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The elites' fixation on self-aggrandizement is a pathological feature of Nigerian political culture, one that has hindered the state from fulfilling its responsibility to protect life and property within its borders.

Islamist Terrorism and State Failure in Northern Nigeria

Osita G. Afoaku

Boko Haram, six years after it declared war on the Nigerian state, has extended its operation to the neighboring countries of Cameroun and Chad and ranks as the world's deadliest terrorist organization. These developments have lent credence to the view that it is on a mission to eradicate Western cultural influence in Nigeria. However, the conventional narrative does not explain the Jonathan administration's inability to dismantle or significantly degrade it despite an apparently favorable balance of power. Furthermore, it does not explain the government's failure to nip it in the bud during the period of radicalization that for ten years preceded the inception of its terrorist mission. To bridge the existing knowledge gap pertaining to Boko Haram's resilience and growth, this article posits that the Islamist terrorist group and other insurgencies are symptomatic of the dysfunctionality of the Nigerian state. State dysfunction or failure derives from the chronic inclination of the national elites to abuse their role as custodians of public institutions and resources. As evidenced by key national decisions related to constitutional separation of state and religion, Nigeria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Countries, the adoption of sharia by northern states, and the Jonathan administration's counterinsurgency strategy, the autonomy of the Nigerian state and its ability to safeguard the safety of life and property within its borders have been severely compromised by elite behavior marked by political expediency and obsession with personal aggrandizement. Contrary to the conventional narrative, politicians from throughout Nigeria, including those in the south, contributed to the conditions that gave rise to Boko Haram.

Nigeria, despite its troubles, is by all accounts considered a regional power in West Africa, where it has historically played a leading role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, thanks to its vastly superior military power. In

2016, it was ranked forty-fourth out of 126 countries in terms of military strength. In contrast, Boko Haram can be described as a ragtag insurgency, inspired by an extremist religious ideology; however, as evidenced by the magnitude of violence perpetrated by its members during the past six years, it has managed to shake popular confidence in the Nigerian state by creating a climate of fear in the country. According to the latest report, it has killed 20,000 people and displaced 2.5 million within and across Nigeria's borders. In 2014 alone, it was responsible for 6,644 deaths, compared to 6,073 at the hands of ISIS. It has caused 15,000 schools to be closed, 950,000 children to be denied access to education, and 13,000 churches to be abandoned, closed, or destroyed. Finally, it has abducted 2000 children and recruited 10,000 boys. Not surprisingly, in 2015 it achieved the notoriety of being ranked as the world's deadliest terrorist group, followed by ISIS and al-Qaeda (Okakwa 2016). While it was still unknown to most Nigerians, it was involved in a series of violent activities between its founding, in 2002, and 2009, when it had its first bloody encounter with state security agents in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state.

The primary aim of this article is to shed light on the failure of Goodluck Jonathan's counterinsurgency strategy to dismantle or degrade Boko Haram despite an apparently favorable balance of power between Boko Haram and the Nigerian armed forces. I attempt here to explain the Jonathan administration's inability to confront Boko Haram during a ten-year period, which culminated in Boko Haram's transformation from an obscure Muslim youth organization to a full-blown terrorist organization. My central argument is that, in large measure, the audacity and resilience displayed by Boko Haram is symptomatic of the dysfunctionality of the Nigerian state. I problematize state failure as a function of the chronic inclination of the national elites to abuse their role as custodians of public institutions and resources. I postulate that their fixation on self-aggrandizement is a pathological feature of Nigerian political culture, one that has hindered the state from fulfilling its responsibility to protect life and property within its borders. In other words, contrary to the conventional narrative, politicians throughout Nigeria, including those in the south, have contributed to the conditions that have given rise to Boko Haram. The next part of the article explores links among corruption, state failure, and insurgency in Nigeria.

Corruption, the Scourge of the Nigerian State

Contemporary discourse on governance holds the state to be the principal provider of public goods. The most critical of such goods includes protecting citizens' life and property against external and internal threats; safeguarding citizens' rights to participate freely, openly, and fully in politics and the political process; adjudicating disputes and regulating the norms and prevailing mores of a particular society; and providing physical infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, roads, railroads, airports, and harbors. Accordingly, a

state can be described as strong or weak as a rough estimate of its capacity to provide public goods to persons living within its borders (Rotberg 2003). In empirical terms, a strong state will be ranked high on performance indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. Conversely, a weak state will "show a mixed profile, fulfilling expectations in some areas and performing poorly in others. The more poorly weak states perform, criteria by criteria, the weaker they become, and the more that weakness tends to edge toward failure, hence the category of weakness that is termed *failing*" (Rotberg 2003). With particular reference to its less than stellar performance during the Jonathan administration, Richard Joseph has this to say about the Nigerian state: "With infinitesimally fewer financial resources than the Nigerian government, an amorphous insurgency has proved to be more effective in its violent campaign than the Nigerian military and police" (Joseph 2014).

By far the most important manifestation of state failure in Nigeria is corruption, a scourge that has plagued every facet of the country since the end of British rule in 1960. The political culture is strongly shaped by the notion that holding public office provides officials with access to resources and that the theft of such resources goes largely unpunished. Nowhere is this pattern more endemic in the country than the public institutions charged with the functions of legislation, law enforcement, and security. Nigerian politicians at all levels see their position as an opportunity to accumulate wealth. At \$189,500, the annual salary of Nigerian federal lawmakers is 118 times the country's GDP per capita, of \$1,600. Nigeria's federal lawmakers earn disproportionately more than their counterparts in countries such as the United States (\$174,000), Brazil (\$157,600), the UK (\$105,400), South Africa (\$104,000), France (\$85,900), and Saudi Arabia (\$64,000), though each of these countries has a stronger economy than Nigeria. In addition, senators and representatives are paid N192 million (\$1.28 million) and N140 (\$0.93 million) respectively in illegal quarterly allocations not provided for by the Revenue Mobilization Allowance and Fiscal Commission (Nwabugo n.d.). Although the Senate, after months of intense criticism, agreed to a \$20 billion cut, its new allocation—of \$130 billion—still outweighs the individual budgets of nineteen states of the federation (Isine 2015). Despite public outcry, the Senate spent \$4.7 billion in 2016 on vehicles for its leaders and members (Mamu 2012). The Nigerian Police, originally established by the British to enforce colonial policies, is widely perceived as a chronically corrupt and ineffective institution. A commonplace practice, in which uniformed officers extort money from ordinary citizens, is exacerbated by dismal working conditions, making it difficult for police officers to resist corruption. The Nigerian military, unlike the police, has historically claimed the moral authority to chastise errant politicians. For the greater part of Nigeria's postindependence era, ambitious military officers have used this pretext to take control of the levers of political power through coups. In general, the military's constitutional mandate of protecting the territorial

integrity of the country has been trumped by senior officers' private ambitions. Furthermore, students of Nigerian politics generally believe that many years of military dictatorship contributed to the entrenchment of corruption across the entire fabric of the nation (Agbese 1992; Mbaku 2000). In 2016, the Department of State Security, a federal anticorruption agency, was embarking on a nationwide clampdown on the judiciary for corruption. As noted by the news agency Sahara Reporters on October 11, 2016, its primary targets included two Supreme Court justices, three justices of the Court of Appeal, seven federal high court judges, and four state high court judges implicated in the controversial gubernatorial election petition in Rivers State. Sahara Reporters noted the next day that corruption in the national judicial system had become deeply entrenched, prompting many Nigerians to demand a wider probe.

By far the most compelling evidence of corruption is the discrepancy between Nigeria's resource endowment and the people's standard of living. Nigeria is the eighth-largest exporter of crude oil, which accounts for nearly 40 percent of the GDP, more than 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and roughly 80 percent of government revenues. However, little of the oil revenues trickles down to the masses. By recent World Bank estimates, Nigeria has lost \$400 billion to oil thieves since independence in 1960, and 80 percent of oil revenues that accrue to the domestic front benefit only 1 percent of the population (Nnochiri 2012; Omeje 2011). Despite its resource wealth, Nigeria in 2015 was ranked 152nd out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index, life expectancy at birth was 52.8 years, maternal deaths per 100,000 live births were 560, and 62 percent of the population lived below the poverty line, defined as US\$1.25 per day.

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that Nigeria has a largely untapped youthful potential because of the combined effects of poor governance, corruption, and parochial cultural practices. Seventy-five million Nigerians—more than 50 percent of the national population—are under eighteen. One-third of school graduates are unemployed, and experts suggest that the economy will have to expand dramatically to keep pace with growing demand for jobs. As Reuters noted in March 2014, a scramble for government jobs, coupled with poor management, led to the death of sixteen people in stampedes at five locations where a half-million applicants were scheduled to take a test for 4,500 immigration service posts. When it comes to education and youth development, Nigeria can hardly be called a progressive country. Despite the federal government's policy of free primary education, approximately 8.2 million children are out of school, and more than half of them live in the north. Of the less than 50 percent of children attending school, only one-third are girls. In northern Nigeria, where Muslim traditions predominate, girls as young as thirteen are pressured into early marriage. Sexism and a belief that schools are vehicles of negative Western cultural influences discourage families from sending girls to school. An inadequate supply of educational materials is an additional headache for teachers and schoolchildren. In principle, pupils are to be supplied textbooks and

other materials as part of the government's free primary education policy; however, textbooks marked "Not for Sale" and "Property of the Government of Nigeria" often find their way to bookstores, where they are sold at exorbitant prices. Thanks to public officials who connive with booksellers, illegal trade in educational materials thrives across the country. Bureaucratic corruption is making it harder for poor families to send their children to school. Consequently, in sprawling urban centers such as Lagos, hundreds of boys as young as ten work as bus conductors, while thousands of school-age boys and girls join the crowd of street vendors that sprint among heavy traffic, selling water, food, and personal-care and household products (Duffield 2010). In 2010, as Nigeria approached the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, the Jonathan administration was confronted with overwhelming popular dissatisfaction with the state of the nation. Bukola Saraki, governor of Kwara state, lamented an inadequate supply of qualified teachers in his state, where only seven out of 20,000 teachers passed an aptitude test (Guardian 2008; Adebimpe 2010).

Nigeria is widely regarded as "the giant of Africa," but it epitomizes the proverbial paradox of "scarcity in the midst of plenty" (Campbell 2011). *Almajiri*, the Muslim boarding-school system that enrolls 8 to 9 million children across the northern region, is graphic evidence of government and societal negligence with regard to children's welfare. The Quranic schools are plagued by a myriad of problems that include parental ignorance and poverty, the extended separation of children ages four to fifteen from family members and communities, imprecise duration of studies (estimated duration is twenty years), the irrelevance of Quranic literacy to the job market, an unfriendly and unsanitary environment, an inadequate food supply, overcrowding, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient and semi-literate teachers, and inadequate community support (AbdulQadir 2013). So far, the government has made little effort to reform and/or integrate *Almajiri* into the national education system. Without good teachers and a supportive environment, the pupils are reduced to bowl-carrying beggars, who can be seen almost everywhere across the north (AbdulQadir 2013). Unsurprisingly, though children from diverse backgrounds are attracted to antiestablishment organizations, the *Almajiri* are likelier to be "associated with Islamic radicalism, militancy, and the periodic riots that have blighted many northern Nigerian cities" (Hoechner 2014). They are prime targets for recruitment as child soldiers and suicide bombers (Adenrele 2012; Alechenu 2013; Onuoha 2014).

According to Sarah Chayes, four elements help explain the causal link between corruption and violence. First, corruption is about not only stolen money, but also the humiliation inflicted upon the poor and voiceless, and how the resultant disillusionment can push victims of corruption over the edge. In other words, the violation of human dignity due to corruption can trigger an enraged response. The second element relates to citizens' lack of recourse when powerful government officials perpetrate crimes. Under such circumstances, it is natural for the poor to be skeptical about recovering by

peaceful methods embezzled money that was earmarked for development projects. Third, the loss and hopelessness felt by victims could be aggravated by the depth of corruption embedded in the machinery of state. At this point, corruption has become a systemic problem, or the “practice of sophisticated networks armed with all the instruments of state function.” Ultimately, corruption is likelier to trigger a violent response when the sum of looted money is estimated in colossal terms (Chayes 2016). The last point hits home with regard to Nigeria, which has witnessed massive looting of money that could have gone a long way to improve health care, public transport, sanitation, water, a living wage for teachers, and other social services needed by the people. Viewed through the eyes of a militant religious sect such as Boko Haram, corruption can be so morally reprehensible as to warrant the rejection of the existing social order (Chayes 2016). As discussed below, Boko Haram is one of several sources of threat to the legitimacy of the Nigerian state. Unsurprisingly, in 2016, Nigeria ranked thirteenth out of 178 countries on the global Fragile State Index, down from fifty-fourth in 2005. The latest ranking placed Nigeria in the High Alert category, slightly above the most unstable group (Very High Alert) of countries on the list.

Reflecting on the link between corruption and violence, Dipak Gupta suggests that the existence of structural imbalances that deprive people of the opportunity to achieve their full potential are a necessary but insufficient condition for the spontaneous explosion of collective violence, as has been witnessed in Nigeria and other countries of West Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa. This is because, according to Gupta, group grievances will translate to terrorist acts only when an oppressive social order creates incentives for the rise of political entrepreneurs. This analysis of the role of entrepreneurs expands the concept of rationality to include altruism as an incentive for individual actors to engage in political violence, both for themselves and for others. Entrepreneurs build on long histories of frustration and grievance to motivate followers to shift from ideas to action (Gupta 2008). Notably, since achieving political independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed the rise of religious and nonreligious insurgencies in different parts of the country. The leaders of these insurgencies share a common inclination to articulate, on behalf of their followers, arguments for rejecting the existing social order (Ikelegbe and Garuba 2011). Accordingly, Boko Haram has effectively exploited the self-centered politics of Nigeria’s Western-educated elites, who have been largely responsible for the country’s political and economic ills. In the passage below, Bishop Mathew Kukah offers an insightful explanation of the group’s deconstruction of the Eurocentric nation-state model, which Nigeria inherited from British colonizers.

You people say in your constitution that everybody must have western education before you become councillor, local government chairman, right up to senate or president. There is no evidence that if you have a certificate in Arabic studies you can become a councillor in Nigeria. At least that is what the

law says. . . . My understanding of their view is that if this is all western education is about, then it is haram (taboo), because it is not meeting the needs which education is meant to meet. They are saying the local government chairman who is a thief; member of the House who is a thief; senator who is a thief; minister who is a thief, and all other people who are thieves, all they have in common is western education. (Kukah 2011)

In other words, Boko Haram's vilification of Western education should be understood in the context of its role in opening the door to government employment and as a tool for corruption (Chayes 2015). The notion that the postcolonial state system works to the advantage of a privileged few resonates with many Nigerians—which partly explains why Boko Haram and other militant groups often succeed in establishing bases of support in local communities.

OIC Membership and the Sharia Movement as Antecedents to Boko Haram

Nigeria has the unusual characteristic of being an intensely religious country that exhibits a high level of tolerance for impunity from its leaders. This paradox largely reflects the fact that unscrupulous politicians and their counterparts in the faith communities have frequently exploited the country's religious diversity. The self-serving behavior of Nigerian elites is largely responsible for the failure of the state to protect the citizenry against the onslaught of religious extremism and militant groups such as Boko Haram. As Toyin Falola states in his seminal book, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, "Religion and politics have been bedfellows throughout Nigerian history. In the precolonial era, religion was integral to the state; it was a part of identity construction, a means for power legitimation, and a determinant of economic might" (1998). According to Falola, both Islam and Christianity witnessed rapid growth during the colonial era and helped shape the development of the elites who would inherit the mantle of political power after colonial rule. At the end of colonial rule, the national elites neglected their responsibility to adapt the nation-state system to local realities (Davidson 1992) and failed to set firm limits on the scope of influence that religion should exert on the postcolonial dispensation. Nigeria's postcolonial leaders paid lip service to the constitutional principle of separation of state and religion, but most of their decisions on this issue have been governed by political expedience because, as Falola explains:

Religion is used by the power-hungry as a stepping-stone to power and political legitimacy. Since the mid-seventies, politicians have urged their followers to vote along religious lines—Muslims are told to vote for Muslims, and Christians

for Christians. . . . Later[,] on the eve of the 1979 presidential elections, Sheik Abubakar Gumi advised Nigerian Muslims, in a speech broadcast nationally, not to vote for a non-Muslim candidate. The 1990 gubernatorial elections in Lagos and Kaduna were deeply affected by religious issues, and the primary process for the 1993 election of a civilian president was complicated by conflicts between Muslim and Christian candidates. (Falola 1998)

With particular reference to Islam, the tendency to view religion as an instrument of political control dates back to 1804, when Uthman dan Fodio embarked on his famous jihad in what would become present-day northern Nigeria. His purported spiritual mission—purging Islam of syncretism—culminated in the overthrow of the Hausa kings, who allegedly opposed his reformist agenda. Subsequently, British colonial authorities allowed sharia in the northern region not so much to promote Islam, but as a ploy to co-opt Muslim leaders (Igboin 2014). Islam has been integral to the local culture across northern Nigeria since its founding, but northern elites did not make a serious effort to thrust their religious ideals to the center of Nigerian politics until the late 1970s, when sharia emerged as a contentious issue on the national agenda. Contemporary efforts by northern leaders to politicize sharia date back to the 1977–78 Constituent Assembly, where delegates were required to review the proposed constitution of the Second Republic. Whether Nigeria should remain a secular state or adopt sharia in the predominantly northern region became a bone of contention between Muslim and Christian delegates. The preamble of the proposed 1979 constitution describes Nigeria as a “Sovereign Nation under God,” while section 10 states, “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as [a] State Religion.” However, after heated debate and walk-outs by northern delegates, the Constituent Assembly incorporated into the text the so-called Adebo proposal. While rejecting the Muslims’ demand that a federal sharia appellate court be included in the new constitution, the Constituent Assembly decided that “all appeals from the system of courts of al-Sharia would be settled in accordance with al-Sharia at the Federal Court of Appeal, which, while not an orthodox court of al-Sharia, would take principles of Islamic law into consideration in its decisions”; accordingly, section 240 of the 1979 constitution authorized states to establish sharia courts of appeal, whose decisions would be subject to review by the Federal Court of Appeal (Falola 1998; Maier 2000:166). With regard to the jurisdiction of the state appellate courts, section 242 (1) makes clear that “The Sharia Court of Appeal of a State shall, in addition to such other jurisdiction as may be conferred on it by the Law of the State, exercise such appellate and supervisory jurisdiction in civil proceedings involving questions of Islamic law which the court is competent to decide in accordance with the provisions of subsection (2) of this section.” Subsection (2) (e) authorizes state appellate courts to exercise jurisdiction “where all the parties to the proceedings (whether or not

they are Moslems) have requested the court that hears the case in the first instance to determine that case in accordance with Islamic personal law." Northern Muslims did not get everything they wanted from the Constituent Assembly, but they scored a huge victory against their Christian rivals, whose religion was not even on the agenda. Balarabe Musa had this to say about why northern politicians insisted on sharia:

In the face of the new political programme, the ruling class in Northern Nigeria knew that they were threatened by a new democracy. They had no foothold or any solid base for the political competition as a block with the rest of the country. In view of this political bankruptcy, it became clear that Islam would offer the only alternative for the protection of their class interests. But even this was not an easy card to play. The so-called Muslim North no longer existed, but all the same, it was clear that to seek to defend it would enhance their position. So, they held on to the issue of Sharia in the Assembly as their only weapon for mobilization in the North. (Igboin 2014)

President Olusegun Obasanjo, the military head of state who presided over the 1977–78 constitutional debate, played a major role in engineering the Adebo compromise. The pro-sharia group, led by Shehu Shagari, who would later become president of the Third Republic, had staged a walkout to register their commitment to their cause. It took Obasanjo's "intervention and stern warning" against the danger of dragging the country into another crisis to compel Shagari and his colleagues to reach a political compromise on sharia with Christian delegates in the interest of national unity (Igboin 2014). Apparently, Christian delegates did not give serious thought to the implications of this development; however, it was only a matter of time before the sharia issue would come to the fore.

President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's decision to register Nigeria as an official member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in January 1986 marked yet another critical juncture in the evolution of Islam in Nigerian politics. This measure purportedly made Nigeria eligible for the benefits of OIC membership, including the possibility of receiving interest-free loans from wealthy OIC member states, such as Saudi Arabia (Walles 2002). Babangida decided to upgrade Nigeria's role in the OIC to full membership without wide consultation. After much public outcry and denial by the federal military regime, the Shagaya panel, set up to investigate the government's action, recommended withdrawal from the body—which was ignored by Babangida and his supporters. Regardless of his explanation for the decision to register Nigeria as a full member of OIC, non-Muslim Nigerians regarded his action as a flagrant violation of the constitutional principle of separation of state and religion. Furthermore, because of Babangida's ethnic origin, his action continues to evoke the specter of Hausa-Fulani hegemony among southerners (Walles 2002). However, he was not solely responsible

for compromising the secular identity of the Nigerian state, as virtually every Nigerian head of state has supported the country's OIC membership since the organization was established, in 1969. President Yakubu Gowon, a northern Christian from Plateau state, took the first step by registering Nigeria as an observer in 1969 (Ajayi 2013).

Opportunity for renewed debate on sharia came up when the next Constituent Assembly was convened, in May 1988, to deliberate on the draft of the 1989 constitution. Once again, Muslim and Christian delegates could not agree on the matter. On November 28, the Babangida government stepped in with its own preference, limiting the application of sharia to states that requested it. Presumably, unlike in the past, non-Muslims would henceforth have nothing to do with the sharia courts, which, under the new dispensation, would hear only cases involving Muslims. Thus, to some observers, the military government's intervention offered a workable compromise for both sides (Falola 1998). According to Justice A. N. Aniagolu, chair of the Constituent Assembly,

The Christians have won the victory that henceforth, the Sharia laws in Nigeria would remain for only Muslims[,] and no non-Muslims would ever again be made subject to their tenets. The Muslims, on the other hand, have won their fight that the Sharia should not be excluded from the Constitution. (Quoted in Falola 1998)

Southern delegates and other observers who subscribed to Aniagolu's view ignored the fact that the purview of sharia was extended from personal law in the 1979 constitution to civil proceedings in article 261 of the 1989 constitution. This development could be interpreted as a ploy to extend sharia to non-Muslims. More importantly, the incremental gain achieved by Muslims between 1979 and 1989 prepared the ground for full implementation of sharia in 1999. For northern Muslims who remained inflexible in their commitment to the sharia cause, the fight was far from over. During the interval between the constituent assemblies discussed above, the north witnessed religiously motivated riots pitching Muslim youth gangs in bloody confrontations with Christians. The period was marked by a proliferation of radical Islamist groups that shared a common interest in promoting full implementation of sharia (Maier 2000). As if the above incidents were not enough, at the conclusion of an international Islamic conference held in 1989, Nigeria agreed to host the headquarters of a proposed pan-African Muslim body known as Islam in Africa Organization. Its members pledged "to go any length to get Sharia established in [Nigeria] whether we are alive or dead" (Falola 1998).

Amid the long-festering controversy, Zamfara state governor Ahmed Sani in October 1999 announced his government's decision to adopt Islamic law, claiming that the measure was necessary "to ensure justice, protection of the people's lives and property and sanctity of which cannot be guaranteed

without making sharia our guide" (Igboin 2014). Shortly thereafter, Katsina, Kano, Sokoto, Bauchi, Niger, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Borno, Kebbi, and Yobe states opted for full implementation of sharia. Before 1999, only its implementation in matters of personal jurisprudence—marriage, divorce, inheritance, wills, and the custody of children—had been allowed by the federal constitution. Full implementation of Islamic law paved the way for states to enforce a penal code that would potentially require flogging, amputation, or stoning as penalties for stealing, adultery, and fornication. If implemented, the penal code would forbid the use or sale of alcohol and require women to adhere to a strict dress code (Walles 2002).

The decision by northern states to adopt full sharia provoked arguments and counterarguments about Islamic fundamentalism that foreshadowed Boko Haram's jihadist rhetoric. For instance, sharia advocates claimed that full implementation of Islamic law was necessary to rid Muslim communities of crimes and immoral lifestyles that Western jurisprudence had proved unable to restrain. They asserted that only full observance of Islamic law would end the rift between Christians and Muslims, political uncertainty, and economic fluctuations. They claimed that Islamic schools would promote literacy crucial to the successful restoration of sustainable Muslim communities consistent with the teachings of Mohammed (Walles 2002). In Zamfara and other sharia states, Christians complained against the treatment of non-Muslims as second-class citizens since the inception of Islamic law, as they were no longer allowed to participate in the government, teach in the schools, or appear on radio. In general, women were subjected to more restrictions than men. Some noticeable restrictions included the closure of bars and barring women from working in hotels and restaurants and riding on motorcycle taxis or in taxicabs driven by men (Campbell 2011; Maier 2000; Walles 2002).

Nigeria's return to democratic rule with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as president in May 1999 did little to restore public confidence in the country's governing elites, as the sharia controversy put into sharp relief the extent to which these elites would go to subordinate public interest to narrow political ends. In October, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria warned Obasanjo about the dangers of promoting sharia or any other religious law at the national level; however, the federal government continued to drag its feet, despite the urgent tone of the bishops' letter. Eventually, in February 2000 the National Council of States, comprising the president and all thirty-six state governors, voted to suspend sharia in the northern states. This measure was of little consequence, since the Obasanjo administration was unwilling to take a firm stance on the controversy. He waited until March 2000 to make his famous speech on sharia, which further revealed his disinclination to take a principled stance on the issue. Not surprisingly, five northern governors who had participated in the Council of State's decision to suspend sharia later reversed their stance in favor of adopting full sharia. On March 20, 2000, Zamfara state carried out its first amputation, in keeping with the Islamic penal code (Igboin 2014).

The following year, Obasanjo gave his presidential blessing to Nigeria's OIC membership by attending a meeting of D-8 Islamic countries held in Egypt. Similarly, while presiding over the political and military struggle against Boko Haram, President Jonathan represented Nigeria at OIC conferences (Adeoti 2014). Furthermore, he not only tolerated the sharia penal code, which included imprisonment and the public whipping of suspects for engaging in homosexual behavior, but in 2013 signed into federal law the so-called Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, which provided a prison term of ten to fourteen years for homosexual behavior (The Guardian 2014; Onuah 2014). Each head of state, though personally a Christian, appeased Muslim leaders and their constituencies instead of confronting Nigeria's OIC membership and sharia. Their willingness to compromise on those issues supports the view that members of the Nigerian hegemonic class share a common interest in preserving their private interests within the framework of the federal power structure. When carried too far, political compromises designed to preserve short-term gains for the elites tend to jeopardize public interest in the long term (Afoaku 1999).

Political Expedience and Boko Haram's Improbable Rise

The origin of Boko Haram dates back to 1995, when Imam Abubakar Lawan established a Muslim youth organization known as Ahlulsunna Wal'jama'ah Hira (True Followers of the Prophet Muhammad) on the campus of the University of Maiduguri. In 2002, when charismatic Islamic scholar Mohammed Yusuf became its leader, it began to embrace Salafism, a fundamentalist Sunni ideology (Onuoha 2014:159). Friendship developed between Yusuf and Senator Ali Modu Sheriff in late 2002 and early 2003, while the latter was running for governor of Borno state. Apparently, mutual interest in promoting sharia played a part in cementing ties between Yusuf and local politicians. Accordingly, Sheriff received help from Yusuf, whose students were recruited as political thugs to support his campaign. Following Sheriff's electoral victory in April 2003, Alhaji Buji Foi, a close associate of Yusuf's, was appointed state commissioner for religious affairs. Yusuf, who had been expelled from two local mosques because of doctrinal differences between him and his spiritual mentor, Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, was granted permission to build a compound with a mosque and a Quranic school in the capital city of Maiduguri (Reinhard and Garçon 2014:237).

Against this backdrop, Boko Haram's transformation from a peaceful Muslim youth organization to an Islamist terrorist organization has been ignored or downplayed in conventional narratives. By most accounts, the period 2009–10 marked the beginning of Boko Haram's turn toward violent extremism. On the contrary, Yusuf, following his ascent to leadership of the sect in 2002, did not hesitate to push the group toward ideological radicalization (Onuoha 2014). Thanks to his political connections, the Borno state government allegedly channeled funds to him through Buji Foi. Yusuf used

the funds to establish an informal microcredit scheme, enabling his disciples to set up businesses. In turn, they donated part of their profits to a common fund, which the group used to begin to amass arms, with Yusuf's father-in-law as the alleged supplier (International Crisis Group 2014). During the period of radicalization, Yusuf was involved in official efforts to introduce and implement sharia in northern states. From 1999 through 2003, he was a member of the Borno State Sharia Implementation Committee and participated in debates on local radio and television stations. His friendship with Sheriff apparently fell apart after the latter reneged on his promise to implement sharia fully. The state government would allow sharia courts to have jurisdiction over social matters but refused to allow "traditional criminal punishments such as flogging for theft and fornication and amputation and stoning to death for adultery." Yusuf registered his objection by directing his sermons against Sheriff, whom he ultimately branded an apostate. In 2007, Buji Foi resigned his appointment in protest (International Crisis Group 2014). Despite unbridled public vilification of Sheriff for his alleged role in sponsoring Boko Haram, the state and national governments made no attempt to indict him. As the national chairman of the People's Democratic Party, he continues to influence Nigerian politics (Gyang 2016).

As illustrated by the progression of events described below (which supports the thesis of state failure advanced in this study), state and federal government authorities failed to take adequate measures to stop Boko Haram before it could gather enough force to embark on full-blown jihad (Associated Press 2009). In mid-2003, two hundred young men, mostly consisting of Yusuf's students, relocated to the Yobe countryside, where they allegedly founded a religious community under a new name, Al Sunna Wal Jamma (Followers of the Prophet's Teachings). Subsequently, they moved to Kanama, near the Nigerian border with Niger, following confrontations with local authorities. Between December 23 and 31, members of Al Sunna Wal Jamma attacked police stations and government buildings in Kanama and four other northern cities. Soldiers killed several of them, and a majority of the remaining members returned to Maiduguri and were reintegrated into Yusuf's community. The authorities blamed Yusuf for the violent incidents in which his students were implicated. They allowed him to leave for Saudi Arabia, where he stayed until 2005, when he returned to Borno state and resumed his clerical work. Meanwhile, in June 2004, four Boko Haram militants were killed by prison guards in what was described as a foiled jailbreak in Damaturu, capital of Yobe state. In September, suspected former followers of Yusuf attacked police stations and killed several policemen and civilians in Gwazo and Bama towns in Borno. Soldiers counterattacked, killing an estimated twenty-seven militants around the Mandara Mountains along the Nigerian-Cameroonian border. On October 10, an affiliate group of Boko Haram attacked a police convoy in Kala-Balge near the Chadian border and kidnapped twelve policemen. Between 2005 and 2007, Yusuf and his followers concentrated on recruiting new members and expanding their resources. He himself was arrested by the police on

numerous occasions during this period, but influential men obtained his release each time, and he was allowed to return to his base in Maiduguri (Reinhard and Garçon 2014).

Arguably, Boko Haram reached a climax in its ideological evolution in 2007. In the month of April, doctrinal differences between Yusuf and Ja'far Mahmud Adam led to the death of Yusuf's former mentor, who was gunned down during early morning prayers inside his mosque in Kano (Reinhard and Garçon 2014). This show of force by Boko Haram, coupled with the group's previous violent activities, sent a clear warning to the authorities that Boko Haram could no longer be presumed to be a benign group, whose activities did not warrant serious scrutiny. The security agencies, though they had ample opportunity to nip the group's excesses in the bud, made light of their responsibility. According to Imam Ibrahim Ahmed Abdullahi, "More than 50 Muslim leaders repeatedly called Nigeria's police, local authorities[,] and state security to urge them to take action against Boko Haram sect militants[,] but their pleas were ignored" (Associated Press 2009). Similarly, Col. Ben Ahanotu, who was heading a local anticrime operation unit in Maiduguri, made several fruitless attempts to obtain clearance from his superiors to take action against Boko Haram (Associated Press 2009).

As revealed by recent findings by the CLEEN Foundation, a nongovernmental organization that advocates for justice-sector reform in Nigeria (Chayes 2015), the fateful incident of July 11–12, 2009, could have been avoided if government authorities had not responded lackadaisically to early warnings about Boko Haram. On these dates, fourteen members of Boko Haram were allegedly shot by security agents following an altercation over the group's noncompliance with the state's crash helmet law (Reinhard and Garçon 2014). In a video message addressed to President Jonathan after the incident, Yusuf threatened retaliation against the federal government. Subsequently, between July 26 and 31, Boko Haram launched uprisings in Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, and Katsina. A massive military crackdown led to the death of more than eight hundred persons, mostly Islamist militants and civilians, and Yusuf and his father-in-law died in police custody (Associated Press 2009; Reinhard and Garçon 2014). In the aftermath of the unrest, surviving members of Boko Haram regrouped under a new leader, Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's second-in-command. In September 2010, they launched reprisal attacks.

The magnitude of violence perpetrated by Boko Haram is unprecedented in Nigeria, but ethnic militias have engaged in violent protest against the state. The Niger Delta is home to at least five armed ethnic militias, including the Niger Delta Vigilantes, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, the Niger Delta Liberation Front, and the Niger Delta Avengers. These militias have inflicted heavy losses on the country in revenues and human lives. Other prominent ethnic militias include the Odua People's Congress, which operates in the southwest, the Arewa People's Congress, based in the north, and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, based

in the southeast (Otitte 2012). Each of these groups continues to challenge the legitimacy of the Nigerian state.

Jonathan's Counterinsurgency Strategy

Until the inception of the Buhari administration, which has joined forces against Boko Haram with the Chad Basin countries of Cameroun, Niger, and Chad, efforts to contain the threat of Islamist terrorism in northeastern Nigeria were largely ineffective. Faced with mounting pressure on account of mass atrocities committed by Boko Haram, President Goodluck Jonathan seemed more intent on achieving a military solution, in contrast to his decision to grant amnesty to Niger Delta militants in 2009 in exchange for peace (Campbell 2011). In large measure, his counterterrorism strategy was consistent with the one-size-fits-all policies of previous administrations, which had favored the indiscriminate use of force against militants.

Like other terrorist organizations, Boko Haram posed peculiar security challenges, for which conventional military strategies proved grossly inadequate (Dye 2016). The counterinsurgency policy of the Jonathan administration, apart from its excessively militarized character, was hamstrung by institutional dysfunction in the security sector, evidenced by unexpected shortfalls in the supply of military equipment, poor training, indiscipline, poor intelligence, and low morale. The administration was up against "the most frightening scenario," due to "lack of morale, zeal, patriotism and the desire to make sacrifice[s]" on the part of state security personnel (Mamu 2012). The Islamist militants demonstrated conviction, discipline, and dedication to their cause, but federal troops frequently abandoned their uniforms and ran for cover instead of confronting the enemy. On one occasion, the commercial city of Kano was held hostage for more than fourteen hours by Boko Haram, "with both the Police and the Army unable to confront their excesses, resulting in unacceptably high casualties and the death of more than 200 people" (Mamu 2012). Under President Jonathan, corruption in the upper echelons of the security sector was a major impediment to the government's counterterrorism efforts. According to independent sources, security votes dedicated to counterterrorism operations served as a conduit pipe for siphoning public funds into officials' private coffers. More than 70 percent of police officers killed in armed conflict with Boko Haram were not paid their entitlements and commensurate motivational allowances. As a result, their families could not afford basic necessities, such as food and school fees for their children. The federal government's dilemma was compounded by lack of a dedicated oversight mechanism for monitoring, assessing, and reporting to the presidency on the progress of counterterrorism operations. Furthermore, the government's policy appeared to be more reactive, as evidenced by President Jonathan's decision in January 2012 to dismiss Hafiz Ringim, Commissioner of Police, for his failure to turn around the deteriorating security situation in the country. This was not an isolated

case of an incompetent police chief, but also a counterinsurgency system that required comprehensive overhaul to ensure substantial improvement in the quality of intelligence, safety of police informants, and government relations with local communities. Jonathan ignored critical recommendations on police reform by a committee of security experts. Consequently, Ringim's appointment, like that of his predecessor, was based on political considerations, rather than merit and seniority (Concerned Nigerians 2010).

President Jonathan's decision in May 2013 to declare a state of emergency in three northern states revealed yet another serious lacuna in the government's counterterrorism strategy. The policy proved disastrous as security operatives, allegedly engaged in indiscriminate shooting of innocent residents, resulting in hundreds of casualties, thousands of homes destroyed, and massive dislocation of civilians forced to seek refuge in neighboring states and even outside the country. Massive human-rights abuses were reported by international human-rights monitors and local residents who offered eyewitness accounts of scorched-earth military operations by federal troops. During the first six months of 2013, more than 920 people died in military custody. Frequently, prison inmates died from suffocation and other injuries associated with overcrowding, severe beating, shooting, lack of medical care, and starvation (Amnesty International 2013). Disillusioned local residents blamed lax security for indiscriminate terrorist attacks, which, for instance, led to the death of fifty-nine male students at Federal Government College, Buni Yadi, Yobe, on February 24, 2014 (Nossiter 2014). Former chief of defense staff Alex Badeh attributed the dismal security situation in the northeast to an unfavorable technology gap between state security agencies and Boko Haram, squarely placing the blame for the failure of the government's counterterrorism effort on corruption within the military hierarchy:

For the first time, I was the head of a military that lacked the relevant equipment and motivation to fight. . . . Furthermore, the activities of fifth columnists in the military and other security agencies, who leaked operational plans and other sensitive military information to the terrorists, combined to make the fight against the insurgents particularly difficult. The activities of these unpatriotic members of the military not only blunted the effectiveness of the fight, but also led to the needless deaths of numerous officers and men who unwittingly fell into ambushes prepared by terrorists who had advance warnings of the approach of such troops. (Quoted in BellaNaija.com 2015)

Boko Haram, considering its organizational discipline, logistical sophistication, and operational successes, was obviously receiving support from powerful sponsors, but Jonathan's counterinsurgency effort was largely driven by the tactical and political appeal of crushing visible sources of terrorism while ignoring the strategic, albeit more complicated, task of

apprehending and bringing to justice both the militants and their backers. This approach often backfired because the government and its military planners minimized the importance of separating the terrorists from innocent citizens. Not surprisingly, it caused political fallout in the north, where the suspicion that the federal government was waging war on northern Muslims was growing (Nyako 2014). Furthermore, the massive collateral damage resulting from the military operations in the northeast became a bone of contention between the Jonathan administration and international allies. For instance, as noted by *Premium Times Nigeria* in 2015, growing concern over human-rights abuse by Nigerian security forces caused the Obama administration to impose restrictions on US military assistance under the Leahy Law, which prohibited the departments of state and defense from offering “military assistance to foreign military units which allegedly commits [*sic*] human rights abuse with impunity.” US military assistance against Boko Haram would not be resumed until President Muhammadu Buhari’s first official visit to Washington, in July 2015 (Olorunyomi 2016).

Conclusion

This study raises a range of issues that point to the enfeeblement of the Nigerian state as the primary driver of Boko Haram’s rise and dramatic growth over the past six years. Boko Haram, following its formation as a purportedly benign youth organization in 1995, evolved ideologically into an ultra-Salafist sect, dogmatically committed to the use of force as its preferred method of establishing traditional Islamic values in northern Nigeria. To shed light on this development, I argue that the conditions that enabled its rise had been long in the making, thanks to the actions or inactions of the Nigerian ruling class. As evidenced by the inability of the defunct Jonathan administration to protect the country from the onslaught of Islamist terrorism, the integrity, morale, and operational efficacy of Nigeria’s state institutions are severely broken. The police, military, and other institutions charged with national defense and law enforcement were too weak to turn around the security situation in the country. Consequently, by the end of Jonathan’s second term, in May 2015, Boko Haram had succeeded in extending its terrorist activities to the neighboring countries of Cameroun and Chad—a development that cast Nigeria as the epicenter of violent extremism in West Africa.

Boko Haram, its recent setback notwithstanding, will most likely continue to pursue its jihadist agenda. In the short term, the Buhari government will most likely carry out joint military operations with the other Chad Basin countries and continue to degrade and, possibly, dismantle Boko Haram (Suberu 2015). However, in the long run, Nigerians will have to choose between coping with the perpetual crises, conflicts, and anxieties associated with state dysfunction and embarking on comprehensive reconstruction of the polity with a view to fostering a national culture of transparency and accountability. Toward this end, the Buhari government will have

to intensify its ongoing fight against corruption inside the security sector in particular and throughout the country. Furthermore, he and his supporters will have to address criticisms against the government's antigraft policy. Reviewing and rebalancing this policy should be a top priority to facilitate and legitimize the process of bringing to justice suspected looters of the national treasury (Afoaku 2016).

Nigeria's war against Islamist terrorism has put into sharp relief the costs of ignoring the constitutional ambiguity that enabled the political elites to exploit sectarian conflicts to further their parochial ambitions at the expense of the public interest. Buhari, in view of his Muslim background and persistent allegations of religious intolerance against him, will have to confront what could be the biggest challenge to his presidency by taking a principled stance on the paramount issue of separation of state and religion in Nigerian politics. In this respect, he will have to succeed where his predecessors failed. This aspect of the state reconstruction project requires clear-eyed reassessment of Nigeria's OIC membership, sharia rule in the north, and the less scrutinized irregularities associated with proliferation of prosperity Christianity in the southern region. To keep Nigeria from reaching the tipping point, the government and general public must not only work together to eradicate corruption, but urgently review the conflictual relationship between Islam and Christianity through an inclusive dialogue, and investigate, document, and proscribe abuses by unscrupulous clerics and their associates in both religions. A national conversation on the role of religion in Nigerian life will set the stage for changes in the national constitution, as well as legislation designed to proscribe entanglement with either of the rival religions in the country and to protect Nigerians against religious intolerance and frauds associated with religion. At the same time, the government should enlist the support of civil society and religious actors embedded in communities at risk of being radicalized by extremists. The government can support these actors from behind to avoid putting them at risk. Religious actors can provide psychological support to young men and women vulnerable to recruitment by Boko Haram, or as advocates in addressing the political dynamics that contribute to violent extremism. They can even serve as intermediaries with extremists (Nozell and Hayward 2014).

The Buhari administration's response to the alleged killing of innocent civilians by armed Fulani herdsmen in parts of Nigeria predominantly inhabited by Christians has complicated the security environment. The task of restoring public trust in the state as an impartial arbiter will remain incomplete without making social justice the centerpiece of public policy. Toward this end, the federal government should join forces with civil society and other stakeholders to implement a bold national initiative designed to promote the rule of law by reforming and equipping the police, the courts, and related agencies. Since the operational efficiency of these entities is crucial to the success of the national struggle against Boko Haram, the government should take measures to prevent them from driving the local populations into the arms of the terrorists by engaging in indiscriminate

use of force. Relatedly, while a considerable amount of investment in the military is still needed to defeat Boko Haram, it is necessary to allocate adequate resources to human security. For instance, the federal government will have to intensify its commitment to intergovernmental collaboration for the purpose of reversing the unacceptably high level of youth unemployment (Attah-Asamoah and Aning 2011; Cincotta and Leahy 2006; Ikelegbe and Garuba 2011).

Finally, the government should pay particular attention to the plight of women and girls displaced by the conflict with Boko Haram. This group includes formerly abducted individuals. According to Human Rights Watch (2016), displaced women and girls were frequently abused by members of state security forces and local vigilante groups who were supposed to be protecting them. Some were drugged and raped, some were coerced into sex through false marriage promises and material and financial assistance, and some became pregnant and were abandoned by the men. To make matters worse, they and their children experienced further abuse, discrimination, and stigmatization from other camp residents.

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