
Boko Haram: Diverging Approaches to Fighting Insurgency

Justin D. Leach
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Troy University
Troy, Alabama, USA

Abstract: *This essay argues that Nigeria's continued democratization is crucial to limiting the appeal of and damage caused by insurgencies such as the Islamist movement commonly known as Boko Haram. The popularity of insurgent groups can be mitigated with an emphasis on good governance measures, particularly those emphasizing local and national government transparency, emphasis on development and education, and strong links with civil society and the public (especially with regard to police and military operations).*

In achieving the above, the essay analyzes and dissects two key ongoing processes in Nigeria that have sometimes been conflated with each other; namely, the change of presidential administrations in 2015 and the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency based in the country's northeast. It seeks to establish that while the current Buhari administration has launched several relevant successes in fighting the group, some of the key factors allowing for a more successful push against the insurgency in 2015-16 were underway even before the change of administration, in a large part due to pressure from regional and international actors and internal fracturing within the group, itself partly a result of this regional coalition's success. The recent rising of instability again in the Niger Delta demonstrates that dramatic political promises and their implementation may still not be touching on Nigeria's underlying security concerns.

Key Words: Boko Haram, Insurgency, Corruption

Introduction

Nigeria's interrupted but persistent democratic experiment reached an important milestone on 29 May 2015 with the first peaceful transition of power between elected leaders in the country's history, as former general and military dictator Muhammadu Buhari's victory denied Goodluck Jonathan a second full presidential term. The election focused on multiple issues, but the destruction and terror the Boko Haram insurgency had launched across the country up to this period was an overriding security concern at the time. The radical Salafist organization had turned to violence before the Jonathan administration came to office in 2010 upon the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Nevertheless, the 2011-2015 period saw its ability to cause chaos reach something of a crescendo. At its high point, Boko Haram was estimated to have between 9,000 and 15,000 members of varying degrees of effectiveness and loyalty. The movement is known to conscript unwilling recruits, including children (Amnesty International, 2015; Blanchard, 2016).

A broad consensus exists that the movement rose in part due to the marginalization inhabitants

of the underdeveloped northeast corner of the country have experienced (Olojo, 2013; Rosen, 2015; Downie, 2014). The security dimension has also been examined, in particular the heavy-handed approach of police and security forces in subduing organized violence, often carelessly and at the cost of civilian life (Baker, 2015). However, the intersection of national politics and the differing political strategies of presidents Jonathan and Buhari to resolving and or exacerbating these problems while dealing with the ongoing crisis have not sufficiently been examined in detail outside of political campaigning or editorializing.

This paper seeks to establish the political handling of the group by the Jonathan and Buhari governments during the 2011-16 period. It will first provide a general background of the group's rise, then review the handling of the insurgency by both administrations. It will discuss regional and international involvement in counteracting the group, and the internal dynamics of the group often ignored in larger political analysis.

Assessing the manner in which democratically elected Nigerian leaders approach the Boko Haram problem is a crucial—if only partial—method of assessing the health of Nigerian democracy overall. A democratic leader must balance responsibilities regarding security with respect for human rights, the rule of law, relations with neighbors and patrons, and other political realities. While it is too soon for a complete examination of how the Jonathan and Buhari administrations have juggled these responsibilities with relation to each other, over a year of the Buhari administration's governance allows for some contrast between approaches.

Review of Literature

Humphreys and others have reviewed the role poverty often plays in war, particularly civil wars (Humphreys, 2002; Cramer 2010). While Nigeria's wealth in oil and natural gas has certainly contributed to organized conflict in the past, it is not as clearly connected to the rise of the Boko Haram conflict as it is to, for example, the revived hostilities occurring in the Niger Delta as of 2016. Nor does Boko Haram have clear political objectives such as separation or reform within the national government (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Insurgencies are a common byproduct of the neoliberal reforms associated with attempts to improve economic efficiency (Humphreys, 2002) but Boko Haram did not result from any such government attempts, at least in an immediate or identifiable way. Consistent marginalization of the northeast region has led to a desperate economic base for the insurgency, however. The economic imbalance is therefore certainly a consideration. Cramer has stressed that links between labor markets and political violence are often not clear (2010). Their relations cannot be examined without reference to other economic activity and indeed other political characteristics altogether. Northeastern instability ultimately cannot be understood without the political, social, cultural, and ethnic context of which this study hopes to provide an outline.

Fearon and Laitin's review of conditions under which insurgencies are likely to form relates directly to the Nigerian experience regarding Boko Haram. "Poverty and slow growth, which favor rebel recruitment and mark financially and bureaucratically weak states, rough terrain, and large populations" is their assessment of such violence-prone states (2003). All of these characteristics pertain to the Nigerian climate in which Boko Haram operates and most are discussed in this essay (a review of population density being addressed more in terms of urban-rural dichotomy in the interests of brevity and direct relevance). The conclusion of that study—that economic considerations allowing a

“recruitment base” and creating conditions of poverty are superior indicators than a lack of democratic rights of countries prone to civil war—Is an incomplete fit for as large and diverse a country as Nigeria (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). As this study indicates, political and cultural context help explain why insurgencies may rise and fall in one area of a country and not another.

Bhavnani also reviews the cycle of scarcity and abundance prevalent in many developing countries. It is questionable whether this dynamic characterizes the northeast region, though Bhavnani correctly identifies it as a historic trend in Nigeria at a national level. Lack of political representation, services, and employment opportunities for certain ethnicities—the Kanuri in this instance—may indeed be a motivating force of insurgency. This model works well for an analysis of insurgency in the Niger Delta, and indeed that is a region Bhavnani focuses on in this study (Bhavnani, 2009).

What are the motives for rebellion? Ballentine and Nitzschke (2009) discuss how objectives can change over time, beginning with “purer” ideological objectives and transforming into campaigns waged in the pursuit of “short-term economic benefits.” Boko Haram has almost certainly struggled to finance itself in recent years, and there is indication it has altered its message in part due to this reality. The loose construction of the group, however, makes it difficult reach any sweeping conclusion on this point. The lack of access to resources has ensured an increasingly predatory and opportunistic relationship against the civilian population of northeast states from the outset of its transformation into a violent insurgency during 2009-2010. Perceived shifts in “mission” (such as the declared affiliation with Islamic State in 2015) have not been inconsistent with an overall jihadi mission, though they have been somewhat dependent on events outside the affected region. Boko Haram's promise of opportunity to young men not realized with the existing order remains a key component of its attraction.

Ardo references Ted Gurr's version of the Relative Deprivation Theory as it relates to the Nigerian north and “Middle Belt”, and to democratic rule since 1999 (Ardo, 2013). Highly relevant to the Boko Haram crisis would appear to be the northern discontent that resulted from unrealistic expectations and promises regarding the effects of democracy on standards of living. A continued study of political promises, strategies, and changes of policy is ultimately important not only when assessing what contributions the failure of the democratic process has had upon the rise of groups like Boko Haram, but also in assessing how a government's success or failure to act against these groups affects the faith of the public in the benefits of democracy. Nigeria, as a country that is perpetually “on the brink” of stable democracy, must therefore be examined in these terms.

In analyzing the ability of insurgents to work partisan divisions within an affected democracy, Hamilton discusses the importance of unity with regard to the Northern Ireland conflict of the 1970s and 1980s (2011). By contrast, the Nigerian situation is rather complex. While political opponents may rarely have been fully opportunistic in their approach to ending the conflict in the northeast, it is fair to say that the attitudes and approaches to insurgency of presidential candidate and outsider Mohammedu Buhari changed substantially with his promotion to president and insider. Characteristic of many violent political groups before them, Boko Haram may not have maximized their ability to manipulate partisan divisions in a state still new to democracy.

Large concludes in her work that the “overriding principle” of a democracy countering insurgency must be “a commitment to uphold and maintain constitutional systems of legal authority” (2005). A state which fails to adhere to this dictum in suppressing insurgencies runs the risk of

delegitimizing itself by ignoring the very laws it professes to defend. Particularly in a state like Nigeria, where large corners of the population feel marginalized in regions such as the northeast, this is crucial. The overbearing history of security forces throughout the country requires substantive and consistent attempts to change the professional culture of security with an eye towards establishing the trust and cooperation of the public and civil society.

Background to Insurgency

The basis of the group popularly known as Boko Haram as a distinct branch of Nigerian Salafism originated from the preaching of Mohammed Yusuf, a young cleric who became active sometime in the mid-1990s in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state. The cleric's followers practiced a rigid interpretation of Sunni Islam with few roots in northeast Nigeria, and its earliest incarnation was dedicated to detachment rather than engagement with society. By 2002, the group began adopting a more adversarial profile, especially with government authorities and law enforcement. In December 2003 it coordinated several attacks on regional police stations and other targets in Yobe State (Feyyaz, 2015). Yusuf may not have been involved in these attacks, but he accepted that its perpetrators were putting his philosophy into action.

The insurgency's early organization was not strong and remained deeply provincial. It continued a focus on local targets in northeast states, particularly police, military, and traditional Islamic elites. The government, however, viewed the new Islamist group wholly as a security threat. By 2009, a government task force called Operation Flush II was enacted in Maiduguri against the group. In retaliation, the increasingly militant Yusuf called on followers to protect themselves and strike back at law enforcement. After his apprehension by the army he was turned over to the police, where he died in custody, likely in an impromptu execution (Duodu, 2010). Yusuf's death led the group to step up its violence, and the revolt he inspired took on a life of its own. His martyrdom galvanized the core of the group ideologically even as it had been dealt major setbacks militarily. Its demands of the federal government became increasingly maximalist.

Yusuf deputy Abubakr Shakau, took control of the group after his death but the new leadership was fragile during the remainder of 2009, a period which saw another swell of group adherents to North African and Sahelian states. The movement resumed its violent campaign with gusto in 2010 and began its sustained menace to federal and state governments. From this violent incarnation until 2016, Boko Haram is estimated to be responsible for 20,000 deaths (Kazeem, 2016). By 2015, the U.S. Institute for Economics and Peace listed it as the deadliest terror group in the world, outpacing even Islamic State in fatalities due to terrorist activity (Global Terrorism Index, 2015).

Success altering the movement's agenda would become a theme. From this early period until the militancy that followed Yusuf's killing, the movement slowly began gaining steam and expanding its aspirations, in part due to the lack of resistance it met from weak local institutions, particularly in the realms of politics and security. Borno governor Ali Modu was considered a particularly ineffective link in fighting against the group before his leaving power in 2011 (Baca, 2015). The departure of Nigerian Islamists to Mali, Algeria, and elsewhere during this time to train with the insurgencies that would eventually morph into Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) expanded the appeal and ability of the movement to turn to violence in pursuit of its agenda, and opened up a supply of arms from the emerging trafficking routes there that would later prove useful (Smith, 2014; Chothia, 2015).

The Jonathan Administration (2010-2015)

The presidency of Goodluck Jonathan saw the first attempt at a national strategy towards the growing insurgency. Jonathan's May 2010 assumption of the office following his predecessor's death, and his election a year later coincided with a major uptick in Boko Haram activity nationally. The group began expanding its operations out from the northeast region. On 16 June 2011, mere weeks after Jonathan's election, it launched the first suicide attack in Nigerian history at the police headquarters in the federal capital of Abuja. Another suicide car bomb attack in Abuja followed on 26 August 2011 at the UN compound. The December 2011 to February 2012 period saw the group recommit to a focus on Christian churches, attempting to stoke the fires of sectarian conflict.

Boko Haram was able to support itself through various coercive methods, including bank raids, the extortion of local businessmen, and government officials throughout 2012. Occasionally high profile kidnapping cases, generated revenue, as in 2013 when a French family in Cameroon was returned for a \$3 million ransom. Supply of weaponry was a similarly improvised affair. Raids on construction sites allowed for detonation material used in improvised explosive devices. Material such as RPGs, assault rifles, trucks, and other material was acquired from overrun government facilities. After the dissolution of the Libyan government in 2011, the availability of small arms and other weaponry increased significantly (Chothia, 2015; Hiribarren, 2016). The group sought ways to broaden its appeal among Nigeria's Muslims. Expanded attacks on Christian targets were an attempt to nationalize the group by stirring up existing tensions between religious communities. Growing sectarian violence between Muslim and Christian communities in the "Middle Belt" of Nigeria, particularly in Jos and elsewhere in Plateau state. The Christian religion of the new president and his Ijaw southern heritage were also features of the group's rhetoric.

In 2013, Jonathan finally began taking substantive legal measures in fighting back against Boko Haram, ordering a military crackdown on the movement that June. A state of emergency was declared in the northern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (Botelho, 2013). The group relied on alienation from heavy-handed government tactics to secure a base of support. The killing of hundreds of detained civilians by soldiers after the 14 March 2014 Boko Haram attack on a barracks in Maiduguri was a typical example of how the government continued to alienate locals throughout Borno State in particular, allowing for the mistrust of the federal government and general insecurity which the group would take advantage of throughout the course of that year.

In 2014 Boko Haram boosted its international recognition as a terrorist organization with the April abduction of 276 girls from a secondary school in the village of Chibok, killing hundreds in the attack. Soon after, group leader Abubakr Shakau announced that the mostly Christian captives would convert to Islam and become wives for the group (Thurston, 2015; Sieff, 2016; Bloom & Matfess, 2016). The attack launched an international campaign for the girls' release, and Western governments such as the US and UK promised additional troops to help.

Based upon the understanding that people in the under serviced northeast had legitimate grievances that could not be addressed in the current dangerous climate, and in an effort to retrieve the Chibok girls, negotiations were seen by the government as a viable if undesirable option. On 17 October 2014, the Jonathan government announced it had reached a ceasefire with Boko Haram. An insurgent

attack in Borno state the next day killing eight indicated the tenuousness of this claim. On 31 October 2014, the group's leader Shakau released a video denying any such ceasefire had been agreed to. The Shakau statement and violence to follow led many cynical members of the media and public to conclude the "ceasefire" was either an incompetent attempt to deal with one of Boko Haram's more marginal factions or a ploy to score a "breakthrough" in advance of the 2015 presidential election (Soyombo 2014). Attacks continued throughout the rest of the year across the north, the capital, and elsewhere in the country (Nossiter, 2014).

In the lead up to the anticipated election, Boko Haram launched devastating assaults against a variety of Nigerian targets and extended its presence across international borders. The January 2015 attack and countermeasures around the town of Baga, on the Chad border killed up to 2000, though the exact amount is disputed (Rosen, 2015). The group followed this by extending its presence into southern Niger in February 2015 and pledging its allegiance to Islamic State in March 2015 (Gaffey, 2016). The military's early inability to subdue the insurgency led the Jonathan administration to supply local vigilante groups in the region, which remain active under his successor.

The pervasive federal corruption that continued under the Jonathan Administration sapped at the effectiveness of the fight against Boko Haram. Sambo Dasuki had been brought on in 2012 as National Security Adviser by Jonathan, in part to deal with the crisis. However, in 2014 he was implicated in a scandal involving cash diverted from weapons to fight Boko Haram. In May 2016, key Jonathan aide Hassan Tukur was arrested for stealing \$40 million designated to pay ransoms for kidnapped Chibok girls. Other former members of his cabinet are also under investigation, such as petroleum minister Diezani Alison-Madueke with regard to a missing \$6 billion. In June 2016, Jonathan revealed that he personally was under investigation by the Buhari Administration regarding corruption (Vanguard, 2016).

Corruption has been a feature of Nigerian politics for decades, but its pervasiveness has allowed Boko Haram in particular to gain strength, both due to the opaqueness it creates in everyday society and the hostility this engenders. As Forest (2012) writes, the "shadow economy" developed within such a state allows for the creation of a terrorist infrastructure to take advantage of lax enforcement of law and the regular trade of illicit goods to superimpose its own trade routes and patronage networks that thrive from a lack of transparency.

Corruption has taken its toll in other ways on Nigerian security. The Nigerian Police Force is chronically under budgeted, and money is frequently stolen along the line of the chain of supply. Police reform committees have been an initiative of successive administrations, but of debatable effectiveness. Earlier committees were set up in 2006 and 2008 by the Obasanjo and Yar'Adua administrations. Jonathan's attempt at a third one in February 2012 has had limited impact. The panel submitted a final report in September 2012, but very little has been done to enact reforms. The widespread domestic allegations of corruption and ineffectiveness during this period were buttressed by the concerns of Nigeria's international partners. U.S. officials became wary of extending cooperation to the Jonathan administration by 2014, charging that much of the \$2.1 billion in aid sent to the Nigerian military to respond to Boko Haram was not accounted for.

Jonathan's efforts against Boko Haram were hindered by such problems and the insurgency's wave of activity in the months immediately preceding the election. By election day, the group had seized

one third of the north. Only one road was left linking Borno State with the rest of Nigeria (Ishiekwene, 2016). Over two million Nigerians were IDPs or refugees.

Buhari Administration (2015 -)

The 2015 campaign for president was hard fought on both sides and, though often ugly, fought over substantive issues. In March 2015, Goodluck Jonathan became the first sitting Nigerian president to be defeated in a peaceful election widely regarded as legitimate. The victor, Muhammadu Buhari, was a retired major-general who had run a military dictatorship for twenty months in the mid-1980s. As a candidate, he relied upon his reputation as an incorruptible, no-nonsense martinet who put patriotism before personal gain. This image was used to his advantage in the face of the corruption and regional mayhem the country experienced as of early 2015.

A key issue in the campaign was the nature of the fight against Boko Haram. In the years following his 2011 electoral defeat at the hands of Jonathan, Buhari intimated that the oppressive nature of the Jonathan administration had turned the disenfranchised youth of the northeast to a wayward, misguided, radical doctrine of Islam. As Jonathan had earlier, Buhari routinely putting forward the possibility of discussing a cease fire with the group. The incentives for negotiation remained practical: providing long-term security remained as difficult within the region after Boko Haram as it was before the group's rise. As Buhari explained, little point existed to sending the army there to clear areas that could not be held. Upon assuming the presidency, he declared he would negotiate "without preconditions" regarding the release of the girls kidnapped at Chibok, providing a "credible leader" of the group could be identified (Dupraz-Dobias, 2016; BBC, 2015b).

After his election, President Buhari continued to stress the need for drastic military reform, removing top military commanders considered corrupt, incompetent, or unprofessional in an attempt to raise the morale of poorly equipped and poorly led troops. In January 2016, Buhari declared that he believed corruption in the military was a key reason for its unpreparedness in quashing the insurgency during the Jonathan Administration, particularly as it resulted in the loss of fourteen local government areas to the insurgency during 2015 (Nwabughio, 2016).

In addition to the immediate replacement of many general officers, Buhari moved the Nigerian Military Command Center from the federal capital of Abuja to Maiduguri. The general appointed to lead the international task force working against Boko Haram, Major-General Buratai, was a native of Borno State. This measure was seen as enacted to increase local confidence that the federal government was taking its obligation to enforce security while taking the needs of the local community into account more seriously.

Buhari's governance reforms have not simply been driven at improving the effectiveness of the police and the military, but renewing the confidence in Nigeria of allies and business interests. To end government graft, Buhari promised to simplify "the books" in Nigeria so that a single account would be used at the treasury, rather than the elaborate network that has allowed for patronage and blatant corruption in the past. The Treasury Single Account was enacted to close the multiple accounts in the various ministries and agencies of the federal government. Revenue generating agencies in particular were called on to close illegal revenue accounts.

As with earlier administrations, police reform was on the agenda. Buhari's assumption of office coincided with the dismissal of the Inspector General of Police, Suleiman Abba. A Jonathan appointee, Abba was widely considered to be mired in corruption during his tenure. A drive to recruit an additional 10,000 police was also put in motion; Buhari speculated that such a program would not only curb crime but address the challenge of youth unemployment (Premium Times, 2016a).

Buhari's vow at the outset of his presidency to defeat Boko Haram completely by the end of 2015 year was flamboyant, but not entirely unrealistic. As a former general, he was more familiar to soldiers in temperament and reputation than President Jonathan. As a northerner and a Muslim, he could convincingly argue he was able to buoy support against the group in the affected states. Reason existed for Buhari's confidence by December, even if the ultimate objective remained out of reach. The governor of Borno, after most of the state was retaken, proudly announced that month that Boko Haram had lost its ability to collect "taxes", and that the Nigerian constitution was once again being enforced throughout the country (Salem, 2016).

As noted, Boko Haram's slow decline was an ongoing process by the time of Buhari's inauguration. The group had already retreated mainly to primarily rural areas where it was more directly in competition with traditionally conservative Muslim orders that saw the group as alien. Boko Haram remains inflexible regarding its theology, and an inability to deviate to accommodate conservative peasants has led to an increased reliance on coercion. Conscripted and threats against the families of those who will not join are also reported (Baca, 2015). Nevertheless, Buhari had to couch his December 2015 victory announcement by specifying that Boko Haram could no longer launch "conventional" attacks. As of 2016, Chief Defense Staff Olonisakin argued that the movement could no longer launch coordinated attacks. Attorney General and Minister of Justice Malami declared that Boko Haram was no longer able to hold territory (Nwosu, 2016; Bello, 2016).

While the movement remains on the back foot, it is far from defeated. As of April 2016 it has launched a campaign of suicide attacks in towns throughout the northeast in proximity to Maiduguri. In early February 2016, a refugee camp in Borno suffered twin suicide attacks killing over seventy people (Al Jazeera, 2016a). A 10 February attack on a refugee camp near Maiduguri killed 58. Despite its setbacks, the insurgency remains capable of killing hundreds. The movement has become ever more reliant on suicide attacks, and roughly one and five of these are conducted by children (Al Jazeera, 2016b).

Regional Coordination Against Boko Haram

Ultimately a commitment from other actors in the region was vital to the 2015-2016 coordination against Boko Haram. The group's increasingly millenarian approach to "foreign policy", which allows for no clear distinction between "other" and "enemy", has led to a more effective international response than Abuja ever could have devised on its own. Stepped up regional involvement preceded the Buhari Administration. Following the January 2015 carnage on the Chadian border, the AU called for a summit of the five-nation regional force of 7500 troops (later increased to 8700). Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Benin came together to form a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) under a single command.

Buhari nevertheless made international cooperation against Boko Haram a priority. His first visit

internationally was to the US to seek support for the war. Buhari sought to reaffirm international confidence in Nigeria's leadership. In addition to meeting with G7 heads and other international figures, Nigeria hosted a Regional Security Summit in May 2016 to advocate for advancing military operations against the Boko Haram insurgency and to seek international support for developing states affected by the insurgency, as well as to rehabilitate internally displaced persons (Al Jazeera, 2016c). At the meeting, Buhari impressed the difficulty of the challenges to come.

Increased coordination meant 2015 saw regular cross-border attacks on Boko Haram sites inside Nigeria by neighboring states. February of that year marked Boko Haram's first incursion into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad (BBC, 2015a). The federal government assured the public that these countermeasures by regional governments were not a compromise of the country's sovereignty. Chad's successful efforts to kick Boko Haram out of the Nigerian town of Gamboru that month also saw retaliation, with the insurgency's crossing into Cameroon and destroying a mosque in Fotokol before being repelled by a joint Cameroonian/Chadian force. The MNJTF based out of N'Djamena was deployed by 30 July 2015 to move against Boko Haram.

Buhari saw a restructuring of the military as a good not just in itself, but for broader strategic purposes. The Nigerian military's "cleansing" was a way Nigeria could reaffirm to skeptical allies such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom that it was committed to renewed efforts at internal security. These states in turn pledged their support again and promised to share intelligence. The U.S. and the UK have each sent about 300 troops to train and advise local forces. In 2016, the Obama administration agreed to sell light attack aircraft to Abuja two years after intervening against such a sale of US helicopters in 2014 (Cooper & Searcey, 2016; Coughlin, 2016). The UK assured Abuja it would step up its coordination with Nigeria via contributions in increased intelligence sharing, military hardware, and training of troops in counter-terrorism tactics. London has pledged to spend £860 million in foreign aid largely devoted to this project, but concerns have been raised in the media that much of the money devoted to this project is being instead used to target Buhari's opponents in the defeated People's Democratic Party (Coughlin, 2016).

The coalition of regional countries had almost succeeded in pushing Boko Haram out of most urban centers even before Buhari's electoral victory, but almost immediately upon assuming the presidency Buhari's army began intensifying its operations, particularly with regard to taking back terrain Boko Haram had claimed or been able to occupy. This retreat led to a renewed Boko Haram focus on non-military "soft" targets both to demonstrate a continued presence and to indicate to the people that the army could not protect them. This is indicative of the group's ever more coercive relationship with people as it struggles to connect its message with them, no longer able to make good on the promises of security, piety, and social advancement that initially gained it popularity (MercyCorps, 2016).

The Internal Dynamics of Boko Haram from 2010 To 2015

While the transition of administrations is worth taking into account when examining how democratizing states combat insurgency, it cannot be expected to subsume all other contributing factors. The Boko Haram insurgency balanced and modified its objectives both due to the influence of international currents in jihadism and because of coalitions dedicated to resisting it. Kydd and Walter (as cited in Forest, 2012) note that terrorist organizations rely on adhering to the specific political objectives of disaffected locals. Five key ones are: "regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control,

and status quo maintenance". The group's inability to expand its territory by 2015 may have given it added incentive to declare itself loyal to Islamic State in the hopes that attaching itself to the higher profile, more successful insurgency might prove lucrative. The March 2015 Boko Haram *baya* (religious pledge of loyalty) was specifically to "caliph" Abubakr Al-Baghdadi. The group changed its name to IS West African Province (ISWAP) but no clear operational link appeared for the following year to exist between the groups. By August 2016, the affiliation with Islamic State appears to have contributed to a factional leadership contest within Boko Haram (Withnall, 2016).

Boko Haram gained strength as it was responsive to the perceived marginalization of much of the public in the northeast in the absence of strong, representative government and institutions of civil society. Much of its internal ideological confusion has been a result of its confused message as it has abandoned local causes for wider jihadism. The early Boko Haram movement had an exclusive Nigerian context, with an emphasis on policy change and social control as its primary themes under the Kydd and Walter criteria. The decision to move away from this founding premise has been shaped by the perceived need to gain international Islamist allies and legitimacy. Though the group claims an austere form of Sunni Islam not represented nationally, or even regionally, it is subject to the same ethnic attachments seen throughout the rest of Nigeria and the resulting pressures of social control. While Boko Haram's increasingly acephalous nature makes it hard to determine if its transformation is in keeping with Ballentine and Nitzschke's (2003) theory of insurgent movements abandoning loftier aspirations for short-term economic gain, it demonstrates the group's early willingness to alter itself as required.

The decline of government services provided in the remote corners of the north has continued for decades, and by the turn of the century this resentment had begun to fuse with the common tendency for Salafists religious movements to form in that region. Despite its current militant projection, Boko Haram began as one of many civil society organizations struggling to fill the need for education in the region with a philosophy stemming from the group's Salafi form of Islam (Forest, 2012; Matfess, 2016). Early paramilitary squads associated with the movement primarily attacked competing Salafi groups before graduating to law enforcement targets. This transformation during the 2000s, especially noticeable after Yusuf's death, demonstrated how the movement slowly made the federal government its target.

The ability of Boko Haram to drive openly in massive convoys across the northeast had been nearly eradicated by mid-2016, but it has retained the ability to launch suicide attacks that can destabilize the region. Such attacks are cheap, require relatively little training or coordination, and are good for intimidation even while as the group becomes weaker. In discouraging public congregation where they are active, Boko Haram have been able to tear at the fabric of civil society and have traditionally encouraged overreaction by authorities. Holding territory and civilian populations are key to the movement's ability to provide wives and slaves for members, and even for further military operations. Counterterrorism experts in the U.S. estimate at least 105 of these suicide attacks from June 2014 to April 2016 have been perpetrated by women and girls (Coughlin, 2016). Two female suicide bombers killed 58 in 2015 at a Nigerian refugee camp. International pressures therefore have led the group to alter its internal practices, even while rationalizing them via the same unyielding interpretation of Salafi doctrine as before.

Boko Haram has been weakened, focusing on soft targets more often in recent months. But

even with the loss of its more valuable territory the group can still launch devastating attacks. The primary remaining stronghold of the group is the Sambisa Forest an optimal retreat for insurgencies of any kind. The sprawling wilderness stretches across four Nigerian states, with dense trees and few roads making the territory nearly impenetrable by land or air. This terrain has proved difficult for the federal government to penetrate. After its initial April 2015 attempts, the army was forced to retreat and regroup after mines and other traps led to casualties among some of the paramilitary units assisting the government.

The large majority of Boko Haram fighters are Kanuri by ethnicity, though the movement claims no ethnic objectives in regard to its overall mission and indeed most of its victims have also been Kanuri. The Kanuri had been represented at the executive level via the military dictatorship of Sani Abacha during the 1990s, but had seen a drastic reversal of fortune by the early 2010s. While wary of regional and national adversaries—the election of a southern president in Goodluck Jonathan, for example—there is no open support among northern elites for Boko Haram. It has gained less of a following among young non-Kanuri men, even those with concerns about employment and education (Forest, 2012). Abuja has attempted to use this ethnic dominance in the group to its advantage, intimating through propaganda in 2012 that the group's Kanuri leadership use members of other ethnicities as suicide bombers. The movement's foundation among Kanuri may limit its appeal to those of other ethnicities in Northern Nigeria, who for the most part are loyal to much older traditions of Islam.

Boko Haram's early radicalism convinced many disenfranchised Kanuri, especially young men, that the group planned to upend the socioeconomic order which they had been shut out of. Its attacks on civil society were seen as attacks on the establishment, the corruption it represented, and the grossly inequitable distribution of wealth in the region. The group thrived in urban areas initially, where landless young men would congregate, but always had a hostile relationship with rural communities uninterested in the “purer” Salafi variant of Islam the group espoused over traditional Maliki Islam.

State authorities allowed themselves to be made an easy villain by the group. The Nigerian military has a history of human rights abuses, nationally and in the northeast region in particular. The tendency to quash any perceived challenge to state authority with brutal force has engendered distrust among local communities (Smith, 2014; Thurston, 2015). The heavy-handed approach of military, security, and police forces towards the insurgent group since 2009 is generally agreed to have been counterproductive, allowing Boko Haram to benefit from the complete alienation of local citizens from the Nigerian state.

Despite their 2015 pledge to Islamic State, Buhari said there is no solid evidence that Boko Haram have been getting a weapons supply from the Levantine insurgency. Rather, Boko Haram's best weaponry likely came from the military and police facilities the group accessed during the early years of the insurgency (Premium Times, 2016b). Freed hostages have reported that the group is running low on weapons due to renewed multinational efforts to cut off supplies. In return, Boko Haram has little to offer Islamic State except the token of its loyalty in a noncontiguous part of the world. The regional grievances which helped it recruit fighters initially do not make it an effective vessel by which men can be regularly recruited for operations in the Levant or even Libya. The Nigerian group also lacks Islamic State's relatively polished propaganda capabilities, or ability to draw in the West and its enemies by attacking their interests. Boko Haram remains focused on attacking the Nigerian government and its allies, disrupting its nation-building efforts.

Discussion of Findings

It is the civil society dimension of democratic governance that Nigerian elites have found most difficult to respect, and to protect. The decline of prominent civil society organizations such as trade unions and professional guilds in the northeast states has been cited as helping Boko Haram to early prominence. In recent years, however, a reinvigorated civil society has gotten involved in the fight as well. As of June 2016, a civil society umbrella group known as the Coalition for a New Nigeria has assisted a government board of inquiry to determine the identities of those involved in the continuing attacks in the northeast of the country.

The military and federal police have faced difficulty strengthening ties with civil society. Both have a widespread reputation for corruption and brutality that has been difficult to overcome. Buhari is under pressure to increase their effectiveness while he simultaneously reduces the size of government. Violent attacks on the part of law enforcement and military units have led to international accusations of human rights abuses. The army is relatively small compared to other West African states considering Nigeria's size. It has also been involved in much regional peacekeeping.

Corruption's prevalence has made it a way of life in many parts of Nigeria, particularly for low-level officials such as policemen who are underpaid and often work in harsh conditions with little training or equipment. The colonial-era policy of housing police officers in barracks prevents them from living in and establishing relationships with local peoples. Police reform is crucial for Nigeria's immediate future regarding ending insurgencies. Police recruitment is often prone to political tampering and favoritism, the result of which is an unprepared force. The rapid turnover of Inspectors General of the Police (IGPs) caused by new administrations and corruption has led to varying, inconsistent agendas and levels of professionalism at the top levels.

Grassroots militias dedicated to providing local security have become crucial to the federal government's response. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF or JTF, of no direct connection to the MNJTF) is an umbrella vigilante organization in the northeast that partially compensates its lack of training with a strong knowledge of local terrain and society. Most of its fighters are poorly armed, with daggers, swords, bows, and guns, but they have been useful in that they provide information and links with local civil society. In May 2016, President Buhari noted that the JTF were of "tremendous help to the military because they are from here, they have local intelligence and some of them are retired military or retired policemen" (Odeyemi, 2016). In an effort to counteract the detachment and isolation most military and police often feel in these areas, President Buhari suggested the federal government could integrate individuals from the civilian JTF in the northeast into the Nigerian military and police after the conclusion of the campaign against Boko Haram. The integration process began in earnest by July 2016 with the absorption of 250 JTF fighters into the army (Oche, 2016; Sahara Reporters, 2016).

A key problem facing both administrations has been how to resolve the underlying economic problems in the region. Like other parts of Nigeria prone to instability and violence, the northeast has long been neglected by the national government. It is the most underdeveloped and illiterate area of the country, with little formal education among either men or women in the areas most affected by insurgency. Even with education, there are few career prospects in the region. In keeping with Fearon and Laitin's theory, bomb makers recruited by Boko Haram have often been identified as often unemployed university graduates with skills to build explosives but no regional employment prospects

(Chothia, 2015).

The movement's initial appeal to recruits was in providing the social opportunities the Nigerian state could not guarantee and seemed increasingly less interested in advancing. The abduction of young women is part of this process, as increasing the availability of brides would have appeal among young Kanuri men, for whom marriage is an important element of social advancement (Matfess, 2016).

Both presidents have recognized the role a lack of education played in the rise of Boko Haram. Jonathan stressed, "they were more active in two states, Borno and Yobe. If you relate this with the issue of education, you will discover that these two states have the worst cases in terms of children's school drop-out rate with more than 50 percent drop-out rate. So you can see that this high rate of out-of-school children speaks to the issue of the prevalence of insurgency in these states" (Anaba, 2016). Northerners are generally less educated than southerners. Buhari has sought to address education with a national program but the necessary focus on the north is sensitive to the president, himself a northerner, for political reasons. There are many marginalized communities throughout Nigeria, the rationale for focusing on the north is unclear to citizens elsewhere. That these areas continue to flounder while oil resources are used to fund development throughout other parts of the country supports the application of Gurr's relative deprivation at a national level, but also demonstrate the intricate political balance politicians must play in addressing marginalization nationally.

A degree of stability is fundamental when establishing fragile democratic frameworks within a state, but a vicious cycle is created when rural livelihoods are disrupted by Boko Haram. Peasants flee or are killed, their land is untended, crops rot in the fields. As the north produces less food, it is increasingly reliant on aid and faces more malnutrition. Agriculture is 40% of the Nigerian GDP and employs 70% of the population. Most farmers work small plots of land without access to irrigation and are solely reliant on rain. The lack of irrigation or infrastructure generally has served to isolate these communities, making them alien to urban centered law enforcement and easy prey for insurgents and criminals. With no easy access to roads it is difficult to get crops to market even during stable periods.

Conclusion

In Nigeria's halting democratic experience, elected officials have potential to be seen less as proponents of good governance than as proponents of patronage, corruption, ethnic and sectarian rivalry, and inconsistent or ineffective plans for security. Boko Haram has receded from the headlines and the revolt is on the back foot. There are myriad issues to concern Nigerians in its place: the effect of low oil prices internationally on a collapsing Nigerian economy and the renewed rebellion in the Niger Delta being only two of them. Nevertheless, the Salafi insurgency has touched on many underlying tensions within the Nigerian political realm.

The election of 2015 is a significant one for Nigerians. Not only was it the first time a Nigerian head of state stepped down after being defeated in a peacefully contested election, but the choice between the two candidates was substantive. The approach to dealing with Boko Haram was but one of many issues hashed out over the course of the campaign, and the election delved not just into the personalities of the leading candidates, but fundamental differences at the party level between the PDP and the APC. The approaches between the two candidates are measurably distinct from each other and, while there is almost certainly some scapegoating of the previous Jonathan administration, it is clear

that his government had fundamental flaws in addressing systemic causes for Boko Haram. These include an inability to stop the pervasive corruption of Nigerian politics, which contributed to a corrosive cynicism toward electoral procedures and governing that damages the broader Nigerian faith in democracy.

Buhari's approach to fighting the insurgency has met with some success, but also shows potential weaknesses. Nigeria is a country fractured at a national level. The recent rising of political violence again in the Niger Delta after six years of relative peace demonstrates that such activity is not limited to the northeast, and that grievances neglected can reemerge anywhere. Moving the military headquarters to the northeast may be useful in the fight against Boko Haram, but what of the resurgent violence in this region? Will Buhari now move the campaign headquarters once again? These problems fundamentally require solutions that can only be realized at a national level.

Many suspect an opportunity to defuse the escalating violence was lost after the initial eruptions of 2009 and Yusuf's death, when the government could have opened up talks with the group to de-escalate tensions but chose a military solution. This pattern appears to be repeating again in Kaduna State, where a December 2015 massacre of adherents to the Islamic Movement of Nigeria Shia sect resembles in some respects the approach taken to Boko Haram seven years ago. This indicates that leaders may rotate but institutional psychology is more difficult to change.

While Nigeria's underlying problems are national, Boko Haram has not succeeded in making itself a national movement. Its efforts to stoke sectarian conflict have had been of limited success, no doubt in part because the majority of its victims continue to be Muslim. It has not been able to seize lucrative oil facilities in the manner of Islamic State, the group it has attempted both to serve and emulate. It has managed to spread its carnage across the Nigerian and Chadian international borders, but has absolutely no message that might appeal to the peoples of those countries. The group's drift away from its original appeal—the resentment of poor people towards a government perceived as brutal, corrupt, and derelict—may damage it as much as any regional coalition formed to dismantle it.

In interviews following his exit from the presidency, Jonathan underscored that the fanaticism of the movement had made it qualitatively different than other insurgencies the country had faced, such as the armed groups in the Niger Delta. Boko Haram's objectives were more disparate and often fanatical. Jonathan stresses that his administration set up the framework to deal with such a movement and that current president Buhari is reaping the rewards of his policy.

While it is reasonable to note the impact of the Buhari administration on pushing back against Boko Haram in the past year, the group's decline is also the result of multiple processes at the regional and local level. The new administration was pivotal in coordinating a regional and international response to Boko Haram, persuading the U.S. to sell arms to Nigeria again and working closely with regional states now involved in the fight.

A combined approach involving Nigeria's neighbors has demonstrated an impact on the group's ability to destabilize the area, though long-term causes for Boko Haram's decline are not only due to government policy, but its own practices.

Addressing the concerns of the people—development, civil society, job opportunity, education—

is key. These concerns are interrelated and fundamental. The Buhari government's success in securing international assistance in the fight against Boko Haram is significant, but does not address the underlying issues which allowed the group to gain such international prominence in the first place.

Neither is democratic reform alone enough to combat problems related to development, corruption, and police/military brutality. Still, it is at least crucial to the success of democracy that Nigerians feel empowered in resolving their problems, and that government reform is part of this process.

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