of these minority groups with a call for 'resource control'. A joint proclamation demanded democracy, indigenous rights, and environmental protections for people adversely affected by oil development. More than 500 communities expressed support for the statement (Campbell 2011). Children gave horrifying testimony of being beaten by soldiers, while women described being raped (Semenitari and Ekeinde 1999). A few months later several police officers were kidnapped in Bayelsa State. The new democratic government, recently inaugurated after over 16 years of dictatorships, responded by razing the town of Odi with bombs and heavy artillery (Obasi 2005). Human rights groups called the attacks genocide carried out to protect nearby oil flow stations (Constitutional Rights Project 1999). This disproportionate response radicalized youth groups and generated sympathy for their cause within broader civil society. It was from this context that the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and several other groups formed. By 2004 kidnappings and violence directed at government officials or foreign oil workers were widespread (Hazen 2009). Between January 2006 and July 2007, various rebel groups took at least 319 hostages, including nationals from the US, Britain, India, China, Pakistan, France, the Philippines, and other countries.[3]

By 2008 civil society and diaspora groups pleaded with the government to avoid militarizing the conflict. 'What is needed is an urgent and massive injection of funds into the region', wrote one newspaper editorial. 'We are sure that if the militants see a commitment on the part of government to do this, they will lay down their arms since that is the purpose of the armed struggle' (Daily Champion 2008). When Nigeria's president visited the United Kingdom to secure arms sales, a coalition of diaspora groups called on Prime Minister Gordon Brown to withdraw his offer of military aid (Oyedoyin and Bello 2008). Whether due to civil society pressure or otherwise, the military began showing greater restraint, and the minister of defence said the following year, 'We are not considering the situation in the Niger Delta as if we are in a battle' (James and Taiwo 2009).[4] Once the government's strategy shifted, it earned enough credibility to engage in summitry with the militant groups. By 2010, as a demilitarization and reintegration process was underway, Goodluck Jonathan (then the 'Acting' President) described the flow of arms into the Niger Delta as part of the problem.[5]

The 2009 capture and extrajudicial killing of Boko Haram's leader, Mohammed Yusuf (and his father-in-law), during a sprawling five-day battle has had radicalizing effects similar to the 1999 state repression in the Niger Delta. In July 2011, a Joint Military Task Force (JTF) created a military cordon and went from house to house, shooting and arresting suspected Boko Haram sympathizers. 'Residents of Maiduguri have been bearing the brunt of the activities of the fundamentalist group' noted a news magazine (Ayorinde 2011). The JTF killed 30 suspects in October 2012, and publicly shot another 40 the following month (Madueke 2012). A prominent Nigerian human rights group complained, 'They accused the young persons of being Boko Haram members, with no evidence' (Nossiter 2012, p. A6). The JTF continued its tactics, with a February 2013 bombing of a remote encampment with helicopters, killing 17 suspected members (Abubakar 2013).

These heavy-handed tactics have facilitated radical recruitment, according to the Presidential Committee on Security Challenges in the North-East Zone (hereafter the 'Presidential Committee'). It directly linked the 'extra-judicial killing' of Yusuf by government security forces, widely broadcast on the Internet, with the immediate causes of terrorism in the north (Omonobi *et al.* 2011). Farouk Lawan, a northern politician who is one of the longest serving members of the House of Representatives agreed, pointing out that Boko Haram's attacks 'appear to be revenge attacks. They were attacked by security agencies, and now they are targeting the security agencies'. According to him, the attacks on churches and the UN amount to *failed* attempts to internationalize the conflict or activate Nigeria's religious cleavages.[6]

Civil society leaders and local elites have strongly criticized the Jonathan administration's approach. Traditional rulers, including the Borno Elders Forum and the Arewa Consultative Forum, have urged the federal government to re-assess its military approach (African Examiner 2012, Paden 2012). Human rights groups have also pleaded with the government to stop the violence (Amnesty International 2011). A leading opposition party called for diplomatic engagement with Boko Haram and criticized the government's use of 'brute force', noting that President Jonathan's state of emergency merely encouraged the Boko Haram to pick softer targets (The News 2012). Drawing the lesson from the Niger Delta into sharp focus, a member of the government's Technical Committee on the Niger Delta concluded in an interview, 'the military will not be able to defeat Boko Haram'.[7]

The coercive counterterrorism strategy also plays into a historical narrative of mistrust that undermines local cooperation. Market traders in Boko Haram's home base of Maiduguri previously cooperated with security officials, often at great personal risk (Nwankwo 2012). Maintaining this cooperation has become very difficult in a climate of militarization and given the police's reputation for abuse. The security services have a history of harsh responses to communal conflicts and protests sometimes *against* Sharia in the north-east, which makes any community trust particularly fragile (Fwa 2003). The problem is not unique to the north-east though, and an analysis of 400 police stations found that the police

'routinely carry out summary executions of persons accused or suspected of crime; rely on torture as a principal means of investigation; commit rape of both sexes', and that arbitrary 'holding charges' are used to detain suspects for long periods (Network for Police Reform 2010).

Fragmentation

A second lesson from the Niger Delta concerns how fragmentation undermined opportunities for peacemaking. As MEND and other militant groups gained notoriety between 2007 and 2009, criminal gangs with profits rather than politics in their sights borrowed its brand name (Asuni 2009). The governor of Bauchi State, which has been hard hit by Islamic violence in the last few years, made a similar observation to the Presidential Committee. One faction of Boko Haram is based on a distortion of Islam, he said, and the other faction is a band of criminals out for profit (Omonobi *et al*. 2011). Two different people claimed to speak on behalf of Boko Haram after the June 2011 attack on the police headquarters in Abuja (Jega 2011). Further evidence of fragmentation emerged when a splinter group broke off from Boko Haram in June 2012, declaring that they did not believe in killing innocent non-Muslims except 'in self-defence or if they attack Muslims' (Shuaib 2012).[8] 'Boko Haram is not a monolithic, homogenous organization controlled by a single charismatic figure', argued the US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Ambassador Johnnie Carson. 'Boko Haram is several organizations, a larger organization focused primarily on discrediting the Nigerian government, and a smaller more dangerous group', he told a Washington think tank (Daily Trust 2012).

With the announcement in early 2013 that the US will be basing surveillance drones in neighbouring Niger, there is a risk that fragmentation could become a deliberate tactical counterterrorism tool. Military strategists portray assassinations as a tool for disrupting organizational leadership to create opportunities that can then be militarily exploited. Should the US eventually arm the Unmanned Arial Vehicles, as it did in the Horn of Africa, this could therefore create new roadblocks. Fragmenting Boko Haram may appear to weaken it, but this very strategy renders political and civilian-led solutions more remote as the number of stakeholders around the table multiplies and grievances become more diffuse. 'When we had the militancy in the Niger Delta', says Representative Lawan, 'it was based on a certain pattern and it was very easy to see what the concerns were. It was easy to separate the criminal aspect of it from the activism so to speak.' However, he continued, 'in the northeast now, it is difficult to identify who to dialogue with.'[9] President Jonathan has said much the same: 'There is no dialogue that is going on anywhere. There is no face so you don't have anybody to discuss with', though his administration has allegedly opened negotiations through back channels (IRIN News Service 2012).

Global or Local?

A final lesson concerns whether the rebels see their critique of Nigeria through local sectarian terms—not unlike the nineteenth century uprisings—or as part of a global narrative. Some Niger Delta rebel leaders bragged about overseas training, and several MEND leaders were thrown in prison by the dictatorship of Equatorial Guinea on loose allegations of coup plotting. But the Niger Delta rebellions were overwhelmingly an indigenous affair.

Boko Haram at this point is best understood as a distinctly domestic phenomenon as well, despite some contact with foreign extremist groups. Referring to possible links with al-Qaeda, the US military's Africa Command concluded in a 2009 study that 'no evidence exists to prove any substantive connection between the groups'. While Nigerian extremists claim ties to al-Qaeda, the report emphasized the absence of any mention of Nigeria by al-Qaeda in public statements or in seized documents (Urgo 2009). Other officials have found 'no direct evidence' of links between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda (Nossiter 2011).[10] 'Rather than looking for the root cause of these problems' though, said a government official, where Boko Haram has been active, 'we have been looking for elusive sponsors'.[11] There are some reports that Boko Haram will in fact expand its international agenda if the US increases its counterterrorism assistance (Tribune 2012). Thinking through the likely ramifications, one former US ambassador said 'If the United States becomes associated with Abuja's oppression, then we and the international community become fair game' (Johnson 2011). The best publicly articulated evidence about the international links has been the US State Department's 2012 decision to single out three members of Boko Haram for a 'Foreign Terrorist' designation—but not the group at large.

There has been significant speculation on the sources of Boko Haram's funding, since this would provide concrete evidence of international ties. Some members were charged but never convicted under Nigeria's broad anti-terrorism laws of accepting money from al-Qaeda, though members also pay fees, and politicians seeking radical grassroots support have allegedly provided funding (Aghedo and Osumah 2012). Most of its funding, however, comes from simply robbing banks, totalling an estimated 500 million naira ($3.1 million) as of late 2012 (The News 2012). The former governor of Borno State, according to diplomats I spoke with and much speculation in the Nigerian media, funded Mohammed Yusuf's early preaching. But now prosecuting the governor is in fact one of Boko Haram's demands (Obia 2012).

The domestic origins of the Niger Delta unrest and the Boko Haram movement are important because they increase the likelihood that domestic policy changes would undermine conditions driving the rebellions in the first place. Boko Haram's violence is embedded within a broader, legitimate northern critique of failed Nigerian governance. The United Nations estimates that out of Nigeria's 36 states, the five with the lowest levels of development for women are all in the north-east (United Nations Development Programme 2009). The Nigerian Bureau

of Statistics' *National Poverty Profile* for 2012 similarly documented high rates of food insecurity (51 per cent of the population) and absolute poverty (69 per cent) in the north-east. The figures are identical for the north-west, where Boko Haram has had virtually no presence, suggesting that poverty is not the insurgency's only driver. Politicians from the south have been quick to make this point, but that does not diminish the harsh realities of life in the north-east, and the Jonathan administration's political distance from it.

Both insurgencies also requested credible, neutral outside mediation and the Nigerian government consistently rejected that option. For example, in 2006 the Delta's main rebel groups and prominent Ijaw liaisons such as Edwin Clark pleaded for international mediation (Ero 2006), as did the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta in 2009. Much the same is happening with Boko Haram. In late 2012 leaders called for negotiations in Saudi Arabia, and proposed several mediators (Obia 2012). Aside from obvious fears of imperial international meddling, a president poised to controversially declare his intent to run for re-election in 2015 does not want to legitimize a critique of his governance by acknowledging developmental inequities as a cause of the insurgency.

There are some differences between Nigeria's northern and southern rebellions, starting with the tactical characteristics of the violence. At the peak of the Niger Delta rebellion in 2006, militant groups took over 150 hostages (mostly foreign oil workers), but they typically went to great lengths to avoid harming them. When MEND set off bombs at the independence anniversary celebrations in 2010, it warned the public in advance. Its core demands mirrored politicians' rhetoric about environmental clean-up and 'resource control'. By contrast Boko Haram has deliberately targeted civilians. Its calls for the application of Islamic Law to criminal codes appear to leave little room for compromise, and these demands lend themselves to an interpretation as a global Islamist ideology. But this ignores the domestic and historical contexts. It invests the Nigerian government in a vaguely conceived counterterrorism strategy that undermines the nonviolent options rooted in civilian institutions, and it marginalizes the historical evidence of moderation.

Getting to Development and Dialogue

While the Nigerian government has concerns that talking to terrorists would reward extremism, recent comparative research suggests that the absence of dialogue typically prolongs conflict (Perry 2010, Goerzig 2012). Nigeria's road to peace through development and dialogue will not be easy. When a moderate intermediary met with former President Olusegun Obasanjo to lay the groundwork for possible peace talks in 2011, he was immediately murdered by hardliners (This Day 2011). In January 2012, Boko Haram appeared to reject President Jonathan's qualified offer to talk. But in March, its spokesman proposed laying down their arms within a month if the government would

release its members from detention and assure the safety of existing members through a mediator, a prominent northern sheik (Oladeji *et al*. 2012). By early 2013 it downplayed calls for Sharia and instead emphasized three straightforward demands: prosecution of Mohammed Yusuf's killers, reconstruction of damaged places of worship, and compensation for victims of violence (apparently from all sides). Taking such steps presents no significant risks to the government, would deny Boko Haram sympathizers an important propaganda tool, and could significantly alter the political calculus of dialogue.

As remote as that possibility might seem, there are at least three endogenous sources of moderation that have shaped previous debates about the relationship between Islam and the Nigerian state. The first is a theological and cultural basis for conflict resolution in the north (Paden 2005). Some historians suggest that *hudood* or criminal sanctions were not widely applied under Islamic laws in effect during the nineteenth century (Mohammed 2005). In the south-west, where millions of Muslim Yorubas live, calls for Sharia have always been muted. The Islamic Trust Foundation and the Da'Wah Coordination Council have published pamphlets explaining the Koranic basis for tolerance, including the obligation to defend holy places. A coalition of hundreds of Islamic scholars, the Committee of Federal Capital Territory Imams, has similarly explained the theological bases for preaching tolerance (and criticized the security services). The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council signed a joint memo to President Jonathan in 2013 blaming religious intolerance and north-eastern underdevelopment as twin crises.

A second source of moderation is rooted in the institutions of federalism underlying the country's political bargain between north and south. During the constitutional debates on Sharia in the 1970s and 1990s discussed earlier, Christian and Muslim delegates agreed on the need for restraint (Suberu 1997, pp. 401–425). The same moderation was evident in 2000, when all 17 southern state governors issued a statement pledging religious tolerance and noting that any application of Islamic law should require mutual consent of the parties concerned (Charles-Obi 2001). The instruments of federalism are moving in this direction once again, with all 19 northern governors coordinating an agenda to end the Boko Haram rebellion, which they noted should include extensive investment in development (Binniyat 2012). After they formed a Northern Governors Peace and Reconciliation Committee, the Sultan of Sokoto announced that elites deserve some of the blame for letting the northern situation deteriorate, urging dialogue with Boko Haram (Ibrahim 2013). The governor of Borno State, Alhaji Kashim Shettima, urged the government to negotiate with Boko Haram numerous times in 2011 (Jega 2011). In sum, during each of the major constitutional revisions since the 1950s, Nigeria has repeatedly resolved debates about religion and the state's secularism with similar constitutional compromises, accepting a role for Islamic law in many civil affairs and protecting the idea of consent for the parties concerned (Suberu 2009). This social compact in effect works against Boko Haram's claim to popular appeal.

Third, the democratic transition in 1999 has created a political and economic basis for pragmatism. Just weeks after the northern states passed Sharia

legislation in 2000, the governors toned down calls for Sharia after President Obasanjo told them the instability could provide the military a pretext for a coup (Agekameh 2000). In the religiously and ethnically mixed 'Middle Belt' states on the edge of the north, elites there complained that Sharia was really ethno-political, suggesting that it was about increasing northern leverage over the country's oil riches from the south. Eager to avoid alienating these states, many northern politicians therefore decided to take a less orthodox path to implementation (Paden 2004, pp. 17–37). By 2004, *Hisbah* enforcers had abandoned areas popular for vices in Sokoto State, gender segregated public transportation in Bauchi State was largely gone, and the Governor of Kano elected on a wave of populist Sharia appeal had backed away from orthodoxy (Mojeed 2004). Even in Zamfara State, where the legislative wave began, the governor pleaded with business interests—many of whom were neither indigenous nor Muslim—to stay by promising them that Sharia would not apply to Christians (Mohammed 2005). 'He saw it as a political weapon', against Obasanjo who was a southern Christian president, explains Representative Lawan, 'and at a point it did not work.'[12]

Today you see evidence of this moderation among political parties calling for a 'national security summit' with stakeholders (The News 2012). Senior security officials within the government have openly questioned whether a counter-terrorism strategy premised on coercion (including unpopular and inefficient police checkpoints) can succeed (Ayorinde 2011, Odiogor 2011). In fact one of the main recommendations of the Presidential Committee on Security Challenges was that 'the Federal Government should fundamentally, consider the option of dialogue and negotiation which should be contingent upon the renunciation of all forms of violence and surrender of arms to be followed by rehabilitation' (Omonobi *et al*. 2011). The Speaker of the House declared in late 2012 'there should be a kind of peace pact' (Obia 2012). A communique issued by the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, an establishment think tank designed to facilitate contact between intellectuals and the military, urged 'dialogue with all identified insurgent and aggrieved groups' and the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[13] A communique signed by the CLEEN Foundation and the Ministry of Police Affairs made the same point: combatting terrorism requires investment in human capital, increased government engagement with religious leaders, and a need to 'deemphasize deployment of the military to quell civil unrests'. A CLEEN poll also found that nearly 80 per cent of Nigerians in the north-east, and a majority nationwide, support dialogue with Boko Haram (CLEEN Foundation 2011).

The splintering of Boko Haram, and the violent reactions of its hardliners against diplomatic overtures, do make a peaceful solution to Nigeria's most recent sectarian challenge seem remote. But the lessons from the demobilization of the Niger Delta's militants suggest that non-military alternatives are viable and they enjoy support today. In the end, a lasting solution to Boko Haram will require a robust political component. As former US president Bill Clinton tactfully described the Boko Haram crisis during a visit to Nigeria in February 2012, 'it is almost impossible to cure a problem based on violence with violence'

(Okon-Ekong 2012). The challenge is therefore to create the circumstances which will enable a lasting peace.

An offer of amnesty remains a popular suggestion for a way forward, but this is becoming increasingly more difficult as the death toll rises. Moreover, while it would generate needed political support for Jonathan in the north, it would be greeted less enthusiastically in the south. The release of hundreds of Maitatsine followers in 1982 offers a cautionary note, in that the opposition accused the northern president of 'misplaced magnanimity' (Okoli 1982). Nigeria's government would also have to avoid two mistakes it made with the Niger Delta process, according to a Technical Committee leader: first, amnesty became a tool for letting people become rich and, second, it negotiated an incomplete peace without an outside third party.[14] As a result, demobilization has meant little without a framework that addresses governance failures and the widespread sense of disenfranchisement in the Delta. On the more fundamental idea of dialogue at least, there seems to be some agreement among Nigerian civil society, traditional rulers, and influential elites.

Conclusion

Boko Haram presents national security dilemmas for both the Nigerian government and for Western nations. In the West, policymakers are eager to provide assistance but realize that doing so would direct Boko Haram's anger abroad. Thus, despite concern that the group might develop international ambitions, this has restrained the post-9/11 impulse to apply counterterrorism and pushed some creative thinking about security sector reform. In Nigeria, civil society leaders and many elites appreciate the political logic of demobilization and reintegration (modelled after the Niger Delta's), but officials fear that any accommodation would reward rebellion rather than deter future insurgency. Moreover, enforcing the rule of law by holding the security services accountable for abuses poses stark risks for politicians in a country with half a dozen successful coups since 1966. Through encounters with its critics of its counterterrorism strategy, Nigeria is confronting its incomplete democratization and revisiting familiar debates about the relationship between religion and national identity.

In Nigeria, resolving this dilemma means that improving safety requires a civilian law enforcement strategy that builds the trust and cooperation of a sceptical and victimized citizenry. The attorney general's prosecution of Mohammed Yusuf's killers through federal criminal proceedings might offer some hope. This would isolate Boko Haram, enhance the administration's credibility, and create avenues for dialogue. Current plans to devote nearly a quarter of the federal budget to national security unfortunately point in another direction. The administration is divided over tactics, with many politicians seeking amnesty modelled after the Niger Delta, the security services favouring counterterrorism, and local leaders worried that the JTF's tactics will further

alienate people from a government that has failed them. It needs a coherent policy, with tactical law enforcement plans for the short term and political strategies for the long term, if it is to avoid repeating shortcomings of the Niger Delta amnesty.

Nigeria celebrated 50 years of independence in 2010, but the one-hundredth anniversary in 2014 of the 'amalgamation' of the northern and southern regions may be even more important; today the opinion pages debate the 'mistake of 1914'. An acceptance of Islamic traditions lies at the core of the country's underlying federal bargain, which balances the interests, cultures, and histories of these two disparate regions. The country has survived numerous challenges to this political equilibrium since the 1960s, including a civil war of secession, dictatorships, and ethnic pogroms. Yet the institutional and historical bases for the mediation and moderation that have held the nation together offer both hope and practical ideas for today.

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Notes

1 Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria Security Tracker (https://nigeriasecuritytracker.crowdmap.com/main).

2 Interview with Okwesilieze Nwodo, 8 March 2010, Abuja.

3 This figure is based on a review of newspaper accounts. See also Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (2008).

4 Some governors did ask for an increased military presence (see Isine 2009).

5 See for example his speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, 12 April 2010.

6 Interview with Hon. Farouk Lawan, 24 February 2012, Abuja.

7 Interview with Anyakwee Nsirimovu, 29 February 2012, Abuja.
8 This group, Jama'atu Ansarul Musilimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Vanguard for the Aid of Muslims in Black Africa), claimed responsibility for attacks on Nigerian troops headed to Mali in January 2013.
9 Interview with Hon. Farouk Lawan, 24 February 2012, Abuja.
10 Abdulmultallab, who *did* pose a threat to the US and did have ties to al-Qaeda, had no known link to Boko Haram (International Crisis Group 2010).
11 Interview with an aid to Governor Ibrahim Idris, 26 February 2012, Abuja.
12 Interview with Hon. Farouk Lawan, 24 February 2012, Abuja.
13 Eminent Persons and Expert Group Meeting on Complex Insurgencies, August 2012, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Nigeria.
14 Interview with Anyakwee Nsirimovu, 29 February 2012, Abuja.

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