

Governance Failure and the Rise of Boko Haram Insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: Demystifying the root causes of Boko Haram insurgency in North-eastern Nigeria has continued to provoke endless academic debate that opened new frontier for research among social science scholars and other allied disciplines. This study contributes to the debate by interrogating the nexus between governance, underdevelopment, religious extremism and the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria. The data for the study are drawn from articles published in journals, newspapers, magazines and official documents while content analysis and trends analytical technique were applied for data analysis. Anchoring its explanations on the propositions of terror triangle theory, the study argues that the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east is a logical consequence of governance failure in the region. It asserts that abysmal failure of the governments to provide basic means of livelihoods for the people has engendered underdevelopment crisis in the region that exposed the poor masses into severe socio-economic hardship. As a result, the gullible and impoverished masses easily fall prey to the antics and manipulations of religious extremists who demonized the Nigerian state, seduced, brain washed, radicalized and hypnotize the frustrated masses with Islamic ideologies. The study recommends among others; the provision of welfare services for the masses, poverty reduction, entrepreneur development and de-radicalization of the youth in the region.

Key words: Governance • Underdevelopment • Religious Extremism • Boko Haram and Insurgency

INTRODUCTION

The persistence of the violent activities of the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria provokes academic questions that underscore the need to understand the root causes of the menace [1]. Against this backdrop, this study interrogates the underlying factors that led to the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria. The study argues that the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-Eastern Nigeria is an ample manifestation of governance failure in the region. It asserts that the governing elites have mismanaged the abundant resources in Nigeria and the consequence has been the underdevelopment crisis witnessed in the North-East and other parts of the country today. Regrettably, Nigerian state to say the least is blessed with rich human and abundant material resources which if properly tapped and managed could place the country at a par with other developing countries of the world [2]. Unfortunately, the governing elites have thrown the people of this rich country into abject poverty due largely

to bad governance occasioned by inept corruption and lack of visionary leadership. Paradoxically, Nigerian State is a rich country whose people are wallowing in abject poverty and penury [3].

Unarguably, the abysmal failure of governing elites to provide the basic means of livelihoods for the people occasioned by many years of bad governance is bound to generate underdevelopment crisis in the country. Today, Nigeria has become an ideal laboratory for studying all forms of humanitarian crisis, such as social insecurity, hunger and diseases, internally displaced persons, refugee problem, armed robbery, kidnapping and other various forms of heinous crimes. These development crises have invariably exposed every average family to severe socio-economic hardships such that average families in Nigeria can no longer afford to meet up with their traditional roles [4]. The situation is further exacerbated by inept corruption, poor policy reforms and weak institutional structures. Paradoxically, the state institutions in Nigeria have become too weak that they can no longer play their assigned roles in the

system while some few individuals have too powerful that they can profane the law with impunity. As such injustices and sufferings have become the order of the day in the country [5].

Instead of tackling the myriad issues of unemployment, infrastructure decay, rising digit inflation and other attendant socio-economic problems pervading the state, the governing elites had decided to close their eyes as if everything is normal. As a result of the irresponsible attitudes of the elites, the aforesaid socio-economic challenges rose astronomically, throwing more families into severe socio-economic hardship [6]. In the absence of social safety nets mechanisms provided by the government to cushion the affects of the hardship on the masses, the gullible and disparate masses have become vulnerable to possible manipulations. As a result, some radical Islamic clerics and other religious extremists cashed on the prevailing situation to render some welfare services to the poor masses hiding under the cloak of Islamic welfare programmes [7].

Consequently, the gullible and impoverished masses easily fall prey to the antics and manipulations of Islamic clerics and religious extremists, who demonized the Nigerian State, seduced, brain washed, radicalized and hypnotized the frustrated masses with Islamic dogmas. Undoubtedly, the Islamic clerics and extremists have supremely convinced the ignorant youth population to hold the Nigerian state and leaders accountable for their sufferings and that their salvation lay in the over throw of the Nigerian State and replacing it with Islamic system of governance [8]. As such the Boko Haram insurgency is seen and welcomed by many of the youth population as a liberation struggle that will put an end to many years of sufferings unleashed on them by leaders of the Nigerian State.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted qualitative method in carrying out its investigation. The data employed for the study were gathered from secondary sources. As such, data used for this study were collected from public libraries as well as private libraries of a number of colleagues and associates within and outside the country. Besides, the study also made use of internet materials wherein relevant articles were carefully retrieved. The study utilized both content analysis and trend analytical techniques for the analysis of data. As such the information employed for analysis in the study were carefully extracted from logical chains of

evidence presented in journal papers, conference papers, periodic papers, edited books, documentary materials among others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study strongly argues that the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-Eastern Nigeria is an ample manifestation of governance failure in the region. The struggle for control of political power by the northern political elites was fundamental to the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria [9]. It has been alleged in some quarters that northern political, traditional and religious leaders were behind Boko Haram insurgency in pursuance of an agenda for the promotion of northern domination and the supremacy of the Muslim religion in the affairs of the Nigerian state. According to this assertion, Boko Haram was meant to undermine the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian [9]. However, [10], argued that Boko Haram was the creation of bitter politics, which predated President Jonathan's presidency dating back to about 2002. During the period, the group had remained docile but turned violent following the military's attack on its headquarters in July, 2009. The attack, which was ordered by late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua, was presumed to have wiped-out the sect until it returned about a year later with deadly attacks under Abubakar Shekau, who was until the death of Muhammad Yusuf, the deputy leader of the group.

The emphasis on the military option in tackling the Boko Haram insurgency by the Government of President Jonathan appears to suggest that the lesson of the return of the sect about a year after it was presumed extinct has not been learnt. According to [10], the rejection of this lesson by the President Jonathan Administration, has led to suspicions by some northerners that: "The authorities do not want to end the insurgency because ending it would make it difficult, if not impossible, to rig the 2015 elections in a region widely regarded as hostile to his (Jonathan) stay in office."

Riding on the crest of such sentiment, [10], further argued that it was absurd for anyone to think that a sect, whose creed was widely regarded as heretic by the mainstream religious and secular leaders in the north will be their choice for advancing their religious or political interest. It is also argued that from the attempts on the lives of some prominent traditional rulers in the north like the Shehu of Borno; the Emir of Kano and from the

number of Muslims and their clerics killed or attacked by Boko Haram, that even if anyone in the north ever sponsored the sect, the purported sponsors have since lost control over it.

The perennial ethnic and sectarian disturbances in northern Nigeria, such as the Sokoto jihad; Tiv riot; Maintasine riot; Zango-kataff riot; Jos crisis; Juku-Taraba communal crisis; among others had created a fertile ground for Boko Haram. Also, bad leadership and corruption have provided a rallying cry for Boko Haram. According to [11], which quoted an interview with Muhammed Yusuf, - Boko Haram's first leader; "Corruption became the catalyst for Boko Haram... would have found it difficult to gain a lot of these people if he was operating in a functional state. But his teaching was easily accepted because the environment, the frustrations, the corruption and the injustice made it fertile for his ideology to grow fast, very fast, like wildfire."

The group had continued to emphasize corruption and injustice as the motivating factors for their desire to institutionalize Islamic government based on the principles of sharia, which they saw as anti-dote to corruption and lack of basic social services such as health-care, education, water, electricity, good housing, roads, amongst others for the ordinary citizens. As [11], noted, while professing to oppose corruption, Boko Haram has at times openly exploited it to advance its cause. For example, the Report observed that Boko Haram claimed that it succeeded in carrying out a car bomb attack on the United Nations Office in Abuja, in August, 2011 by bribing government security personnel at check points along the 800kms route from Maiduguri to Abuja. According to Boko Haram's spokesman quoted in the Report, "luckily for us, security agents were not out to work diligently but to find money for themselves and N20.00 or N50.00 that was politely given to them gave us a pass" [11].

Apart from corruption, the socio-economic hardship occasioned by abject poverty was another factor that gave impetus to the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. Nearly, 100 million Nigerians live on less than one US dollar a day. In January 2012, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics released a report showing that the percentage of Nigerians living in abject poverty had increased nation-wide from 55 to 61% between 2004 and 2010 [12]. This phenomenal rise in the country's poverty profile was particularly notable given that in the preceding year (2011), Nigeria was the world's fourth largest exporter of oil [11].

Poverty is unevenly distributed in Nigeria with the north being the worst off. [13], showed that 70% of Nigerians in the north-eastern part of the country (Boko Haram's traditional stronghold) lived on less than one US dollar a day compared to 50 and 59% in the south-western and south-eastern Nigeria respectively. Also, government's demographic and health survey in 2008 cited in [11], revealed that less than 23% of women and 54% of men in the north-east Nigeria could read and write compared to more than 79% of women and 90% of men in the south. Furthermore, chronic malnutrition among children is also more prevalent in northern Nigeria than in the south. Infrastructural development also lags behind in the north. In the north-east, for instance, only 24% of households have access to electricity compared with 71% of households in the south-west [13]. Unemployment, lack of economic opportunities and wealth inequalities are sources of deep frustration across the country, especially in many parts of the north.

Boko Haram has thus, exploited Nigeria's history of ethnic and sectarian strife along with conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation, pervasive corruption at all levels of government, unemployment and social injustice as justification for its violent campaign. The Boko Haram sect believed that the infiltration of America and European cultures into Nigeria has a corrupting influence on the country's governance, hence their anti-west and America. All these have informed the desire of the group to establish an Islamic state of Nigeria based on sharia. In fact, the emergence of Boko Haram reflects the long festering extremist impulses that reign deep in the social reality of northern Nigeria.

Despite per capital income of more than \$2, 700 and annual GDP growth of 7%, Nigeria has one of the world's poorest populations [15]. Economic disparities between the north and the rest of the country are particularly stark. In the north, 72% of the people live in poverty compared to 27% in the south [16]. Indeed, most of the apparent ethnic and religious crises in the north and the youth restiveness and criminality in the south can be linked to increasing economic inequality. According to Nasir Ahmed El-Rufai in [16], "An analysis of public investments in infrastructure and human capital in the north eastern Nigerian would explain why the region is not only home to flawed elections and economic hopelessness but Boko Haram insurgency as well."

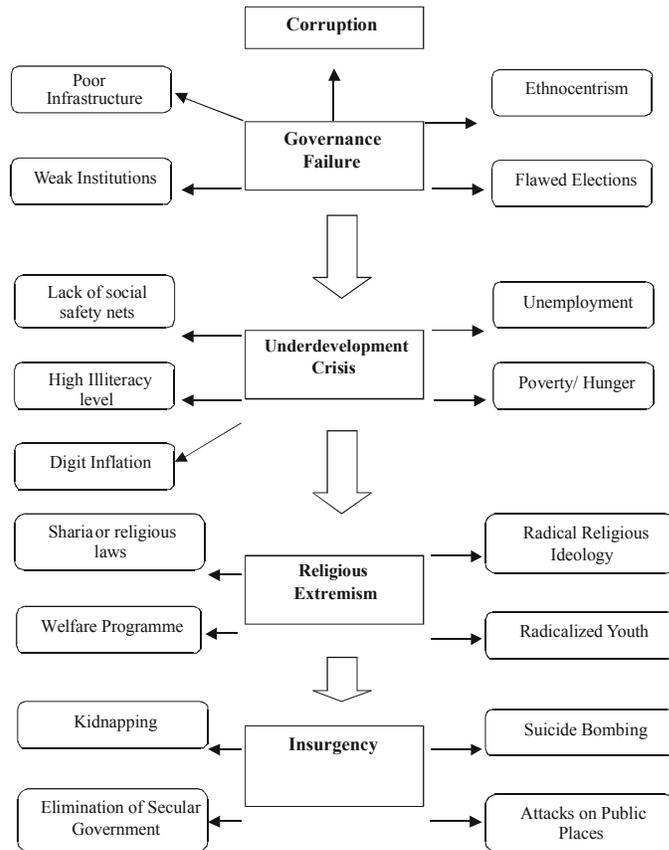


Fig. 1: A logical structure illustrating the interface between governance failure and the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria

Given the level of underdevelopment in the north, the generality of northerners fear that their political influence in the country was fast waning. Also, many northern Muslims, especially, in the opposition parties viewed the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, as illegitimate, arguing that he ignored an informal power-rotation agreement that should have kept a Muslim-northerner as President. The northern Muslims' anxiety over southern Christians' control of the economy as well as the political power with the election of President Goodluck Jonathan (Christian) fueled the post-2011 election crisis and the rise of Muslim fundamentalism [17]. These developments, which further alienated the Muslim north, played a significant role in the spread of Boko Haram sect in the region.

CONCLUSION

The paper argues that the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria is a consequence of governance failure in Nigeria. It asserts that the

underdevelopment crisis engendered by corrupt and inept leadership in Nigeria has given ample opportunities to religious extremists to demonize the Nigerian state, seduce, brain wash, radicalize and hypnotize the frustrated masses with Islamic ideologies. The study concludes that the military approach to tackling the Boko Haram insurgency in the country has failed not for lack of professional competence and capability on the part of the Nigerian security forces per se but because it was a wrong prescription, which addresses the symptoms of the problem rather than the root causes.

The paper therefore, recommends that the permanent solution to the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria lies in the domestication of true democracy and good governance, which will address the socio-economic and political roots on which extremist ideologies thrive such as absolute and dehumanizing poverty; high corruption; bad leadership; electoral fraud; social injustice; inequality, etc. The paper further maintains that the Boko Haram insurgency will fizzle out once the fundamental challenges such as unemployment and hunger are

addressed through jobs creation and social safety programmes. Again, government should make concerted efforts to de-radicalize the youth population in the region by embarking on national re-orientation. More than that government must down play, political, religious and ethnic differences among the people and work towards the unity of Nigeria in order to promote patriotic spirit among Nigerians. Besides, there should be convocation of the National Conference or Dialogue in order to provide a unique opportunity for a new and creative ways of eliminating tendencies that drive people to extremism as amply demonstrated by the Boko Haram insurgency.

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