

“Where Did Boko Haram Come From? Human Rights and Governance in Nigeria”

Crisis Group presentation, 4 February 2015

Background

Most Nigerians are poorer today than they were at independence in 1960, victims of the resource curse and rampant, entrenched corruption. Agriculture, once the economy's mainstay has collapsed. In many part of the country the government is unable to provide security, good roads, water, health, reliable power and education. The situation is particularly dire in Nigeria's far north. Frustration and alienation is driving many to join “self-help” ethnic, religious, community or civic groups, some that are hostile to the state.

In 2006 Crisis Group wrote in *Nigeria: Want in the Midst of Plenty*: “the politicisation of ethnicity and religion and factional mobilisation ... is a direct by-product of the monopolisation of power and assets by ruling elites eager to avoid open and fair competition. With Nigeria's emergence as a major oil producer, pervasive patron-client networks have developed at all levels of government. Federalism has permitted entitlements to be spread more widely across society but it has in turn fuelled a proliferation of state and local institutions that have made governance fragmentary and unwieldy”.

Political competition has led to escalating electoral violence. Even in the relatively successful 2011 elections some 1000 people are believed to have died in protests after the results were announced. While much better than past votes, the polls were still riddled with malpractices, logistical deficiencies and procedural inconsistencies.

There are many reasons for concerns for Nigeria, which is suffering an almost perfect storm, with a tight and highly contested political contest between two evenly matched parties threatening pre and post-election violence, the Boko Haram insurgency creating both a major security challenge and raising constitutional issues, and the economic shock of drastically lower oil prices.

Elections

Despite a non-violence accord signed by major presidential candidates and high profile visits by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Secretary of State John Kerry, there are still very serious concerns about large-scale pre- and particularly post-election violence. Election-related violence continues, including attacks on President Jonathan's campaign train in two northern cities, and threats by former Niger Delta militant leaders that if Jonathan is not re-elected it will be considered “an act of war”. If the vote is not seen as free and fair, protests could quickly turn bloody and may spiral out of control.

North-South Claims to the Presidency

Northerners feel cheated by President Goodluck Jonathan, who assumed Nigeria's highest office after his Northern predecessor Umaru Musa Yar'Adua died in office. He is now running for a second full term. Some politicians, including former President Olusegun Obasanjo, claim that he had privately agreed not to do so because if he wins, he would be president for more than the 8-year constitutional mandate. However Jonathan's region contends this is the first time a person

from the Niger Delta, the source of most government revenue, has held the highest office and they want him to serve a second term. On 27 December former militant leader, now leader of the Niger Delta Peoples' Salvation Front (NDPSF), Alhaji Mujahid Asari-Dokubo, declared that President Goodluck Jonathan "has already won" the presidential election, that it was "impossible" for the incumbent president, who is from the Niger Delta to lose. He said: "In whatever way they want him, he will win. He has already won", and stressed that no other result will be acceptable to people in the Niger Delta.

The Religion Factor

The country is roughly divided between the largely Muslim North and largely Christian South. Cleavages are exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency, increasing radicalization of both Christian and Muslim groups and increasing demands by local communities for positions in state and local institutions.

Campaign Violence between Parties

Fortunately the violence around the party primaries was relatively limited, but pre-election violence has been on the rise since the beginning of 2015.

Both parties think they are going to win

Supporters of the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) seem to believe that their presidential candidate is going to, and should, win. Ekiti State Governor Ayodele Fayose (PDP) said APC's presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari, was "an Islamist...out to return power to the northerners and implement Islamic agenda" and that if elected, his victory could trigger crisis in the Niger-Delta. On 4 January National Chairman of All Progressives Congress (APC), Chief John Odigie-Oyegun, said his party will form "a parallel government" if the 2015 elections are rigged, either through the use of a compromised Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) or by the use of security agencies to harass, intimidate and cajole voters.

Inadequate Election Arrangements

The electoral commission is struggling to complete electoral preparations, including delivery of millions of permanent voter cards. It is also implementing new and untested card readers and must train staff for some 155,000 polling points. And struggling to make provisions that would enable internally displaced persons to vote; many are not registered. There are also unresolved legal questions. What is the impact of the insecurity in the North East? It will suppress voting in an opposition stronghold. How does this impact constitutional provisions that the president must win 25 % of the vote in 2/3 of states "of the Federation". Clearly either side will contest the result regardless of the outcome.

Neutrality of Security Agencies

Continuing pro-PDP bias by security agencies is also heightening tensions around the elections, raising doubts about their reliability to be even-handed in dealing with possible post-election violence. The security sector is also in a bad state after years of attacks by Boko Haram leave citizens wondering whether they can help secure a peaceful vote. The police are dysfunctional and the army is reeling from casualties, corruption and mismanagement.

Boko Haram

The Boko Haram insurgency has stretched federal security services extremely thin, with no end in sight. From its origins as a localized rebellion in Borno state in 2009, the conflict grew to much of the North East and has spilled over into northern Cameroon and threatens Niger, weak states poorly equipped to combat a radical Islamist armed group tapping into genuine grievances – bad governance, corruption, impunity and underdevelopment – shared by most people in the region. Recently insurgents have expanded and seized territory from 20,000 to 30,000sq km (about the size of West Virginia). In January the group overran two military bases (in Baga and Monguno), attempted to seize the Borno state capital, Maiduguri (on 25 Jan and 1 February), and killed more civilians including massacring hundreds, maybe 2,000, in Baga. It is using more girls and women for suicide bombings, and recently showed training camp for child soldiers. There are indications that the splinter group, Ansaru, may be returning to prominence.

The conflict is spreading, with Boko Haram making more incursions into Cameroon and threatening Chad and Niger. Chad sent substantial military support to Cameroon, commenced military operation in Nigeria, and risks becoming new target of Boko Haram attacks. However, differences between Nigeria and its neighbors (over authorization, status/mandate, concept of operations, etc) continually hamper the establishment of a proposed intervention force. Some progress was made at a regional meeting in Niamey, Niger, on 20 January, but much more needs to be done. The AU has also endorsed a regional force to combat the group, but the details still need to work.

The humanitarian crisis is growing worse: Over one million people are now displaced within Nigeria and as refugees in Cameroon, Niger and Chad. A food crisis is looming with USAID warning that 3 million will not meet basic needs by mid-2015. Education and other services have been greatly disrupted: about 900 schools destroyed, at least 176 teachers killed in the three previous years. National Emergency Management Agency reports 120,077 students out of school due to attacks in the three north eastern states. Increasing numbers of children violated, orphaned, traumatized: insurgents turning captured boys to child fighters, hundreds of girls and young women kidnapped or captured in overrun towns shared as so-called “wives” to the fighters or sold as sex slaves; many continually subjected to serial and group rape. In recent months, Boko Haram using more girls and young women for suicide bombing missions. Also, some reports of rape and other sexual abuse in IDP camps.

The Economy and Other Serious Medium Term Challenges

Nigeria is Africa’s top oil producer, and its economy has grown about 7% annually for the past decade. Despite significant investment in other economic sectors, oil remains its top export and makes up about 80% of government’s revenue. The precipitous drop in the price of oil will have a dramatic impact on the economy, the federal budget and government’s ability to deliver services (including security). The government is already struggling to provide the basic conditions for economic development, including adequate infrastructure and reliable electricity provision. Leaders state that the economic crisis will help diversify the economy and possibly reduce corruption, but it remains to be seen whether either candidate can deliver.

Tackling corruption and improving governance in general will be huge challenges. Unless the government makes significant advances doing so, grievances that feed insurgencies like Boko Haram will continue to plague Nigeria for years to come.

What can Congress Do?

Elections

- Sustain international support and attention to the elections.

Follow the elections closely. Nigerian elite are sensitive to the outside judgment and their image abroad. Be positioned to intervene with one voice. Ambassadors in Abuja are starting to coordinate. This should also be done at the capital level. Should be expanded to level of prime minister/president. Possibly get parliament, legislatures involved—to speak to their counterparts in Nigeria. Try to expand pressure groups from just the “West” to include other democracies and concerned countries from the South.

- Reduce tensions between political parties, also between region-based pressure groups. Congress should urge Nigerian politicians and parties to discuss the ground rules going into the election, particularly constitutional questions. Parties and their leaders, as well as leaders of regional pressure groups, should be asked to tone down their rhetoric and hold members accountable for inflammatory actions and language. In the event of contested results, aggrieved parties must turn to the courts, rather than resort to violence or unconstitutional arrangements.

- Ensure security agencies remain neutral.

Institutions overseeing security agencies and monitoring respect for citizens’ rights, including the Police Service Commission, National Human Rights Commission and relevant committees of the federal parliament, should publicly condemn partisan acts and other excesses by security agencies.

Combating Boko Haram

- Demand stronger collaboration between Nigeria and its neighbors.

The AU recently endorsed a 7,500 troop regional mission to combat Boko Haram, which will most likely require significant U.S. support. In exchange the government should demand that the region develop a sophisticated regional strategy to tackle the insurgency and increase military cooperation.

- Provide more support to the growing humanitarian crisis.

But also require Nigeria, as a middle-income country to provide its fair share. Demand that the Nigerian government greatly improve humanitarian response to the crisis. Support international assistance to Nigerian government efforts.

Relevant Crisis Group Nigeria reports (available at www.crisisgroup.org):

Nigeria’s Dangerous 2015 Elections: Limiting the Violence, Africa Report N°220, 21 Nov 2014
Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency, Africa Report N°216, 3 Apr 2014

Curbing Violence in Nigeria (I): The Jos Crisis, Africa Report N°196, 17 Dec 2012

Lessons from Nigeria’s 2011 Elections, Africa Briefing N°81, 15 Sep 2011

Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict, Africa Report N°168, 20 Dec 2010

Nigeria: Want in the Midst of Plenty, Africa Report N°113, 19 Jul 2006